

Highway *Luzūmiyyāt* Revisited *Some Thoughts About Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī, the Freethinker*

LORENZ MATTHIAS NIGST (Vienna)

Abstract

Al-Ma‘arrī sometimes declares that being rational is tantamount to recognising mortality. He is quite emphatic in this respect insofar, as he characterises as ‘sound’ or ‘properly working’ a thinking that takes account of death. At the same time, he often utilises religious (and in particular: eschatological) content in his poems. Considering that there is a logical connection between death and eschatology, the following article tries to provide some examples of how al-Ma‘arrī creatively and freely used eschatological content to communicate his idea of rationality.

Some time ago, an online shopping portal on which so-called ‘atheist shirts and atheist merchandise’ were for sale, caught my eye.¹ The so-called ‘atheist’ products for sale varied from baseball jerseys, sleeve T-shirts, Golf shirts, tracksuits, raglans and sweatshirts to fitted T-shirts. They had one thing in common, though: All sported a translation of what probably is the most famous verse written by Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī: ‘The world holds two classes of men—intelligent men without religion, and religious men without intelligence.’

It does not exactly come as a surprise, though, that items labeled ‘atheist’, of all things, bear a verse by the 10th / 11th century A.D. poet Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī², for this verse for a

1 <<http://www.cafepress.com/nostupid/1664607>> (18.2.2011)

2 Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī was born into a prominent and learned family in the town of Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān in 973 A.D. (both his father and his grandfather were judges; cf. VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 11). He lost his eyesight at the age of four due to an infection with smallpox. He received his education first at home and from various teachers in Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān and is said to have composed his first poems at the age of eleven (cf. VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 12). Having lost his father at the age of fourteen, he continued his education in Aleppo, visited Antiochia and Tripoli, and it is told that on this way to Antiochia he stopped at the convent of Pharos close to Latakia where he heard a monk speak about Greek philosophy (VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 12). When he returned to Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān at the age of twenty, he had received a thorough education: ‘il maîtrise sans doute l’essentiel des connaissances de son époque’ (cf. VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 12). For more than a decade he lived as a poet in his hometown where he frequented the literary circles, but soon declined to compose laudatory poems, for he perceived them to be ‘contraire à sa dignité’ (VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 12). In 1008 A.D. he left for Baghdād (maybe he still hoped to make a career as a panegyric poet; cf. SCHOELER 2002: 13). For reasons that are not entirely clear, he returned to Ma‘arrat an-Nu‘mān already in 1010 A.D. The death of his mother (who died while he was away) may have prompted him to put into practice his already long held determination to lead an ascetic life (vegetarianism included). He decided not to leave his house again (and it is not devoid of humour that al-Ma‘arrī thus practiced

number of years now spooks on countless atheist websites which (naïvely) celebrate and claim al-Ma‘arrī as one of their own. In fact, already since the 19th century A.D. ‘freethinker’³ (with good reason) and, more recently, ‘atheist’⁴ (with less good reason⁵) is a most recurrent characterisation of al-Ma‘arrī. It is hardly surprising that the verse quoted above enjoys such great popularity on atheist websites—after all, it certainly *is* a most loveable specimen of any atheist’s conviction.

The problem though is that the verse was written by one of the most difficult and challenging—but also most rewarding—authors who have ever written in Arabic. More precisely, it belongs to Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī’s voluminous collection of poems *Luzūm mā lā yalzam* (i.e. the so-called ‘*Luzūmiyyāt*’). The verse is taken out of its context, and it certainly does not permit to draw any premature and hasty conclusions as regards al-Ma‘arrī’s thought.⁶

In the following article, I want to bring forward the argument that al-Ma‘arrī in fact should be considered as a true freethinker—but in an even more specific and maybe surprising sense, though, than this often seems to be the case. I thereby tentatively want to contend that a concentration on those verses in which al-Ma‘arrī most outspokenly criticises specific contents of faith maybe contributes to overlooking another—very careful and markedly different—usage of religious content in his work. This is not to deny that he in fact mocked contents of faith on many occasions and severely criticised *a lot*⁷ with regard to religion and religious agents. One *must not* overlook this, for this in fact would be tantamount to missing a highly important part of his most challenging thoughts (which for good reason turn him into a freethinker). Thus, in full awareness of this quality of al-Ma‘arrī’s work, I here try to focus upon another aspect of his reference to religion, for I think that it runs the risk of being overshadowed by the most exquisitely daring statements referred to above. I want to contend that this is very much to the detriment of the under-

two forms of *luzūm al-bayt*, one ‘physical’ and one ‘poetical’). Yet al-Ma‘arrī did not cut the bonds with his social environment: he taught, exchanged letters, once engaged in a political mission (obviously the only instance when he left his house again), and was visited by countless people—among them the Ismā‘īlī missionary Nāṣir-i Khosraw who—in counterdistinction to other reports—described al-Ma‘arrī as very rich and as an important local political figure whom the people served (cf. SCHOELER 2002: 14). Al-Ma‘arrī died in 1057 A.D. For details regarding al-Ma‘arrī’s lifetime which was highly ‘agitated’ politically speaking cf. SCHOELER 2002: 9-12; VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 10-11. For al-Ma‘arrī see further *Ét*² s.v. *al-Ma‘arrī* (P. SMOOR).

3 HITT 1970: 147; VON KREMER 1875: 304-312; STROUMSA 1999: 15; <<http://www.sdsmt.edu/student-orgs/tfs/reading/freethought/islam.html>> (18.2.2011).

4 <<http://www.godwouldbeanatheist.com/resources/quotes.htm#almaarri>>; <<http://www.arrogantatheist.com/forum/comments.php?DiscussionID=143>>; <<http://www.atheistempire.com/greatminds/more.php>>; <<http://www.muslimphilosophy.com/ip/rep/H035.htm>>; <<http://secondskeleton.com/2010/01/some-famous-atheist-quotes.html>> (all: 18.2.2011).

5 Cf. VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 197-198.

6 For further information regarding al-Ma‘arrī’s intricate thought see the abundant annexes in VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 193 ff. Apart from his clear recourse to the tradition of Muslim asceticism, it shall be emphasised that al-Ma‘arrī not only lived in a ‘multi-confessional’ environment, but that his lifetime generally is characterised by the thriving of ‘heterodox’ schools of thought (VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 10). Some of al-Ma‘arrī’s statements thereby suggest that he was influenced by certain Ismā‘īlī positions (cf. VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 205 ff; cf. also DAFTARY 2004).

