“It Eclipsed Cairo and Outshone Baghdad!”: Ibn Rashīq’s Elegy for the City of Qayrawan

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Abstract

Ibn Rashīq’s popularity in the Arab world as one of the most distinguished classical Maghribi poets owes much to what is often called in Arabic school textbooks “Nūniyyat Ibn Rashīq fi rithā’ al-Qayrawān,” or simply “Nūniyyat Ibn Rashīq.” Ibn Rashīq composed his city-elegy, the *nūniyyah* while living in exile to lament the destruction (*kharāb*) and desolation (*khalā*) of Qayrawan in the wake of the Hilālī sacking of the city in 1057 CE. A full English translation of Ibn Rashīq’s printed and standardized *nūniyyah* follows an introductory essay that enumerates salient linguistic and rhetorical features, and offers a manuscript and publication history for the poem. The essay pivots around the lack of elegiac and nostalgic representation of Qayrawan’s once majestic ‘cityscape’ and iconic worldly buildings in the *nūniyyah*, finding the mnemonic and nostalgic focus of the Maghrib’s most renowned city-elegy to be rather the loss of the city’s *fuqahā*’ (Islamic scholars or jurists).

Keywords

Ibn Rashīq – Qayrawan – *nūniyyah* – *rithā’ al-mudun* – Banū Hilāl – *fuqahā*’ – city elegy – translation

عراق الغرب بينهما كثير
وكيف تقاس بالسنة الشهور
وتلك اختط ساحتها أمير .

عراق الشام بغداد وهذي
ولست أقيس بغداد اليها
بلاد خطها أصحاب بدر

Baghdad is the Iraq of the East, this [Qayrawan] is the Iraq of the West,
 they may share many things in common.
 But I am not measuring Baghdad to it [Qayrawan],
 for a year and a month, one can never compare!
 It was the Badrīs who drew the outline of this [Qayrawan],
 a prince drafted the plan of that one!

ABŪ AL-QĀSIM AL-FIZĀRĪ (D.956)¹

كيف يا قيروان حالك لما نثر البين سلكك المنظوما
 كنت أم البلاد شرقا وغربا فمحا الدهر وشيك المرقوما.

O Qayrawan! What has become of your state
 after separation dispersed your thread of beads.
 You were the mother of the land, in the East and the West,
 before your colorful ornament was erased by Fate.

IBN FADDĀL AL-QAYRAWĀNĪ (D. 1086)²

Before its catastrophic destruction and desolation at the hands of the nomadic tribes of Banū Hilāl in 1057 CE, Qayrawan was hailed by al-Idrīsī (d. 1165) and many others as the unmatched metropolis of the Islamic West (hereafter the Maghrib). In the eyes of its admirers, even Cordoba, then the capital of al-Andalus, was not a serious rival, let alone a worthy competitor. For those admirers, if there existed a city that matched theirs, that city was Baghdad alone. As poetically captured in the title and the prefatory sample verses to this article, some of Qayrawan's most stalwart enthusiasts went so far as to declare, rather haughtily, its supremacy over the caliphal capital of the 'Abbasids. During Qayrawan's peak years of Aghlabid glory (808-909), the city, which was founded by 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' al-Fihri (d. 683) in 670 CE, witnessed an unprecedented urbanization and construction boom.³ Concurrently, Qayrawan enjoyed a long period of scholarly renaissance, both religious and worldly. In *al-Mu'jib fī talkhīṣ akhbār*

1 Cited in Abū Bakr al-Mālikī (d.1061), *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nufūs fī ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' al-Qayrawān wa-Ifriqiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1983), 225.

2 Quoted in al-Dabbāgh, *Ma'ālim al-īmān fī ma'rifat ahl al-Qayrawān* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1968), 225.

3 See Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge, University Press, 1987) and M. Talbi, *L'émirat aghlabide, 184-296/800-909: histoire politique* (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient, 1966).

al-Maghrib, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Marrākushī (d. 1185) sums this up well when he notes that Qayrawan, “from its foundation until it was sacked by the Bedouins was the [power]house of knowledge in the West, the center of its major scholars, and the destination of the seekers of knowledge across it [the West].”⁴

Both in poetry and prose, pre-Hilālī Qayrawan was movingly eulogized and romantically depicted across a plethora of Maghribi (western) as well as Mashriqi (eastern) sources. Mashriqi al-Muqaddasī (d. 946) had no qualms about singing Qayrawan’s praise and claimed it as unique not only in the Maghrib but also in the entire *Dār al-Islām* (abode of Islam). In his *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma’rifat al-aqālīm*, he praises it as, “the pride of the Arabs, the seat of power, and one of the pillars [of *Dār al-Islām*]” before proceeding to declare it superior to Nishapur, Damascus and Isfahan.⁵ In the copious praise for the Aghlabids, and to a lesser degree the Zirids, Qayrawan was nostalgically captured by later Maghribi and Andalusī scholars. Suffice to mention in this regard famed geographers al-Idrīsī and Ibn Sa’īd al-Maghribī (d. 1286), historians Ibn ‘Idhārī al-Marrākushī (d. 1295) and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), and travelers al-‘Abdarī (d. 1336) and al-Ḥasan al-Wazzān al-Fāsī (d. 1554)—known in the West as Leo Africanus.⁶ Commenting on its pre-Hilālī urban glory, cultural achievement, and its place in the Islamic West, al-Idrīsī hailed Qayrawan as, “the greatest city in the West, the most populated, the most prosperous and thriving, with the perfect buildings.”⁷

The effusive comments dramatically turn into elegiac and nostalgic statements as soon as al-Idrīsī discusses the sack of Qayrawan by the Banū Hilāl.⁸ What was once the most majestic metropolis of the Maghrib, al-Idrīsī mournfully comments, became nothing but (*aṭlālun dārisatun wa-āthārun ṭāmisah*) “erased traces and obliterated ruins.”⁹ Perhaps more suggestively, Andalusian Ibn Yūsuf al-Saraqūstī (d. 1143) devoted an entire *maqāmah* of his *al-Maqāmāt*

4 Al-Marrākushī, *Kitāb al-Mu’jib fī talkhīṣ akhbār al-Maghrib* (Leiden: Brill, 1881), (441). See also Abū al-‘Arab al-Qayrawānī (d.945), *Ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqīyyah wa-Tūnis* (al-Dār al-Tūnisiyyah lil-Nashr, 1968); Abū Bakr al-Mālikī (d.1061); *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nufūs*; and Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Mu’askarī, *Naba’ al-‘īwān bi-jam’ al-dīwān fī dhikr ṣulahā’ madīnat al-Qayrawān* (Markaz al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyyah bi-l-Qayrawān, 2012).

5 Al-Muqaddasī, *Kitāb Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma’rifat al-aqālīm* (Leiden: Brill, 196), 224.

6 Both visited the city and were appalled at what they saw. See M. Talbi, “Kairouan,” in *Cities of the Islamic World*, ed. C. Edmund Bosworth (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 258-268.

7 Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah al-Diniyyah, 1990), 284.

8 See M. Brett, “‘Fitnat al-Qayrawan’: a Study of Traditional Arab Historiography”. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis (London, University of London, 1970).

9 Al-Idrīsī, *Nuzhat al-mushtāq*, 284.

al-Luzūmiyyah in rhymed prose to mourn the destruction and desolation of Qayrawan. In "al-Maqāmah al-Qayrawāniyyah," [Maqāmah 29], as translated by James T. Monroe, al-Saraqūṣṭī al-Ashtarkūnī has this to say on the tongue of his (anti)hero:

خرجنا في جماعة ذات قيروان حتى مررنا بمدينة القيروان مع نفر من فتاك
العربان وصعاليك الذؤبان فوصلناها وقد وطئنا الطريق وتزائل الخليط منا
والفريق وقد استول عليها الخراب وزهبت بدولتها الأعراب فأغاضت
حوضها وغديرها وزلزلت خورنقتها وسديرها فعُجبت على تلك الأطلال
والرُسوم وثُقت إلى تلك الآثار والوسوم.

We set up in a group, traveling in caravan, until we came to the city of Qayrawan ... Destruction had overtaken the city, Bedouin Arabs had made off with its power, diminished its cistern and pool, and shaken its Khawarnaq and Sadir. I therefore halted before those ruins and tracings, and felt nostalgia for those vestiges and tattoo-like markings.¹⁰

But the Qayrawan at whose *aṭlāl* the non-Qayrawānī al-Saraqūṣṭī halted in his idiosyncratic rhymed prose decades after its *kharāb* was already, indeed most movingly, bewailed in verse by arguably its own greatest poets of all times: al-Ḥasan Ibn Rashīq (for the Arabic and my English translation of his *nūniyyah*, see the appendix to this article), Muḥammad Ibn Sharaf (d.1067), 'Alī al-Ḥuṣrī (d.1095), and Ibn Faḍḍāl al-Qayrawānī (d.1086). All four lived to see their beloved city ravaged, destroyed, and desolated. "Their lamentation in verse," Michael Brett notes, "is a literary monument to the disaster, couched in the conventional language and imagery of poetry."¹¹ Personally impacted by the catastrophe, they were each then forced to flee their beloved city, and died in exile.¹²

10 Abū l-Tāhī al-Saraqūṣṭī, *al-Maqāmāt al-luzūmiyyah*, trans. James T. Monroe (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 302.

11 Michael Brett, "The Poetry of Disaster: the Tragedy of Qayrawān 1052-1057 CE," in *Continuity and Change in the Realms of Islam*, eds. K. d'Hulster and Jo van Steenberg (Leuven, Peeters, 2008), 77.

