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Knowledge and Communication in Travel Writings During Epidemic and Disaster Crises in the Maghreb: A Reading of the Manuscript by AbūḤāmid al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī (d. 1895 CE)

Abstract

Travel literature functions as a truthful mirror reflecting the social and economic conditions of the communities visited by travelers. These narratives document the living standards of populations, commodity prices, the prevalence of diseases, and aspects of everyday life. In addition, they provide detailed accounts of social structures and the imbalances affecting particular regions. Through the careful observations and subjective impressions of travelers, historians have been able to reconstruct key societal developments, such as famines and epidemics, making these narratives valuable primary sources that vividly portray the intricacies of historical life.

Among the most influential literary genres in Islamic societies, travel literature holds a privileged place due to its empirical nature and ability to capture complex social realities. In particular, Maghrebi travel writing experienced notable growth during the 13th century AH / 19th century CE, emerging as an important medium for the transmission of knowledge and the facilitation of cultural exchange. These texts serve as detailed records of social change, with meticulous accounts of economic, social, and health-related conditions, especially during periods of crisis.

Within this framework, the travel manuscript of AbūḤāmid al-‘Arabī ibn ‘Alī al-Mushrifī represents a distinct example of crisis documentation in the Maghreb. His account provides a nuanced and historically grounded portrayal of poverty, disease outbreaks, and the disintegration of economic structures. This study seeks to shed light on the epistemological and communicative functions of travel literature in times of crisis by analyzing al-Mushrifī’s manuscript through an anthropological lens that explores how societies perceived and responded to epidemics and disasters.

Keywords: *historical anthropology, communication, knowledge, crisis documentation*

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Məğribdə epidemiya və fəlakət böhranları zamanı səyahət yazılarında bilik və ünsiyyət: Əbuhamid əl-Ərəbi əl-Müşrifinin (ö. 1895-ci il) əlyazmasının oxunuşu

Xülasə

Səyahət ədəbiyyatı səyahətçilərin ziyarət etdiyi icmaların sosial və iqtisadi şəraitini əks etdirən, həqiqətə uyğun güzgü kimi fəaliyyət göstərir. Bu rəvayətlər əhalinin həyat səviyyəsini, əmtəə qiymətlərini, xəstəliklərin yayılmasını və gündəlik həyatın aspektlərini sənədləşdirir. İslam cəmiyyətlərində ən təsirli ədəbi janrlar arasında səyahət ədəbiyyatı, öz empirik mahiyyətinə və mürəkkəb sosial reallıqları tutmaq qabiliyyətinə görə imtiyazlı yer tutur. Xüsusilə, Məğribi səyahət yazısı hicri 13-cü əsrdə/19-cu əsrdə nəzərəcarpacaq inkişaf yaşadı, biliklərin ötürülməsi və mədəni mübadilənin asanlaşdırılması üçün mühüm bir vasitə kimi ortaya çıxdı. Bu mətnlər sosial dəyişikliklərin təfərrüatlı qeydləri kimi xidmət edir, xüsusilə də böhran dövrlərində iqtisadi, sosial və sağlamlıqla bağlı şərtlərin ətraflı təsviri ilə.

Bu çərçivədə, Əbuhamid əl-Ərəbi ibn Əli əl-Müşrifinin səyahət əlyazması Məğribdəki böhran sənədlərinin bariz nümunəsini təmsil edir. Onun hesabı yoxsulluğun, xəstəliklərin yayılmasının və iqtisadi strukturların dağılmasının nüanslı və tarixi əsaslı təsvirini təqdim edir. Bu araşdırma, cəmiyyətlərin epidemiyaları və fəlakətləri necə qəbul etdiyini və onlara necə reaksiya verdiyini araşdıran antropoloji obyektiv vasitəsilə Əl-Müşrifinin əlyazmasını təhlil edərək, böhran dövrlərində səyahət ədəbiyyatının epistemoloji və kommunikativ funksiyalarına işıq salmağa çalışır.

Açar sözlər: tarixi antropologiya, ünsiyyət, bilik, böhran sənədləri

Introduction

Travel literature is regarded as a foundational source for historical writing across political, economic, social, and cultural domains. It facilitates civilizational interaction and captures knowledge related to societies through the lens of travelers' observations and personal impressions. These accounts possess considerable academic value, enriched with descriptive prose, poetic elements, and ethnographic and anthropological details, all of which provide indispensable material for historians and researchers.

In the Maghreb, travel writing attracted significant scholarly and cultural interest, particularly pilgrimage narratives, which were esteemed for their religious relevance. The 13th century AH / 19th century CE marked a flourishing period for this genre, which diversified in themes, structure, and expression, navigating between conventional literary forms and emerging stylistic innovations. These works reflect the social dynamics and phenomena of their time, often interwoven with personal reflections and literary flourishes that convey the author's aesthetic sensibilities and intent to enrich the travel narrative.

Research

AbūḤāmid al-ʿArabī ibn ʿAlī al-Mushrifī contributed extensively to this tradition, with several travel narratives to his name. His most notable work, *Events Occurring in Northern Morocco...*, demonstrates a unique synthesis of chronological narration and analytical reflection, offering a literary style that seamlessly integrates historical record and personal experience.