7 Cf. VUONG & MÉGARBANÉ 2009: 197 ff.

standing of a very original—and ‘free’—usage of religion on his part to communicate his rationalistic message. The following article aims at focusing upon this ‘free’ usage, i.e. it tries to draw the attention to a particular thread of thought in the *Luzūmiyyāt* with the hope to contribute to the understanding of al-Ma‘arrī, the ‘freethinker.’

Asceticism and Eschatology

Considering that religion in many respects is of central importance in the *Luzūmiyyāt*, it is worthwhile to start with a remark by Edmund Leach about religion:

At the heart of the matter is our recognition that man is mortal and that illness threatens death. The central doctrine of all religion is the denial that death implies the automatic annihilation of the individual self.⁸

If religion certainly denies that death implies the automatic annihilation of the individual self, then this logically implies that religion is quite obsessed with death. However the concrete beliefs connected with the denial of which Leach speaks look like, they certainly did not exist if people did not die. Reason simply forbids that there could be anything like a Hereafter without death and dying. Thus, regardless if individual contents of faith are considered as absurd, there certainly is a rational side to religion insofar as, in principle, it takes death into account. There is good evidence that in the *Luzūmiyyāt* al-Ma‘arrī was concerned with dragging this footing of religion into the limelight and to use it for his purposes, and in fact, this is what informs the ascetic thrust of his copious collection of poems. It is a well-established fact that within Islam generally and within the field of Muslim asceticism and renunciation in particular, the here and now (*ad-dunyā*) was emphatically identified as the object of renunciation, and that ‘all agreed upon this point.’⁹ If we rule out the assumption that renunciation is an altogether absurd and fortuitous enterprise, then there must be some rationale behind it, i.e. it must be connected with some sort of insight and consideration that turn it into a ‘reasonable’ form of behaviour. Needless to say, it is the inevitable transience of the here and now—i.e. death—which informs renunciation. Consequently, the recognition of mortality and the emphasis on the transience of the here and now are omnipresent elements of the discourse of renunciation.

It is important to underline, though, that this discourse not only and solely dwells upon the transience of the here and now—to which Jesus is supposed to have said ‘Get away from me, you swine!’¹⁰—, but contrasts it with the nature of a Hereafter which—fundamentally so—is *not* affected by the failings of the here and now, i.e. a Hereafter in which the bitter transience of this world has been overcome; an abode which ‘does not suffer damage through time.’¹¹ Thus, in line with the Islamic creed, this discourse establishes an opposition between the ephemeral here and now—lightweight like the ‘wing of a mos-

8 LEACH 1976: 71.

9 GRAMLICH 1997: 30.

10 GRAMLICH 1997: 110.

11 GRAMLICH 1997: 38.

quito' and something akin to the 'hop of a hare'¹²—and a Hereafter which is considered as the 'true life' and which is connected with promises ('paradise') and threats ('hell') which form an integral part of the Islamic religious message. Thus, renunciation is tantamount to sacrificing the transient for the sake of the eternal.

From this it can be concluded that within the 'logic' of renunciation, three notions are brought into mutual relation: transience, renunciation and eternity. If there is an irreducibly rational side to renunciation, then it precisely lies with the fact that renunciation is kindled by—or at least goes hand in hand with—the recognition of mortality. As regards this recognition, it is open to *everyone*: 'Party over, oops, outta time!' certainly is *not* a finding in the exclusive possession of the US-American pop star Prince (cf. '1999'), and this recognition is *not* bound to the adherence to a particular religious creed.

Beyond that, renunciation further is a 'rational' form of behaviour if it is seen against the backdrop of the Islamic ingredients of the denial of which Edmund Leach speaks: It certainly makes sense to sacrifice the here and now, which is affected by death, for the sake of a good life in the eternity of the Hereafter. But as against the mere recognition of mortality which is open to everyone, the eschatological thrust of the religious message of Islam entails that rationality is 'catapulted to another level', so to say, for *if* someone believes in the message of Islam, then in order to act 'rationally', he *must not* limit himself to recognising mortality, but *in addition to this* has to take into account that the quality of his acts will be explored at Judgement Day, i.e. he has to act in compliance with the peculiar religious logic to which he adheres and which not only recognises mortality but meets it with a specific sort of denial ('Hereafter') which involves *rules*.

There is abundant evidence that within the discourse of renunciation, the peculiar list which the logic of the religious message bestows on rationality is vehemently emphasised (cf. e.g. Thābit b. Aslām: 'Wohl dem, der an die Stunde des Todes denkt! Kein Knecht denkt oft an den Tod, ohne dass man es an seinem Tun sehen würde.'¹³ Or Bishr: 'Das Gestern ist tot, das Heute liegt im Sterben, der Morgen ist noch nicht geboren. Darum: Eile mit deinen guten Werken!'¹⁴). Important though is that one still has to do with *rationality* here, which is well corroborated by the fact that the *prompt to think* figures prominently in the statements of ascetics (cf. 'Die Sache des Diesseits ist gering, seine Güter sind wenige, das Vergehen über es beschlossen, und Gott ist sein Erbe. Seine Bewohner gehen hinüber in Behausungen, die nicht zerfallen und keinen Schaden durch die Länge der Zeit. Und das Leben darin vergeht nicht, so dass sie sterben würden, und sie werden nicht hinausgebracht, wenn sie auch lange darin verbleiben. Seid also besorgt um jene Wohnung – doch es gibt keine Macht ausser bei Gott – und denkt oft an jene letzte Stätte!').¹⁵

In line with the denial and the belief in the coming of a Hereafter, the here and now radically changes its meaning and becomes *mazra' al-ākhira* 'the sowing-field of the Hereaf-

12 GRAMLICH 1997: 138.

13 GRAMLICH 1995 I: 41.

14 Cf. ANDRAE 1931: 326; cf. also *EF*² s.v. *zuhd*, where an anthology by al-Bayhaqī is mentioned, where 'various nuances attributed to *zuhd*' become obvious. One of these is *al-mubādara li-l-'amal qabla bulūgh al-adjal* 'the pressure to finish works before the end of life'.