12 One would have loved to see a chapter exploring the forgotten corpus of Qayrawānī city-elegies in the recent edited volume *The Fall of Cities in the Mediterranean: Commemoration in Literature, Folk-Song, and Liturgy*, eds. Mary R. Bachvarova et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016). All of the above-mentioned poets were Mediterranean par excellence, especially when we know that after the fall of their city, they all had to live and die in exile in various Mediterranean countries like Italy (Sicily), Spain (al-Andalus), and

What follows consists of a translation of the 1961 published edition of Ibn Rashīq's *nūniyyah*, introduced by a brief manuscript and publication history for the poem.¹³ Considering the city-elegy's salient linguistic and rhetorical features, Qayrawan's cityscape is remarkable in the *nūniyyah* precisely in its absence from a poem ostensibly in its lament; a poem caught up in a rivulet of tears shed rather over the scholars of the poet's beloved city. Drawing on modern western theorizations of sites of memory and the discursive implications of nostalgia and loss, the introductory essay closes on the mnemonic and nostalgic modes of the *nūniyyah*.

Ibn Rashīq and His *Nūniyyah*

Abū 'Alī al-Ḥasan ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī (d. 1063 or 1071) is the single most distinguished cultural figure associated with Qayrawan, the first Islamic capital of al-Maghrib and its once prosperous metropolis.¹⁴ Not originally of Qayrawan, Ibn Rashīq was born in the western town of Masila located in modern-day Algeria around 1000 CE. He spent his childhood in Masila where he was schooled in various branches of traditional Arabo-Islamic knowledge and exhibited a penchant for *adab* and poetry. During the poet's youth, Qayrawan thrived under the Zirids (1072-1152) and remained a cultural capital for

Morocco. Despite the fascinating interdisciplinary outlook of the essays—which mostly explore ancient and premodern Greek and Latin city-elegies for Athens, Rome, and Constantinople—there is no reference whatsoever to the rich Mediterranean corpus of premodern Arabic *rithā' al-mudun*, even if the volume was inspired by the ongoing tragic *kharāb* and *khalā'* of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cities such as Aleppo, as the editor reveals in the engaging introduction.

- 13 It should be mentioned that Michael Brett offered an interpretive prose translation/summary of the *nūniyyah* in his "The Poetry of Disaster." This present translation is a more literal verse rendering and is largely informed by my humble familiarity with Mālikī lexicon dominant in the *nūniyyah*. Within classical and even modern Mālikī scholarship, *al-sādah al-Mālikīyyah* refers to Mālikī scholars/jurisprudents (*fuqahā'*).
- 14 This association is no better illustrated than in the title chosen by Tunisia's greatest modern historian, Ḥasan Ḥusnī 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1968). For his classic on the history and culture of Qayrawan: *Bisāṭ al-'aḳīq fī ḥaḍārat al-Qayrawān wa-shā'irihā Ibn Rashīq*. It is to be noted that, in addition to a plethora of educational institutions and cultural clubs in Tunisia that bear his name, Ibn Rashīq's imaginative portrait graces a Tunisian note of 50 dinars, the highest currency note in the country. For more on the poet in English, see Ibn Khallikān's account of his life and achievements in *Biographical Dictionary, Volume 1*, trans. William MacGuckin Baron de Slane (Paris: The Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1843), 348-386.

ambitious scholars aspiring to fame and patronage. In 1016, Ibn Rashīq moved to the capital city of Ifriqiyya, hence his designation *al-Qayrawānī*. His relocation coincided with the accession to power of the ambitious Zirid governor al-Mu'izz Ibn Bādīs (r. 1016-62). Ibn Rashīq attended the circles of some of the most influential Qayrawānī scholars and gained the protection of the powerful polymath Ibn Abī al-Rijāl (d. 1035). Ibn Rashīq rose to fame and was summoned to the court of al-Mu'izz. At the Zirid court, Ibn Rashīq became one of the two most powerful court poets along with his archrival, Ibn Sharaf (d. 1067).¹⁵

In 1048, the Zirid governor al-Mu'izz broke ties with the Fatimids of Egypt. Not only did he declare his principality independent of the Fatimids, but he boldly swore allegiance to the 'Abbasids in Baghdad.¹⁶ This theo-political move led indirectly to the catastrophic invasion and sacking of his capital city at the hands of nomadic tribes of Banū Hilāl and their associates in 1057. Arriving mainly from Najd and Hijaz via Upper Egypt, these tribes and others such as Banū Salīm and Banū Riyāḥ were unleashed by the Faṭimids as a vindictive retaliation against the Zirid governor al-Mu'izz. "When the star of misfortune rose over the dominion of al-Mu'izz Ibn Bādīs," Ibn Rashīq fled with his patron al-Mu'izz to Mahdiyya on the eastern coast of Tunisia, "under a heaven with eclipsed moons and a remainder of a soul that is shorter than the drinking interval of a donkey,"¹⁷ as Ibn Bassām put it eloquently.¹⁸ At the death of his patron in 1062, he set out for Mazzara in Sicily where he spent the remainder of his life in exile, dying there either in 1063 or 1071.¹⁹

In the Western academy, Ibn Rashīq's fame rests more upon his critical than his poetic legacy. Chiefly known for his *magnum opus* of poetic theory *al-Umdah fī šinā'at al-shi'r wa-naqdih*, Ibn Rashīq was in fact one of the Maghrib's preeminent and most influential poets.²⁰ During his lifetime he was

15 Ḥasan Ḥusnī 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Bisāṭ al-'aḳīq fī ḥadārat al-Qayrawān wa-shā'irihā Ibn Rashīq* (Tunis: Maktabat al-Manār, 1970), 58.

16 Ibn 'Idhārī. *Kitāb al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa-l-Maghrib* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1967), 397.

17 «ولما طلع نجم النحوس بملك المعز بن باديس وخرج إلى المهدية بسما كاسفة الأقدار ودماء أقصر من ظمأ الحمار كان أبو علي ممن انخسر في زمرة المحروبة.»

18 Ibn Bassām, *al-Dhakhīrah fī maḥāsīn ahl al-jazīrah* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1979), 598.

19 M. Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 1999), 192. See also H. R. Idris, *La berbérie orientale sous les Zirides: Xe-XIIe siècles* (Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1962) and Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Tenth Century CE* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2001).

20 He is also the author of *Qurāḍat al-dhahab fī naqd ash'ār al-'Arab*.

appreciated more for his poetic practice than his poetic theory. "C'est surtout à sa poésie," Chedly Bouyahia writes, "qu'Ibn Rašīq devait son ascension et sa célébrité."²¹ There is sufficient evidence to indicate that Ibn Rašīq's poetry was treasured not just in his home region of Ifriqiyya²² but all across the Maghrib, al-Andalus, and Sicily, and travelled as far as the Mashriq.²³ Despite a legitimate doubt surrounding the existence of a *dīwān* he compiled, Ibn Rašīq left behind a voluminous poetic oeuvre. His poetry displays an impressive mastery of classical Arabic poetics and has been hailed as unequalled in illustrating the exemplary implementation of poetic concepts and principles.²⁴ "He [Ibn Rašīq] is above all," Bouyahia notes, "the poet most skilled in felicitously applying the theories and rules of Arabic poetry, so expertly expounded in his major work, *al-'Umdah fī šinā'at al-shi'r wa-naqdih*."²⁵

In the modern period numerous scholars have revived interest in Ibn Rašīq's poetry by collecting and publishing several of his poems. Ibn Rašīq's modern popularity owes much to the teaching of what is often called in Arabic school textbooks "*Nūniyyat Ibn Rašīq fī Rithā' al-Qayrawān*" (hereafter, the *nūniyyah*). Ibn Rašīq composed the *nūniyyah* to lament the departed splendor of his city, which he lived to witness with his own poetic eyes. But unlike the unjustifiably forgotten *lāmiyyah*, *hā'yyah* and *rā'yyah* of Ibn Sharaf or the *tā'yyah* of al-Ḥuṣrī, the *nūniyyah* remains popular and widely read.²⁶ It is part

21 Ch. Bouyahia, *La vie littéraire en Ifriqiya sous les Zirides, 362-555 de l'H./972-1160 de J.-C.* (Paris: Sorbonne, 1972), 107. The French quotation translates as follows: "It is mostly to his poetry that Ibn Rašīq owes his rise and fame."

22 Modern day Tunisia and the adjacent regions of eastern Algeria and western Libya.

23 Famous Andalusian and Sicilian poets such as Ibn Khafājah (d. 1139), Ibn Ḥamdīs (d. 1133), and Ibn al-Ṣaffār al-Ṣiqillī (fl. 11th cD) revered Ibn Rašīq. His poetry was sung by famed Andalusian polymath Ibn Bājjah (d. 1138). Ibn Abī Kudayyah al-Qayrawānī (d. 1119) recited Ibn Rašīq's poetry while in Baghdad. Syrian Ibn Ya'īsh (d. 1245), best known for his elaborate commentary on al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Mufaṣṣal* used to admire Ibn Rašīq's poetry. The *nūniyyah* of Shams al-Dīn Maḥmūd al-Kūfī (d. 1276) in lamenting Baghdad after its catastrophic sacking by the Moghuls in 1258 was a poetic *mu'araḍah* (imitation) of Ibn Rašīq, as was the most famous Arabic city-elegy by al-Sharīf al-Rundī (d. 1285), widely known in Arabic as "*Nūniyyat al-Rundī fī rithā' al-Andalus*" (the *nūniyyah* of al-Rundī lamenting the loss of al-Andalus).

24 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Maymanī, *al-Nutaf min shi'r Ibn Rašīq wa zamilihi Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawāniyyayn* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-Salafiyyah, 1925), 4.

25 Ch. Bouyahia, "Ibn Rašīq," In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds, P. Bearman et. al. (Leiden, Brill: 2004), 903-904.

