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Constructing an Event: A Narratological Perspective on Ibn Ḥaḡar and the al-Harawī Affair

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Constructing an Event

A Narratological Perspective on Ibn Ḥaḡar and the al-Harawī Affair

♦ ABSTRACT

Ibn Ḥaḡar al-‘Asqalānī’s accounts of the al-Harawī affair have been extensively studied by Joel Blecher. Yet, this article proposes a new focus on that passage of the *Inbā’ al-Ġumr*, from a narratological perspective. It aims to analyse the narratological processes through which Ibn Ḥaḡar constructed a narrative of this fact, turning it into a narratological event. Compared to other chronicles, the textual space given to this academic discussion and the way the protagonists—among whom Ibn Ḥaḡar himself—are staged show how the narration is a particular occasion for historicizing the Self. The action is organised by the author according to a dialectical composition that leads to the denunciation of the fraud and the revelation of the author as the true master in *ḥadīth*, and finally announces the deferred achievement of the narrative sequence. The constructed *emplotment* of the event appears even more clearly through the roles that are given to each character that can be analysed thanks to Greimas’ works on the actantial model in tales. The narratological value of these roles is emphasized through the obvious shift which Ibn Ḥaḡar creates between the socio-political life of the sultanate and the narration of this event. The *emplotment* of the disruption provoked by al-Harawī’s arrival in Cairo is an occasion for Ibn Ḥaḡar to present himself as the subject of history, participating in the creation of his own fame as the restorer of religion and justice.

Keywords: Mamluk Studies, Middle East, Middle Ages, intellectual history, history of justice, narratology

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♦ RÉSUMÉ

Construire un événement : une perspective narratologique sur Ibn Ḥaḡar et l'affaire al-Harawī

Le récit qu'Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī fait de l'affaire al-Harawī a été étudié exhaustivement par Joel Blecher. Cet article, néanmoins, propose une nouvelle approche sur ce passage de *l'Inbā' al-Ġumr*, selon une perspective narratologique. Il vise à analyser les procédés narratologiques par lesquels Ibn Ḥaḡar a élaboré un récit de ce fait, le construisant en événement narratologique. Comparé aux autres chroniques, l'espace textuel dédié à cette discussion académique et la façon dont les protagonistes – dont Ibn Ḥaḡar lui-même – sont mis en scène montre combien la narration est une composition dialectique qui mène à la dénonciation de la fraude et à la révélation de l'auteur en tant que véritable maître dans la science du *ḥadīth*, ce qui, finalement, annonce l'accomplissement différé de la séquence narrative. L'élaboration de la mise en intrigue de l'événement apparaît encore plus clairement à travers les rôles qui sont donnés à chaque personnage, qui peuvent être analysés selon les travaux de Greimas sur le schéma actanciel dans les contes. La valeur narratologique de ces rôles est soulignée par l'évident décalage que crée Ibn Ḥaḡar entre la vie sociopolitique du sultanat et la narration de l'événement. La mise en intrigue de la disruption provoquée par l'arrivée d'al-Harawī au Caire est une occasion de se présenter soi-même comme le sujet de l'histoire, contribuant ainsi à la création de sa propre renommée en tant que restaurateur de la religion et de la justice.

Mots-clés : Études mameloukes, Moyen-Orient, Moyen Âge, histoire intellectuelle, histoire de la justice, narratologie

♦ ملخص

بناء حدث: رواية ابن حجر وقصة الهراوي من منظور علم السرد

إن رواية ابن حجر العسقلاني عن قضية الهراوي قد قام جويل بليشير Joel Blecher بدراستها بصورة شاملة. بيد أن هذا المقال يطرح محوراً جديداً لدراسة هذه الفقرة من كتاب «إنباء الغمر بأبناء العصر» من منظور علم السرد. وهو يرمي إلى تحليل العمليات السردية التي بنى ابن حجر من خلالها سرداً لتلك الواقعة، محولاً إياها إلى حدث لعلم السرد. ومقارنةً بأعمال مؤرخين آخرين، فإن الحيز النصي المخصص لهذا النقاش الأكاديمي والطريقة التي يُستعرض بها أطرافه – وبينهم ابن حجر نفسه – يظهران كيف كان السرد فرصة خاصة لتأريخ الذات. وينظم كاتب المقال العملية وفق تركيب جديلي يقود إلى إدانة التدليس وشجبه وإلى إظهار المؤلف كالعالم الحقيقي في «الحديث»، وأخيراً يعلن الخاتمة المؤجلة للتسلسل السردية. وتتجلى «الحبكة» للحدث التاريخي بصورة أوضح عبر الأدوار الممنوعة لكل شخصية والتي يمكن تحليلها بفضل أعمال ألكسندر جوليان غريماس Greimas عن النموذج العاملي في الحكايات. وتؤكد قيمة هذه الأدوار من منظور علم السرد عبر النقلة الواضحة التي يُحدثها ابن حجر بين الحياة الاجتماعية-السياسية

للسلطنة وبين سرد الحدث. إن «الحبكة الروائية» للحدث التاريخي المتمثل في الاضطراب الذي سببه وصول الهراوي إلى القاهرة يُشكّل فرصة لابن حجر ليمثل بها نفسه كفاعل للتاريخ، على نحو يسهم في صناعة صيته كمن يسهر على إقامة الدين والعدل وإحيائهما.

كلمات مفتاحية: دراسات مملوكية، الشرق الأوسط، العصور الوسطى، تاريخ فكري، تاريخ العدالة، علم السرد

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IN the year 818/1415 an academic assembly took place in the garden of the sultan al-Mu'ayyad Šayḥ (815–824/1412–1421). Joel Blecher has analysed the various accounts of this assembly in his PhD, in a seminal article related to a peculiar moment of this scholarly meeting and subsequently in a chapter of his book *Said the Prophet of God*.¹ Blecher's interest in this event inspired him to write a comparison of two texts written by one participant of this *disputatio*, Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī. The first account appears in his chronicle, the *Inbāʾ al-Ġumr*,² while the second account is in his magnum opus, the *Fatḥ al-Bārī*,³ a commentary on *Šaḥīḥ al-Buḥārī*. These accounts make a rather exceptional addition to *ḥadīṭ* literature, considering that long narratives of scholars' meetings are uncommon in chronicles. Ibn Ḥaḡar's narrative of this event focuses particularly on one figure, a Persian scholar named Šams al-Dīn Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh al-Rāzī al-Harawī (767 or 768–829/1365 or 1366–1426), whom Ibn Ḥaḡar challenges in a competition displaying their discipline's standards of excellence.

Blecher's study of the assembly focuses on the social and cultural practice and the writing process of the *ḥadīṭ* commentary. Seeing as a major part of the anecdote relates to testing al-Harawī's credentials and skills, Blecher raises the question of the accreditation for commentating on the *ḥadīṭ*. The quarrel that appears between various scholars on the basis of this accreditation issue reveals not only the presence of a group of Persian scholars in Cairo—which Carl Petry has described and exemplified through the biography of al-Harawī—⁴ but also the competition between Persian and Arab scholars in this cultural context.⁵ Considering the fact that al-Harawī—like Ibn Ḥaḡar—was granted highly coveted positions after his failure to prove his intellectual authority, Blecher remarks how this event brings into question the relationship between the academic performance and its symbolic and material outcomes. The event's conclusion—the appointment of Ibn Ḥaḡar—points to another paradox between Ibn Ḥaḡar's

1. Blecher 2013a, pp. 261–287; Blecher 2013b, pp. 9–98; Blecher 2018. On that event, see also Jaques (2009, pp. 72–73).

2. Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Inbāʾ al-Ġumr* III, pp. 57–62.

3. Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fatḥ al-Bārī* II, pp. 143–145.

4. Petry 1981, pp. 61–68, esp. p. 66.

5. Blecher 2013b, pp. 60–104: Chapter 2 on “Politics, Ethnicity and the Authority to Comment”.

theoretical discourse and his social practices, which Joel Blecher notes: “While Ibn Ḥaḡar stated that deriving religious benefit (*istifāda*) from knowledge in the live commentary sessions was the ideal, his conspicuous commitment to *istifāda* in the garden session ironically served as a key credential in the pursuit of his patron’s favour and, as a consequence, a judicial and teaching appointment”.⁶ Nevertheless, Blecher argues that the practice of *ḥadīṭ* commentary not only reveals the networks of patrons, students, academic rivals, and a competition for offices, which Ibn Ḥaḡar himself participated in, but also defined the standard of excellence embedded in the living practice of the academic performance and the normative value of *ḥadīṭ* commentary.⁷

As Blecher’s study focused on the sociocultural aspects of this event, he divided the original text in several parts which he translated and analysed separately according to the various questions that each part raises.⁸ My intention, in this article, is to take the text related to the event as a whole, in order to evaluate the narration rather than the social practice of *ḥadīṭ* commentary, to examine how this event has been narrated and textually constructed. In other words, I intend to question the way in which Ibn Ḥaḡar presents an academic *disputatio* as a major historical event in his chronicle.

This research was inspired by narratological theoretic works mainly based on French theory, and by various studies which apply this approach to the field of medieval Middle Eastern studies, as laid out by Jo Van Steenberg.⁹ I aim to analyse the rhetoric and narratological processes through which Ibn Ḥaḡar constructed a narrative from this assembly, in order to turn it into a historical event, marking it as a moment of crucial significance in the history of the Cairene sultanate. Based on Ricœur’s ideas concerning the *emplotment* process (*mise en intrigue*), Deleuze’s theory about the event as a semiotic mutation, Todorov’s works on the sequential structure¹⁰ and Hühn’s research on the concept of event¹¹, my demonstration will provide a description of the formation of the event as an emphasized representation of a historical happening, without denying the reality of facts. The facts become an event insofar as they are narrated in a way that gives them a peculiar meaning which is inscribed in time: that is, a moment of evolution from one state to another. As assessed by Walsh, the “significance of narrative is not latent in the data of experience, or of imagination, but fabricated in the process of subjecting that data to the elemental rhetoric of the narrative form itself”.¹² The analysis of this rhetoric and of the dramaturgy of the event will be an important step in my demonstration, whose keystone will be Greimas’ structural approach of narratology, as little attention has yet been given by scholars to “the repertoire of narrative technique in historiographic narratology”,

6. Blecher 2018, p. 81.

7. Blecher 2013a, p. 284.

8. Evaluation of competence and credentials; relationship between academic performance and its material outcomes; role of social and political networks in the practice of commentary; role of the live session in the writing process of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* commentary, etc.

9. Van Steenberg 2021, pp. 1–29.

10. Todorov 1968.

11. Hühn 2009, pp. 80–97.

12. Walsh (2007, p. 39), cited by Abbott (2009, pp. 309–328).

Daniel Fulda notes.¹³ This work leads me to clearly distinguish between the notions of *fact*, i.e. what really happened or “the happening”, *narrative*, i.e. the discursive representation of the fact, and *event*, i.e. the emploted fact that is emphasized in the narration.

I will first give a paraphrased version of the event to the reader. Next, I will argue that the constructed event emanates from a careful selection of facts and from the exceptional place granted to it within a larger text: Ibn Ḥaḡar arranges certain kinds of facts that are generally neglected in chronicles (an academic *disputatio*), and over the course of the chronicle lets a narrative unfold with the aim of insisting on a dyadic relationship (in contrast to all other relationships in this event) that puts him in opposition with another scholar, Šams al-Dīn al-Harawī. Third, I will analyse the event’s three acts as a textual composition meant to produce a dialectic reversal of a preceding situation and to create a horizon of expectations that is to define the role of the author in the following pages of his work. Fourth, I will explain that the author reorganizes the sociocultural and political context in order to give dramaturgical roles to certain individuals: namely, by constructing a *persona* of the false scholar as an opponent to the hero who is none other than the author himself, Ibn Ḥaḡar.

1. Paraphrasing Ibn Ḥaḡar’s Narration

In order to transmit a clear understanding of the article to the reader, it appears necessary to propose either a translation or a summary of Ibn Ḥaḡar’s text. I propose my own paraphrased version here, rather than reproducing Blecher’s excellent translations.¹⁴ Of course, this is a re-narration of Ibn Ḥaḡar’s highly selective narration of the event, and thus it assumes a second level of distortion. Even so, it presents the factual sequence and clarifies the three subsequent space-time acts within the event—the importance of which will be highlighted below.

1.1. Act I: In the Citadel

The first act happened on 12th Rabīʿ I 818/22nd May 1415 in the citadel where the sultan’s private *Mawlid* (the birthday celebration of the Prophet) was celebrated. Sultan al-Muʿayyad Šayḥ entrusted two judges—the Šāfiʿī Ibn al-Bulqīnī (d. 824/1421) and the Ḥanbalī Ibn Muḡulī (d. 827/1423)—with the mission of testing Šams al-Dīn al-Harawī’s exceptional academic claims: the knowledge of 12,000 *ḥadīṭ*-s¹⁵ and the entire *Šaḡīḥ* al-Buḡārī, including the *matn*-s and the *isnād*-s. They asked him about the existence of a *ḥadīṭ* granting permission for shorter evening prayers during a journey. His positive answer cited an oriental book as reference which neither judge could find. Al-Harawī did not lose his composure and replied that the

13. Fulda 2014.

14. I refer to Blecher’s English translations of the separated parts of the text as referenced in the annexe.

15. Some sources mention 10,000 *ḥadīṭ*-s (Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ* III, pp. 57, 60). Others mention 12,000 *ḥadīṭ*-s (Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ* III, p. 62; al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd* III, p. 462; al-Saḡāwī, *al-Ḍawʾ al-lāmiʿ* VIII, p. 152).

book they found in Cairo was the shortened version of a larger volume which contained the *ḥadīṭ*, but which could not be found in Egypt. Although this assertion was considered a lie by Ibn Ḥaḡar, the judges could not prove al-Harawī to be false.

