

Manifestations of Travel Writing in Algerian Literature: A Reading of Selected Works

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Abstract:

This study examines Algerian travel literature as a multifaceted cultural and intellectual phenomenon through selected representative travel narratives produced by Algerian scholars and writers. It aims to analyze the cultural, intellectual, and social dimensions embedded in these texts and to highlight their role in documenting historical realities and shaping cultural identity. The study adopts both descriptive-analytical and historical approaches to trace the evolution of travel writing in Algeria and to interpret its thematic diversity. The findings reveal that Algerian travel literature functions not only as a record of movement but also as a medium for knowledge production, cultural exchange, and identity construction. The study concludes that Algerian travel narratives constitute a valuable documentary heritage that requires further critical editing, preservation, and academic exploration.

Keywords: Travel Literature, Algerian Literature, Cultural Identity, Historical Narratives, Travel Writing.

Résumé:

Cette étude examine la littérature de voyage algérienne comme un phénomène culturel et intellectuel multiforme à travers une sélection de récits de voyage représentatifs produits par des savants et écrivains algériens. Elle vise à analyser les dimensions culturelles, intellectuelles et sociales inscrites dans ces textes, ainsi qu'à mettre en évidence leur rôle dans la documentation des réalités historiques et la construction de l'identité culturelle. L'étude adopte une approche à la fois descriptive-analytique et historique afin de retracer l'évolution de l'écriture viatique en Algérie et d'en interpréter la diversité thématique. Les résultats montrent que la littérature de voyage algérienne ne se limite pas à un simple récit de déplacement, mais constitue également un support de production de savoir, d'échange culturel et de construction identitaire. L'étude conclut que les récits de voyage algériens représentent un patrimoine documentaire précieux qui nécessite davantage d'édition critique, de préservation et d'exploration académique.

Mots-clés : Littérature de voyage, littérature algérienne, identité culturelle, récits historiques, écriture viatique.

Introduction

Travel literature is one of the most significant literary genres through which human experience, cultural interaction, and historical observation have been documented. It integrates

narration, description, and knowledge transmission, thereby functioning as both a literary and historical source.

In Algerian literary heritage, travel writing occupies a prominent position due to its richness in intellectual, religious, and social dimensions. Algerian scholars and writers produced a considerable number of travel accounts that reflect their engagement with the wider Arab-Islamic world.

The importance of this study lies in re-evaluating Algerian travel narratives as cultural documents that contribute to the preservation of historical memory and the construction of collective identity. It also seeks to highlight their role in intellectual exchange and cross-cultural communication.

The study addresses the following question: **To what extent do Algerian travel narratives reflect the cultural and civilizational identity of Algerian society, and what are their main intellectual and literary manifestations?**

To answer this question, the study adopts descriptive-analytical and historical approaches.

The study is structured into two main sections: **Section One examines the concept, origins, and characteristics of travel literature in Algeria, while Section Two analyzes selected models of religious, scholarly, exploratory, and political journeys.**

Section One: Travel Literature in Algeria: Concept, Origins, and Characteristics

Travel literature occupies a distinguished position in Arabic literary heritage as a medium for recording experiences, observations, and cultural encounters. This section explores the concept of travel literature and traces the emergence and development of this genre within Algerian literary tradition.

First Requirement: The Concept and Significance of Travel Literature in Arabic Literature

Travel literature represents an important literary form that combines narration, description, and the transmission of knowledge across different societies.

1. The Concept and Development of Travel Writing in Arabic Literature

Travel writing constitutes one of the most prominent themes in Arabic literature, as it reflects the human being's interaction with his natural, social, and cultural environment. Travel texts - whether in the form of memoirs, epistles, or poetry - embody the observation of daily and natural life and reveal the human being's passion for discovery and knowledge.

Travel writing evolved within Arabic literature "and became an authentic Arab art form in Arabic prose, characterised by its historical and geographical features, its interest in people's lives and ways of living, and by its distinctive intellectual and social content and its literary style, generally setting it apart from other genres".¹

¹ -'Umar ibn Qayna, *Ittijahat al-Rihhalin al-Jaza'iriyyin fi al-Rihla al-'Arabiyya al-Haditha* [The Orientations of Algerian Travellers in Modern Arabic Travel Literature], p. 11.