Travel literature, in this regard, stands as a key historiographical resource, offering insights and a wealth of empirical data for those engaged in the study of history and cultural heritage. (Ḥajjī, Introduction to al-Rihla al-Muyassara ilā al-Biqāʿ al-Muqaddasa al-Muṭāhhara li-Adāʾ Manāsik al-Ḥajj wa al-ʿUmrah, 1391 AH - 1972 CE) The accounts it contains, often based on events witnessed firsthand, render these texts especially valuable due to their originality and authenticity, making them indispensable references for historical scholarship.

Maghrebi scholars demonstrated particular interest in travel writing, which varied widely in subject matter, narrative form, length, and stylistic approach. Among these journeys, pilgrimage travel held a special status due to the sacred nature of its destination, focusing on the holy sites and

the fulfillment of the fifth pillar of Islam. Performing this religious duty represented the highest aspiration for many Maghrebi scholars, historians, and jurists.

The importance of these literary works lies not only in their documentation of spiritual journeys but also in their broader communicative function and their multifaceted contributions to knowledge. They conveyed essential information about standards of living, educational levels, social interactions, and the socio-cultural transformations experienced by Maghrebi societies during the 13th century AH / 19th century CE. These journeys skillfully combined literary description with historical narration, thereby enriching their content with profound humanistic and cultural depth.

Furthermore, travel literature played a crucial role in fostering civilizational dialogue and intercultural understanding. It emerged as an effective means of cultural and intellectual transmission, helping to bridge regional divides and establish mutual understanding among diverse communities. Through these journeys, the flow of knowledge was no longer confined to scholarly elites but extended beyond to wider audiences, crossing geographic boundaries. Travel narratives offered vivid depictions of everyday life and revealed the diversity and richness inherent in human societies, making them a compelling medium for civilizational and historical communication.

The 13th century AH / 19th century CE saw the proliferation of numerous travel accounts that recorded a wide range of observations and impressions. These accounts documented not only economic, social, and cultural conditions but also provided detailed descriptions of travel routes and their distinguishing features. A defining characteristic of many of these narratives is their blending of traditional and innovative elements, both in structure and content.

The phenomenon often described as imitation appears prominently in these texts, which frequently include extended quotations, recurring references to the intellectual and cultural past, and firsthand reports of social tragedies, such as the epidemic featured in the current journey under discussion. These writings also touched on various historical and political aspects, at times referencing episodes of despotism and conflicts of both local and international scope.

Moreover, many of these journeys are marked by extensive literary digressions, which substantially contribute to their length and complexity. This tendency stems from the authors' deliberate efforts to diversify their material, a practice they regarded as intellectually rewarding, given the wealth of information, personal reflections, and direct observations it yielded.

It is noteworthy that the author in question produced a considerable number of travel writings, which is indicative of his deep familiarity with this literary genre and his expansive scholarly knowledge. Among his documented journeys are: al-Riḥla al-ʿArīḍafiʿAdāʾ al-Farīḍa, Nuzhat al-Abṣār li-Dhawī al-Maʿrifawa al-Istibṣār, Tanfīʿan al-Mutakāsīl al-WasanfīManāqibSayyidiʿAḥmad ibn MuḥammadwaʿWaladiḥ al-Ḥasan, RiḥlailāNawāḥīFās, Tamḥīd al-JibālwanāʾWarāʾahāmin al-MaʿmūrwaʿIṣlāḥ al-Ḥālfī al-Sawāḥilwa al-Thughūr, RiḥlatDhakhīrat al-Awākhirwa al-AwwalfīmāYataḍamman min Akhbār al-Duwal, and RiḥlatMashmūmʿArār al-Najd wa al-Ghiṭān al-Muʿadd li-Istinshāq al-WāliwaʿAnfās al-Mawla al-Sultān.

The journey titled Events that Occurred in Northern Morocco..., authored by AbūḤāmid al-ʿArabī ibn ʿAlī al-Mushrifī (Ḥamdādū & al-ʿArabī, 2012, pp. 76-77), is among those in which the author sought to organize his materials in a chronological manner. He often expanded upon key ideas and was meticulous in documenting every notable moment, relying on a coherent structure that grouped ideas, main themes, and subthemes logically, according to the nature of the events and issues he encountered.

Such conditions enabled the author to demonstrate the full extent of his scholarly insight, often incorporating comprehensive quotations, compilations, and interpretations of earlier heritage texts. As a result, this journey stands out for its intellectual richness and the breadth of knowledge it conveys.

The Author's Life:

His Birth and Lineage:

There remains considerable uncertainty surrounding the exact birth date of al-ʿArabī al-Mushrifī, making it difficult to establish with precision. However, at the conclusion of his book al-Ḥusām al-Mushrifī li-QaṭʿLisān al-Sābb al-Jaʿfarī, the author mentions that he was fifty years old at the time of

its writing. Drawing on the information provided in *Ittiḥāf al-Muṭālī*[‘], which states that he passed away in the year 1313 AH / 1895 CE at approximately ninety years of age, it is reasonable to estimate that his birth occurred near the end of 1804 or the beginning of 1805 CE.