15 GRAMLICH 1997: 38.

ter', i.e. the lieu where one works for an entirely religious time: that which comes *after* death (cf. *man 'amila li-mā ba'd al-mawt*).¹⁶

Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī's *Luzūmiyyāt* are most obviously—and incisively—shot through with all this.¹⁷ Al-Ma'arrī often and rightly has been characterised as a *rationalist*. But this should by no means result in looking for his rationalism solely in those verses which mock religion (cf. above). On the contrary, al-Ma'arrī concedes rationality to *all* who take death and dying and the final collapse of every human project into account (maybe this is the—rather trivial, to be sure—kernel of his ascetic thought). Thus and in line with what has been said, for al-Ma'arrī rationality in principle can be the business of *both* 'religious' and 'non-religious' individuals. Yet, with reference to the peculiar ingredients which the religious logic throws into the game (i.e. the belief in a Hereafter which is preceded by Judgment Day), he judged the rationality of religious people according to their *own* standards. *He who believes, is rational in a peculiar way*. And in case he does not come up to that which is dictated by his *own* logic, well, then his stupidity is a most resounding one (and al-Ma'arrī quite lavishly unearths this stupidity).

In the following, I will dwell on a number of verses / poems by al-Ma'arrī, and I hope not only to lay bare the connection he established between rationality and the recognition of mortality, but also to show how *freely* he used this connection to cross-cut the forgetfulness of *all*—be they religious or not: Wherever he recognised rationality—i.e. wherever he thought people were 'thinking things through' to their bitter end and looking right into the abyss of their mortality—he defended this (and quite fullheartedly, I think). Needless to say and given the denial which religion, as a matter of principle, propagates, religious people are rather promising candidates for succumbing to irrationality (in al-Ma'arrī's sense).

Rationality: Al-Ma'arrī's Conception of a "Sound Mind" ('*aql ṣaḥīḥ*)

A number of poems in the *Luzūmiyyāt* clearly suggest that al-Ma'arrī was willing to accept a thinking as consistent and thoroughgoing—i.e. as 'sound' or 'properly working'—only *then* if it did recognise the central fact of transience and death. Thus, the ascetic thrust of the *Luzūmiyyāt* rests upon a conception of thinking that understands thinking (worthy of that name) in the sense of a 'thinking things through'—this is al-Ma'arrī's '*aql ṣaḥīḥ*'.

As regards these poems, they are written with considerable care and their intellectual progression is extraordinarily subtle. One cannot but agree with Stefan Sperl who writes (with respect to another poem by al-Ma'arrī):

Despite the clarity of its message, the thematic coherence of the work is not immediately obvious. Particularly the latter part of the poem appears to consist of couplets carefully constructed in themselves but unrelated to one another by unity of subject matter or chronological sequence. In the course of the analysis, I hope to

16 *GHAZZĀLĪ Iḥyā'* III: 368.

17 I dedicated more detailed work to the ascetic content in al-Ma'arrī's *Luzūmiyyāt* in my MA thesis; cf. NIGST 2003.

show that the poem's composition nevertheless follows a sensible course, designed to unfold with growing precision the poet's awareness of mortality.¹⁸

Personally, I cannot think of a better characterisation of that which will concern us in the following, i.e., it is this 'growing precision of the poet's awareness of mortality' to which we no have to turn.

The first poem I want to examine is *Luzūmiyyāt*¹⁹, 1: 199 (*basīt*):

- (1) *lā tafrahanna bi-fa'lin 'in sami'ta bihī // wa-lā taṭayyar 'idhā mā nā'ibun na'bā*
 - (2) *fa-l-khaṭbu 'afza'u min sarrā'a ta'mulahā // wa-l-'amru 'aysaru min 'an tuḍmira r-ru'ubā*
 - (3) *'idhā tafakkarta fikran lā yumāziḍjuhū // fasādu 'aqlin ṣaḥṭhin hāna mā ṣa'ubā*
 - (4) *fa-l-lubbu 'in ṣaḥḥa 'a'ṭā n-naḥsa fatratahā // ḥattā tamūtu wa-sammā ḍjiddahā la'ibā*
 - (5) *wa-mā l-ghawānī l-ghawādī fī malā'ibihā // illā khayālātu waqtin 'ashbahat lu'bā*
 - (6) *ziyādatu l-ḍjismi 'annat ḍjisma ḥāmilihī // ilā t-turābi wa-zādat ḥāfiran ta'bā*
- (1) Don't rejoice at a good omen when you hear it, and whenever a crow croaks, don't see that as a bad omen,
 - (2) for the calamity is more horrible than whatever happiness you are hoping for. But the whole thing is too insignificant for you to entertain fear:
 - (3) If you think in such a way that no wrongness blends with a properly working intellect, then that which is obstinate becomes easy,
 - (4) for the intellect, if it is sane, cools off the soul to the point where it dies, and calls a game that which is most serious to it (=soul).
 - (5) And the young girls who frolicingly set out in the morning, are nothing but the fantasies of a short moment who resemble dolls.
 - (6) That a body puts on weight tantalises him who carries it (=body) to the grave and multiplies the gravedigger's toil.

The progression of these six verses clearly suggests that *transience and death* are the fundamental and central thoughts articulated. First (cf. verse 1) one is disadvised against hoping for happiness and against fearing misfortune and calamities. The reason given is that happiness will be nullified by misfortune anyway (i.e. misfortune is certain). But the whole thing should be seen as too trivial to arouse fear (cf. verse 2). If a consistent thinking understands that, everything becomes easy (cf. verse 3). As regards this 'proper thinking', it is further specified as a thinking which recognises that the soul succumbs to an infinite number of things—which is declared to be a form of *illusio* (cf. verse 4). Obviously, an example is given (cf. verse 5). As regards the last verse, it reads like a sort of summary of what has been said before: The statement that a fatter body is heavier, and thus causes more fatigue when being carried to the grave, again reintroduces *death*. Al-Ma'arrī arguably articulates the more general idea here that every kind of 'growth' and 'making' is doomed to fail and cease—this is al-Ma'arrī's (rather intellectualistic) emphasis that *every human project*

18 SPERL 2005: 131.

19 The references to the *Luzūmiyyāt* refer to the following edition: Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī: *Luzūm mā lā yalzam*, 2 volumes, Bayrūt: Dār Ṣādir, 1961.

ultimately is senseless. The last verse (cf. verse 6) thereby is a most illustrative example of his demand that things have be ‘thought through’: If someone’s goal is to get (rich and) fat, then ‘thinking things through’ would imply taking death into account and thus give up the respective project, and in this verse death is—not devoid of humour—quite physically present for those who plod and toil with the *dead fat body*; the certain failure of every (‘naive’) investment in any human project will ‘kick back’ like the dead fat body which is a most annoying symbol for ‘things not thought through.’