2. Prominent Arab Travelers and Their Contributions

A number of celebrated figures emerged in this tradition, among them Ibn Khaldun, author of *Al-Ta'rif bi-Ibn Khaldun wa Rihlatihi Sharqan wa Gharban* (Introduction to Ibn Khaldun and His Journey East and West), the travelogue of Ibn Battuta, and the travelogue of Ibn Jubayr, who "was diligent in recording his memoirs and observations day by day, avoiding the mention of curiosities and wonders... and adopted purposefulness as a methodology in travel".²

There was also Muhammad al-'Abdari, author of *Al-Rihla al-Maghribiyya* (The Moroccan Journey), who described the countries of North Africa with meticulous precision, as well as the traveller al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan, known as "Leo Africanus," and others who "recorded their journeys and set down their observations — not in a direct, reportorial manner, but rather cast their journeys and observations in a beautiful literary form".³

Second Requirement: The Emergence and Characteristics of Algerian Travel Literature

Algerian travel literature emerged within the broader Maghrebi tradition and developed distinctive features shaped by religious, intellectual, and cultural influences, particularly those associated with pilgrimage journeys and the pursuit of knowledge.

1. The Emergence and Historical Foundations of Algerian Travel Literature

The Algerian travelogue developed as an extension of the wider North African travel tradition, especially religious journeys directed toward the Arab East, motivated by the presence of sacred sites such as the Ka'ba, the Prophet's Mosque, and Jerusalem. Within this context, Algerian travel writing attained a remarkable level of distinction, and Algerians are considered among the earliest contributors to this literary form.

The foundations of Algerian travel literature are often attributed to Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi (d. 543 AH), who composed his travelogue in 485 AH / 1092 CE. Some sources also attribute the early establishment of this tradition to Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 AH) through his travel narrative *Tadhkira bi-al-Akhbar 'an Ittifaqat al-Asfar*, dated 578 AH. Between these milestones, al-Warjalani Abu Ya'qub Ibrahim undertook a pilgrimage to the Hijaz and documented its course in a long poetic composition of 571 verses".⁴

2. Characteristics and Development of Algerian Travelogues across Regions

Algerian travel literature continued to evolve after al-Warjalani's journey, particularly through pilgrimages to the Arab East for religious devotion and the pursuit of knowledge. Algerian travelers consistently recorded their journeys, reflecting a growing literary consciousness within this genre.

² - Fu'ad Qandil, *Adab al-Rihla fi al-Turath al-'Arabi* [The Literature of Travel in the Arab Heritage], Maktabat al-Dar al-'Arabiyya lil-Kitab, Cairo, Egypt, 2nd ed., 2002, p. 76.

³ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tajarib fi al-Adab wa al-Rihla* [Experiments in Literature and Travel], L'Entreprise Nationale du Livre, Algeria, p. 203.

⁴ - Abu Ya'qub Yusuf ibn Ibrahim al-Warjalani, *Rihla al-Warjalani* [The Journey of al-Warjalani], edited by Yahya ibn Bahun Hajj Ahmad, Army Press, 2007, p. 19.

As noted in scholarly sources, "the appearance of travel writings was noted, most of them being eastward journeys undertaken for the purpose of seeking knowledge or performing the pilgrimage".⁵ Consequently, Algerian travel narratives were predominantly oriented toward the East, focusing on sacred destinations and intellectual enrichment, which shaped their thematic and stylistic characteristics.

Section Two: Manifestations of Algerian Travel Literature through Religious and Scholarly Journeys

Algerian travel literature flourished through numerous journeys undertaken by scholars, jurists, and pilgrims in search of knowledge and spiritual fulfillment. These journeys constitute valuable historical and cultural records that reflect the intellectual dynamism of Algerian society.

First Requirement: Religious Journeys

Religious motivations, particularly pilgrimage (Hajj) and the visitation of sacred sites, constituted one of the most important drivers of Algerian travel literature. These journeys combined spiritual devotion with observation and documentation, allowing travelers to record both religious experiences and the social and cultural environments they encountered during their routes.

1. Ibn Marzuq al-Khatib's Journey (d. 780 AH)

The travelogue of the scholar and jurist Ibn Marzuq al-Tilimsani is considered among the earliest written Algerian travel narratives produced by its author. His work, *Al-Musnad al-Sahih fi Ma'athir Mawlana al-Hasan* (The Sound Compendium of the Merits of Our Master al-Hasan), records his pilgrimage journey to the Hijaz.