26 Professor Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych alerted me to the possibility that the curricular use of the *nūniyyah* in the Arab world could well be related to its construction of the

of the canon in modern-day Tunisia, as well as several other North African and Middle Eastern countries.²⁷ In western language scholarship, by contrast, Ibn Rashīq's city-elegy for his adopted home city of Qayrawan is unduly neglected despite the growing interest in premodern Arabo-Islamic city-elegies.²⁸

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- image of a Golden Age of Arab-Islamic learning and scholarship. For more on this topic, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Abbasid Panegyric: *Badī* Poetry and the Invention of the Arab Golden Age," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 1 (2017), 48-72.
- 27 The renewal of interest in Ibn Rashīq's poetry in general and the *nūniyyah* in particular was ushered in the late 19th century by Tunisian scholar Ḥasan Ḥusnī 'Abd al-Wahhāb's *Bisāṭ al-'aḳīq fī ḥaḍārat al-Qayrawān wa-shā'irihā Ibn Rashīq*. 'Abd al-Wahhāb selectively included 27 verses of the *nūniyyah* that he deemed most illustrative of what he presented as the original city-elegy. A few decades later, Indian Arabist al-Maymanī (Rājkūti) published *Al-Nutaf min shi'r Ibn Rashīq wa zamīlihi Ibn Sharaf al-Qayrawāniyyayn* in Cairo around 1925. Al-Maymanī included a 56-verse poem adding a brief note stating that he based his selection on the version incorporated by al-Dabbāgh (d. 1209) in the introduction to his seminal *Ma'ālim al-īmān fī ma'rifat ahl al-Qayrawān*. In his introduction, al-Dabbāgh speaks of the history of Qayrawan (mainly its *faḍā'il* (virtues)). Al-Dabbāgh introduced the *nūniyyah* with the following interesting statement: "*wa-qāla yarthī al-Qayrawān min qaṣīdahtin lah*," (he [Ibn Rashīq] said, elegizing Qayrawān from a poem of his) (*Ma'ālim al-īmān*, 15). This use of *min* may suggest that what he is to quote is an extended excerpt and that the original *nūniyyah* could have been longer. In fact, after citing the 56-line poem, al-Dabbāgh briefly stated that the complete *nūniyyah* consisted of 145 verses and was fully anthologized by a Qayrawānī scholar named Ibrāhīm al-'Awānī (fl. 11th AD) (*Ma'ālim al-īmān*, 21). Due to the lack of an original *diwān*, as well as the challenge of identifying al-'Awānī, it is impossible to confirm the existence of a longer original *nūniyyah* that consisted of 145 verses.
- 28 The published works in English on *rithā' al-mudun* rely heavily on Ibn Rashīq's theoretical views on *rithā'* even if his own elegiac production is never discussed. Michael Brett is the only scholar who has explored the *nūniyyah*, in "The Poetry of Disaster: the Tragedy of Qayrawān 1052-1057 CE," *Continuity and Change in the Realms of Islam: Studies in Honour of Professor Urbain Vermeulen*. Eds. K. d'Hulster and Jo van Steenberghe (Leuven; Peeters, 2008, 73-89). Nearly all English studies on premodern Arabic city-elegies fail to incorporate chapters on the Qayrawānī/Maghribi corpus of city-elegy. In addition to Alexander Elinson's fascinating study on Andalusian city-elegies, I have in mind Ibrāhīm Sinjilāwī's unpublished dissertation, "The Lament for Fallen Cities: A Study of the Development of the Elegiac Genre in Classical Arabic Poetry," (University of Chicago, 1983) and more recently, Anan Habeeb's unpublished dissertation, "Nostalgia and the East in the Arabic and Hebrew Poetry of Islamic Spain," (Indiana University, 2015).

Synopsis of the Poem

The *nūniyyah*—composed in the *kāmil* meter— has enjoyed a fair amount of attention in the Arab world. This is largely due to the poem's inclusion in an anthology of Ibn Rashīq's poetry, titled *Dīwān Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī*. This work was collected and edited by 'Abd al-Raḥmān Yāghī in 1961.²⁹ Clearly, Yāghī's title is rather misleading even if it is a common practice, not least because no *dīwān* attributed to Ibn Rashīq seems to have survived the centuries, if in fact it ever existed.³⁰ Amongst the numerous poems he included, it is the *nūniyyah* that has drawn wide attention, both popular and scholarly, gaining an almost sanctified canonical status. Unfortunately, Yāghī did not mention anything regarding the source of the poem, nor did he explore even in passing its textual history. Briefly stated, Yāghī introduced the *nūniyyah* with the following Arabic statement: "*qāla yarthī al-Qayrawān*/And he said elegizing Qayrawan." This statement seems to indicate that the 56-verse poem Yāghī included in the anthology is original and complete.³¹ Accordingly, a majority of subsequent scholars as well as ministries of education in many Middle Eastern and North African countries have helped in the wide circulation and standardization of the 56-verse published *nūniyyah*.³²

- 29 'Abd al-Raḥmān Yāghī, *Dīwān Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah 1961). There exist two other modern published *dīwāns*: *Dīwān Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī* published in Beirut in 1996 and edited by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ḥawwārī and Hudā 'Awdah (Beirut: Dār al-Jil); and *Dīwān Ibn Rashīq al-Qayrawānī*, edited by Muḥyi al-Dīn Dīb (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-'Aṣriyyah, 1998). Both editors incorporated the 56-verse *nūniyyah* without hinting at the possibility that it is missing lines.
- 30 Perhaps with the exception of Ibn Khallikān, there is no single reference to his *dīwān* in medieval Arabic sources. For this reason, Yāghī was strongly faulted by Bouyahya for his "unreliable and controversial treatment" of Ibn Rashīq's scattered poetry. According to Bouyahya, Yāghī "ne réunit pas tous les vers connus de I.R [Ibn Rashīq] dans des manuscrits et même dans des ouvrages édités." *La vie littéraire en Ifrīqiya*, 107).
- 31 Of course, many who studied and memorized the poem in high school, myself included, might be surprised, if not disappointed, to know of the strong likelihood that the *nūniyyah* may in fact originally have been much longer (see note 9).
- 32 This is also evident in many academic entries on Ibn Rashīq published in the West. Russell Hopely, in his very informative entry on Ibn Rashīq in the *Dictionary of African Biography, Volume 2* briefly commented on the *nūniyyah* by saying that, "Ibn Rashīq's poetry has survived largely intact ... Of particular interest is Ibn Rashīq's lament for al-Qayrawān (n 221 in the *Dīwān*), a poem of some fifty-six lines written in the wake of that city's destruction in the mid-eleventh century" (115). Similarly, Hussein Bayyud in *Die Stadt in der arabischen Poesie*, bis 1258 n. Chr., before offering his German translation of the *nūniyyah* in a chapter entitled "Die Klage über Zerstörte Städte," by referring to it as

The first section of the published *nūniyyah* mourns the death and exile of Qayrawan's jurists: the *fuqahā'*. What is most striking, if not suspicious, is the unrhymed *maṭla'* (opening line), which seems to begin in *medias res* and becomes unconventional, especially if one reads it against arguably the most popular *maṭla'* of Arabic-Islamic city-elegy: the better known later poem "Nūniyyah fī rithā' al-Andalus," by al-Sharīf al-Rundī (d.1285).³³ As is conventional of *rithā'*, however, the poem smoothly transforms itself into a human eulogy wherein the poet pays tribute to the *fuqahā'*. This section constitutes more than a third of the published *nūniyyah*. It begins with verse 1 and continues until verse 17 or even 18 (specifically the first hemistich). The latter shifts its attention to the city itself for the first time in the poem: in the two subsequent lines Ibn Rashīq extends his eulogy to the city even if he relates its supremacy to its *fuqahā'*. In many aspects, one can argue that verses 18 to 21 amount to a brief *mufākharah* (boasting match) between Qayrawan and two of its main

a 56-verse poem: "Ibn Rašīq al-Qairawānī (gest. 456/1064) n.a. 463/1070) hat über dieses Unglück ein sechsfünfundzig Verse langes Gedicht gemacht." (101).

- 33 A thorough reading of the published *maṭla'* of the *nūniyyah* can decidedly raise some eyebrows especially with regard to the non-rhyming opening line (the *ʿarūdah* [*sādatin*] and the *ḍarb* [*īmānī*]). This is in addition to the abrupt *kam kāna fihā* which may indicate the existence of earlier missing lines in which Qayrawan is mentioned. Whether the *maṭla'* of the standardized *nūniyyah* is indicative of Ibn Rashīq's felicitous implementation of poetic rules is a legitimate concern. The fact of the matter is that many connoisseurs of *rithā' al-mudun* would conjure up the most memorable *maṭla'* of the Arabic city/kingdom elegy, such as al-Sharīf al-Rundī's classic "*Nūniyyah fī-Rithā' al-Andalus*." The *maṭla'* of this later Andalusian elegiac masterpiece has attained an unequaled fame and is one of the most quoted verses in the Arab-Islamic world. As masterfully translated by James T Monroe, the *maṭla'* is as follows: "Everything declines after reaching perfection,/therefore let no man be beguiled by the sweetness of a pleasant life" (*Hispano-Arabic Poetry: A Student Anthology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 336). Due to the popularity of the above opening line of al-Rundī, many would expect a city-elegy to begin perforce with a contemplative/proverbial *maṭla'* on the faithlessness of the Times and the vagaries of the World. Indeed, Ibn Rashīq himself, as explained by Professor Van Gelder, devoted a "special chapter to the meanings of *maṭla'*" in his work on poetics (*Beyond the Line: Classical Arabic Literary Critics on the Coherence and Unity of the Poem* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 116). Van Gelder's translation of Ibn Rashīq's statement on the opening line merits quoting at length: "Poetry is a lock, the first (part) of which is the key. A poet ought to make the beginning of his poem good, for it is the first thing to strike the ear; and from it one can infer, from the first instant, what he has to say (*mā ʿindahū*)" (*Beyond the Line*, 116).