I want to underline again that al-Ma‘arrī explicitly emphasises that this sort of ‘thinking things through’ is tantamount to a ‘properly working intellect’, whereby the ‘*aql ṣaḥīḥ*’ of verse (3) is taken up again by *al-lubbu in ṣaḥḥa* in verse (4).²⁰

This notion of an ‘*aql ṣaḥīḥ*’ and the firm link it establishes between ‘proper thinking’ and the ‘recognition of mortality’ is fully supported by more than one poem in the *Luzūmiyyāt*.

Highly illustrative in this respect is *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 262 (*tawīl*) with its most subtle—and humorous—usage of the lexeme ‘*āqil*’:

- (1) *Banī ‘Ādamīn! Man nāla maḍīdan fa-‘innahū // sa-yanquluhū min dhālika l-maḍīdi nāqilū*
- (2) *wa-mithlāni Zaydu l-Khayli fīkum wa-ghayruhū // wa-siyyāni Qussun fī l-kalāmi wa-Bāqilū*
- (3) *li-kulli ‘aḫī nafsīn ḥiḍjan wa-faṭānatun // wa-ta‘rifu ‘af‘āla l-ḥusāmi ṣ-ṣayāqilū*
- (4) *wa-law lam yakun mustanfīru l-‘uṣmi ‘āqilan // la-mā bāta fī ‘alā dh-dhurā wa-hwa ‘āqilū*

- (1) Sons of Adam! Whoever gains fame—someone will remove him from that fame.
- (2) And equal are among you Zayd al-Khayl and someone else; and equal are he who is (as eloquent) as Quss in his speech and he who (stammers) like Bāqil.
- (3) Whoever has a soul (i.e. every living being) has intellect and intelligence; and those who make and polish the swords know (very well) what a sword is made for.²¹
- (4) And in case a mountain goat that is frightened away was not endowed with reason, well, then it would (certainly) not spend the night high up on the mountains where it is well protected.

In this poem, *all verses point to death*: Interest in glory and reputation rests upon the repression of that which is inevitable, i.e. death and transience (cf. verse 1). This transience is intensified, whereby the rhetorical strategy seems to consist in what Sperl termed *coincidentia oppositorum*²² (cf. verse 2): *all will die*. That the poem actually is about death is suggested somewhat more explicitly in the form of those who make swords—after all, the intention to *cause death* and to destroy lives is the *raison d’être* of a sword (cf. verse 3). Finally, the mountain goats are seeking refuge on top of the mountains, for they *fear death* (cf. verse 4).

20 For a similar use of the lexeme *labīb* cf. *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 619 (*basīṭ*), verse (2).

21 Lit. ‘the deeds of the sword.’

22 To be sure, this has nothing to do with Nikolaus von Kues; cf. SPERL 2005: 119 ff.; cf. also WAGNER 1988: 126.

A remarkable feature of the poem is that, once again, al-Ma‘arrī establishes a most firm link between ‘rationality’ and the ‘recognition of mortality’ between ‘thinking’ and ‘taking death into account.’ This link maybe is not immediately obvious, but once the centrality of the topic of death has been grasped, the poem proves to be of a most outstanding coherence. In line with what he terms the *‘aql ṣaḥīḥ*—i.e. his urge to ‘think things through’—al-Ma‘arrī clearly insinuates that *not* to ‘think things through’ is a form of stupidity. Attention thereby deserves his exquisitely ironic and most funny use of the lexeme *‘āqil*. As has been shown above, *‘āqil* means two things in Arabic: ‘climbing a mountain (to be safe up there)’ and ‘being rational.’ Thus (cf. verse 4), the mountain goats are ‘double-*‘āqil*’, so to say, *because they fear death*: They flee to the tops of the mountains (= *‘āqil*) because they fear death; and they fear death because they are ‘rational’ (= *‘āqil*). Needless to say, the biting irony of the verse lies with its being an insinuation that, of all, those who are socially most acclaimed (cf. verse 1) are shot through with the greatest dose of stupidity: Even the *mountain goats* prove to be smarter, because, as against to those who seek vain glory, *they* recognise their mortality.

Al-Ma‘arrī’s Demand of ‘Thinking Things Through’ Against the Backdrop of the Logic Proper to Religion

Al-Ma‘arrī often dwells on religious content in the *Luzūmiyyāt*. As has been said above, an important point of religion is the denial proper to it ‘that death implies the automatic annihilation of the individual self’ (E. Leach), whereas in the case of the Islamic creed, this denial is inseparable from the belief in a Hereafter. Thus, if al-Ma‘arrī often takes up the logic proper to religion, it has to be surmised that *eschatological* content plays a major role in the *Luzūmiyyāt*.

I want to underline again that there could be no eschatology if people didn’t die, i.e. *eschatology implies death*.²³ Thus, if al-Ma‘arrī dwells on transience and death virtually everywhere in his *Luzūmiyyāt* and if he argues that *without* recognising and facing mortality there can be no rationality (cf. his notion of *‘aql ṣaḥīḥ*) then this clearly implies that *the reason why eschatology exists and the result of his ‘thinking things through’ in fact coincide*. It is exactly by virtue of this fundamental fact that eschatological content is highly attractive for al-Ma‘arrī: He astutely can throw it into the game to communicate his message, i.e. *eschatological beliefs represent an immense extension of the field of rationality, where ‘things can be thought through.’*

The only thing that is important to keep in mind, though, is that (cf. above) the logic proper to religion accordingly bestows rationality—in the sense of the recognition of mor-

23 A good example is provided by Al-Ma‘arrī’s usage of the lexem *nufā* ‘drop of sperm’ (cf. *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 95). In the Qur’ān, the function of this lexeme *nufā* is to point to the first genesis of man in order to dissipate possible doubts as to resurrection: if God was able to let man grow out of a drop of sperm and let him grow up and live for more or less extensive span of time, then He is in the position to raise him *again* after death (cf. Q 53:46-47; Q 75:37-40). *But in order to be raised after death, one has to die first*. Thus in the Qur’ān, *nufā* is overshadowed by mortality and death (cf. also Q 40:67). According to the logic proper to religion (which has been expounded further above), this implies that man is urged to possibly not forget that he acts as a *mortal being*. He always and inescapably approaches his certain death.

tality—a form proper to religion. A central element of Islamic eschatology is Judgement Day which is something like the long arm of the Hereafter reaching into the here and now: After all, it is in the transient here and now that man lays the foundation for the quality of his afterlife through his acts (for which holds true the Pet Shop Boys' guess that 'you don't have to be beautiful, but it helps!' as well). Thus, if mortality is both the result which rationality yields and the fundament of eschatology, then this implies that everything which counts at Judgement Day—i.e. an individual's acts—should be pervaded with the recognition of mortality; that to commit an act with Judgement Day in mind is tantamount to admitting death.