This estimate contradicts the view held by some who suggested that he was born toward the end of the second decade of the 19th century, an assertion that appears unlikely in light of the available evidence. His birthplace was the village of al-Karṭ, located on the outskirts of the city of Mascara. (Ḥajjī, According to the author of *Ittiḥāf al-Muṭālī*[‘], our subject was born and educated in Tlemcen. In contrast, Yaḥyā Bū‘azīz believes he was born in Ghrīs. *Ittiḥāf al-Muṭālī*[‘] bi-Wafayāt A‘lām al-Qarn al-Thālith ‘Ashar wa al-Rābi‘, 1417 AH)

His Lineage:

Al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī was a member of the esteemed al-Mushrif family, (al-Idrīsī, al-Fuḍaylī, & al-Mushrifī, "1987" "N.D" "2005"), which traces its lineage to the ‘Arḥūbiyyīn, descendants of Mushrif (the name being pronounced with either a kasra or a faṭḥa on the letter "r") ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mas‘ūd. The al-Mushrif family, belonging to the Ḥasanid branch, is widely recognized for its noble and authentic descent. This lineage has been documented in all the major authoritative works on noble ancestry, which affirm its legitimacy and distinguished origins.

In this regard, the author of al-Durrar al-Bahiyya notes: “The al-Mushrifīs possess numerous records and esteemed fatwas, among them twenty royal decrees (ṣaḥā’ir), including those endorsed by the ruling Ottoman sultans of the time, alongside other legal attestations.” The oldest of these royal decrees dates back to the 11th century AH.

A comprehensive account of al-Mushrifī’s lineage is provided in al-Yawāqīt al-Thamīna, where it is written: “It is essential to mention our lineage, which is connected to that of the ‘Arḥūbiyyīn. It is as follows: the full name and genealogy is Muḥammad al-‘Arabī ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn ‘Alī, ibn Muḥammad, ibn Mas‘ūd, ibn ‘AbdAllāh, ibn Yūsuf, ibn ‘Īsā al-Būkhaylī, ibn Šāliḥ, ibn al-Ḥasan, ibn Abī al-Qāsim, ibn Abī ‘AbdAllāh, ibn Muḥammad, ibn al-Shaykh Mawlānā Ya‘qūb, ibn Abī Šḥāq, ibn ‘AbdAllāh, ibn Abī ‘Umar, ibn Mūsā, ibn al-Shaykh Mawlānā Šafwān, who was known among non-Arabs as Lisān al-Qibt, Bashshār ibn Mūsā, ibn Sulaymān, ibn Yaḥyā, ibn Mūsā, ibn ‘Īsā, ibn Idrīs, ibn Idrīs, ibn ‘AbdAllāh al-Kāmil, ibn al-Ḥasan al-Sibt al-Muthannā, ibn al-Ḥasan al-Sibt, the son of Mawlānā ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Fāṭima, daughter of the Messenger of Allah” (al-Mushrifī, p. no. 1534D).

Upbringing and Education

Abū Ḥāmid al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī began his early education within the household of his family. His father, ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn ‘Alī al-Mushrifī, was highly respected in his community for his profound knowledge of Islamic jurisprudence, as well as his integrity, piety, and sound judgment. These attributes earned him the role of arbitrator in local disputes, a position he fulfilled with distinction.

In line with the common educational path followed by children in his village, al-Mushrifī joined the local kuttāb (Qur’anic school) in his hometown of al-Karṭ, where he undertook the memorization of the Qur’an. He himself attests to this early accomplishment in one of his writings, stating: “I read the Qur’an before I reached puberty.”

Regarding the scholars from whom he received instruction during this formative period, the following individuals are noted:

Sīdī ‘AbdAllāh ibn Dīda, with whom he studied the rules of Qur’anic recitation, specifically rasm and ḍabt, as well as al-Durrar al-Lawāmi‘, a text on the variant readings (qirā’āt) of Imam Nāfi‘.

Sīdī Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān

al-‘Arabī Būrūba

Muḥammad ibn ‘Adla

After acquiring foundational skills in reading and writing in his hometown of al-Karṭ, al-Mushrifī moved to the city of Mascara to pursue higher levels of education. There, he studied under several distinguished scholars, among them, but not limited to, the following:

Muḥammad ibn ‘AbdAllāh Saqqāṭ al-Mushrifī

al-Ṭayyib ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān

Aḥmad ibn al-Tahāmī
Muṣṭafā ibn Aḥmad al-Tahāmī
MuḥammadBūsayf al-‘Āmirī al-Tarārī
Ibn ‘Ub ibn al-Muṣṭafā
al-Ṭāhir al-Mushrifī
‘Abd al-Qādir ibn Muṣṭafā ibn al-Aḥmar
al-Sanūsī ibn ‘Abd al-Qādir

Upon completing his studies in Mascara, al-Mushrifī relocated to the city of Mostaganem, where he continued his education under its local scholars and teachers. He notes in his writings: “We also studied under other scholars of Mostaganem.” Among the teachers he mentioned are:

Muḥammad ibn Ṣābir
Muḥammad ibn ‘Āmir al-Barjī
Muḥammad ibn ‘Āshir
‘Abd al-Qādir ibn al-Qandūz
Khalīl al-Farandī

Al-Mushrifī’s quest for knowledge did not stop there. He extended his scholarly travels to the city of Tlemcen, referred to by AbūRās as the “City of the Wall”, in pursuit of advanced learning. In his writings, he recounts his time in Tlemcen and his studies under notable scholars such as Shaykh al-Hājj al-Dāwdī al-Tilimsānī, ShaykhMuḥammad ibn Sa’d al-Tilimsānī, and SīdīMuḥammad al-Fakhkhār.