For more on the surviving fragments of Ibn Rashīq's *nūniyyah* and other medieval Algerian city-elegies, see my forthcoming monograph, *Of Cities and the Poetic Imagination in the Premodern and Precolonial Maghrib* (McGill-Queens University Press).

competitors: (Fatimid) Cairo and (Abbasid) Baghdad—hence the title of this essay.³⁴ The declared victor is known ahead of time. The third section extends from verse 22 until verse 25. These verses relate to the brief *mufākharah* but dramatically pronounce a thematic detour: the tragic denouement of what was the perfect city. In other words, when Qayrawan reached perfection it became the target of competitors and rivals. Qayrawan is presented as the victim of the perfidy of destiny. Ibn Rashīq conventionally dwells on the capriciousness of fate and proverbially captures “the transitoriness” of the glories of cities, to loosely quote Thomas Bauer.³⁵ Recalling classical elegies and pre-Islamic *qaṣīdah*, Ibn Rashīq invokes Fate to dwell rather submissively on its capricious will to turn the course of his city from full bloom to doom. The fourth section (verse 26 to 38) catalogs and exposes the evil qualities of those who sacked Qayrawan: the poet enumerates their atrocities against the helpless and powerless inhabitants of the city. As conventional in medieval Arabic war-themed poetry, the focus of this section falls on womenfolk and children.³⁶

The poet proves able to divert some of these lines into riveting *ghazal*, offering us two rare, amatory verses in which he extolls the beauty of the maidens (verses 37 and 38). The fifth section (verses 39 to 42) depicts the *khalā'* (desolation) of the city, focusing on the abandonment of Qayrawan's most iconic religious space, the Mosque of 'Uqbah, as will be discussed in detail below. The sixth section (verses 43 to 50) is one of the most moving and intricately crafted sections of the poem. It melodramatically deals with the elegiac motif of distress and universal sympathy. The final section (verse 51 to 56) of the published poem ends with a series of rhetorical contemplative questions about fate and the unknown future of the ruined city. In several aspects, the poet leaves a margin of hope by borrowing extensively from the genre of *al-faraj ba'da al-shiddah* (relief after hardship), competing with an elegiac diction akin to an amatory prelude (*nasīb*) of the classical *qaṣīdah*, only in reverse.³⁷ The section bristles with consolatory proverbial statements concerning the irreversibility

34 For an illuminating discussion of *mufākharah* in classical Arabic literature, see Geert Jan van Gelder, “Conceit of Pen and Sword,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32 (1987), 329–360.

35 Thomas Bauer, “Communication and Emotion: The Case of Ibn Nubāṭah's Kindertotenlieder,” *Mamlūk Studies Review* 7 (2003), 49–95. For a discussion of the centrality of the motif of the capriciousness of fate in classical Arabic elegy, see Thomas Bauer, “Todesdiskurse im Islam,” *Asiatische Studien* 53 (1999), 5–16.

36 Especially pre-Islamic poetry, Arab-Byzantine war poetry, poetry of the counter-Crusades, and counter-Reconquista. See *Warfare and Poetry in the Middle East*, ed. Hugh Kennedy (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

37 Especially with regard to diction related to the classical motifs of loss, departure, erasure, separation. My main interest here falls rather on the representation of the physical urban motifs and diction, which I see as more central in *rithā' al-mudun*.

of fate, the transience of earthly life, and the perfidy of the world. Ibn Rashīq mourns the ruined city as an elegist might address a deceased in an elegy for a human,³⁸ yet at the same time remains relatively optimistic with regard to a future resurrection of his ruined city and the restoration of its past glory.

Elegy, Qayrawan, and the Scholars

As can be seen from the appended translation and foregoing synopsis, at least seventeen lines of the *nūniyyah* are devoted entirely to eulogizing the religious scholars of Qayrawan. While the elegiac theme is economically initiated and effectively disseminated by the opening erotema *kam kāna*, the remaining words, phrases, and sentences of the following 16 lines offer a paean to the scholars,³⁹ and represents the nucleus of the published *nūniyyah*.

One of the most imposing linguistic features of this section, indeed the *nūniyyah* as a whole, is the extensive reliance on Qur'anic idioms and traditional Sunni scholarly phraseology, coupled with an abundance of a certain diction that is largely idiosyncratic to the Mālikiyyah school of Sunni Islam.⁴⁰ Additionally, Ibn Rashīq borrows—both interpretively and verbatim—from the Qur'ān.⁴¹ While the elegist's intense *iqtibās* (borrowing) from prosaic Islamic sources may be thought to have negatively impacted the metaphorical and symbolical foundation of the poem, Ibn Rashīq, in my view, has masterfully succeeded in converting the prosaically technical diction into material for poetically well-crafted hemistichs and verses. He does so mainly through the use of two rhetorical devices of *ṭibāq* (antithesis) and *nasāq* (balance or rhythm), which dominate the poem.⁴² The nostalgic, elegiac opening rhetorical

38 The *nūniyyah* incorporates almost all the motifs of classical Arabic elegy aptly discussed by Arie Schippers in the introduction to his "Hebrew Andalusian Elegies and the Arabic Literary Tradition," *Near Eastern Studies* (1988), 290–338. I am much indebted to Schippers in the above synopsis.

39 I prefer to call it erotema rather than the more common enumerative.

40 For example *sādah* (literally nobles) in the specific Qayrawānī/Māliki context of the poem means religious scholars (*fuqahā'*). See note 13.

41 Line 8: "تَجَافَى جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ هَجْرًا" based on the Qur'anic "يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا" [32: 16]; line 12: "الْمُتَّقُونَ اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ" based on the Qur'anic "يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ" [3:102]; line 29: "سَامُوهُمْ" based on the Qur'anic "يَسْمُونَكَ سَاءَ عَذَابٍ" [2:49] and [14:6].

42 Line 30: the striking antithesis between *qarār* (stability) and *mayalān* (tilting) which animistically and dramatically describes the sympathy of the earth. For balanced words/

erotema, *kam kâna* dominates the entire section.⁴³ Mentioned only once at the beginning of the presumed *maṭlaʿ* of the *nūniyyah*, the manifest eulogistic context and elegiac atmosphere of the poem are delicately served through its non-repetition. Of course, while Alexander Elinson points out the importance of repetition as perhaps the most favorite rhetorical device of premodern Arabic city-elegies⁴⁴, the erotema *kam kâna* –which is usually repeated in other city-elegies—appears only once in the whole poem.⁴⁵ But, even with the unconventional absence of the repetition of *kam kâna* in Ibn Rashīq's *nūniyyah*, it is effectively omnipresent, enframing the poem through its rhetorical continuance and the generic association of the city-elegy.

This rhetorical prescience continues even when the poem briefly transforms itself into a boast, or *mufākharah*. The latter's climax is indubitably achieved when the poet declares his city's supremacy over Baghdad, in a line borrowed for the title of this article:

18. Thanks to them—if minbars were counted—

Qayrawan was considered the flower of all cities.

19. As it proudly boasted, it so deservedly
eclipsed Cairo and outshone Baghdad!⁴⁶

structures, consider the description of the desolation of the Mosque in line 39: **خرب**
المعاطن مظم الأركان.

43 Hussein Bayyud captures this quite remarkably in his German translation by opting for the repetition the German equivalents *wieviele* four times and, once, *wie manch* at the beginning of the five opening lines (*Die Stadt*, 105).

44 Alexander Elinson, "Loss Written in Stone: Ibn Shuhayd's *rithāʿ* for Cordoba and Its Place in the Arabic Elegiac Tradition," in *Transforming Loss into Beauty: Essays on Arabic Literature and Culture in Honor of Magda al-Nowaihi*, eds. Marlé Hammond and Dana Sajdi (Cairo: AUC Press, 2008), 79-114. Elinson has convincingly argued that repetition of the name and epithets of the lost city fulfils a central elegiac function of preserving "the name, and thus the memory of the place alive." (85-6). The *nūniyyah* of Ibn Rashīq is evidently different in this regard. Briefly stated, in the 56 lines, Qayrawan is named only twice. Perhaps this difference is rooted in namelessness. Still widely practiced in Tunisia, for example, referring to the deceased only by 'he' or 'she' and other related pronouns intensifies the mourning.

45 This contrasts with one of the most central characteristics of city-elegies: repetition, especially those composed in al-Andalus as shown by Elinson.

46 One is not sure as to whether the poet's choice of *miṣra* instead of *al-qāhirah* is ideologically motivated (avoidance of the Fatimid appellation of the city) or simply dictated by prosody, as is the case with *baghdāni* (*baghdāda*) to match the rhyming consonant (*rawīyy*).

At this juncture, mention should be made of the rhetorical importance and dramatic potency of the phrase *wa-tarā* (line 13). While literally it means, "and you [will] see," this phrase carries an inviting undertone with dramatic effect. Reminiscent of one of the most dramatic Qur'anic verses which describe the horrors of the Day of Judgment,⁴⁷ not only does it call to, but succeeds in engaging the listener/reader by dramatizing the most impressive quality of the pious scholars—their standing up to tyrants—and calling for the poem's audience to witness a dramatic enactment of the *dignitas* of the jurists at the courts of the ruthless tyrant-kings.⁴⁸ Metaphorically saturated with a hyperbolic portrayal of the Qayrawānī religious elite, these lines in turn serve what Suzanne P. Stetkevych has called the "poetics of Islamic legitimacy."⁴⁹ By reenacting their theological battles, the elegist represents the scholars, both ritualistically and performatively, as the epitomization of *awliyā' allāh al-ṣāliḥūn* (the ideal allies or friends of God), who:

13. In their presence, you would see the mighty kings
bending their necks and lowering their chins,
14. Out of awe, they are speechless
so dumbstruck: they can only point with their eyes and their fingers.
15. They [the scholars] feared The Lord so they were feared by all creatures
even the fiercest lions of the thicket.
16. Their solemnity would make you forget the haughtiness of every
king and the dreadful mien of every possessor of power.

