





























































ministrative power from the institution of the chancery as an administrative and cultural center maintained by its elite. The latter in turn engendered a vigorous atmosphere of competition, one that involved not only departments like finance, military, and chancery scribes, but also an ever-increasing number of other kinds of authors who chose to operate outside statist domains in order to exercise their independence and sense of ownership. As a consequence of this increase in productivity, a new textual regime is established in almost every branch of knowledge, although the predominant field involves issues of statecraft, social order, moral and religious thought, worldly pursuits, and sensory or visionary experience.

As a natural consequence of this cultural milieu, we find a number of epistles or *maqāmāt* that focus specifically on disputation, debate or dialogue among the three leading administrative departments: finance, war and military, and chancery—the last being the primary domain for writers, or *arbāb al-aqlām* (lords of the pen).<sup>86</sup> While clearly being a major participant in the process of state building, at the same time this assiduous activity arouses some suspicions on our part, not with respect to the rules of supply and demand, competition and advancement among writers, but rather relating to its unsettling magnitude. A question that arises is thus: are we in the presence of Borges' minutely drawn map that negates its original?<sup>87</sup> Is this an institutionalization in rhetorical form of a paper empire, of words on words, and *kalām 'alā kalām* (metadiscourse)? Even when negated by modernists as superfluity, negation of rhetoric and its domains in the culture industry only testifies to its presence in a rich culture which necessarily takes language as its field. "The disclaiming of rhetoric," says Christine Brooke-Rose, "is itself a figure of rhetoric."<sup>88</sup> Was this enterprise essentially constructed on an antecedent authority or a contemporary inventory of poets, prose writers, Sufis, speculative theologians and rationalists, each category having its impact on

<sup>86</sup> For references to this usage, see Qalqilah, *Al-Naqd al-Adabi*, 43. Ibn Ḥijjah included this in his *Sharḥ* (mistakenly called *Khizānat al-Adab*) as "Risālat al-sayf wa-al-qalam." See *Khizānat al-Adab*, 1:360.

<sup>87</sup> Jean Baudrillard writes in *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor, 1994), 1: "If once we were able to view the Borges fable in which the cartographers of the empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly (the decline of the Empire witnesses the fraying of this map, little by little, and its fall into ruins, though some shreds are still discernible in the deserts—the metaphysical beauty of this ruined abstraction testifying to some pride equal to the empire and rotting like a carcass, returning to the substance of the soil, a bit as the double ends by being confused with the real through aging)—as the most beautiful allegory of simulation, this fable has now come full circle for us, and possesses nothing but the discrete charm of second order simulacra."

<sup>88</sup> Christine Brooke-Rose, "Whatever Happened to Narratology?" *Poetics Today* 11, no. 2 (summer 1990): 283–93.

extraction, conjugation, patching, inversion, derivation, abstruse reasoning, and logical postulations, not to mention hundreds of other means for stemming up with new meanings from the same root or name?<sup>89</sup> However, the simulacrum is no paper tiger. Instead it is there in order to raise questions, invite conceptualization, and also lead to action. Perhaps in anticipation of a disintegrating Mamluk order that is to ensue as a result of the Ottoman invasion of Egypt (1517), it lays the “groundwork” in words in order to formulate a displacement of notions and nations.

---

<sup>89</sup> Suzanne P. Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the ‘Abbāsīd Age* (Leiden, 1991), 16–17. In her translation, al-Jāhīz says: “For the Mutakallimūn [speculative theologians] selected expressions for their concepts, deriving terminology for things for which the Arab language had no word. In doing so they have set the precedent in this for all who came after them and the model for all who follow. Thus they say accident (*‘araḍ*) and essence (*jawhar*); to be (*aysa*) and not to be (*laysa*). They distinguish between nullity (*buṭlān*) and nihility (*talāshin*) and they use the terms “thisness” (*hādhiyyah*) identity (*huwiyyah*) and quiddity (*māhiyyah*). In the same way, al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad assigned names to the meters of the *qaṣīdas*...whereas the [Bedouin] Arabs had not known the meters by those names. Similarly, the grammarians named and referred to the circumstantial accusative (*ḥāl*) the adverbial accusatives (*zurūf* and such things)...Likewise, the mathematicians draw upon names which they have designated as signs in order to understand one another...Someone preaching in the heart of the Caliph’s palace said, ‘God brought him out of the door of non-being (*laysiyyah*) and let him enter the door of being (*aysiyyah*).’ These expressions are permissible in the art of Kalam when existing words lack the requisite range of meaning. The expressions of the Mutakallimūn are also befitting to poetry...” But see also ‘Ārif Tāmīr on the use of these terms by al-Karmānī and al-Fārābī: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Munāzarāt* (The debates), ed. ‘Arif Tāmīr (Beirut, 1992), 28–29.