Eventually, al-Mushrifī settled in the city of Oran in the year 1240 AH / May 1824 CE, where he continued his scholarly pursuits under a group of prominent teachers. However, the onset of the French occupation of Algeria profoundly affected both his academic and social life. Witnessing the successive fall of Algerian cities brought deep sorrow and a sense of loss, which significantly disrupted his educational trajectory.

As he recounts, the occupation compelled him to return to Mascara after spending six years in Oran. There, he began teaching children, and he later reflected on this period with the following words: (Refers to the French) “The sudden arrival of the accursed French to the Algerian coast disrupted our plan to study tafsīr and canonical ḥadīth texts. So I returned to Ghrīs, content with having mastered grammar and jurisprudence. Praise be to God, I devoted myself to teaching during my father’s lifetime, which brought joy to his heart” (Al-Mushrifī, 12 verso)

Following his return to Mascara and his temporary withdrawal from scholarly life, al-Mushrifī once again resumed his educational journey, this time traveling to the plains of Majāja in the year 1249 AH / 1833 CE to continue his studies.

This first stage of al-Mushrifī’s life, marked by his academic movements between Mascara, Mostaganem, Tlemcen, and Oran, came to an end following the defeat of Emir ‘Abd al-Qādir at the Battle of ‘AynTāqīn in 1843. Due to the combination of previously mentioned circumstances, he found it impossible to remain in Algeria, which ultimately led him to migrate to Morocco in 1844.

In Morocco, al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī led a life defined by hardship and marginalization. He faced notable rejection from several scholars of the time, particularly from the historian Aknasūs and the jurist Muḥammad Kinnūn, with whom he engaged in frequent and intense scholarly disputes. These tensions reflected deeper intellectual disagreements and added complexity to his academic standing during his time in Morocco.

Despite his prolific writing and frequent travels, these considerable efforts did not succeed in elevating al-Mushrifī’s standing among the scholars of his time. He expressed this disappointment in his own words: “Despite all of this, I am counted among the strangers, even though they consider me one of the literati, and place me in the second rank of the teaching class. I am deprived of endowments from the benefactors. Such is the fate of one cast out by destiny from his homeland, my virtues turned into faults, and my friends into adversaries” (Al-Mushrifī, 2659K).

Nevertheless, this marginalization did not prevent him from cultivating cordial relationships and scholarly connections with several eminent scholars of his era, particularly in the city of Fez. Among the most prominent of these figures were Muḥammad al-Fāṭimī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṣiqillī,

al-Mahdī ibn Sūda, al-Ḥājj Idrīs ibn ‘Alī al-Qurbāwī al-Mālikī al-Sinān, and al-‘Abbās ibn Aḥmad al-Abbār.

His Students:

After his death in 1313 AH / 1895 CE, though some sources suggest the year 1311 AH / 1893 CE, al-Mushrifī left behind a number of notable students who continued his scholarly legacy. Most of them were members of his own extended family. Among the most distinguished were:

Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muṣṭafā al-Mushrifī: A cousin of al-Mushrifī, he served as a judge in al-Ḥayyāna and was one of the two notaries who sealed the document of the muḥājirūn in Fez in 1313 AH / 1894 CE. This act renewed their allegiance to Sultan al-Ḥasan I, resisting French efforts to offer protection and bring them under colonial influence in Algeria.

‘Alī ibn al-Ḥājj ibn Mūsā al-Jazā’irī (1244–1330 AH / 1829–1910 CE): A prominent scholar of ḥadīth and a judicial figure. Born in Algeria, he received his education locally and was appointed as a judge at the age of twenty-five, initially in Miliana, then in Tenes, and later in Tlemcen. He authored several works, among them *Ribḥ al-Tijārawa Maghnam al-Sa‘āda fīmā Yata‘allaq bi-Aḥkām al-Ziyāra*. He passed away in the early 20th century, remembered for his exceptional generosity, deep commitment to scholarship, and tireless efforts in the collection and transcription of books. Al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī granted him an *ijāzah* in 1294 AH / 1878 CE.

‘Abd al-Qādir ibn al-Bashīr: A student of exceptional brilliance, about whom al-Mushrifī wrote: “In brilliance and reputation he had no equal. Were time to show him favor, he would have risen to the highest ranks. He was the companion of the learned and the scholar’s ambassador during public readings. He was our distinguished student, al-Ṣadr al-Mushīr, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Qādir ibn al-Bashīr” (Al-Mushrifī, 2659K, p. folio 18 verso)

Abū al-‘Abbās Sayyid Aḥmad: Recognized as one of the most capable and accomplished judges of his generation. Al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī praised him, saying: “Our cousin, the jurist, the distinguished student, son of the virtuous scholar, blessed in calm and in motion, the one called to the path of justice and answered its call, whom competence addressed and who responded eloquently” (Al-Mushrifī, 2659K, p. folio 20 verso).