Now, mortality and death are a fact whereas the existence of the Hereafter is a belief. To al-Ma'arrī, the belief seems to be interesting above all insofar as it touches the fact.

He just had to take seriously the inner logic proper to the contents of faith in order to intensify his gaze at mortality. If someone believes, but does not take serious the importance of his own acts—i.e. acts without taking into consideration the exploration of his acts at Judgement Day—then he is irrational, for *he will die for sure* and not have accomplished what is in line with his fear of Hell. This clearly implies that an unbeliever may be more rational. By contrast, a believer is highly rational, if he works for the Hereafter and hopes for it, for *he will die for sure* and his acts show that he *recognises* this truth.

Al-Ma'arrī (cf. below) sharply criticises those who wish to turn away an individual from its orientation toward the Hereafter in order to make it plunge into the joys of this life.²⁴ He insists that—according to his 'thinking things through'—the respective gains will be losses.

All of this clearly suggests that, according to al-Ma'arrī, critique always then is appropriate, when people lose sight of mortality and transience. It has to be stated emphatically that al-Ma'arrī's critique is based on rational arguments and *not* on religious ones. What counts is *not* the question if a given individual is religious or not, but what counts is that it takes mortality into account. Thus, one can be religious and rational; one can be religious and irrational; one can be non-religious and rational; and, finally, one can be non-religious and irrational. Al-Ma'arrī in many instances does not seem to be criticising the fact that someone believes in eschatological content and the logic which pervades it, but he seems to insist that to believe in this content necessary entails that, against the background it provides and the logic it introduces, the recognition of mortality—and thus *rational* behaviour—take on a peculiar form.

In the following, I want to turn to a number of poems for all of which is most characteristic that al-Ma'arrī (according his *'aql ṣaḥīḥ*) systematically discovers rationality right there where people do *not* ignore mortality. If they are believers or not does not really make a difference—both are subject to death, and both can see that.

The first text is *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 177 (*ṭawīl*):

- (1) 'arāniya fī qaydi l-hayāti mukallaḥan // *ṭhaqā* 'ila 'amshī taḥtahā wa-uṭābiqū
- (2) 'idhā kunta fī dāri *sh-shaqā* 'i muṣalliyan // fa- 'innaka fī dāri s-sa- 'ādati sābiqū

24 Cf. *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 136 (*kāmil*); cf. also *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 619 (*basīṭ*), verse (2): *wa-qad yarūmu ḍa'īfun nayla 'akhīratin // fa-lā yashukku labībun 'an sa-yu 'āhā*.

- (3) *'idhā l-ḥurru lam yanhaḍ bi-farḍi ṣalātihī // fa-dhālika 'abdun min yadi d-dahri 'ābiqū*
- (4) *taqīyun yu'ānī zim'ahū wa-muḍallalun // lahū ṣābiḥun min ḡhayri ḥillin wa-ḡhābiqū*
- (1) I see how, in the fetters of life²⁵, I am burdened with heavy burdens, under (the weight of) which I walk in small steps (like a prisoner with his feet in chains).
- (2) If you pray (or: cross the finishing line second) in the house of misery, you come out ahead in the house of bliss.
- (3) If a freeman does not carry the duty of prayer, he is nothing but a slave who flees from time.
- (4) The pious one bears his thirst, and the one led astray has one who without permission gives him to drink in the morning, and one who gives him to drink in the evening.

This poem is remarkable for a number of reasons. First, it contains an extraordinary pun, which unfortunately cannot be translated or ‘rescued’ easily. Second, it is another highly illustrative example for al-Ma‘arrī’s manner of “thinking things through” to which I am trying to draw the attention. Third, it is highly coherent. To understand that, it again is essential to turn to the progression of the poem und thereby to focus upon three semantic threads.

The first thread leads to the idea of ‘captivity’. The first verse suggests that life is a sort of bondage (cf. the lexeme *qayd*)—an idea which al-Ma‘arrī carefully intensifies in the next verse (cf. verse 2) where he uses the verb *tābaqa* which specifically denotes the manner of walking of a prisoner who has his feet in chains. Another allusion to the semantic field of captivity is found in verse (3) both through the occurrence of the active participle *ābiq* ‘fleeing’ and the occurrence of the pair of opposites *ḥurr* ‘free’ and ‘*abd* ‘slave.’

A second thread leads to the semantic field of piety and religious obligation. Already in verse (1), al-Ma‘arrī uses the lexeme *mukallaḥ*, the religious overtones of which can hardly be missed. Explicitly religious further are *muṣallī* ‘praying’ and *sābiq* ‘being ahead’ (cf. verse 2). As regards the word *sābiq*, it further is an allusion to Q 35:32 where mention is made of those who are ‘foremost in good deeds.’ Al-Ma‘arrī plays out a remarkable pun in verse (2), insofar as the verb *ṣallā* not only can mean ‘to pray’ but also ‘to cross the finishing line as the second.’ Into the direction of religious obligation further points *farḍ* ‘duty’ (cf. verse 3).

Finally, a third thread of thoughts leads to eschatology that is present in the form of *dār aṣḥ-ṣḥaqā* ‘house of misery’ (i.e. the here and now) and *dār as-sa‘āda* ‘house of bliss’ (i.e. the Hereafter) (cf. verse 2).

Al-Ma‘arrī now quite virtuoso establishes a number of interrelations between these three semantic threads; consciously creates *tension*.

If we come back to the progression of the poem again, then verse (1) emphatically establishes two things: religious obligations and the feeling of burden and captivity. Implicitly, the verse raises the question if maybe there is a way out of captivity. But—and this is precisely where the specific virtuosity of the poems lies—al-Ma‘arrī seems to suggest that

25 Or just: ‘while I am alive.’

this captivity in fact is ambiguous or relative: It is both the captivity which life generally means, and the burden which being bound by religious obligations implies. The next verse (cf. verse 2) takes up the religious obligations again in the form of the ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) and piety, and it throws eschatology into the game (cf. *dār ash-shaqā'* and *dār as-sa'āda*).