He departed from Tlemcen and passed through several major cities, including Tunis, Tripoli, and Cairo, during both the outward and return journeys, accompanied by his father. The narrative reflects not only a religious itinerary but also a lived intellectual and human experience shaped by companionship and scholarly tradition.

He states: "My master and father - may God have mercy upon him - deemed it appropriate to journey alone, and sent me home in a matter too long to recount, and for reasons he set forth, the most important of which was what my father proposed in response to his inclinations toward the tomb of the Prophet (peace be upon him)".⁶

The main purpose of this journey was the fulfillment of the obligatory pilgrimage. Nevertheless, Ibn Marzuq's travelogue also provides detailed descriptions of urban architecture, public celebrations, and the customs of the societies he visited, reflecting the dual religious and documentary nature of Algerian travel writing.

⁵ - Samira Itsa'id, *Al-Rihla ila al-Mashriq fi al-Adab al-Jaza'iri* [The Journey to the East in Algerian Literature], Dar al-Huda, 'Ayn Milila, Algeria, 2009, p. 58.

⁶ - Muhammad ibn Marzuq al-Tilimsani, *Al-Musnad al-Sahih al-Hasan fi Ma'athir Mawlana al-Hasan* [The Sound and Excellent Compendium of the Merits of Our Master al-Hasan], edited and studied by María Jesús Viguera, introduced by Mahmud Bu'iyad, Société Nationale du Livre, Algeria, 1981, p. 480.

2. The Role of Religious Pilgrimage in Shaping Algerian Travel Literature

Religious pilgrimage represented a central axis in the formation of Algerian travel literature, as it encouraged repeated journeys toward the Arab East for the purpose of performing Hajj and visiting sacred places. These journeys were not limited to spiritual fulfillment; they also served as opportunities for intellectual exchange and scholarly enrichment.

Most Algerian travelers documented their routes, observations, and experiences during these journeys, which contributed to the emergence of a distinct literary tradition characterized by geographical precision and cultural awareness. Through these pilgrimage narratives, Algerian travel writing developed a dual function: spiritual documentation and cultural historiography, making it a valuable source for understanding historical societies and intercultural encounters.

Second Requirement: Scholarly and Intellectual Journeys

Many Algerian travelers embarked on journeys motivated by learning, scholarly exchange, and intellectual interaction with leading scholars of their time.

1. The Journey of Ibn Qunfudh al-Qusantini (d. 810 AH)

This is a Sufi travelogue undertaken by its author to visit the shrines of the righteous saints and to seek the blessing of men of learning and those endowed with miraculous gifts, in a journey he entitled *Uns al-Faqir wa 'Izz al-Haqir* (The Solace of the Poor and the Glory of the Humble). He visited numerous shrines and Sufi masters, "mentioning their accounts and spiritual struggles and drawing attention to the distinctive features of the life of each one of them".⁷In general, this travelogue is a record of the biographies of certain individuals renowned for their piety within society.

2. The Journey of 'Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi (786 AH / 1385 CE — 872 AH / 1468 CE)

This is a scholarly journey that its author named *Ghanimat al-Wahid wa Bughyat al-Talib al-Majid* (The Windfall of the Solitary Traveller and the Desire of the Distinguished Seeker). In it, the learned scholar narrated his movements to centres of learning, recording the biographies of the masters and scholars under whom he studied. He speaks of his teacher, the learned scholar Ibn Marzuq al-Tilimsani, saying: "My master and sheikh, the imam of learning, the great pillar, the reliable speaker, the critical scholar, the last of the hadith scholars, the master of his time and the cloud of his age and the pious man of his era and the most virtuous of his peers and the wonder of his time and the criterion of his moment, possessor of approved manners and virtuous and exalted qualities and refined and pure deeds, Abu 'Abd Allah, son of our master the jurist and imam Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad ibn Marzuq - may God perpetuate his blessing, elevate the scholars' estimation of him, and make the saints his companions"⁸.

⁷ - Ibn Qunfudh al-Qusantini, *Uns al-Faqir wa 'Izz al-Haqir* [The Solace of the Poor and the Glory of the Humble], edited and corrected by Muhammad al-Fasi and Adolphe Faure, Publications of the University Centre, Rabat, Morocco, n.d., 1965, Introduction, p. z.

⁸ - 'Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi, *Ghanimat al-Wahid wa Bughyat al-Talib al-Majid* [The Windfall of the Solitary Traveller and the Desire of the Distinguished Seeker], followed by *Al-Rihla* [The Journey], edited by Muhammad Shayib Sharif, Dar ibn Hazm, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2005, p. 115.