His Scholarly and Intellectual Output:

A. General History

Dhakhīrat al-Awākhir wa al-Awā’ ilfīmā Yataḍamman min Akhbār al-Duwal

B. History of Algeria

Ṭars al-Akhbār bimā Jarā’ Akhīr al-Arba‘īn min al-Qarn al-Thālith ‘Ashar lil-Muslimīn ma‘a al-Kuffār wa fī ‘Utuww al-Ḥājj ‘Abd al-Qādir wa Ahl Dā’iratih al-Fujjār

C. History of Morocco

al-Risāla fī Ahl al-Baṣbūr al-Ḥuthāla

Mashmūm ‘Arār al-Najd wa al-Ghiyāṭān al-Mu‘add li-Istinshāq al-Wālī wa Anfās al-Mawlā al-Sultān

Tārīkh al-Dawla al-‘Alawiyya

al-Āyāt wa al-Ḥawādith

D. Genealogy and Biographical Virtues

Yāqūt al-Nasab al-Wahhāja, also known as al-Ta‘rīf bi-Sayyidī Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Mawlā Majāja, or alternatively titled al-Yawāqīt al-Thamīna al-Wahhājafī al-Ta‘rīf bi-Sayyidī Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī Mawlā Majāja

Tārīkh ‘Ulamā’ Fās

Ithmid al-Jufūn fī Man bi-‘Ahd Allāh Yūfūn

E. Travel Accounts:

al-Rihla al-‘Arīḍa fī Adā’ al-Farīḍa

Nuzhat al-Abṣār li-Dhawī al-Ma‘rifawa al-Istibṣār, Tanfī‘an al-Mutakāsīl al-Wasan fī Manāqib Sayyidī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad wa Waladih al-Ḥasan

Rihlailā Nawāḥī Fās

Tamḥīd al-Jibāl wa Mā Warā’ ahāmin al-Ma‘mūr wa Islāḥ al-Ḥāl fī al-Sawāḥil wa al-Thughūr

F. Refutations and Objections:

al-Radd‘alāAbīRās al-Nāşir (Sharaf, 2011, pp. 140-145)
Jawāb‘alāSu‘āl al-SanadAbī al-Ḥasan‘Alī ibn Ṭāhir al-Madanī li-‘Ulamā’ Fās
al-Ḥusām al-Mushrifī li-Qaṭ‘Lisān al-Sābb al-Ja‘farī, who uttered the heresies of the ill-minded
Ja‘ūsAknaşūs (Sharaf, 2011, pp. 140-145)

Dara’ al-Shaqāwa‘an al-Sādāt al-Darqāwa
al-Durr al-Maknūnfī al-Radd‘alā al-‘AllāmaJanūn
al-Mushrifī al-Ḥamzāwī li-Qaṭ‘Fu‘ād al-Khubzāwī
‘Ajīb al-Dhāhibwa al-Jā‘ifīFaḍīḥat al-Ghālī al-Lijā’ī
al-Ḥusām al-Mushrifīlil-Muhājir al-Muqtafi
Nuzhat al-MāshīfiQabā’ih al-‘Ayāshī al-Mustaghānamī
TaqyīdfīDhammahl Fās

J- Other Fields:

A marginal commentary on al-Makkūdī’s commentary.

Faṭḥ al-Mannān on Ibn al-Wannān’s poem, also known as al-Mawāhib al-Saniyya in the
commentary on al-Shamqamqiyya.

al-Faṭḥwa al-Taysīr in the commentary on the poem Ghūthiyyat al-Badr al-Munīr by
SayyidMuḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Wazīr.

The Kunnāshes (No. 204 / No. 471).

A poetic Dīwān titled In Praise of the One Who Awakened the Slumbering Eye of Religion,
Mawlānā al-Ḥasan.

Aqwāl al-Muṭā‘infī al-Ṭa’nwa al-Ṭawā‘īn (On the Statements of the Critics Regarding Plagues
and Epidemics).

Brief pages on the circulation of currency and its increase. (Ḥamdādū I. ‘., 2017, p. 215)

Introducing the Manuscript:

In this comprehensive study, we aimed to provide a concise biography of the author and his
academic journey, followed by a presentation, description, and analytical reading of the manuscript’s
title and the insights it contains. We also addressed the date and motivation behind its composition,
its literary genre, and the methodology employed by the author in constructing its content.

We clarified the manuscript’s sources, its thematic substance, then offered a description of the
manuscript itself, along with an explanation of the editorial method we followed in its verification
and textual refinement. This effort is intended to make the manuscript accessible to researchers for
reading and study, to highlight its historical knowledge, and to convey the author’s opinions and
impressions during his journey.

The Manuscript Title:

While exploring all available sources that dealt with the figure of AbūḤāmid al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī
or biographical references that mentioned him, we found no work citing the exact title of the
manuscript under study. However, we found a title bearing the name: Events that Occurred in the Far
Maghrib During the 13th Century AH, attributed to AbūMuḥammad al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī al-Ḥasanī.

1. Attribution of the Manuscript to Its Author:

Although most biographers and contemporary historians of al-Mushrifī did not reference or
attribute this manuscript to him directly, the evidence supports the attribution. This is clearly seen
through the mention of his lineage, despite the title referring to events that took place in the regions
of Fez, in the Far Maghrib, during the 13th century AH (i.e., the 19th century CE).

This confirms that he was referring to parts of Fez during that period. It should be noted that this
manuscript is distinct from the Journey to the Vicinity of Fez, which is a poetic urjūza composed of
168 verses. The manuscript in our possession is a prose text, not poetry. This highlights the divergence
between the two manuscripts, not only in terms of form and meaning, but also in title.