And now the poem really starts to move dramatically: If al-Ma'arrī suggests in verse (2) that the pious individual 'comes second' in this world (cf. the pun with the ambiguity of *muṣallī*), then this logically implies that *someone else* must be *ahead*—and reason dictates that the latter cannot be from among the *pious*. Verse (4) mentions him: He is not pious, but *muḍallal* 'led astray.' So far, al-Ma'arrī has created considerable tension between two things, i.e. between a pious lifestyle and a non-pious lifestyle. He now starts to play out the ambiguity of 'captivity': Verse (1) somehow reads like a complaint or a sober assessment of religious obligations as some sort of 'captivity'; a burden which for the sake of bliss in the Hereafter has to be shouldered, though—even if this implies to 'be the loser' in the here and now. But now what, if someone *rids* himself of the religious obligations, i.e. 'does *not* carry their duty'? Loyal to his rationalistic project, al-Ma'arrī now 'thinks things through.' He suggests that, *of course*, it is possible *not* to comply with one's religious duties. At this point it seems important to me to underline again what I have said above about al-Ma'arrī's use of eschatological content: Often when al-Ma'arrī speaks about things eschatological, he plays out the logical connection between eschatology and *death*, and he regularly suggests that the belief in a Hereafter enforces a peculiar form of rationality, i.e. *whoever believes in the Hereafter has only one chance to be rational—taking seriously those obligations which promise otherworldly bliss*. Now, if a given individual decides to turn its back to the eschatological perspective and thus the peculiar rational behaviour it enforces, then this individual may, of course, free itself from the 'captivity' and the burden of the religion obligations. *But it certainly cannot escape transience and death*. This seems to be the proposition of the—truly outstanding—verse (3) of the poem: *one certainly does not have to be mortal in the sense of Islam, but one still is mortal*. He who flees from the captivity of the religions obligations, in vain runs away from another—and much more profound—captivity, i.e. the captivity of *time*: To run away from 'the hand of time' is unlikely to be a successful enterprise, and we all know very well where this hopeless run is going to end. Even if such an individual is *sābiq* in this world, the gain will end in a loss. Al-Ma'arrī's '*aql ṣahīh*' once more has 'thought things through'. If verse (4) contrasts two different models of how one could live one's life—'piously' or 'led astray'; 'thirsty' or 'boozed'—then al-Ma'arrī's sober and laconic statement seems to be the following: *The 'pious' and the one 'led astray' lead different lives, but they both are going to die. There is nothing more to say.*²⁶

26 For a very similar content cf. *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 136 (*kāmil*). In this poem, al-Ma'arrī again explores the consequences of turning away from eschatological beliefs (cf. verse 1). Again he sketches an individual that has made itself independent from the Hereafter through *not believing* in it, i.e. he suggests that an individual, of course, can give up eschatological beliefs and stop hoping for otherworldly bliss and fearing Judgement Day. Of course, this independence entails that such an individual does not have to stick to the moral code that leads to either paradise or hell. But al-Ma'arrī sets out to explore this independence in line with his 'thinking things through'. Again he seems to suggest that turning one's back to the scenario painted by eschatology, by no means implies the ability to turn one's back to the truth it implies, i.e. transience and death. Even if *nothing but* death and the decay of the bodies awaits an individual, this still is an *amr mūdji* 'painful affair' (cf. verse 3).

A Qur'ānic Intertext

I would like to turn to a last poem from the *Luzūmiyyāt*, i.e. *Luzūmiyyāt*, 1: 334 (*basī*). The basic line of argument of this poem fully corresponds to the 'logic' laid bare above. But what bestows a truly extraordinary and simply outstanding quality upon this poem is that it establishes an opposition between 'believers' and 'unbelievers' (and their respective choices and the form of rationality these entail) through its conscious and careful use of *intertextual relations with the Qur'ān*. In the following, I hope to make visible how al-Ma'arrī—with a most fascinating discreetness—sets out to effect subtle semantic shifts with respect to the Qur'ānic text:

- (1) *'in ṣaḥḥa lī 'annanī sa 'idū // fa-laytanī ḍammanī ṣa 'idū*
- (2) *ṣumtu ḥayātī 'ilā mamātī // la 'alla yawma l-ḥimāmi 'idū²⁷*
- (3) *wa-rā 'anī li-l-ḥisābi dhikrun // wa-gharranī 'annahū ba 'idū*
- (4) *wa-'an yamīnī wa-'an ṣhimālī // yaṣḥabunī ḥāfiẓun²⁸ qa 'idū*
- (5) *ḥamāmatun fī ghuṣūni 'aykin // nāḥat fa-'ansha 'tu 'asta 'idū*
- (6) *wa-mā faqīhu l-murāda minhā // kullu faqīhin lahū mu 'idū*
- (7) *'idhā radjawnā qaḍā'a wa 'dīn // fa-kayfa lā yurhabu l-wa 'idū*

- (1) Should I succeed in being blissful (in the Hereafter), well then: If only a grave would embrace me.
- (2) I did fast my entire life, until my death: So maybe the day of death will be a feast day.
- (3) Mention of Judgement Day terrified me, whereas I was blinded by (the thought) that 'it was still far away.'
- (4) While angels accompany me—one sitting at my right and one sitting at my left—who register (my good and bad deeds).
- (5) A dove cooed in the branches of a thicket, and so I began to repeat (what it said).
- (6) I did not understand what it meant, (but, after all,) every *faqīh* has a drill-assistant.
- (7) If we hope for the fulfilment of that which has been promised, then how come that that with which we have been threatened is not feared?

A more detailed analysis of al-Ma'arrī's poem allows for making accessible how very finely he has established an intertextual relation with the Qur'ānic text. To begin with, on a purely formal level, the rhyme in al-Ma'arrī's poem equals the end rhyme in Q 50:17 ff., i.e. in both cases it is –'idū. Thus, there are good reasons to believe that al-Ma'arrī was more than willing to give a hint as to what his poem was alluding to (i.e. Q 50). This is most obvious in his mention of the two angels who record a man's deeds, which is a clear allusion to Q 50:17 (as well as to Q 82:10; cf. above):

27 'Death as a fast-breaking meal' is a topic well documented in ascetic literature. Cf. for example Dāwūd aṭ-Ṭā'ī: 'Zu einem, der um eine Weisung gebeten hatte, sagte er [i.e. Dāwūd aṭ-Ṭā'ī]: "Faste, indem du dich des Diesseits enthältst, und mache den Tod zum fastenbrechenden Mahl"' (GRAMLICH 1995 I: 310). Or: 'Er [i.e. Dāwūd aṭ-Ṭā'ī] sagte: "Betrachte das Diesseits als einen Tag, an dem du fastest, und betrachte den Tod als dein fastenbrechendes Mahl. Punktum und Schluss [...]"' (GRAMLICH 1995 I: 316).