1.2. Act II: In the Higher Pavilion

The second act took place one month later, on the morning of 18th Rabi' II 818/27th June 1415 in the higher pavilion (*manẓara*) of the sultan's court in the presence of judges and major scholars, among whom was Ibn Ḥaḡar, who held the office of *muftī Dār al-ʿAdl*, or jurisconsult of the house of justice. The first question asked concerned al-Harawī's personal *isnād*: from whom did he learn the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Buḥārī?¹⁶ Ibn Ḥaḡar questioned the visitor's answer: the *isnād* may have been a forgery. Then, a courtesan suggested that the sultan opens at random a page from the *Qurʾān*: whatever verse he landed on would be the topic of a *disputatio*. The chosen verse was from Surat al-Fāṭir: "And If God were to take the people to task for what they have learned, He would not leave any creature on the earth but He defers them for a specified time."¹⁷ In the subsequent discussion, which focused on the use and meaning of the word "law" ("if") in the chosen verse, *ṣayḥ* Humām al-Dīn¹⁸ defended al-Harawī's exegesis, which complemented Humām al-Dīn's understanding. Ibn Ḥaḡar adds that al-Harawī had married Humām al-Dīn's daughter, suggesting to the reader that this support was motivated by personal interest rather than academia. According to Ibn Ḥaḡar, Humām al-Dīn and al-Harawī had agreed to provoke *qāḍī* Ġalāl al-Dīn b. al-Bulqīnī, as they knew he had a tempestuous temperament. Thus, in angering him, they made Ibn al-Bulqīnī say words that Ibn Ḥaḡar denounced as a misbelief: "I am better than you and better than anything." Ibn al-Bulqīnī claimed that he never said such a phrase, but the sultan and other scholars heard it, so he had to apologize and say that he had simply targeted the persons who were present—which was not considered as misbelief anymore, but a grave discourtesy. Al-Harawī was afterwards interrogated about another *ḥadīṭ* related to the ablutions with wine. Once again, Ibn Ḥaḡar questioned in minute detail the *isnād* which al-Harawī quoted, then challenged al-Harawī, asking him to write down the *isnād* while he (Ibn Ḥaḡar) marked the mistakes, which would then be judged by someone else according to the book of Ibn Māḡa¹⁹ to determine who was right. It appeared that Ibn Ḥaḡar was right and al-Harawī mistaken—Ibn Ḥaḡar explains the details of the mistake. Our author affirms that the sultan secretly supported him with winks, and by sending one of his courtesans

16. In Ibn Ḥaḡar's account, al-Harawī claims to know the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Buḥārī by heart. Other authors say that he claimed to know the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim: Ibn Taḡrī Birdī, *al-Manḥal al-ṣāfi* X, p. 191, al-Maqrizī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd* III, p. 462; al-Saḡawī, *al-Ḍawʿ al-lāmiʿ* VIII, p. 152.

17. The verse in question was: *Qurʾān*, XXXV, 45.

18. His nisba here is not al-ʿAḡamī but al-Ḥuwarizmī. He was the head (*ṣayḥ*) of the monastery (*ḥanqah*) al-Ġamāliyya. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ* III, p. 59.

19. This refers to Ibn Māḡa's *Kitāb al-Sunan*, the last of the six main compendia of *ḥadīṭ*-s, whose quality has long been questioned by scholars but was recognized by Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī in his *Tahḍīb al-tahḍīb*. See Fück, "Ibn Mādja", *ET*, 1971, p. 880.

to convince him to go on with the *disputatio*. So, Ibn Ḥaḡar proposed another challenge: to recite and dictate twelve *ḥadīṭ*-s among the 12,000 that al-Harawī claimed to know. Al-Harawī refused to recite, accepting rather to write, though he stopped writing after the *basmallah*, saying he was not able to write except when isolated. The sultan therefore ordered that both competitors be isolated in a house, in order to see who could write more, based on what they had learnt by heart. At this, Ibn Ḥaḡar refused the challenge, as he did not want to be tested on the rapidity of his handwriting. He then challenged al-Harawī to write just one *ḥadīṭ* in the assembly. But he was unable to do so. The discussion went on until the midday prayer.

1.3. *Act III: In the Garden*

The third act took place on the afternoon of the same day. The participants of the assembly went to a garden belonging to the sultan near the greatest lake²⁰ where *ṣayḥ* al-Qimnī denigrated al-Harawī in front of the sultan. After the banquet, the desserts and fruits, a verse of the *Qurʾān* was read: “The description of the Paradise promised to the righteous is that under it rivers flow; eternal is its fruit as well as its shade. That it is the ultimate outcome for the righteous. But the outcome for the disbelievers is the Fire!”²¹ The afternoon *disputatio* concerned the interpretation of a shade in paradise mentioned in this verse and in a *ḥadīṭ*. In the discussion, Ibn Ḥaḡar demonstrated that he was the most learned of all the scholars by proving he was the only one who had learned from the *ḥadīṭ*-s that there were ten types of people whom God would shade on the Day of Judgment, instead of seven. When the assembly was about to depart for the afternoon prayer, Ibn Ḥaḡar said to the sultan that al-Harawī owed him a debt. “What is it?” asked the sultan. Ibn Ḥaḡar answered: “Twelve *ḥadīṭ*-s”.

2. *Inventing the Event*

2.1. *An Uncommon Place for an Uncommon Topic*

As summarized above, the narrative consists in the *Inbāʾ* of a series of episodes which begin at the end of the month of Rabīʿ I 818/May-June 1415. The presence of an account of a scholarly meeting devoted to *ḥadīṭ* commentary is uncommon in *Fatḥ al-Bārī*, Blecher notes. A comparable remark could be asserted regarding the chronicle: there are accounts of scholarly meetings, but very short ones, unlike the long narration of this assembly. Generally speaking the events that are narrated in chronicles written in the Cairo sultanate were related to the military elite: the sultan, the emirs, their political struggles and manoeuvres, and their wars and rituals. As for other recounted events, some were related to natural phenomena and marvels; other historians were particularly interested in mentioning the value of goods and money, especially when natural or economic accidents occurred. But 15th century historians rarely

20. “Al-birka al-kubrā” in Arabic.

21. *Quʾrān*, XIII, 35.

mention scholars as protagonists of events, except when an event would stage the position of scholars in the context of politics, usually when a scholar was appointed or dismissed from his office, or when he interfered with the sultan's policy, for example, when a judge contradicted the will of the sultan, or when a scholar produced a fatwa against an emir.

The history of scholars did not usually belong to the domain of the chronicle. In contrast, it appears that their history was included when lives were depicted, rather than events, and thus became a biographical history. A longstanding historiographical tradition has been consecrated to authenticating the *isnād*-s, that is, the chains of transmitters of the *ḥadīth*-s from the Prophet Muḥammad to those today. Although only a few biographical dictionaries from the 15th century are specifically consecrated to the research of *isnād*-s, with most containing biographies of emirs and secretaries, the biographies of scholars occupy a major part of these books, far more than the biographies of members of the military elite.²² In this historiographical genre, commonly referred to as the *Ṭabaqāt*, the biographies of scholars generally met the classical standards of the *isnād*-s research: after giving a clear identification of the individual, most of the text is concerned with the professors of this scholar, the books he had learnt, the licenses he received from them, the places where he had studied, his student journeys, his positions, and possibly the names of his own students.²³ Thus, concerns related to the history of scholars do not seem to have evolved greatly over the centuries: they were mentioned for their teachings and positions, for their transmission of science and knowledge, and for their performance of juristic and religious duties, not for the academic events that they took part in. They rarely appear as major protagonists in the “events” section of the chronicles (the so-called “*ḥawādīth*”), and almost never in a performance demonstrating their role as scholars.²⁴

