composed it after the fashion of the Arabic maqamat of al-Hariri and the Hebrew 'Tahkemoni' of al-Harizi. The maqama, as developed by these poets, is a piece of rhymed prose frequently intersected by verse, which deals with subjects of literary and general character, often highly autobiographical. In it one of the two imaginary heroes of the book recounts a story in which suddenly the second hero appears, usually in order to solve a difficulty or to recite a poem etc. In az-Zahiri's 'Sefer Hammusar', 'Book of Instruction', the two heroes are Mordekhai of Sidon and Avner of Yemen, but, as the author makes it clear in his introduction as well as in the last maqama which is a dirge on himself, each of the two constitute one half of his own self, which means that the facts recorded about both of them apply in reality to the author. Moreover, az-Zahiri, like his master al-Harizi, travelled widely, and like him, and even more than he, alludes to his travels in his book. As a matter of fact, fanciful names and routes are used by him much more rarely than by his master [1]. Nevertheless one must never forget that maqamat are primarily a work of fiction. Therefore every geographical, historical or autobiographical detail given in them has to be carefully examined before it can be admitted as a fact. E. g. the very first maqama of the 'Book of Instruction' as well as the 42nd opens with the words : 'I travelled from No-Amon to Mount Hermon'. No-Amon, throughout the Middle Ages, is the Hebrew name of Alexandria [2], whence we should infer that Zakharia had taken the route from Egypt to Syria. But that, as we shall presently see, was not the case. The rhyme is pure fancy and taken from the 'Tahkemoni', maq. no. 20, part 2, line 5. Many 'autobiographical' stories too are nothing but pure imagination, e. g. the story in the eighth maqama of the author's [3] marriage to a black Jewess in Cochin, India, of whom

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[1] Only a few of these az-Zahiri has taken over, e. g. 'Tebes', al-Ḥarizi maq. 6 and 50, az-Zahiri maq. 34 (with the same rhyme 'Tashbes'); or 'Ḥadrakh', al-Ḥarizi maq, 18, az-Zahiri maq. 14, which may mean, of course, Damascus, cf. Zech., ch. 9, v. 1. Where the 'Land of the Hittim' was (maq. 31), az-Zahiri certainly did not care to enquire.

[2] No doubt known to our author, cf. al-Ḥarizi's twelfth maqama.

[3] Expressly noted as such in the rhymed 'Contents' which precedes the book.