He goes on to enumerate the scholars who formed him, among them Sheikh al-Imam al-Hafiz Abu al-Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Uthman al-Manlati, the jurist Abu al-Rabi' Sulayman ibn al-Hasan, and Abu Mahdi al-Ghibrini, whom he met in Tunis, as well as the learned Sheikh Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-Bilali, whom he met in Egypt. Fearing to prolong his account of his masters, he wrote: "This much suffices, and I have omitted mention of many scholars from whom I received knowledge in my transmissions, for fear of lengthening the account"⁹.

3. The Journey of Ahmad al-Maqqari al-Tilimsani (986 AH / 1578 CE — 1041 AH / 1631 CE)

This travelogue was undertaken by the learned scholar, jurist, and historian Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Tilimsani - the unrivalled authority of his age in the sciences of the world and the last of the great prose writers of the Maghreb - to visit the tomb of his grandfather Muhammad al-Maqqari, recorded in his book entitled *Azhar al-Riyad fi Akhbar al-Qadi 'Iyad* (The Flowers of the Gardens Concerning the Affairs of Judge 'Iyad). He included in it aspects of his personal life in Tlemcen and the Maghreb, as well as accounts of the countries he visited - Egypt, the Levant, and the Hijaz. It is regarded as a scholarly, literary, and jurisprudential encyclopaedia for researchers of that era.

The travelogue contains numerous literary accounts including correspondences, registers, and exchanges with the notables of his age - leading poets, men of letters, scholars, jurists, judges, and princes of the Arab Maghreb, Andalusia, Egypt, the Levant, and the lands of the Hijaz -and he included biographical accounts of many dignitaries of the Maghreb and Andalusia who featured prominently in his journey¹⁰. He writes in his travelogue: "When fate decreed and destiny ordained my departure from the beloved homeland and its resting place, after I had breathed its Najdi fragrance with neither grief nor sorrow, on an evening after which there would be no shame, and I departed from the city where my father and those he begat dwelt... a city surrounded by gardens as if it were a beautiful face and the gardens its whiskers"¹¹.

4. The Journey of Ibn 'Ammar (1195 AH / 1707 CE — 1205 AH / 1780 CE)

This is the travelogue of the historian, hadith scholar, man of letters, and poet Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad ibn 'Ammar ibn 'Abd al-Rahman - one of the most prominent figures and literary men of Ottoman Algeria, who lived in the city of Algiers in the twelfth century AH. Historians have neglected to record the dates of his birth and death; the earliest date known of him is 1159 AH, which represents the year he endorsed Ibn Hamadush's work *Al-Durar 'ala al-Mukhtasar*, and the latest known date is 1205 AH, the year he granted his *ijaza* (scholarly authorisation) to

⁹ - 'Abd al-Rahman al-Tha'alibi, *Ghanimat al-Wahid wa Bughyat al-Talib al-Majid*, p. 126.

¹⁰ - Abu al-'Abbas Ahmad al-Maqqari al-Tilimsani, *Rihla al-Maqqari ila al-Maghrib wa al-Mashriq* [Al-Maqqari's Journey to the West and the East], edited by Muhammad ibn Mu'ammam, Maktabat al-Rashid for Printing, Publishing, and Distribution, Sidi Bel Abbès, Algeria, n.d., pp. 13–14.

¹¹ - Shihab al-Din Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Maqqari al-Tilimsani, *Azhar al-Riyad fi Akhbar al-Qadi 'Iyad* [The Flowers of the Gardens Concerning the Affairs of Judge 'Iyad], edited, annotated, and critically prepared by Mustafa al-Saqqa, Ibrahim al-Abyari, and 'Abd al-Hafiz Shalabi, Press of the Committee for Authorship, Translation, and Publication, Cairo, 1385 AH / 1939 CE, p. 4.

Muhammad Khalil al-Muradi¹². Between these two dates lie forty years during which news of him is severed. Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah has suggested that he was born in 1119 AH¹³, which would make him eighty-six years of age in the year 1205 AH - a date by which he may well have died, as 'Adil Nuwayhid, author of *Mu'jam al-A'lam* (The Dictionary of Notables), suggests¹⁴.