Yet, this sort of academic happening was not rare. Discussions and live commentaries were recurrent during annual readings of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Buḥārī, for example,²⁵ and may have taken place as well during academic assemblies that some sultans used to organize.²⁶ As a judge, Ibn Ḥaḡar is interested more than other chroniclers in narrating judicial affairs. As a scholar and a transmitter of *ḥadīth*, his interest in a controversy related to the interpretation of *ḥadīth* and the chains of transmitters may not come as a surprise, yet a meeting of scholars in the presence of the sovereign is by no means what Ibn Ḥaḡar describes as a singular and noteworthy event in his chronicle. Nevertheless, in the *Inbāʾ al-Ġumr*, Ibn Ḥaḡar al-ʿAsqalānī consecrates approximately 2200 words to these two days, or rather to these three sessions, that happened on the 12th Rabīʿ I²⁷ and 18th Rabīʿ II, 818/22nd May and 27th June 1415, and which concern

22. For more on biographical dictionaries, see Onimus (2019, pp. 33–40).

23. Hafsi 1976.

24. Such performances have been recorded in books that used to narrate the *maḡlis* of the sultan, as shown by Christian Mauder's work on the *maḡlis* of Sultan al-Aṣraf Qānīṣawh al-Ġawrī. Mauder 2021, pp. 401–428.

25. Blecher 2018, pp. 77–81.

26. See Mauder 2021, pp. 403–405.

27. The source gives firstly the approximate date of *awākḥīr rabīʿ al-awwal* as “at the end of Rabīʿ I”, but then it later states that it happened during the celebration of *Mawlid*, which traditionally takes place on 12th Rabīʿ I. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ* III, p. 57.

two academic *disputationes* about the *ḥadīṭ*-s, related to the arrival in Cairo of a Persian scholar named Šams al-Dīn al-Harawī. The narrative focuses on the way Ibn Ḥaḡar manages to rebuke al-Harawī's pretentious claims of excellence in the domain of *ḥadīṭ* knowledge and commentary. Two thousand and two hundred words may seem quite a short length for recounting an event when compared to the size of the entire chronicle: in fact, the narrative of both days only represents 0.54% of the book.²⁸ However, this percentage tends to amount to half a year of narrated events in the chronicle.²⁹ The first criterium that distinguishes an event in historiography is the textual space that is granted to it: its emplotment or *mise en intrigue* is firstly emphasized by the disproportion between experiential time and narrated history, and the “refiguration” of the experience of time, as analysed by Ricœur.³⁰ 2200 words in a 15th century Egyptian chronicle—where pieces of information are generally short, one-sentence or one-paragraph textual segments—indeed represents an exceptional length, which echoes the importance the author attributed to the event.

2.2. A Historicization of the Self

Hence the question: what lead Ibn Ḥaḡar to consecrate such space to two days of academic discussions, a type of event generally considered unworthy of being recorded? When comparing Ibn Ḥaḡar's narrative of these events with the way in which other contemporaneous chroniclers recorded it, it appears firstly that the event is forgotten in Ibn Taḡrī Birdī's writings³¹ and secondly that the event, for most authors who mention Šams al-Dīn al-Harawī's appearance at that time, is the reception of this Persian scholar by the sultan and the great honours and gifts that were granted to him, rather than the academic meeting.³² All contemporaneous authors are consistent on this point, although the wording differs, which may suggest that they did not copy their colleagues' work. These honours are the only event related to al-Harawī's arrival in Cairo in al-Maqrīzī's *Kitāb al-Sulūk*.³³ In al-Maqrīzī's *Durar al-ʿuqūd*, the assembly is briefly mentioned after an account of the favours granted to al-Harawī, as follows: “Then the sultan and the major scholars gathered with him on 18th Rabiʿ II [27th June] because he claimed that he knew 12,000 *ḥadīṭ*-s by heart, along with their *isnād*, including the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Buḡārī. But he did not quote any *ḥadīṭ* without making a mistake and was unable to do what he claimed.”³⁴ In both of al-Maqrīzī's texts, the *maḡlis* appears then to be a secondary piece of information, compared to the sultan's favours. The fact that he notes the faulty *ḥadīṭ* corroborates Ibn Ḥaḡar's presentation of the event and highlights the importance of the testing

28. 2,190 words among 407,000 words in the entire *Inbāʾ al-Ġumr*.

29. The chronicle takes place over 82 years. The exact average wording for a half year is 2,481 words.

30. Ricœur 1991, esp. p. 167.

31. Ibn Taḡrī Birdī, *al-Manḥal al-ṣāfi* X, pp. 191-193.

32. The contemporary authors are al-Maqrīzī and al-ʿAynī. Ibn Taḡrī Birdī was young but probably met al-Harawī. The references to the sources are detailed below.

33. Al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk* IV/1, p. 312.

34. Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd* III, p. 462.

situation. But this event seems to be less a matter of academic discourse than a sequence of interactions between the academic milieu and the political power, which can be summarized as standard dealings in a patronage relationship.

Al-ʿAynī's description of the assembly is longer (a single paragraph). However, in his account, the content of the *disputatio* (*baḥṭ*) on the *ḥadīṭ* is not mentioned. Al-Harawī is not even the protagonist of the event; this is rather al-Harawī's mentor, *ṣayḥ* Humām al-Dīn al-ʿAḡamī (i.e. the Persian). What made this assembly an event in al-ʿAynī's eyes was the verbal violence of the debate, which led to an accusation of misbelief by Ibn al-Bārīzī levelled against Humām al-Dīn—and not by Ibn Ḥaḡar against Ibn al-Bulqīnī as mentioned in Ibn Ḥaḡar's chronicle. The denigration of al-Harawī is mentioned though not as the main aspect of the event.³⁵ This event is here categorized as an academic *fitna*, i.e. a moment of tension between two scholars to obtain favours and offices. According to Michael Chamberlain, the *fitna* was an integrative practice and strategy among the scholarly elite, and the substance of their social life.³⁶ Thus, al-ʿAynī reduces these facts to a standard practice within the academic milieu, to such a degree that he adds that “this assembly had no usefulness at all”,³⁷ as if his comment were an answer to the way in which Ibn Ḥaḡar valued it. Indeed, al-ʿAynī's narrative reveals the extreme valuation of this normal event under Ibn Ḥaḡar's pen.

It is clear from comparing the various annals that these academic assemblies were considered important enough to be exceptionally recorded by the chroniclers: al-Harawī's arrival to Cairo appears to have provoked a disruption in the social order of the academic milieu that is illustrated either by the depiction of the sultan's favours or by the quarrels that arose on this occasion. And yet, none of those historians give this event the space that Ibn Ḥaḡar grants to it. Moreover, none of them includes Ibn Ḥaḡar as one of its protagonists. What made the moment an event is not the disruption itself, then, but the narration of the disruption: the relative place this narrative occupies in the chronicle and the way Ibn Ḥaḡar's protagonists are staged as participating in the course of history.