2. Copies of the Manuscript:

During our extensive search across public and private libraries and repositories in Algeria, as well
as within their bibliographic indexes, we found only one single copy. It is preserved at the National
Library of Algeria under catalogue number 3013. It consists of eleven (11) pages, sized 21×27 cm,
with an average of twenty-five (25) lines per page. The name of the scribe is absent. However, the

date of composition is present: it was completed on the 29th of Shafar al-Khayr, year 1285 AH / 1868 CE. The date of copying is also indicated as the morning of Thursday, the 28th of SHafar al-Khayr, 1294 AH / 1877 CE.

This copy is written in clear and legible Maghribi script using black ink. It includes catchwords (ta'qība) and marginal annotations. Notably, the author adhered to the use of ta'qība in composing the text, a word usually written at the lower left corner of a page to indicate the beginning of the following page. This is a common practice among Maghrebi scribes in manuscript writing, and it helps readers easily follow and trace the manuscript's sequence.

3. Motivation for Composing the Manuscript:

The motives for composing this manuscript are made clear in the introduction, where the author writes: "Its writer is among those who dedicate themselves to teaching and uphold the banners of knowledge, among those who migrated for the sake of religion and family..." The primary motive for writing the manuscript appears to be necessity and financial hardship, as he states: "How could one not earn a living from endowments devoted by benefactors... Should a scholar wander the wilderness while his right to city endowments is well known? God forbid that this nation should triumph while its scholar is deprived."

He continues, saying: "My claim to knowledge is testified by my pen. When I found myself among people, envy silenced their tongues. They raised the lances of partisanship against me, and even those who know me denied me. I am someone aware of whom to turn to for sustenance, clothing, and provisions." He also notes in poetic style: "It is not in reading that God's existence and pre-eternity are affirmed."

4. Content of the Manuscript:

In this manuscript, AbūḤāmid al-'Arabī al-Mushrifī begins by discussing his lineage, stating: "My claim to belong to the noble household is attested by what is written in the abridged version of al-BayānfiNasabĀl'Adnān by Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī, in his biography of the Almohad caliphs. His text reads: 'In Ghrīs, among the Akrāt in the region of Jabal [Banī] al-Shuqrān, lived the noble 'Arhabī who came from Fījīj: Mawlānā al-ḤājjYūsuf ibn 'Īsā ibn 'AbdAllāh ibn al-'Arabī ibn Ya'qūb al-Sharīf al-Ḥasanī (Refers to the region of al-Karṭ). He had sons: 'Alī, Maṣūr, 'AbdAllāh, and Aḥmad, the people of Ghrīs, in the region of Mostaganem'". Similar accounts are found in al-Durr al-Nafīsī Dhikr Shurafā' Ghrīs by Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jawzī in his entry on Mawlānā al-ḤājjYūsuf ibn 'Īsā.

Additional confirmation is provided by the esteemed scholar and imam Sayyidī al-Sanūsī ibn Sayyidī Abd al-Qādir ibn Daḥḥ al-Ḥusaynī in Nisbat al-Shurafā' al-AkhyārBanū 'Ammnā al-Abrār, a work about the al-Mushrif lineage descending from the great saint and spiritual pole, Sayyid al-ḤājjYūsuf ibn 'Īsā, buried in al-Karṭ, a village one parasang from the minaret of Mascara, a city he prays may be restored to Islam.

He also recounts natural events and phenomena that occurred during the 13th century AH / 19th century CE, including plague, famine, locust infestations, and floods. Regarding the famine, he states: "As for the famine, its armies descended upon the people of the Maghreb in the year 1267 AH / 1851 CE. That year, the price of a mudd reached thirty uqiyyas, whereas previously eight uqiyyas had sufficed for a good measure of wheat. When it exceeded that by twenty-two uqiyyas, people were bewildered, their minds shaken.

The Bedouins complained to the reigning sovereign, then the heir to his late father, about the injustice they suffered at the hands of urban grain sellers, who would add to each mudd five palmfuls and forearms' worth of excess. The ruler, may God support him, declared the mudd to be valid when it filled a plate flush to its brim. If the grain reached that level, it was deemed fair for both seller and buyer. They called this the 'MuddAbūKharta'".

Regarding the locust infestation, he writes: "Locusts are the first among nations to perish. The author of al-Najm al-Thāqib reports: 'We were told by Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir from Jābir ibn 'AbdAllāh who said: When 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb noticed the absence of locusts, he sent out riders, one to Syria, another to Yemen, and a third to Iraq, asking if anyone had seen any locusts (Ḥamdādū & Bū'ammāma, 2012, pp. 76-77).

A rider from Yemen came back with a handful of locusts and placed them before him. Upon

seeing them, ‘Umar exclaimed Allāhu Akbar three times and said: I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, say: “God created a thousand nations, six hundred in the sea and four hundred on land. The first among these to perish will be the locusts. When the locusts perish, the rest will follow, like beads scattered from a cut string” (ibn Kathīr al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī, 1999, p. 133).

As for the drought and hunger, he writes: “Following the plague of locusts came an extreme rise in prices for oils such as olive oil and butter, due to the lack of vegetation and fruit. A qullah of oil was sold for ten mithqāls after having cost just two; even now, it sells for nearly ten, lacking only half a mithqāl. Oils could only be found with wealthy landowners and those engaged in commerce.

This extreme price surge was followed by a devastating famine at the end of the year 1284 AH / 1267 AH, (Corresponds to the year 1867 CE) which claimed the lives of many among the coastal villagers, the Bedouins of Oujda, and the nomadic dwellers who had taken refuge in Fez, as well as the city’s poor. In many homes, every member of the household perished. During this hunger crisis, the mudd reached fifteen mithqāls, and even then, was unavailable. Had God not graced this nation with rain, people would have consumed one another.”