28 Cf. also Q 82:10: *wa-inna 'alaykum la-ḥāfiẓīn*.

'idh yatalaqqā l-mutallaqiyāni 'ani l-yamīni wa- 'ani sh-shimāli qa 'īdun

'When the two (angels) who keep the account, one sitting on the right, one on the left, take it down'²⁹

Cf. verse (4) of al-Ma'arrī's poem:

wa- 'an yamīnī wa- 'an shimāli // yaṣḥabunī ḥāfiẓun qa 'īdū

Al-Ma'arrī's clear allusion to Q 50 is further corroborated by the fact that his poem is shot through with a whole number of literal (or quasi-literal) lexical borrowings from this Qur'ānic Sūra: *qa 'īd, ba 'īd, wa 'īd, ayk, dhikr(ā)*. Thus, through an accumulation of lexemes borrowed from Q 50, al-Ma'arrī manages to evoke the Qur'ānic text and to silently put it next to his own text. It is the implied and unsaid difference between his text and Q 50—rendered accessible through the shared lexemes—that is the 'key' to his poem.

As regards the Qur'ānic text (i.e. Q 50), its central concern are the 'promise (of Paradise)' and the 'threat (with Judgement Day or Hell)', and quite obviously, 'promise' and 'threat'—and the two corresponding feelings of 'hope' and 'fear'—are pivotal for al-Ma'arrī's poem as well:

Q 50:12-14: *kadhhabat qablahum qawmu Nūhin wa- 'aṣḥābu r-rassi wa-Thamūdu // wa- 'Ādun wa-Fir'awnu wa-Ikhwānu Lūṭin // wa- 'Aṣḥābu l-aykati wa-qawmu Tubba 'in kullun kadhhaba r-rusula fa-ḥaqqā wa 'īdin*

'The people of Noah, Ar-Rass and Thamud denied before them // As did the people of 'Ad and Pharaoh and the brethren of Lot // And the dwellers of the Wood and people of Tubba'. Each of them denied the apostles. So My threat became a reality.'

Q 50:31-32: *wa- 'uzlifati l-djannatu li-l-muttaqīna ḡhayra ba 'īdin // hādhā mā tū'adūna li-kulli 'awwābin ḥāfiẓin*

'And Paradise will be brought near, not far from those who took heed for themselves and feared God. // 'This is what you had been promised,' (will be said) to every penitent who remembered (his duty)'

Q 50:45: *naḥnu 'a 'lamu bimā yaqūlūna wa-mā 'anta 'alayhim bi-djabbārin fa-dhakkir bi-l-Qur'āni man yakḥāfu wa 'īdī*

'We are cognisant of what they say; but it is not for you to compel them. So keep on reminding through the Qur'an whoever fears My warning.'

The above given Qur'ānic passages provide a good base for a more careful analysis of the differences between al-Ma'arrī's poem and the Qur'ānic text—which to comprehend is tantamount to grasping al-Ma'arrī's true message.

I begin with al-Ma'arrī's use of the lexeme *ayk* 'thicket' (cf. verse 5). The Qur'ānic verse given above (i.e. Q 50:14) mentions the so-called *aṣḥāb al-ayka*. As regards the *aṣḥāb al-ayka*, they are said to have accused the messenger sent to them (by God) of being a liar, i.e. in this sense they were 'unbelievers'—which was not to their avail.

29 Translation Ahmed ALI.

But how does al-Ma‘arrī use the lexeme *ayk* ‘thicket’ in *his* poem? In which context does it appear in *his* text?

In stark contrast to the *aṣḥāb al-ayka* from Q 50:14, verse (5) of al-Ma‘arrī’s poem speaks about a totally *unreflected and blind parroting of the Qur’ānic message* (cf. verses 5-6): ‘A dove cooed in the branches of a thicket, and so I began to repeat (what it said). I did not understand what it (actually) meant, (but, after all,) every *faqīh* has a drill-assistant.’ If we start from the assumption that the dove coos in the *sadjī*‘-mode, then al-Ma‘arrī’s statement is rather outspoken (and—needless to say—the *faqīh* from verse (6) clearly corroborates this). Thus, the difference between al-Ma‘arrī’s poem and the Qur’ānic text leaves no doubt as to who is more ‘rational’ according to al-Ma‘arrī’s demand of ‘thinking things through’: It is the (‘unbelieving’) *aṣḥāb al-ayka* who are more ‘rational’ than those Muslims, who in fact are parroting the Qur’ānic message—but do so *without reflecting* upon this message; *without drawing the necessary consequences as regards their doings*.

I want to emphasise again that al-Ma‘arrī here manages to construct an opposition between the peculiar ‘rationality’ of the ‘unbelievers’ and the almost resounding ‘irrationality’ of thoughtless ‘believers’ *without once mentioning the ‘unbelievers’—after all, the ‘rationality’ of the ‘unbelievers’ only lurks in his poem, for he has established an artful and somewhat grinning intertextual relation with the Qur’ān*, i.e. something which is *not explicitly* said in his poem!

How very obviously al-Ma‘arrī’s poem is heading for this direction can be corroborated through another intertextual relation that again establishes exactly the same opposition between ‘believers’ and ‘unbelievers’. This time, al-Ma‘arrī serves himself of the lexeme *ba‘īd* which appears both in his poem and in Q 50:3:

Q 50:3: ‘a’*idhā mitnā wa-kunnā turāban dhālika radjī’un ba‘īdun*

‘When we are dead and turned to dust, this returning (to life) is most far-fetched.’

Again and according to al-Ma‘arrī’s cardinal conviction that ‘being rational’ equals ‘taking death into account’, the ‘unbelievers’ in Q 50:3 are almost crinkly ‘rational’: *They* doubt the reawakening of the dead on the ground of *rational* arguments. If they are saying that this reawakening is *ba‘īd*, then they are saying that it is ‘far-fetched’ and ‘highly unlikely’; ‘questionable’ in every respect—and this clearly implies that *they* actually see the threatening reality of death.

Now what about the use of the lexeme *ba‘īd* in al-Ma‘arrī’s poem (cf. verse 3)? A closer look at verse (3) immediately shows that the verse targets those who believe in Judgement Day—otherwise they would certainly *not* be terrified by its mention—but *do not act in accordance to their fear*. Thus, if al-Ma‘arrī uses the lexeme *ba‘īd*, then in the sense of ‘(still) far away’: *wa-rā’anī li-l-ḥisābi dhikrun // wa-gharranī ’annahū ba‘īdū*.