Ibn 'Ammar named his travelogue *Nahla al-Labib fi Akhbar al-Rihla ila al-Habib* (The Intelligent Traveller's Delight in the Accounts of the Journey to the Beloved). Its title indicates that it is linked to the sacred sites - the vision of the Ka'ba and the tomb of the Prophet (peace be upon him). He was consumed with longing for the holy lands and frequently composed poetry and muwashshah strophic verse to that effect. When the opportunity for the pilgrimage presented itself, he seized it, and began his composition with an introduction in which he addressed what his creative faculty produced before setting out for the pilgrimage.

He writes: "What follows is the words of the poor servant, compelled to the mercy of his Master the Almighty - burdened with sins, hoping for His forgiveness, Ahmad ibn 'Ammar - may God cover him with His satisfaction and grant him the gift of nearness to the one He is pleased with. When the longing that had saturated all markets called me to behold the vestiges and take solace in respite, to forsake family and homeland and to strike out across the vast wilderness with a stopping place".¹⁵ The travelogue includes a section entitled "an intended purpose" in which he addressed what the journey to the return and the laying down of the burdens of travel entails - which is, in other words, the essence of the travelogue - followed by a "conclusion" devoted to a discussion of "what arose therefrom after the settling of affairs and what was subsequently appended to it."

Ibn 'Ammar began his travelogue with an introduction in which he mentioned the motivations for its composition, its naming, the explanation of the religious obligation of the pilgrimage with references to the Qur'an, hadith, and poetry, and the expression of his longing for the dweller of the Hijaz and his spiritual anguish. He also digressed into the mention of others' poetry from East and West, and recalled the custom of the people of Algeria in celebrating the Prophet's Birthday - particularly the kings of the Banu Zayyan and the Banu al-Ahmar. In this travelogue, he also recorded the biographies of a number of notable figures, such as al-Maqqari, al-Thaghari, Ibn al-Khatib, al-Timbukti, and Ibn Khaldun, as well as Abbasid poets such as al-Mutanabbi, Bashshar ibn Burd, and Abu Nuwas, among others".¹⁶

Sources indicate that he undertook two journeys to the sacred lands for the purpose of the pilgrimage. The first was in 1166 AH, in the company of his friend Sheikh Husayn al-Wurtilani. They stopped in Egypt for the purpose of learning, joining the circle of Sheikh Khalil al-Maghribi,

¹² - See: Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tajarib fi al-Adab wa al-Rihla* [Experiments in Literature and Travel], L'Entreprise Nationale du Livre, Algeria, n.d., 1983, p. 64.

¹³ - See: Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi* [The Cultural History of Algeria], Vol. 2, p. 234.

¹⁴ - See: 'Adil Nuwayhid, *Mu'jam A'lam al-Jaza'ir min Sadr al-Islam hatta al-'Asr al-Hadith* [Dictionary of Algerian Notables from the Dawn of Islam to the Contemporary Era], Dar al-Abhath, Algeria, n.d., 2013, p. 260.

¹⁵ - Abu al-'Abbas Sidi Ahmad ibn 'Ammar, *Nahla al-Labib fi Akhbar al-Rihla ila al-Habib* [The Intelligent Traveller's Delight in the Accounts of the Journey to the Beloved], printed at the Fontana Press, Algeria, n.d., 1906, p. 3.

¹⁶ - See: Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 2, pp. 242-243.

from whom they acquired a considerable portion of knowledge in the Mosque of al-Husayn".¹⁷ He then returned to Algeria after performing the pilgrimage rites. Sources record that he was present in 1182 AH when the scholar Ahmad al-Ghazzal of Morocco arrived to negotiate peace between Algeria and Morocco; on that occasion, Ibn 'Ammar delivered a lesson in the Grand Mosque of Algiers. Yet Algeria no longer suited Ibn 'Ammar, and he returned to Tunis with the intention of settling there in 1195 AH. However, the death of the Bey of Tunis and the passing of his friend 'Abd al-'Aziz Hamuda in 1202 AH led him to emigrate to the Hijaz, where he died".¹⁸

In sum, this travelogue is an important source of Algerian religious poetry in particular, and Arabic poetry in general. He recorded the biographies of many Maghrebi and Andalusian poets, and mentioned numerous scholars and jurists from whom he acquired knowledge. Despite Ibn 'Ammar's distinguished literary and intellectual standing and his independent thought, if we are to judge by the opinions of his contemporaries, he was a paragon of rectitude, humility, and noble character, and left behind students in every place he settled. Furthermore, the emigration of Ibn 'Ammar, al-Maqqari, al-Tha'alibi, al-Shawi, Ibn Hamadush, and their like emptied Algeria of its scholarly foundations".¹⁹