Al-Mushrifī further depicts the famine and drought that spread across the Maghreb, including Tunisia, the people of al-Wāsiṭa, (Refers to the people of the Central Maghreb (i.e., Algeria).) and the Far Maghreb, where he states: “I witnessed, in comparison to what befell Tunisia and the people of al-Wāsiṭa, a devastating hunger during which people consumed the flesh of both the living and the dead. The people saw dogs feeding on the corpses left unburied.

We received successive reports that in the province of al-Wāsiṭa in Algeria, half the population had died, and death had begun to spread among the remaining half, with seven people dying in one incident. Later, letters reported that two-thirds had died, and the final third was beginning to perish. This was around the start of the summer season, when crops are typically available, but I do not know how many ultimately died” (Kaddache, 2000, p. 425).

Regarding the plague in the Far Maghreb, a phenomenon that followed immediately after the famine, he provides a direct testimony as an eyewitness to the tragic scenes and the chain of disasters that struck the Maghreb, one region after another. He writes: “Following the famine came the plague, which killed a great number of people, including many prominent figures of Fez, among them the son of the reigning Sultan, al-Mu’ayyad, and the nobleman al-AḥmadAbū al-‘Abbās, one of the candidates for succession.

He passed away on the night of Sunday, the twenty-first of Ṣafar al-Khayr, 1285 AH / 1868 CE (CE.), after sunset. At that time, I was in Ṭālī‘atFās, returning from visiting a sick person, when I was overwhelmed by the wailing of his companions and the cries of his family. That moment reminded me that death spares no one, king or subject, rich or poor. I stopped and recited the following lines:

Let joy be for those who seek its light *** But stand and mourn the noble soul tonight
A gentle friend whose words delight *** A man whose virtues shunned all spite
A seeker time could never yield *** A steadfast refuge, unmatched, unconcealed
My lord Aḥmad, praised in name and deed *** A martyr's child, for whom the hopeful plead
I stood at his door, with tears unclear *** A brother lost—my heart cried out in fear
I saw but pain, and wails that grew *** And maidens bare, their grief in view
They cast the night upon the morning bright *** And tears like blood obscured their sight
Faces once like suns aglow *** Now grim, in sorrow’s heavy throw
Let Islam weep in deepest pain *** Kiss the dust where his light remains

As for the phenomenon of flash floods, the author documents them based on his own observations and experiences, describing them as having devastated everything in their path, both the green and the dry. He writes: “While people were already enduring the hardship of famine, waiting for sustenance from what God might grant them in the form of agricultural recovery, suddenly there came thunderclouds roaring, lightning blinding the eyes, formed from black clouds above the city.

God sent from them torrential rain that flooded the ravines, valleys, mountain slopes, and plateaus. The waters gathered into the rivers of Fez, overflowing their banks into the city. That mighty flood

swept away everyone in its path. It destroyed dams, homes, and shops, carried away millstones from their places, along with containers full of grain and sacks of flour. It uprooted walls built with firm foundations and bore them atop the water like wooden planks. It took with it everything inside the homes and shops, chests, cupboards, and household furnishings.

It devastated the surroundings of the Andalusian Mosque, by the will of the Sovereign Lord, and left people between neighborhoods clinging to their belongings in grief. The mosques near the river were closed for prayer. On the sixth day of this flood, I saw the Zellij Mosque opposite the Rasīf Bridge completely submerged in water. This happened on Tuesday evening, the 16th of Şafar al-Khayr, 1285 AH / 1868 CE.” (Corresponds to the year 1867 CE)

“The following day, Wednesday evening, the flood grew even worse due to thunder that rumbled outside Fez, and it surpassed the earlier flood many times over. This flood rivaled the biblical flood of ‘Āram, it demolished every structure bound by mortar. Another flood had occurred in year 45 of this same century, also on a Wednesday night in Şafar. That flood coincided with this one, according to what has been recorded in the annals of the people of Fez regarding time and place. However, this one occurred at night, on either the 9th or 10th of Şafar. Each of these signs made people forget the one before it and broke the spirits of the afflicted. At that time, the verse of healing was recited: There is no cure except in abandoning sin. No intercession without repentance will avail; no supplication without sincere remorse will benefit.”

The manuscript of Abū Ḥāmid al-‘Arabī ibn ‘Alī al-Mushrifī offers vivid depictions of a reality he witnessed and lived. Through his narration, he generously shares with us his impressions and portrayals of the events and scenes he directly experienced. This is where the historical and literary value of this important source emerges, it documents the calamities and afflictions that struck the Far Maghreb during the 13th century AH / 19th century CE, events that had direct repercussions on the demographic conditions of the time.

His Methodology in Writing:

Al-Mushrifī, in recording his journey and expressing his impressions and observations, followed the well-established conventions of travel literature. This genre is typically built upon three foundational pillars, which some consider the essential constants of travel writing:

First Constant: The human figure at the core of the journey, namely, the author himself, who serves as both the hero of the journey and its narrator. That is AbūḤāmid al-‘Arabī al-Mushrifī al-Ḥasanī al-Jazā’irī, alongside a few secondary characters.