Religious *madīḥ* as a poetic form justifies discourses of physical exaggeration and hyperbole, not least because this particular form is metaphysically fashioned within the divinely miraculous.⁵⁰ The plight of an ideal Qayrawan as a whole is synecdochally narrated through mourning its most valuable ideal

47 "وَتَرَى النَّاسَ سُكَارَىٰ وَمَا هُمْ بِسُكَارَىٰ" [22: 2] (And you will see mankind as in a drunken riot, yet not drunk).

48 I am indebted to Beatrice Gruendler's insightful discussion of the rhetorical and stylistic importance of what she aptly terms "dramatic scenes" and "dramatic passages" in the panegyric poetry of Ibn al-Rūmī. See Beatrice Gruendler, *Medieval Arabic Praise Poetry: Ibn Al-Rūmī and the Patron's Redemption* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 263.

49 Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 252.

50 One is tempted to add that there is something evocative of the Prophetic *badī'yyah* in the panegyric representation of the *fuqahā'*. For more on the (sub)genre, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 2010).

part. The hyperbolic representation of the scholars is not an end *per se*. The elegist's aggrandizement of the scholars dramatically intensifies the sense of the loss and melancholy visited upon a city known as the capital and citadel of faith in the Maghrib. Through grasping and accepting the greatness of the scholars, readers would cathartically re-live the plight of Qayrawan and its victims. Perhaps some readers unfamiliar with the Islamic history of Qayrawan would be surprised by the degree of devotion and veneration Ibn Rashīq has shown for the religious scholars. Indeed, the *nūniyyah*'s veneration of the *fuqahā'* and simultaneous lack of any interest whatsoever in the *udabā'* is poetically surprising, to say the least. And while most city-elegists usually consecrate some verses to eulogizing the religious elite, Ibn Rashīq is by far the medieval city-elegist who shed the most effusive tears over religious scholars, the *fuqahā'* of Qayrawan.

In the corpus of Qayrawānī city-elegies, only al-Ḥuṣrī seemed to care about the elegists' own *métier* and spoke nostalgically of the city's once famed literary elite. In his *tā'iyyah*, a masterpiece of *rithā' al-mudun* and *ḥanīn ilā al-awṭān*, al-Ḥuṣrī dedicated equal space to the two scholarly groups of Qayrawānī citizens who contributed to the pre-Hilālī glory of the city:

وَكِرَ إِمَامَ هَدًى فِي مُرْتَقَى مَلِكٍ	قَدْ تَوَجَّهَ الْمَعَالِي وَالْمَهَابَاتِ
أَقْلَامُهُ أَمْنٌ فِي كُلِّ وَاقِعَةٍ	مِنَ الْعَمَى، وَالْفَتَاوَى وَالْقَرَّاتِ
وَكِرَ بِهَا مِنْ ذِكِّي الطَّيْعِ قَدْ فَضَحَتْ	قَسَّ بَنَ سَاعِدَةٍ مِنْهُ الْفَصَاحَاتِ
وَفِي سَمَاءِ الْمَعَانِي تَحْتَ أَخْصِهِ	بِكُلِّ فَرْخٍ إِذَا مَا قَالَ إِنْصَاتِ ⁵¹

How many were its righteous *imāms* whose ranks equaled those of kings,
whose crowns were their majesty and dignity.

At every instance their pens were shields
against blindness, [deviant] edicts, and misinterpretations.

And how many were its naturally keen people whose eloquent utterances
would shame Quss Ibn Sā'idah⁵²

The heavens of meanings lay underneath the soles of their feet
when they used to speak, all used to listen with attention and pride.

51 Muḥammad al-Marzūqī and Jilānī Ibn al-Ḥajj Yaḥyā, *Alī al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī, dirāsāt wa-taḥqīq* (Tunis: Bayt al-Ḥikmah, 2009), 157.

52 Proverbially dubbed in classical Arabic sources as the most eloquent of the Arabs.

In comparison, the reader is met in the *nūniyyah* of Ibn Rashīq with the elegist's devotion to the *fuqahā'* and inattention to the *udabā'*. The sectarian strife that led to the Hilālī invasion and destruction of Qayrawan weighs upon the poem. Qayrawan paid the price for its ruler's decision to re-establish his North African principality on its Sunni grounds by declaring allegiance to the 'Abbasids of Baghdad. This came after the decision of Ibn Rashīq's patron al-Mu'izz to cut his Zirid principality's theo-political ties with the Fatimids of Egypt. "*Fitnat al-Qayrawān*" (the disaster of Qayrawan), Michael Brett explains, "broke out in 1048 with [al]-Mu'izz's repudiation of Fatimid suzerainty in favor of the Abbasids."⁵³ Ibn Rashīq's elegiac theme and gloss were shaped by his personal ideological engagement with the world in which he lived, and his "subjective vision," to use Elinson's phrase, is at work throughout the *nūniyyah*.

Qayrawan, especially in Maghribi culture, has long been figured as the Islamic city par excellence. Al-Dabbāgh captured this sense of splendor in the introduction to his *magnum opus*, *Ma'ālīm al-imān fī ma'rīfat ahl al-Qayrawān*:

أما القيروان فهي البلد الأعظم والمصر المخصوص بالشرف الأقدم،
قاعدة الإسلام والمسلمين بالمغرب،
وقطرهم الأفضل الذي أصبح لسان الدهر، عن فضله يغرب، وبشرفه
يغرب، قرارة الدين والإيمان، والأرض
المطهرة من رجس الكافرين وعبادة الأوثان.⁵⁴

As for Qayrawan, [I say] it is the greatest land and the city specifically selected for eternal honor. It is the base of Islam and Muslims in the West as well as their most majestic metropolis whose virtues and glories the tongue of Time has most eloquently revealed and spread. It is the permanent abode of the religion and the faith and the land that is purified from the filth of disbelief and the worship of idols.

Although ultimately a man-made city, Qayrawan's foundation and subsequent history are Islamically laden with religious associations. The immense corpus

53 Brett, "The Poetry of Disaster," 77.

54 Al-Dabbāgh, *Ma'ālīm al-imān*, 6.

of stories and legends on its early foundation by 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' bespeaks nothing short of an Islamic theophany and divine prophecy.⁵⁵

Among a plethora of other illustrations, the city's most revealing appellation *rābi'at al-thalāthah* (the fourth of the three),⁵⁶ is particularly suggestive. In a fascinating eulogy for Qayrawan before its plight, poet al-Fizārī boasts of his city's religious foundation. He does so by comparing it to what he describes, not without a derogatory subtext, as the worldly city of Baghdad:

عديـل حين يفتخر الفخور	فهل للقيروان وساكنيها
واسلام ومعروف وخير	بلاد حشوها علم وحلم
عراق الغرب بينهما كثير	عراق الشام بغداد وهذي
وكيف تقاس بالسنة الشهور	ولست أقيس بغداد
وتلك اختط ساحتها أمير ⁵⁷	بلاد خطها أصحاب

Are there any equals to Qayrawan or to its people
when the eulogist engages in eulogy!

A city brimming with knowledge and tolerance,
with faith, good deeds and righteousness.

Baghdad is the Iraq of the East, Qayrawan is the Iraq of the West, they
may share many things in common.

But I am not measuring Baghdad to it, Qayrawan,
for a year and a month, one can never compare!

It was the Badrīs who drew the outline of this Iraq [Qayrawan], whereas
a prince drafted the plan of that one!

Similarly, al-Ḥuṣrī in his *tā'iyyah*, echoes al-Fizārī when he sings the praise of Qayrawan as:

55 There is a possibility that the devotion to the scholars has something to do with the supplication (*du'ā*) attributed to 'Uqbah ibn Nāfi' to bless his newly founded town with eternal knowledge and scholarship.

56 Al-Dabbāgh attributed this appellation to a scholar/traveler from Qayrawan named 'Isā al-Ṣamīlī Ibn Marzūq (d?). According to al-Dabbāgh, Ibn Marzūq was a pious *faqīh* who travelled extensively in the Mashriq and performed *hajj* more than eleven times. Al-Dabbāgh goes on to write that while journeying in the Mashriq, Ibn Marzūq consulted and examined an unmatched corpus of early Islamic sources (*āthārūn wa-akbār*), which led him to designate Qayrawan as *rābi'atu al-thalāthah*: the three being Medina, Mecca, and Jerusalem (*Ma'ālim al-īmān fī ma'rīfat ahl al-Qayrawān*).

57 Al-Mālikī, *Kitāb Ri'yād al-nufūs*, 225.

أَرْضُ أَرْضِةٍ أَقْطَارِ مَبَارَكَةٍ اللَّهُ فِيهَا بَرَاهِينُ وَأَيَّاتُ
حَاشَا الْبَقَاعِ الثَّلَاثِ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَقَلَّ خَيْرُ الْبَقَاعِ تَصَدَّقَكَ الشَّهَادَاتُ
كَرَمٍ مِنْ وَلِيِّ بِهَا لِلَّهِ مَرْتَقِبٍ حَيَاتِهِ كُلُّهَا نَسْكَ وَإِخْبَاتٌ⁵⁸

A land which gathered all that is good and blessed,
full of divine signs and miracles.
Except for the three Holy Places, Say:
She is the best! You are all-truthful in what you say!
Many *awliyā*⁵⁹ she hosts who are devoting themselves to God
and whose entire lives are but piety and virtue.

