The Eleventh Maqamah of Sâweh. Our adventure begins with al-Harith, the narrator of the story. Al-Harith, saddened by some unexplained misfortune, finds himself in the public burial ground of the city of Sâweh. Here he views a funeral in progress. After the funeral, a man in a long cloak stands upon a hill and starts speaking of death and judgement. The man lectures the crowd on one’s fickleness in the face of death. He then rebukes the crowd for their “worldly selfishness” and warns them of the dangers of wealth and power. At the end of his speech, the man begs the crowd for money, and comes down off the hill. Al-Harith knows that he recognizes the man, and after a moment’s contemplation, realizes that this man is Abu Zayd. Al-Harith scolds the man for his hypocrisy, to which Abu Zayd shamelessly says, “…hast thou ever known a time when a man would not win of the world when the game was in his hands.”. One might recognize the more modern adaptation of this quote as, ‘Don’t hate the player, hate the game’. After Abu Zayd’s dismissal of al-Harith’s admonishment, both men then part angrily.

In al-Hariri’s Maqamat, this story is accompanied by the illustration you are currently viewing. This image is quite different to the 10 stories that precede it, as the focus is not on the main characters of the story, al-Harith and Abu Zayd. The illustrator chose to depict the burial scene that al-Harith comes upon, rather than the conversation between al-Harith and Abu Zayd.

Faces of the mourners show grief and anguish. There are both female and male mourners at the gravesite, but the women are shown to have more expressive faces and gestures. The women appear above the crowd away from the central image, and some can be seen rending clothes and throwing ashes. The mourners are wearing traditional funeral garb,

and while the body being laid to rest is the focal point of the illustration, great effort has been made to portray a realistic burial scene. These expressions by the artist reflect the central point of Abu Zayd’s speech regarding death.

A shovel and basket to collect the dug up earth are displayed near the entrance to the crypt, to further the realistic interpretation of this story.

Also pictured is a servant holding a lamp to guide the men burying the body.

Oleg Grabar, an art historian and archeologist, observes that while this illustration doesn’t show the main characters, instead, the painting evokes emotion and sets the tone of the story. Grabar comments on the uniqueness of this image, and says that “only one artist has tried to interpret the more profound spirit of the text”. The artist has chosen what seems like an insignificant moment in the story to be representative of the entire narrative. However, Grabar clarifies that “The frozen silence of the personages, the quietude of the setting, the elaborately massive composition, the gestures stopped in midair, all paraphrase superbly the meditation on death of Abu Zayd’s poem.”