Second Constant: The spatial dimension or geographical setting, that is, the places described. These also form the basis of the travel narrative. Al-Mushrifī recounts the locations and regions afflicted by the various epidemics, disasters, and diseases across different periods, beginning with Fez and its surroundings. Third Constant: The temporal dimension or time frame during which the journey was documented. The main figure remains al-Mushrifī, who relies on a chronological narrative, what is often referred to as the annalistic method, starting from the year 1257 AH / 1851 CE and continuing until 1285 AH / 1868 CE. In addition to these constants, his writing also features formal elements, primarily the descriptive narrative style that characterizes the entire text from beginning to end. He also frequently invokes Qur’anic verses and prophetic hadiths to strengthen his arguments and assertions. In addition, the manuscript includes a vast number of poetic excerpts with varied themes. These poems are either authored by al-Mushrifī himself or borrowed from others. They enrich the narrative, enhancing its beauty and expressive power.

What is particularly notable is that many of these poetic lines were composed for specific occasions and in response to particular circumstances along the journey. Most of them follow a lyrical structure intended to entertain the reader and draw attention to the intellectual and emotional value of the journey.

His Sources:

In composing his travel account, the author relied primarily on direct observation of each event or situation he deemed significant. He used an informative and straightforward narrative style and drew upon a variety of sources, Qur’anic, prophetic, literary, poetic, and, albeit limited, historical. This clearly reflects the author's deep appreciation for poetry and literature and their importance to

him.

Among the sources he referenced, sometimes verbatim, other times adapted, are the following:

The Noble Qur'an

Prophetic Hadiths

Anonymous poetry

Poetry of AbūḤayyān al-Tawḥīdī

Poetry of Sirāj al-Dīn al-Warrāq

Poetry of 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Hilālī

Poetry of Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Daqīq

Verses of Ibn 'Āshir

Verses of Shaykh Khalīl

Verses of AbūMūsā ibn 'Imrān al-Qāḍī

Poetry of Muḥammad ibn al-Faḍl

Poetry of AbūḤāmid al-'Arabī al-Mushrifī

Prose Texts Cited:

The words of Imām Ibn Mas'ūd

The words of Imām al-Shāfi'ī

The words of Imām al-Ghazālī

The words of Imām al-Shuburākhītī

The words of Shaykh 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fāsī

The words of Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (Mukhtaṣar al-Bayān fī Nasab Āl 'Adnān)

The words of Ibn al-Jawzī (al-Durr al-Nafis fī Dhikr Shurafā' Ghrīs)

The words of Shaykh al-Sanūsī ibn 'Abd al-Qādir ibn Daḥḥ (Fī Nisbat al-Shurafā' al-Akhyār Banū 'Ammnā al-Abrār)

The words of Zakī al-Dīn al-Mundhirī (Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim)

The words of Shaykh Ibn Abī Jamrah

The words of Shaykh Mawlāy al-'Arabī al-Darqāwī

The words of Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn al-Shimnī

The words of Shaykh Ibn Marzūq

The words of Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Sūda

Conclusion

At last, this manuscript represents a living document and a vital source for historical writings that chronicle natural disasters, epidemics, crises, and diseases that struck the Maghreb during the late 19th century CE. Al-Mushrifī recorded them with both honesty and objectivity, providing remarkably accurate descriptions.

Key Findings Derived from the Manuscript

Among the most important conclusions we can draw from the contents of al-Mushrifī's manuscript, we highlight the following points:

Before addressing the core topic, al-Mushrifī began by establishing his own genealogy and that of his family, the al-Mushrif lineage.

He addressed in detail the waves of epidemics, diseases, and natural disasters that afflicted the Maghreb, tracing their evolution and describing the scenes and the conditions of the affected regions.

He referred to the phenomenon of "kenīsh al-aḥyā'" among the Romans, which refers to the tying and cleansing of the extremities of the living to prevent the spread of disease through the body.

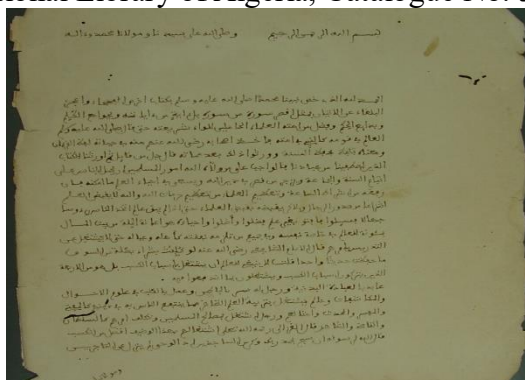
The manuscript reveals al-Mushrifī's broad intellectual exposure and his reliance on a wide variety of sources, which he cited throughout the text.

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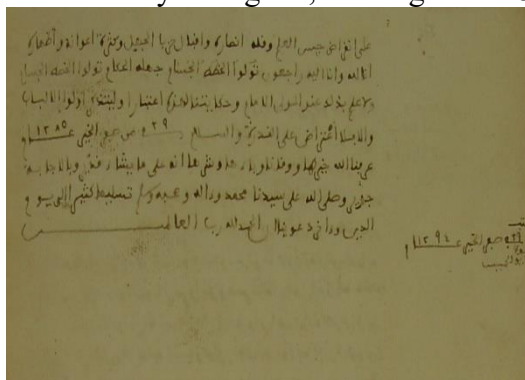
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First Page of the Manuscript
National Library of Algeria, Catalogue No. 3013



Last Page of the Manuscript
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