Qayrawan's Islamic associations as the cradle of Islam in the region and the beacon of (Mālikī) Sunnism are crucial in understating the prevalence of the religious themes in Ibn Rashīq's *nūniyyah*. It is a poetic strategy at the hands of one of the most strategy-conscious Arabic poets of the medieval world.⁶⁰

Alongside this focus on the *fuqahā*' is the lack of lament of the physical city itself. How should we interpret the poet's negligence of the physical spaces of the city, or to use Zayde Antrim's suggestive terms: "the cityscape," and the "urban built environment," of the mourned city (68)? Qayrawan was a metropolis that boasted architecturally majestic buildings and structures: its mosques, the palaces of al-'Abbāsiyyah, Raqqādah and Ṣabrah al-Manṣūriyyah, its markets, its public baths, its gates, and cultural and scientific centers, its *bayt al-ḥikmah*, hospitals, its iconic cisterns (*fisqiyyāt*) and aqueducts (*ḥanāyā*), and artificial pools and gardens.⁶¹ Before its sack by the Banū Hilāl in 1053, Qayrawan was, to requote al-Idrīsī, "the greatest city in the Islamic West, the most populated, prosperous and thriving with the perfect buildings" (284). It is striking that the *nūniyyah* fails to mention any of Qayrawan's "perfect buildings" and its once iconic cityscape. With the exceptions of these verses (39-42), which bemoan the desolation of the city's iconic religious structure, the *nūniyyah* surprises us with its disinterest in Qayrawan's urban built environment:

58 Al-Marzūqī, *Alī al-Ḥuṣrī al-Qayrawānī*, 156-157.

59 Usually translated as "allies of God."

60 The examples are too numerous to cite in full but one has in mind Ibn al-Jahm, Ibn 'Umayrah, al-Wakḥāshī, and Ibn Khafājah's elegies for Valencia. There are also Ibn al-'Assāl's for Toledo, Ibn Sahl for Seville, and Ibn Ḥazm and Ibn Zaydūn's for Cordoba.

61 See Jamila Binous et al., *Ifriqiya: Treize siècles d'art et d'architecture en Tunisie* (Tunis: Institut National du Patrimoine, 2015).

39. As for the [once] busy Mosque of 'Uqbah /its halls were desolate and its corners were filled with gloom.
40. A wasteland attended by no congregation
neither to perform the five prayers nor the summons.
41. A house in which The Lord was worshiped
after the excess of idol worshipping was abolished.
42. A house built with The Lord's inspiration; blessed are the building,
the one who ordered its construction, and its builder.

The worldly Ibn Rashīq never elegizes the once thriving worldly life of a city to which he had been drawn from an early age. Throughout the *nūniyyah*, there is no physical mapping of Qayrawan. The absence of toponyms is also remarkable, and in this forgotten corpus of Qayrawānī city-elegies differs markedly from other examples from al-Andalus and the Mashriq.⁶² One can always surmise that a section on the elegiac portrayal of Qayrawan's cityscape is among the likely missing verses of the original and complete *nūniyyah*. While a hypothetical possibility, one can promptly challenge it by even a cursory glimpse at two other major contemporary city-elegies for Qayrawan by Ibn Sharaf and al-Ḥuṣrī. Ibn Sharaf did not shed a single tear over his city's once majestic worldly buildings and structures. This is striking, especially as, at least by sheer number, Ibn Sharaf is one of the most prolific city-elegists of the 'medieval' Islamic world, leaving to posterity a plethora of elegies.

Elegies for Qayrawan differ markedly from their much better known and studied Mashriqi and Andalusian counterparts. Modern scholars who have studied classical Arabic city-elegies such as Elinson, and more recently Zayde Antrim, usually refer to how the *marāthī* of al-Khuraymī (d. 821), Ibn al-Rūmī (d. 896), and Ibn Shuhayd (d. 1035) lament the sacking of Baghdad, Basra, and Cordoba respectively. As convincingly shown by Antrim in her fascinating study, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World*, al-Khuraymī, Ibn al-Rūmī, and Ibn Shuhayd spoke profusely of their sacked cities' iconic structures and buildings.⁶³ Not only did the three elegize but they also nostalgically mentioned their cities' once majestic palaces, bustling markets,

62 This is related to Elinson's exploration of the three main characteristics of the Andalusian city-elegy which include, in addition to toponyms, repetition and the eulogy for the departed beloved.

63 Al-Khuraymī nostalgically refers to a number of Baghdad's districts and palaces such as Zandaward, al-Yāsiriyyah, al-Khayzurāniyyah, and the palace of 'Abdawayh. Ibn Shuhayd refers to the Umayyad palaces of Zāhiriyyah and 'Āmiriyyah. Ibn al-Rūmī mentions the

lively suburbs, thriving seaports, and river bridges and banks. Examining "the intersection between nostalgic representations of territory and descriptions of the urban built environment,"⁶⁴ Antrim provides illustrative verses emphasizing the centrality of the cityscape and built-environments in the three earliest extant Arabic city-elegies. These arguably three principal pioneers of the Arabic city-elegy described the diminished cityscape of their fallen cities and evoked their desolations in graphic detail to intensify the elegiac and nostalgic.⁶⁵

By contrast, Ibn Rashīq and his Qayrawānī contemporaries paid noticeably little attention to the physical space of their city, of course with the exception of the most symbolic religious space.⁶⁶ Unlike al-Khuraymī, Ibn al-Rūmī, and Ibn Shuhayd, as well as the majority, if not the entirety, of later renowned city-elegists especially from al-Andalus, Ibn Rashīq was not interested, to requote Elinson, in "defining his lost city geographically and architecturally". In fact, his elegiac and nostalgic *points de repère* are manifestly religious and sectarian. He religiously fashions the rhetorical construction of a glorious past of the city throughout the *nūniyyah*. Having taken into account the Islamic referentiality of the city, Ibn Rashīq constructed an idealized Islamic past for Qayrawan, contrasting Qayrawan's golden Islamic past with a desolate present

city's bustling markets, its inbound and outbound ships, and the palaces, mansions, and other edifices.

64 Zayde Antrim, *Routes and Realms: The Power of Place in the Early Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 75.

65 Ibid., 75.

66 In the entire surviving corpus of Qayrawānī city-elegies, only al-Ḥuṣrī in his 69-verse *tā'īyyah* mentions, albeit briefly, two of the iconic physical buildings of Qayrawan: the palatial seat of Ṣābrah and the famous *ḥanāyā* (aqueducts):

في قدرة الله أن يقضي بفرجة من ضاقت عليه من الدنيا المكانات.
هل مطمع أن تُردَّ القيروانُ لنا وصبرةٌ والمعلَى فالحنياثُ.

Since it is in God's power to decree a relief for those afflicted across this world.

So why not hope that Qayrawan return to us

and so will Ṣābrah, its mosque, and aqueducts (*ʿAlī al-Ḥuṣrī*, 158).

Ibn Sharaf briefly refers to *qibābu ṣābrah wa-l-muṣalla* [the domes of Ṣābrah and the mosque] but in a panegyric to Ibn al- Saqqā' (d.1063), the competent *wazīr* of *Abū al-Walid ibn Jahwar*, (petty) king of Cordoba (r. 1043-1059).

by mourning the *fuqahā'* and lamenting the desolation of their city's most symbolic *mnemotopos* or site of memory, the Mosque of 'Uqbah.⁶⁷

In his seminal *Yearning for Yesterday*, Fred Davis argues that contrasting an idealized past with a desolate present is nostalgia's "distinctive rhetorical signature."⁶⁸ Particularly relevant in the context of Ibn Rashīq's elegiac references to the Mosque of 'Uqbah is Pierre Nora's definition of the "*haut lieux de memoire*," which literally means high sites of memory. By *haut lieux*, Nora refers primarily to sites that have witnessed past national triumphs, losses, and tragedies, and that serve, in the context of the *nūniyyah* to commemorate a "certain idea" of a homeland. These referential sites, to paraphrase Nora, are instrumental in crystallizing and secreting memory.⁶⁹ Alfredo González-Ruibal's expands on Nora's definition of sites of memory and his intricate distinction between general sites of memory and the more specific sites of abjection. Read through the work of Nora and González-Ruibal, the message of Ibn Rashīq's hyperbolic dramatization of the desolation of his city's iconic Mosque of 'Uqbah is that the Fatimids through their 'barbarian' agents the Bedouins of Banū Hilāl deliberately turned the most iconic *haut lieux de memoire* of Qayrawan into an abandoned, wretched, and pitiful space.⁷⁰ Moreover, the closing verses of the *nūniyyah* conjure Svetlana Boym's intriguing distinction between "restorative nostalgia" and "reflective nostalgia." While she does not perceive them as "absolute binaries," she maintains that the former focuses on the *nostos* (home), endeavoring to "rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gap."⁷¹

67 One can also note in this context Fred Davis's statement about the structural and rhetorical contrast between the praise of the ignoble and victorious *fuqahā'*, and the *rithā'* of the defatted and defiled women. In addition to the almost structural contrast between what may be described as a victory section of the *nūniyyah* (eulogy of the *fuqahā'*) and a defeat section (elegy of the women), intensifying the rhetorical contrast between the city's ideal past and abject present.

68 Davis Fred, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 72. Drawing also on Davis's intriguing distinction between two types of nostalgia—the private and the communal – there is a striking lack of any individuated nostalgic references throughout the entire *nūniyyah*. This differs markedly from al-Ḥuṣrī and, to a lesser degree, Ibn Sharaf.

69 Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989), 7-25.

70 Alfredo González-Ruibal, "Time to Destroy: An Archaeology of Supermodernity," *Current Anthropology* 49 (2008), 256.

71 Svetlana Boym, "Nostalgia and Its Discontents," in *The Collective Memory Reader*, ed. K. Jeffrey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 453-457.