The length of the historiographical narrative illustrates Ibn Ḥaḡar's willingness to document the academic politics of his times and represents a rare archive that has been deeply analysed by Blecher. Moreover, it is a *distorted* window into these activities and Ibn Ḥaḡar's own role which makes this narrative an exceptional example of a self-portrait integrated into a larger context: the distortion in question is the very topic of this article. Ibn Ḥaḡar stages himself in a book that narrates the history of the Cairo sultanate within the chronological framework of his own life (it starts with the year of his birth). Kevin Jaques, in his biography of Ibn Ḥaḡar, explains how Ibn Ḥaḡar “was attempting to portray and understand the mysteries of God's blessing and his own role in the unfolding of Muslim religious History”.³⁸ Here, the length

35. “*Tanqīṣ ḥaqq al-Harawī*”. Al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-ġumān* I, p. 228.

36. Chamberlain 1994, pp. 47, 91–107.

37. Al-ʿAynī, *ʿIqd al-ġumān* I, p. 228.

38. Jaques 2009, pp. 3–4.

of the narration of this specific event obviously highlights the appearance of a new character—al-Harawī—and Ibn Ḥaḡar’s own central role in this larger context. In other words: Ibn Ḥaḡar creates a historicization of the self.³⁹

3. Staging the Action

3.1. *A Dialectical Composition of the Event*

Ibn Ḥaḡar’s narration is organized through a meticulous staging of facts to display them as an event. The author constructs a certain unity around the event through a time ellipse, bringing together two days that were in fact separated by a month. Moreover, a (voluntary?) mistake concerning the date of the first event reduces the lapse in time between the two dates from one month to a half month. This entire event is composed of three different acts, each of which is properly contextualized by its location and occasion – the private *mawlid* in the citadel, the higher pavilion, the sultan’s garden—as well as other practical details, such as food in the banquet. These three acts correspond to three steps that show a progression in the plot development. In the first step, al-Harawī managed to deceive two chief judges of Egypt. But not Ibn Ḥaḡar, who, despite not being present that day, attests to his higher academic skills (compared to the judges) in the chronicle, by mentioning that al-Harawī’s assertion was a lie, and by proving it in his Commentary of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*.⁴⁰ Thus, an intertextual dialogue can be found between the real-life facts (the *disputatio* on a *ḥadīṭ*), the narration of the facts in the chronicle and the commentary in the theological work. This written dialogue furthers the oral dialogue that took place, allowing Ibn Ḥaḡar to undergo the test *in absentia* and to prevail in the debate decades later, despite his absence on the day in question.

The second step is meant to reveal al-Harawī’s incompetency in three skills that were required for being a high-level jurist: to present a correct personal chain of transmitters; to comment on the grammar of the *Qurʾān*; and to memorize *ḥadīṭ*-s. These skills were tested once again three years later, in 821/1418,⁴¹ after al-Harawī’s successful return to Cairo, while his enemies—namely, the very same ones who tested him in 818/1415, including Ibn al-Muḡulī, al-Bārīzī, and Ibn al-Bulqīnī—endeavoured to provoke his fall from the highest judicial authority in Egypt as Šāfiʿī Chief Judge.⁴² The act of reiterating this test undoes the essential singularity of the event and can thus be considered a key episode for evaluating the legitimacy of an individual as a scholar through those three standards of excellence.⁴³ A fourth skill was rejected from the test because Ibn Ḥaḡar considered it to be unsuccessful in revealing the

39. This article might add to the very limited literature on autobiography in Arabic historiography, explicitly addressed with respect to Ibn Ḥaḡar by Reynolds et al. (2001, pp. 79–86).

40. In his *ḥadīṭ* commentary, Ibn Ḥaḡar wrote several times that such a *ḥadīṭ* that would allow one to reduce their evening prayer does not exist. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Fath al-Bārī* II, pp. 666, 672–675.

41. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ*, pp. 165–166.

42. He is appointed Šāfiʿī Chief Judge on 26th Ġumāda I 821/1st July 1418. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ*, p. 158.

43. On the standards of excellence and a precise narrative of this episode, see Blecher (2018, pp. 83 *sqq.*).

competency of the ‘*ulamā*’: the rapidity of handwriting. This second step is essential in the “narrative construction of reality” as it is defined by Jerome Bruner: the event appears where the narration displays a breach in canonicity as a necessary condition of *tellability*, i.e. the noteworthiness of a story, or the “features that make a story worth telling”.⁴⁴ The function of this step might be to define the norms—the skills of the scholar—and to break with these expectations, as seen through al-Harawī’s provoked incompetency.

After Ibn Ḥaḡar’s initial success in revealing al-Harawī’s fraud comes the third step, which corresponds to Ibn Ḥaḡar’s success in demonstrating his own excellence in the domain. This third step is the only part of the text that is reproduced and modified in Ibn Ḥaḡar’s commentary of the *Ṣaḥīḥ*. Once again, the intertextual dialogue between the *Inbā’ al-Ġumr* and the *Fatḥ al-Bārī* which is at the core of Joel Blecher’s article⁴⁵ provides the key to understanding Ibn Ḥaḡar’s ability to meet the standards of excellence in his domain, since the scene in the commentary is narrated with academic explanations of the *disputatio* which are absent from the chronicle.

In short, a narratological perspective on al-Harawī’s affair shows that the emplotment of the facts organizes the event in three steps. Each step of the plot displays a dramatic reversal of situation, resulting in Ibn Ḥaḡar being successful in the test against al-Harawī. This reversal of situation corresponds to a dialectic move, in the Hegelian sense of the term, in which the first position (the excellence of al-Harawī) is questioned (his fraud is denounced) leading to a new development, an *Aufhebung* (the revelation of Ibn Ḥaḡar as the true Master in *ḥadīṭ*). Thus, our author portrays himself as a Guardian of the Law and the restorer of the judicial order.

3.2. *The Outcome of the Event: Deferred Justice*

It is worth noting, however, that in the sequential structure of the plot, Ibn Ḥaḡar does not manage to create a “new equilibrium” as theorized by Todorov.⁴⁶ In other words, he does not restore the scholarly and judicial institution at the end of the narrative. The account concludes by relating how, at the end of the day, the sultan appointed Ibn Ḥaḡar to a highly coveted position as a reward for his excellence in his domain of knowledge: head and supervisor of the Baybarsiyya khanqah. But al-Harawī was also appointed as head of another coveted institution: the Ṣāliḥiyya madrasa. Hence, a paradox occurs that has been noticed by Blecher: the academic performance does not match the material rewards because of corruption and political and ethnic networks. The author uses various rhetorical devices to separate both promotions which the sultan had likely decided at the same time: not only does al-Harawī’s appointment appear paragraphs later, but it is also mistakenly backdated to 12th Rabī’ II/21st June, before the assembly took place.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the scandalous career of the illegitimate scholar carries on,

44. Bruner (1991, pp. 11–15), cited by Hühn (2009, p. 89). See also Baroni (2011).

45. Blecher 2013a.

46. Todorov 1971, p. 39.

47. Unlike Ibn Ḥaḡar, al-Saḡāwī states that the appointment happened after the assembly, making it therefore one of its consequences. Al-Saḡāwī, *al-Ḍaw’ al-lāmi’* VIII, p. 153.