5. The Journey of Abu Ra's al-Nasir al-Mascari (1165 AH / 1751 CE -1228 AH / 1823 CE)

This is the travelogue of Abu Ra's al-Nasiri al-Mascari - the scholar, historian, and encyclopaedic jurist who "composed works in such abundance as none among the Algerians could rival"²⁰. He "wrote on almost every branch of the sciences known in his time; the majority of his books deal with history, genealogy, and historical accounts. He himself mentioned in his travelogue sixty-three books, small and large, which he divided into thirteen sections, beginning with the Qur'an and ending with poetry. Some have attributed 137 books to him".²¹

His travelogue he named *Fath al-Ilah wa Minnatihi fi al-Tahaduth bi-Fadl Rabbi wa Ni'matihi* (The Opening of God and His Grace: Speaking of the Bounty of My Lord and His Blessings). It is a scholarly travelogue in which he focused on the discussion of learning, scholars, scholarly debates, written works, masters, and jurists, presenting them to the reader. To its reader, it appears as an autobiography in which he takes pride in himself -particularly in the presence of the peoples of the eastern lands he visited - as is evident from his words: "The sheikh came to magnify me despite my young age... and the scholars of the East rose to honour me... until my assembly in the sciences came to shake the horizons and overshadow the learning circles of Egypt, the Levant, Tunis, and Iraq".²² In another passage, affirming this sense of self-esteem and

¹⁷ - See: Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 2, p. 235.

¹⁸ - See: Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 2, p. 236.

¹⁹ - See: Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 2, p. 246.

²⁰ - Abu Ra's al-Nasiri al-Mascari, Introduction by Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Fath al-Ilah wa Minnatihi fi al-Tahaduth bi-Fadl Rabbi wa Ni'matihi* [The Opening of God and His Grace: Speaking of the Bounty of My Lord and His Blessings], edited by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim, L'Entreprise Nationale du Livre, Algeria, 1990, p. 5.

²¹ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 2, p. 394.

²² - Abu Ra's al-Nasiri al-Mascari, *Fath al-Ilah wa Minnatihi fi al-Tahaduth bi-Fadl Rabbi wa Ni'matihi*, edited by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim, 'Alam al-Kutub, Cairo, n.d., 1969, pp. 21–22.

superiority, he writes: "They made peace and acknowledged my excellence and eminence, and I became among them... leaving no dust unsettled".²³

Abu Ra's al-Nasiri divided his travelogue into five chapters. He entitled the first chapter "The Beginning of My Affairs," in which he discussed his personal life from birth through childhood and youth, his education and training, and his marriage and family. The second chapter, which he titled "In Mention of My Masters Who Cleansed Me of the Impurities of My Deficiencies," enumerates his masters in Algeria, the other Maghreb countries, and the East - including his masters in the Hijaz - listing approximately fifty sheikhs. Among the scholars he met in Egypt was the lexicographer Murtada al-Zabidi, author of the dictionary *Taj al-'Arus*, of whom he says: "I met in it the great scholars, the people of learning, literature, and historical accounts - the most excellent imam... our master Murtada. I discoursed with him on various arts and found him to be as I had imagined. I transmitted from him the Two Sahihs, the *Risala* of al-Qushayri, the Abridgement of al-'Ayn, the Abridgement of al-Kanz al-Raqi, and he authorised me with the remainder".²⁴

The third chapter bears the title "Concerning My Journey to the East and the West and Elsewhere, and My Meeting with Scholars and Luminaries, and What Passed between Us in Revision and Discourse," in which he mentions the cities and countries he visited, starting from Algeria, then Tunis, Egypt, the Hijaz, the Levant, and Jerusalem. The fourth chapter, entitled "Concerning Questions and Matters Related to Them," enumerates the issues put to him, which he discussed and answered, and refers to certain scholarly debates that took place between him and scholars and masters in the countries he visited. The fifth and final chapter, which he named "Al-'Asjad wa al-Ibriz fi 'Iddat ma Allftu bayna Basit wa Wasit wa Wajiz" (Gold and Pure Silver: An Enumeration of My Compositions - Extensive, Intermediate, and Concise), discusses his written compositions, books, and commentaries.