Restorative nostalgia is predominantly characteristic of nationalistic and religious projects that physically and rhetorically aim to rebuild a mythologized 'golden age.' Reflective nostalgia de-emphasizes the *regainability* of the past in favor of *algia* (longing). "*Algia*," to quote Boym, "lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history, in the dreams of another place and another time" (41). The closing verses of the *nūniyyah* fluctuate between the two modes of nostalgia:

51. Do you think that the Nights, after what they have done to us,
will ever grant us reunion and nearness!
52. And ever return to the land of Qayrawan,
the glory of its bygone times!
53. After it was plundered of its rare beauty by the Days
and after two factions disputed over it.
54. And after, it was so altered it was as though it had never
prospered, as though it had never been a triumphant, never
humiliated sanctuary.
55. Time toyed with its inhabitants,
whose bonds with their relatives were cut.

The sub-theme of *al-faraj ba'da al-shiddah*, which is dominant in the quoted closing verses, bespeaks Ibn Rashīq's hope that his ruined city will one day regain its golden past—a hallmark of restorative nostalgia, which the rhetorical doubt imbedded in the closing verses challenge in a planned poetic project of regaining its lost glory.

Thus, unlike al-Khuraymī's Baghdad, Ibn al-Rūmī's Basra and Ibn Shuhayd's Cordoba, Ibn Rashīq's Qayrawan is not one of physical traces. The once boastful metropolis of the Maghrib cannot be described as "a physical reality that could be mapped."⁷² The largely forgotten corpus of *marāthī al-Qayrawān* differ markedly in this regard from many, if not most, of their Mashriqi and Andalusian counterparts, antecedents and descendants alike. One can safely argue that the elegiac references and nostalgic allusions in the *nūniyyah* fall manifestly on the iconic *gente* more than the iconic *topos*. The *gente* elegized and eulogized throughout the poem are the religious elite of the Maghribi city that has been, and still is, Islamically (re)imagined and (re)fashioned. Although in a largely different elegiac/nostalgic context, Max Cavitch has argued that, "the traditional task of the elegist is individuated mourning—to describe ... the person and personality of the deceased, to reckon what is unique

72 Elinson, "Loss Written in Stone," 106.

and irreconcilable about this loss.”⁷³ In the *nūniyyah* of Ibn Rashīq, especially if read in light of Cavitch’s statement, the most unique and most irreconcilable loss of the sacking of Qayrawan is evidently that of its religious scholars.

Appendix: Ibn Rashīq’s *Nūniyyah* in Arabic and English Translation

Arabic Poem

يُبِضُ الْوُجُوهُ شَوَاحِجِ الْإِيمَانِ	1. كَمْ كَانَ فِيهَا مِنْ كِرَامِ سَادَةِ
لِلَّهِ فِي الْإِسْرَارِ وَالْإِعْلَانِ	2. مُتَعَاوِنِينَ عَلَى الدِّيَانَةِ وَالْتَقَى
لِنَوَالِهِ وَلِعَرْضِهِ صَوَانِ	3. وَمُهَذَّبِ جَمِّ الْفَضَائِلِ بِاذِلِ
سُنَنِ الْحَدِيثِ وَمُشْكِ الْقُرْآنِ	4. وَأَنْمَةِ جَمْعُوا الْعُلُومَ وَهَذَّبُوا
بِفَقَاهِهِ وَفَصَاحَتِهِ وَيَّانِ	5. عُلَمَاءُ إِنْ سَاءَ لَتَهُمْ كَشَفُوا الْعَمَى
أَبْوَاهُهَا وَتَنَارَعَ الْخُصْمَانِ	6. وَإِذَا الْأُمُورُ اسْتَبْهَمَتْ وَاسْتَغْلَقَتْ
بِدَلِيلِ حَقِّ وَاضِحِ الْبُرْهَانِ	7. حَلُّوا غَوَامِضَ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ مُشْكِ
طَلَبًا لِحَيْرِ مُعَرِّسٍ وَمَغَانِ	8. هَجَرُوا الْمَضَاجِعَ قَاتِنِينَ لِرَبِّهِمْ
مُتَبَتِّلِينَ تَبَتَّلَ الرُّهْبَانِ	9. وَإِذَا دَجَا اللَّيْلُ الْبَهِيمُ رَأَيْتَهُمْ
بَيْنَ الْحَسَنِ الْحُورِ وَالْعُلَمَانِ	10. فِي جَنَّةِ الْفِرْدَوْسِ أَكْرَمِ مَنَزِلِ
نِعْمَ التِّجَارَةُ طَاعَةَ الرُّحَمَانِ	11. تَجَرُّوا بِهَا الْفِرْدَوْسَ مِنْ أَرْبَابِهِمْ
وَالْعَارِفِينَ مَكَائِدَ الشَّيْطَانِ	12. الْمُتَّقِينَ اللَّهَ حَقَّ تُقَاتِهِ
خُضِعَ الرِّقَابُ نَوَاسِ الْأَذْقَانِ	13. وَتَرَى جَبَابِرَةَ الْمُلُوكِ لَدَيْهِمْ
إِلَّا إِشَارَةً أَعْيُنِ وَبَنَانِ	14. لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ الْكَلَامَ مَهَابَةً
حَتَّى ضِرَاءِ الْأُسْدِ فِي الْغِيلَانِ	15. خَافُوا إِلَهَ خَفَاهُمْ كُلُّ الْوَرَى
مُلْكٍ وَهَيْبَةٍ كُلِّ ذِي سُلْطَانِ	16. تُنْسِيكَ هَيْبَتُهُمْ شِمَاخَةَ كُلِّ ذِي

73 Max Cavitch, “American Constitutional Elegy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Elegy*, ed. Karen Weisman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 224-227.

17. أَحْلَاهُمُ تَرْزُ الْجِبَالِ وَفَضْلُهُمْ
18. كَانَتْ تُعَدُّ الْقَيَرَوَانُ بِهِمْ إِذَا
19. وَرَهَتْ عَلَى مِصْرٍ وَحَقَّ لَهَا كَمَا
20. حَسُنَتْ فَلَهَا أَنْ تَكَامَلَ حُسْنُهَا
21. وَتَجَمَّعَتْ فِيهَا الْفَضَائِلُ كُلُّهَا
22. نَظَرْتُ لَهَا الْآيَامُ نَظْرَةً كَاشِحٍ
23. حَتَّى إِذَا الْأَقْدَارُ حُمَّ وَقُوعُهَا
24. أَهْدَتْ لَهَا فِتْنًا كَلِيلٍ مُظْلِمٍ
25. بِمَصَائِبٍ مِنْ فَادِجٍ وَأَشَائِبٍ
26. فَتَكُونُ بِأَمَّةٍ أَحْمَدُ أَثَرَاهُمْ
27. نَقَضُوا الْعُهُودَ الْمُبْرَمَاتِ وَأَخْفَرُوا
28. فَاسْتَحْسَنُوا غَدَرَ الْجَوَارِ وَآثَرُوا
29. سَامُوهُمْ سُوءَ الْعَذَابِ وَأَظْهَرُوا
30. وَالْمُسَالِيُونَ مُقْسَمُونَ تَنَالَهُمْ
31. مَا بَيْنَ مُضْطَرٍّ وَبَيْنَ مُعَذِّبٍ
32. يَسْتَصْرِخُونَ فَلَا يُغَاثُ صَرِيحُهُمْ
33. بَادُوا نَفُوسَهُمْ فَلَمَّا أَنْقَدُوا
34. وَاسْتَخْلَصُوا مِنْ جَوْهَرٍ وَمَلَابِسٍ
35. خَرَجُوا حُفَاةً عَائِذِينَ بِرَبِّهِمْ
36. هَرَبُوا بِكُلِّ وَلِيدَةٍ وَفَطِيمَةٍ
37. وَبِكُلِّ بَكْرٍ كَالْمَهَاةِ عَزِيزَةٍ
38. حُودٍ مُبْتَلَةٍ الْوِشَاحِ كَأَنَّهَا
- كَالشَّمْسِ لَا تَخْفَى بِكُلِّ مَكَانٍ
- عَدَّ الْمَنَابِرُ زَهْرَةَ الْبُلْدَانِ
- تَرَهُو بِهِمْ وَغَدَتْ عَلَى بَعْدَانِ
- وَسَمَا إِلَيْهَا كُلُّ طَرْفٍ رَانٍ
- وَعَدَتْ مَحَلَّ الْأَمْنِ وَالْإِيمَانِ
- تَرُونُ بِنَظْرَةٍ كَاشِحٍ مَعْيَانِ
- وَدَنَا الْقَضَاءُ لِمُدَّةٍ وَأَوَانِ
- وَأَرَادَهَا كَالنَّاطِحِ الْعِيدَانِ
- مَمَّنْ تَجَمَّعَ مِنْ بَنِي دَهْمَانِ
- أَمْنُوا عِقَابَ اللَّهِ فِي رَمَضَانَ
- ذِمَمَ إِلَهِهِ وَلَمْ يُقُوا بِضَمَانِ
- سَيِّئِ الْحَرِيرِ وَكَشَفَ أَلْسُونِ
- مُتَعَسِّفِينَ كَوَامِنَ الْأَضْغَانِ
- أَيْدِي الْعُصَاةِ بِذِلَّةٍ وَهَوَانِ
- وَمُقْتَلٍ ظُلُمًا وَآخِرَ عَانِ
- حَتَّى إِذَا سَيَّمُوا مِنَ الْأَرْنَانِ
- مَا جَمَعُوا مِنْ صَامِتٍ وَصَوَانِ
- وَطَرَائِفٍ وَذَخَائِرٍ وَأَوَانِ
- مِنْ خَوْفِهِمْ وَمَصَائِبِ الْأَلْوَانِ
- وَبِكُلِّ أَرْمَلَةٍ وَكُلِّ حَصَانِ
- تَسْبِي الْعُقُولِ بِطَرْفِهَا الْفَتَّانِ
- قَرَّ يَلُوحُ عَلَى قَضِيبِ الْبَانِ