and al-Harawī manages years later to be appointed to the highest judicial and administrative offices,⁴⁸ despite both public and anonymous criticism of his corruption and his past relationship with the worst enemy of the sultanate, the Tatar sovereign Tīmūr (r. 768–803/1370–1405).⁴⁹ Eventually, al-Harawī's first fall and condemnation in Rabī' I 822/April 1419 was due to Ibn Ḥaḡar's successful efforts as prosecutor,⁵⁰ and his second and final dismissal in 827/1424 was immediately followed by his replacement as Šāfi'ī Chief Judge of Egypt by Ibn Ḥaḡar himself.⁵¹ Ibn Ḥaḡar's triumph during the assemblies of 818/1415 permitted him to denounce the fraud of the false scholar, but the paradox of the appointment of al-Harawī after his failure to prove his skills and competency creates a breach in the narrative sequence where one would expect the establishment of a new equilibrium by the end of the event. The scandalous existence and social survival of al-Harawī and the deferment of Ibn Ḥaḡar's restoration of the judicial order are implicitly explained by the verse from the *Qur'ān* that is quoted and discussed that very morning, a verse which postpones the punishment of humans until the Day of Judgment. In contrast to the verse on virtues leading to God's shelter on the Day of Resurrection, this verse does not describe the Afterlife, but rather the imperfections of secular society.⁵² While in the *Faṭḥ al-Bārī*, the meaning of the event is eschatological,⁵³ it is ethical in the *Inbā' al-Ġumr*.

The narrative of these assemblies then presents a plot that does not end how one might expect, but rather announces rhetorically the onset of an ethical paradox and the deferred achievement of the narrative sequence. It thus creates a horizon of expectations that is to lead the reader toward the final success of the author.

4. Dramatis Personae

4.1. The Biography of a False Scholar

An exceptional density of dialogues contributes efficiently to the dramaturgy of the assemblies. Dialogue stages the individuals as being the subjects of a narrative plot, rather than simply the objects of history. In other words, they appear as characters in a drama, the *dramatis personae* of the academic pursuit of truth. The most striking feature of this text is the fact that the author begins it with a biography of one of the protagonists, Šams al-Dīn al-Harawī. This is an unusual

48. He is appointed Šāfi'ī Chief Judge of Egypt on 29th Ġumādā I, 821/4th July 1418 and dismissed on Rabī' I 822/April 1419, but appointed Chief of the administration (*kātib al-sirr*) in Rabī' II 827/March 1424 and restored as Šāfi'ī Chief Judge on 8th Dū l-qa'da, 827/2nd October 1424. See Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbā'* III, pp. 158, 190, 324, 331.

49. Jaques 2009, pp. 74–75.

50. Jaques 2009, pp. 78–79. See Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbā'* III, p. 190; al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd* III, p. 464.

51. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbā'* III, p. 344.

52. *Qur'ān*, XXXV, 45 (If God were to punish men according to what they deserve, He would not leave on the back of the earth a single living creature, but He gives them respite for a stated Term.)

53. Blecher 2013a, pp. 261–287.

narrative practice in 15th century Egyptian chronicles, as biographies generally have their own place in the chronicle, within the obituary section which concludes the narrative of each year.

The biographical notice mentions that al-Harawī had been a companion of Tīmūr but had fled to the Qaramanid principality in Anatolia, where he came into conflict with the famous scholar al-Fanārī⁵⁴ and had been forced to flee once again. When he arrived in Syria, he made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was then appointed as a professor of the Madrasa Ṣalāhiyya there. He managed to stay in this office despite the enmity of the former professor al-Qimnī and the change in rulers, as both Amir Nawrūz and his rival, Sultan al-Muʿayyad Ṣayḥ, appointed al-Harawī to this position. He obtained permission to come to Cairo thanks to propaganda on the part of the Persian scholars. Ibn Ḥaḡar's text suggests more or less implicitly here that these Persian followers spread the rumour that al-Harawī knew 12,000 ḥadīth-s by heart, as well as the entirety of the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, including the *isnād*-s. His deceived rival al-Qimnī thus tried to discredit him and suggested to the sultan to test him.⁵⁵

This partial biography, which does not end with the individual's death but with the assemblies in question, reflects a balance between the character's life and the author's agency in describing it. In most other biographies, these assemblies are forgotten, while in this one they are the objective.⁵⁶ Unlike in typical scholars' biographies, but rather after the fashion of al-Maqrīzī's *Durar al-ʿuqūd*⁵⁷—which seems to be the source of inspiration for most of the biographies of al-Harawī—Ibn Ḥaḡar skips over al-Harawī's education and moves directly to his relationships with the political leaders of the time, beginning with the worst enemy of the sultanate, Tīmūr. This choice of narrative works to disqualify al-Harawī as a scholar from the very beginning of the text by listing the accusations that would eventually be made against him a few years later, in 822/1419, denouncing him as a corrupted man and oppressor of the Muslims.⁵⁸ It is worth noting that Ibn Ḥaḡar's other biographies of al-Harawī are somewhat different. The notice he wrote in the *Dayl al-Durar al-Kāmina*⁵⁹ is very short and refers to the notice in the *Muʿḡam al-Mufahris*.⁶⁰ The only personal remark evokes al-Harawī's self-complacency.⁶¹ By contrast, Ibn Ḥaḡar's biography in the *Rafʿ al-Isr* is surprisingly agreeable.⁶² Although Ibn Ḥaḡar became one of the most aggressive rivals of al-Harawī, this notice mentions neither al-Harawī's place at the court of Tīmūr nor his recurrent bad behaviour that caused his condemnation in 822/1419—except to mention that some people had grievances against him. In fact, the only negative remark concerns

54. Šams al-Dīn al-Fanārī (751–834/1350–1431) was an Ottoman judge and scholar known for his works about logic, jurisprudence, and mysticism. See Walsh, “Fenārī-Zāde”, *ET*, 1960, pp. 899–900.

55. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ* III, p. 57.

56. Quoted and referenced below.

57. Al-Maqrīzī, *Durar al-ʿuqūd* III, p. 464.

58. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbāʾ* III, pp. 190–191; al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-Sulūk* IV/1, p. 483.

59. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Dayl al-Durar al-Kāmina*, p. 306.

60. Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any biography of al-Harawī in the edition of the *Muʿḡam al-Mufahris* which is at my disposal. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *al-Muʿḡam al-Mufahris*.

61. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Dayl al-Durar al-Kāmina*, p. 306.

62. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Rafʿ al-Isr*, p. 392.

his impetuous temperament. In contrast to the notice that precedes the assemblies in the *Inbā' al-Ġumr*, a paragraph is consecrated to al-Harawī's education. Obviously, the author's agency in the *Inbā' al-Ġumr* was at the nadir compared to his agency in the *Raf' al-Iṣr* where, I may suggest, Ibn Ḥaḡar did not dare condemn too seriously a colleague in a biographical dictionary that was meant to restore the reputation of the judges of Egypt.