To put it differently: We are in the midst of al-Ma‘arrī’s favourite topic of ‘thinking things through.’ This becomes even more obvious if we turn to the progression of the poem: Al-Ma‘arrī again sets in with death and dying. Already verse (2) explicitly mentions death (*al-mamāt; yawm al-ḥimām*). Verse (3) through its mention of Judgement Day (*al-ḥisāb*) explicitly introduces the Islamic eschatological perspective. Again, al-Ma‘arrī clearly juxtaposes death and eschatology—to die *as* a believing Muslim implies slipping into

the arms of one's *own* convictions as regards Judgement Day. Further above I tried to argue that al-Ma'arrī readily grants 'rationality' to those who believe as long as they take death into account. As has been said, al-Ma'arrī thereby seems to suggest that the 'rationality' of the believers takes on a *particular form* which is dictated by their (eschatological) beliefs—which implies that they are 'rational' only *as long as they act in accordance to their beliefs*; as long as their deeds are a recognition of their mortality in the sense that they are set with the clear conviction that they will minutely be explored at Judgement Day.

Quite obviously, in this poem al-Ma'arrī criticises *those* 'believers' who fail to be 'rational' *according to their own standards*; who topple into a most grotesque 'irrationality': They fear Judgement Day—and thus death—, but eliminate the thought of it by relegating it to a distant future (cf. Judgement Day is *ba'īd* 'still far away'!). Al-Ma'arrī seems to suggest that there is a connection between this peculiar 'irrationality' and a thoughtless parroting of contents of faith: People tend to hear the Qur'ānic message and reproduce it—but *without having understood or thought about what it implies*.

Given the intertextual relation with the Qur'ānic text, the poem—needless to say—has a *most provocative and grinning* tone to it. Q 50 emphasises that the threat with divine punishment came true for those who did not believe. Yet, al-Ma'arrī's poem suggests that this did not happen without a peculiar dignity on the part of the 'unbelievers', because *they* took death into consideration: *They* reflected upon the possibility of a reawakening and rejected it *on rational grounds* (cf. *ba'īd* in the sense of 'far-fetched'). The 'believers' on their part believe in Judgement Day, but *they* have not comprehended the dark implications of this belief, and *they* act as if they would live forever. Thus, like in the other poems presented further above, al-Ma'arrī emphasises that the 'logic' proper to religious beliefs necessarily entails a peculiar form of 'rational' behaviour, i.e. a behaviour which takes Judgement Day into consideration. In case this behaviour is non-existent, religious people lose the 'rationality' proper to them.

Al-Ma'arrī emphasised this on various occasions. After all, it was him who said (cf. *Luzūmiyyāt*, 1: 541, verse 7 [*basīf*]):

(7) *wa-lā 'alūmu 'akhā l-'ilhādi bal radjulan // yakshā s-sa'ira wa-lā yanfakku fī s-su'urī*

I do not rebuke him who is godless; rather I rebuke a man who fears Hell and still does not stop acting like a fool.

To sum up, there is some evidence that al-Ma'arrī used religious / eschatological content in his *Luzūmiyyāt* with *considerable freedom*. In various instances, he seems to fall back on eschatology to drag into the limelight his gloomy message of mortality. In the verses / poems presented above, he does not care if someone is religious or not—he teases *all* who do not take into account that they will pass away sooner or later. Apart from all other good reasons for characterising him as a freethinker (which are beyond the scope of this article), this markedly 'free' use of eschatological content certainly also allows for considering him a *true freethinker*, for the goal of the 'rationality' envisaged by him maybe is dark—but it is of *universal* reachability. I certainly do not wish to insinuate that this is the *only* way in which religious content appears in the *Luzūmiyyāt*, but it is an important one because al-Ma'arrī's prompt of 'thinking things through' is *omnipresent* in his voluminous collection

of poems.³⁰ Further above, I characterised the kernel of al-Ma‘arrī’s rationalistic message as somewhat trivial. This should be supplemented by the concluding remark that his poems nevertheless are not simply trivial. This certainly also has to do with the fact that al-Ma‘arrī’s recourse to ascetic thoughts was quite abundant and manifold. Among other things, he seems to have been well aware of the fact that people wish that their lives ‘make sense’ in the light of the constant threat of death and in the light of being contingent³¹ beings: They want to forget this, and they can do so through embarking on some project of *illusio* and through seeking social recognition.³² That is, al-Ma‘arrī’s poems are not trivial, because they are shot through with the tensions, the pain, and the continuous loss that a deeply loved life threatened by death entails—without there being a strategy to really avert them. For al-Ma‘arrī, the strategies at hand seem to be mere ‘coping-strategies’ of a most treacherous forgetfulness. In the end, everything will fail in an almost trivial way. Even the earrings that a woman—as a little ‘beauty-project’ in the here and now—prepares to make herself pretty will capsize into something very different (though foreseeable): they will be stolen by the corpse washer, for this woman is going to die; her little project will collapse and turn into another (rather macabre) instance of the failure to ‘think things through.’³³

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30 For numerous examples cf. NIGST 2003: 84 ff. (“Das Mitdenken des Scheiterns”).

31 Cf. BOURDIEU 2001: 315.

32 There are some hints that al-Ma‘arrī took up the religious discourse about *shuhra* ‘fame’ and *khumūl* ‘namelessness.’ Cf. NIGST 2003: 203 ff.; for the topic of *shuhra* and *khumūl* in ascetic literature cf. GRAMLICH 1997: 301-302; for *djāh* and *khumūl* cf. also MARLOW 2002: 63. – For a most ambitious and lucid analysis of the run for recognition cf. GHAZZĀLĪ *Iḥyā’* III: 268 ff. (*Kitāb dhamm al-djāh war-riyā’*); cf. also JACKSON 2002: 37 ff.; for al-Ghazzālī’s thoughts on *djāh* cf. also NIGST 2011: 479 ff. (‘Postskriptum über *gāh*’).

33 Cf. *Luzūmiyyāt*, 2: 619 (*basī*), verse (4): *wa-dhātī l-qurṭayni fī ḥalyin tu ‘idduhumā // wa-šāra ‘adḡran li-dhātī l-ghasli qurṭāhā*: ‘And (death assails) the woman with her two earrings which (with the intention to pretty herself) she prepares—and as a ‘wage’ for the one who washes her corpse her earrings will end.’

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Lorenz Matthias Nigst, Department of Oriental Studies, University of Vienna, Austria
 ◀ lorenz.nigst@univie.ac.at ▶