39. وَالْمَسْجِدُ الْمَعْمُورُ جَامِعُ عَقْبَةٍ
 40. قَفَرٌ فَمَا تَعْشَاهُ بَعْدَ جَمَاعَةٍ
 41. يَبْتَئِي بِهِ عَبْدُ الْإِلَهِ وَبُطِّلَتْ
 42. يَبْتَئِي بِوَحْيِ اللَّهِ كَانَ بِنَاؤُهُ
 43. أَعْظَمُ بَنَاتِكَ مُصِيبَةٌ مَا تَجَلَّى
 44. لَوْ أَنَّ نَهْلَانًا أُصِيبَ بَعْشَرُهَا
 45. حَزِنْتُ لَهَا كَوْرُ الْعِرَاقِ بِأَسْرِهَا
 46. وَتَرَعَزَعَتْ لِمَصَابِهَا وَتَكَدَّتْ
 47. وَعَفَا مِنَ الْأَقْطَارِ بَعْدَ خَلَائِهَا
 48. وَأَرَى النُّجُومَ طَلَعْنَ غَيْرَ زَوَاهِرٍ
 49. وَأَرَى الْجِبَالَ الشَّمَّ أُمَسَتْ خُشْعًا
 50. وَالْأَرْضُ مِنْ وَلَعٍ بِهَا قَدْ أَصْبَحَتْ
 51. أَتَرَى اللَّيَالِي بَعْدَ مَا صَنَعَتْ بِنَا
 52. وَتُعِيدُ أَرْضَ الْقَيْرِ وَإِنْ كَعَهْدِهَا
 53. مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا سَلَبَتْ نَضَائِرَ حُسْنِهَا أَلْ
 54. وَغَدَتْ كَأَنَّ لَمْ تَغْنِ قَطُّ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ
 55. أُمَسَتْ وَقَدْ لَعِبَ الرِّثْمَانُ بِأَهْلِهَا
 56. فَتَفَرَّقُوا أَيْدِي سَبَا وَتَشْتَتُوا
- خَرِبُ الْمَعَاطِنِ مُظْلِمُ الْأَرْكَانِ
 لَصَلَاةٍ خَمْسٍ لَا وَلَا لِأَذَانِ
 بَعْدَ الْغُلُوبِ عِبَادَةُ الْأَوْثَانِ
 نِعَمَ الْبِنَا وَالْمُبْنَى وَالْبَانِي
 حَسَرَاتُهَا أَوْ يَنْقُضِي الْمَلَوَانِ
 لَتَدَكَّدَتْ مِنْهَا ذُرَا نَهْلَانِ
 وَفَرَى الشَّامِ وَمِصْرُ وَالْحُرْسَانِ
 أَسْفًا بِلَادَ الْهِنْدِ وَالسِّنْدَانِ
 مَا يَبْنَئُ أُنْدُلُسٍ إِلَى حُلُوانِ
 فِي أُفْقِهِنَّ وَأُظْلَمَ الْقَمَرَانِ
 لِمُصَابِهَا وَتَرَعَزَعِ الثَّقْلَانِ
 بَعْدَ الْقَرَارِ شَدِيدَةِ الْمِيلَانِ
 تَقْضِي لَنَا بِتَوَاصُلٍ وَتَدَانِ
 فِيمَا مَضَى مِنْ سَالِفِ الْأَزْمَانِ
 أَيَّامٌ وَاخْتَلَفَتْ بِهَا فِتْنَانِ
 حَرَمًا عَزِيزَ النَّصْرِ غَيْرَ مُهَانِ
 وَتَقَطَّعَتْ بِهِمْ عُرَا الْأَقْرَانِ
 بَعْدَ اجْتِمَاعِهِمْ عَلَى الْأَوْطَانِ

1. How many honorable scholars used to reside in it [Qayrawan]/ pure and proud in their faith as if they were mountains,⁷⁴
2. Who would aid each other in religion and piety /both inwardly and outwardly for the sake of God.

74 Again, in Mālikī terminology, *al-sādah* (lit. the nobles) is synonymous with the scholars.

3. And how many cultivated men plentiful of virtues/who would give up their [worldly] rewards and safeguard their honor.
4. And how many imāms who mastered the sciences, and studied the Prophetic traditions and the Qur'ān's difficult words.
5. [Genuine] scholars, who if asked, would expose fallacies [blindness]/ with erudition, eloquence, and clear expression.
6. And when issues turned obscure and the doors to understanding them were locked/ and two opponents disputed
7. They solved the obscurities of every problem/with convincing and credible proof,
8. They abandoned their beds to stand reverently for their Lord/seeking an everlasting and eternal good.
9. When the black night descended, you would see them/ devoting themselves like monks.
10. In the garden of paradise, the noblest abode/ amidst the lovely hours and youths.
11. They engaged in the commerce that gains paradise/surely, the best trade is obedience to the All-Merciful.
12. Fearing The Lord as He ought to be feared/ mindful of Satan's crafty wiles.
13. In their presence, you would see the mighty kings/ bending their necks and lowering their chins,
14. Out of awe, they are speechless/ so dumbstruck: they can only point with their eyes and their fingers.
15. They [the scholars] feared The Lord so they were feared by all creatures/ even the fiercest lions of the thicket.
16. Their solemnity would make you forget the haughtiness of every/ king and the dreadful mien of every possessor of power.
17. Their forbearance is as heavy as the mountains and their superior virtue/ evident to all, like the sun that shines everywhere.
18. Thanks to them—if minbars were counted—Qayrawan would be considered the flower of all cities.
19. As it proudly boasted of them, it eclipsed Cairo and it outshone Baghdad.
20. It became so beautiful. Then, its beauty reached perfection/and every gazing eye was raised to it.
21. And when it gathered all virtues [merits]/and it became the abode of surety and faith,
22. The Days looked at it with an envious eye/ seeing it with the look of a jealous rival.
23. When Fates were decreed to strike/and Destiny's time drew near.

24. Fates brought Qayrawan calamities like a dark night/and Destiny knocked it on its face.
25. With disasters caused by (the tribe of) Fādigh and a mixed group from among those who had gathered of the Banū Dahmān.⁷⁵
26. They wreaked havoc on the community of Muḥammad⁷⁶ /I wonder if they thought they were safe from The Lord's wrath in Ramaḍān.
27. They breached the signed pacts, violated God's covenants/and did not honor their pledges.
28. They condoned betraying their protégés/and found pleasure in capturing and defiling the women.
29. They inflicted upon them the worst persecution/and with reckless abandon revealed their hidden rancor.
30. While Muslims were divided suffering/humiliation and disgrace at the hands of the transgressors.
31. They were either oppressed or tortured/ or slaughtered unjustly, or else taken captive.
32. They would cry for help, but their cries went unanswered/ until they grew exhausted by wailing,
33. They revealed themselves. Then when they had rescued/[what they could] of their gold, silver and chests,
34. And when they had collected [what they could] of their jewelry, clothes,/ rare objects, provisions, and vessels,
35. They escaped terrified⁷⁷ seeking refuge in their Lord/from their fear and manifold tragedies.
36. They fled with every female newborn, newly weaned toddler/with every widow and every [chaste] married woman.
37. And with every precious virgin, who like an oryx/would enchant men's hearts with her captivating glance.
38. So soft and tender with an ornamented belt as if she were/a moon atop the branch of the Ben-tree.
39. As for the [once] busy Mosque of 'Uqbah/its halls were desolate and its corners were filled with gloom.

75 The Banū Fādigh and Banū Dahmān were two *furū'* (tribal branches) of the Banū Riyāḥ, who were among the largest Bedouin tribes that sacked Qayrawan. For more on the Hilālī tribes, see Gerald Schuster, *Die Beduinen in der Vorgeschichte Tunesiens: die "Invasion" der Banū Hilāl und ihre Folgen* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2006).

76 I.e., Muslims.

77 Alternatively, "barefoot" if the word is originally *ḥufātan* and not *khufātan*.

40. A wasteland attended by no congregation/neither to perform the five prayers nor the summons.
41. A house in which The Lord was worshiped/after the excess of idol worshipping was abolished.
42. A house built with The Lord's inspiration;/blessed are the building, the one who ordered its construction, and its builder.
43. What a horrific disaster! The grief will never fade/its day and night will never end.
44. Had Mount Thahlān⁷⁸ been smitten with a tenth of the disaster/its peak would have become dust.
45. All the provinces of Iraq grieved for it/and so did the towns of the Levant, Egypt, and Khurasan.
46. The regions of India and the Two Sindhs⁷⁹ trembled and succumbed to despair/ out of sorrow for Qayrawan's misfortune.
47. After its desolation, the regions that lie between al-Andalus and Ḥulwān [ʿIrāq] were effaced.⁸⁰
48. I see the stars rose dimly on their horizon/and the two moons [the sun and the moon] turned dark.
49. I see the lofty mountains, shaken/ both men and jinn were trembling.⁸¹
50. And the once stable earth, distraught on account of it, now lists precariously.
51. Do you think that the Nights, after what they have done to us, will ever grant us reunion and nearness!⁸²
52. And ever return to the land of Qayrawan/the glory of its past times!
53. After it was plundered of its rare beauty by the Days/and after two factions disputed over it.
54. And after, it was so altered it was as though it had never prospered, as though it had never been a triumphant, never humiliated sanctuary.
55. Time toyed with its inhabitants/ whose bonds with their peers were cut.
56. And so, they dispersed in all directions (like the people of Saba')/and they were scattered after congregating in the homeland.

78 The Mount of Thahlān is a mountain somewhere on the Arabian Peninsula and was seen as the most massive mountain in the pre-Islamic and medieval Arabic imagination.

79 The two regions east and west of the Indus Valley.

80 See L. Lockhart, "Ḥulwān," *The Encyclopedia of Islam, New Edition, Volume III: H–Iram* (Leiden, Brill: 1986), 571–572).

81 *Al-thaqalān* is a Qurʾanic term that refers to mankind and jinn.

82 In Arabic, "the Nights," and "the Days" refer to Fate.