It is also worth mentioning that before describing this assembly, al-ʿAynī gives a short biography as well, which, as previously mentioned, is an unusual narrative practice. Al-ʿAynī's introductory biography sheds quite a different light on the facts: he mentions neither al-Harawī's relationships with Tīmūr nor his quarrel with al-Fanārī, and insists, to the contrary, on the honours he enjoyed in the Qaramanid principality. According to al-ʿAynī, al-Harawī did not take the office of professor in the Ṣalāḥiyya madrasa from al-Qimnī but from a deceased former professor, Ibn al-Hā'im. Thus, in this account, al-Harawī's rival is not al-Qimnī but Ibn al-Bārīzī, and the rumour that al-Harawī knew thousands of *ḥadīṭ*-s by heart was not spread by his followers but, on the contrary, by his opponents in order to convince the sultan to test his knowledge and to denounce the forfeiture.⁶³ On every single piece of information, al-ʿAynī and Ibn Ḥaḡar contradict each other, with the position of al-ʿAynī being in favour of al-Harawī and Ibn Ḥaḡar in disfavour, so we may suggest that the short biography that Ibn Ḥaḡar wrote was an answer to the one al-ʿAynī wrote, as the *Iqd al-Ġumān* was written before the *Inbā'*.⁶⁴

By comparing Ibn Ḥaḡar's dramaturgy of the event with other narratives, the role which this biography plays in it is made obvious: the biography elaborates and embellishes a *persona* of the false scholar whose role consists in being denounced by the true scholar, i.e. Ibn Ḥaḡar himself. In the perspective of a *historia magistra vitae*, al-Harawī appears as a model of the bad scholar and judge, and in fact as the opposite, negative face of Ibn Ḥaḡar, who may have created an idealized version of himself.⁶⁵ In other words, our author staged a negative *persona* whose function consists in creating a juxtaposition between al-Harawī's ignorance in matters of *ḥadīṭ*-s and Ibn Ḥaḡar's own knowledge and qualities, the very first of which includes his academic excellence, proven publicly during the assemblies of Rabī' I and Rabī' II 818/May and June 1415.

4.2. Roles in the Narratological Structure

This biography delimits the text, marking its beginning as a different textual entity than that of the rest of the chronicle. It also matches the standards of historical scholars who generally embedded a text having a biographical shape, as mentioned above—thus, this textual feature

63. Al-ʿAynī, *Iqd al-ġumān* I, p. 226–228.

64. Nevertheless, from the fact that the mistake about the Ṣalāḥiyya madrasa comes from Ibn Ḥaḡar, it could be induced that al-ʿAynī corrected this mistake in his own chronicle. Thus, this would mean that al-ʿAynī had a certain knowledge of Ibn Ḥaḡar's chronicle before it was completed, just as he knew and plagiarized some parts of the *Fatḥ al-Bārī*. Cf. Blecher 2018, pp. 59–60. On the rivalry between Ibn Ḥaḡar and al-ʿAynī, see Broadbridge (1999).

65. Rosenthal, "Ibn Ḥadjar al-ʿAsḳalānī", *EI*², 1975, p. 800.

can be understood as announcing the historical field in question, i.e. academic matters. However, this biography does not only have a formal function within the structure of the text, it also has a narrative function in the structured plot. It is indeed striking that the features of this narrative correspond to what structuralist narratological studies have named the actantial model.⁶⁶ Greimas' works have demonstrated that the semiotics of tales are based on roles and relationships which give structure to the narration.⁶⁷ "Narrativity is situated and organized prior to its manifestation", Greimas explains.⁶⁸ Whatever the tale, the action is organized through six *actants*: the *Subject* (or hero); the *Object* of his quest; a *Sender* who sends the subject to perform his quest; a *Receiver* who is the beneficiary of the achievement of the quest; a *Helper*; and an *Opponent*.

According to such a model, we might have expected that the initial biography would describe the former life of the subject, but this is obviously not the case. The subject—the hero, so to speak—is Ibn Ḥaḡar himself, whose biography might be understood as the whole chronicle, which begins with his birth, as a historicization of himself.⁶⁹ To delineate a hero, the presence of an opponent becomes a narratological necessity: that is what al-Harawī's biography provides. In the narratological structure of the *Inbā' al-Ġumr*, al-Harawī's arrival is the plot development that allows the subject to begin his quest. In Greimas' model, this quest is determined by the will of the Sender.⁷⁰ In Ibn Ḥaḡar's narrative, the Sender appears to be the character who organises and arbitrates the assemblies: Sultan al-Mu'ayyad Ṣayḥ who asks his hero to go on with the *disputatio* using winks and secret messages, which are staged in Ibn Ḥaḡar's narrative, in order to foster justice and the knowledge of the Prophetic Word—objects of the quest. This narrative model defines a Receiver,⁷¹ a character who is supposed to be the one who benefits from the success of the quest: this Receiver might be here the Muslims, who are meant to benefit from the academic pursuit of God's truth. The other scholars are useless in the *disputatio* and cannot be considered adjuvants, or Helpers (according to Greimas' actantial model) of the hero: the judges of Act I prove themselves unable to denounce the fraud and nothing results from the intrigant al-Qimnī's accusative vociferations in Act III. Nevertheless, the author does benefit from an external aid. The intertextual density of the episode is key: the adjuvants (Helpers) are not Ibn Ḥaḡar's contemporary scholars but his eminent predecessors, whose books are brought in to prove al-Harawī's fraud: first of all, the six main *ḥadīṭ* compendia, *Ṣaḥīḥ* al-Buḡārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim, and the "book" of Ibn Māḡa (209–273/824–825–887)⁷² which

66. *Schéma actantiel* in French.

67. Greimas 1966.

68. Greimas (1977, p. 23), cited by Abbott (2009, p. 312).

69. Indeed, considering al-Harawī the subject of the narrative would neglect the fact that, although this narrative contains al-Harawī as his own narrative entity, it works as part of a longer self-historicization discourse, i.e. the chronicle as a whole, whose subject might be Ibn Ḥaḡar himself as suggested by Jaques (2009, pp. 3–4).

70. *Émetteur* or *destinateur* in French.

71. *Récepteur* or *destinataire* in French.

72. See above.

are explicitly mentioned, as well as other compendia that are collectively evoked.⁷³ Another book is mentioned and read during the assembly because it is quoted by al-Harawī, *al-Firdaws* by Abū l-Layṭ al-Samarqandī (d. 373 or 393/932–934 or 1002–1003).⁷⁴ These books help the hero fulfil his quest by answering enigmas: does such a *ḥadīṭ* exist? Is the *isnād* attributed to this *ḥadīṭ* true? What do these words of God mean? One of the characters seems to have a peculiar role: Taqī al-Dīn al-Ġibtī appears in both the morning and afternoon assemblies as a neutral guarantor of probity,⁷⁵ and it is striking that in the test of 821/1418, once again al-Ġibtī hardly tries to remain neutral, as pointed out by Joel Blecher:⁷⁶ he might thus be the only contemporary scholar that may be considered an adjuvant of the hero.

By the end of the text, these structural roles tend to disappear: the density of the dialogues in the dramaturgy contrasts with the progressive mutism of most of the actors. Although the sultan intervenes punctually with al-Qimnī he does not say a word, but rather winks and sends messages during Act III. These various invisible processes are made visible in the narration in order to stage an intimacy between the author and the sultan, which is later reinforced by the final *bon mot* of the author. Al-Harawī's loquaciousness itself is progressively extinguished when Ibn Ḥaḡar takes the floor for a clever and conclusive presentation. Our author's discourse replaces and smothers all other voices in this academic polyphony, becoming the substance of the narrative development that makes up the event.

4.3. Characters Outside Their Social, Cultural, and Politic Context

Thus, the narrative of those academic assemblies cannot be considered a simple account of facts; it is a composition that transforms facts into events and organizes the dramaturgy of the scene, one perhaps less dependent on the actual actions of the individuals than on the roles the author assigned to each actant (which is a far cry from al-'Aynī's narrative)—to such a degree that an absent character may *narratively* intervene in a scene, as Ibn Ḥaḡar does at the end of Act I. This epistemic shift between the event as it happened and the way it is recorded is what Paul Ricœur calls *emplotment* or *mise en intrigue*, a necessary step in the making of an event.⁷⁷

73. Namely, the *Sunan* of Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidī, and al-Nasā'ī. See Robson, "Ḥadīth", *EI*², 1975, p. 25.

74. Schacht does not mention the *Firdaws* but he does refer to various other books of Abū l-Layṭ al-Samarqandī. Schacht, "Abū l-Layṭ Naṣr b. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Ibrāhīm al-Samarqandī", *EI*², 1960, p. 141.

75. He is the one who testifies against Ibn al-Bulqīnī's misbelief and the one who writes the *isnād*-s quoted by al-Harawī and Ibn Ḥaḡar. Although his kunya is Taqī al-Dīn in the narrative of 818/1415 and Šams al-Dīn in 821/1418, it seems to be the same individual according to the functions attributed to him in his obituary. It is noteworthy that in Ibn Ḥaḡar's obituary of al-Ġibtī or al-Ġitī or al-Ḥabtī, the author is very positive and stands up for him against some accusations. Ibn Ḥaḡar, *Inbā'* III, pp. 291–292.

76. The spelling of his name in my edition of the *Inbā'* ("Ġitī" or "Ḥabtī") is wrong. It's corrected in "Ġibtī" by Joel Blecher. See Blecher 2018, p. 86.

77. Ricœur 1992, pp. 29–35.

Like the alternative narratives of those assemblies, the larger context that appears in the various chronicles reveals that the employment of the facts might have been quite different. On a sociocultural level, the Persian faction appears to support al-Harawī rather than make al-Harawī simply another member of the faction—as he is under al-ʿAynī’s pen—and thus Ibn Ḥaḡar subordinates the ethnicity issue to the dyadic competition between both protagonists. On the political level, these assemblies are not an incident in this ethnic competition but rather a moment in Sultan al-Muʿayyad Ṣayḥ’s academic policy. After his victory against rebellious emirs,⁷⁸ the sovereign undertook to patronize several junior scholars: this included not only Ibn Ḥaḡar and al-Harawī, but also al-ʿAynī, Ibn al-Muḡulī, and al-Dayrī, among others—a policy which was emphasized by al-ʿAynī in his panegyric of Sultan Ṣayḥ, in which he mentions al-Harawī specifically as proof of the sultan’s great generosity and consideration toward scholars.⁷⁹ In other words: on the political level, the sultan may be the *Subject* of the event rather than the *Sender*, while Ibn Ḥaḡar and al-Harawī are not opponents but, on the contrary, both *Receivers* of the same policy. In Ibn Ḥaḡar’s narration of this event, the author-turned-character performs a semiotic shift: he extracts the event from the ethnic competition or the sovereign’s policy and agency and uses it as an occasion to reveal himself, under the patronage of the sultan and God, as restorer of the scholarly and judicial institution. Through the tool of narrative, Ibn Ḥaḡar transforms a fact into an event by extracting it from the normalized socio-political life of the sultanate and by redefining the roles of each participant.

* * *

Creating an event in general is a narrative construction that manifests through both its length and its composition. The academic assemblies of Rabiʿ I and II 818/May and June 1415 are clearly distinguished in the *Inbāʾ al-Ġumr* by the length of their descriptions that differentiates them from the usual short, segmented writing found in chronicles. This moment represents a turning point for Ibn Ḥaḡar, not only in the author’s life and career, but also in his narration of history, paving the way for narrated episodes on judicature from 818/1415 onwards. An analysis of the composition also demonstrates how the author’s semiotic goals guide the narrative structure of the text. Its organization, involving three acts on three separate stages, defines a dialectic progression, from fraud to an unveiling of truth. The inadequacy between this result and the material outcome produces a horizon of expectations that leads the reader through the chronicle until Ibn Ḥaḡar’s eventual success against his rival. The importance of each character’s role in the narrative structure compared to the reality of individuals’ actions is revealed (among other clues) in the position of al-Harawī’s biography, which serves to stage an “anti-scholar”, an opponent in the course of Ibn Ḥaḡar’s historicized life whose actions become the providential opportunity to reveal the author’s true role. This narrative situation creates a climax in the chronicle that defines the event as such and is the occasion for an evolution in the writing of the chronicle.

78. Holt, “al-Muʿayyad Ṣayḥ”, *EP*, 1991, pp. 273–274.

79. Al-ʿAynī, *al-Sayf al-Muhannad*, pp. 265–275.

The event, however, is not just a narrative construction: its roots are deeply embedded in social, political, and cultural phenomena, such as the practice of *ḥadīṭ* live commentary, the ethnic competition and the sultan's academic policy. The assemblies and its protagonists were not invented by the author. The construction of the event is not a fiction but an interpretation of that reality. Events are ideal, in contrast to the corporeity of the fact, and provoke the necessity of a new interpretation, Deleuze explains.⁸⁰ In Ibn Ḥaḡar's narration, the author reorganizes the roles of the social and political actors in order to give a peculiar signification to the phenomena he was confronted with during his lifetime and made the assemblies the *momentum* out of which this signification was revealed, i.e. his role as restorer of the judicial order that has endured a disruption by the arrival of al-Harawī—who appears as a sort of personification of the academic disorder. Staging the breach in canonicity that appears in al-Harawī's fraud becomes the occasion to present himself as the subject of history in a process of self-historicization that is meant to be achieved through the expectations inspired by various narrative techniques involved in the writing of the event.

The event is not only an interpretation of phenomena but also a performative act. Narrating a happening means creating an event which must have resulting consequences. Here, Ibn Ḥaḡar claims precedence over his fellow scholars and probably expects a material outcome—securing his restoration as head of the khanqah Baybarsiyya by the end of the event—as well as an unmaterial outcome—the successful construction of his own fame for posterity, as a major intellectual figure and judge of his time, through the eternal echo of the sound and fury caused by debating scholars. Just as Ibn Ḥaḡar began his historical narration with the year of his birth, the events of his personal life also organized his narration of the sultanate's history toward its finality, which we may understand as the author's restoration of religion and justice.

Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, pp. 57–58.	Blecher 2013b, pp. 74–76.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, pp. 58–59.	Blecher 2013b, p. 79.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, pp. 59–60.	Not translated but summarized in Blecher 2013b, pp. 85–86.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, pp. 60–61.	Not translated but summarized in Blecher 2013b, pp. 88–89.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, p. 62 (part 1).	Not translated but summarized in Blecher 2013a, p. 275.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, p. 62 (part 2).	Blecher 2013a, pp. 275–276.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, pp. 62–63.	Not translated.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, p. 63.	Blecher 2013b, p. 92.
Ibn Ḥaḡar, <i>Inbā' al-Ghumr</i> , III, pp. 63–64.	Not translated.

Annex 1. Joel Blecher's English translations of Ibn Ḥaḡar's text.

80. Deleuze 2009, pp. 9–21.

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