It may be said that the travelogue of Abu Ra's al-Nasiri is a scholarly journey encompassing many jurisprudential, linguistic, and philosophical questions, as well as biographical accounts of the scholars and jurists he encountered. In addition, this travelogue constitutes a chronicle of certain episodes in Arab society in general and Algerian society in particular during the Ottoman era - which led the dean of Algerian historians, Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, to place Abu Ra's al-Nasiri "at the head of historians in terms of both productivity and his grasp of the dimensions of historical study".²⁵

6. The Journey of al-Husayn ibn 'Umar al-Wurtilani (1125 AH / 1713 CE — 1194 AH / 1780 CE)

This is considered one of the most important travelogues of the North Africans directed toward the Hijaz. Its author named it *Nuzhat al-Anzar fi Fadl 'Ilm al-Tarikh wa al-Akhbar* (The

²³ - Abu Ra's al-Nasiri, *Fath al-Ilah*, p. 117.

²⁴ - Abu Ra's al-Nasiri, *Fath al-Ilah*, pp. 115–116.

²⁵ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Abhath wa Ara' fi Tarikh al-Jaza'ir* [Research and Opinions in the History of Algeria], Dar al-Basa'ir, Algeria, n.d., 2007, Vol. 1, p. 186.

Delight of Sight in the Excellence of the Science of History and Historical Accounts). It is a document whose author "committed himself with complete candour to truthfulness in all the events and facts he mentioned - setting forth his opinion with complete frankness and speaking the truth openly when he saw benefit in doing so".²⁶ It is virtually a translation of the culture of Algerian society: "It is a living record of the social and economic situation, a precise description of routes and built environments, caravan stages and water points, and a faithful image of the cultural reality. Perhaps the most distinctive feature of al-Wurtilani in this regard is his biographical accounts of numerous pious men, scholars, and masters of his homeland".²⁷

Al-Wurtilani writes: "When my heart became attached to those vestiges, traces, dwellings, wilderness, and homelands... scholars, virtuous men, distinguished individuals, and men of letters from every place - the jurists, the hadith scholars, the righteous commentators, the gnostic masters, the brethren, the beloved, the divinely drawn, the close ones, and the righteous from East to West - particularly the people of sobriety and effacement, for with the might of God they have no fixed abode, I composed a great travelogue that the stranger marvels at and the student finds pleasing, for it shines by virtue of its merits above many books of historical accounts".²⁸

7. The Journey of 'Abd al-Razzaq ibn Hamadush (1107 AH / 1695 CE)

He was born in the capital city and lived approximately ninety years. This is a travelogue he undertook toward the West (the Maghreb), combining in it the pursuit of knowledge and trade. He set out from the Algerian capital to the city of Tetouan, visited Meknes and Fez, then returned to Algeria. He named his travelogue *Lisan al-Maqal fi al-Naba' 'an al-Nasab wa al-Hasab wa al-Hal* (The Tongue of Discourse Concerning News of Lineage, Noble Descent, and Circumstances). Ibn Hamadush's purpose in journeying to the West was that "the scholarly atmosphere in Morocco was superior to that in Algeria, despite the turbulent political conditions there. The proximity of Morocco to Andalusia, the abundance of educational centres and scholarly capitals, the wealth of libraries, the presence of al-Qarawiyyin, and Morocco's esteem for men of learning all played an important role in attracting Algerian scholars there".²⁹

It may be said that Ibn Hamadush's travelogue testifies that "he was a much-travelled man, greatly interested in human nature and curious phenomena, and a keen observer."³⁰ He also "recorded his scholarly observations, composed epistles, and discussed matters that did not preoccupy the minds of the educated men of his generation".³¹ This was because he "was engaged

²⁶ - Nasir Sa'idun, *Min al-Turath al-Tarikhiyy wa al-Jughrafi li-al-Maghrib al-Islami* [From the Historical and Geographical Heritage of the Islamic Maghreb], Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 1999, p. 420.

²⁷ - Nasir Sa'idun, *Min al-Turath al-Tarikhiyy wa al-Jughrafi li-al-Maghrib al-Islami*, p. 421.

²⁸ - Al-Husayn al-Wurtilani, *Nuzha al-Anzar fi 'Ilm al-Tarikh wa al-Athar* [The Delight of Sight in the Science of History and Antiquities], published by Muhammad ibn Abi Shannab, Maktabat al-Thaqafa al-Diniyya, Cairo, 1st ed., 2008, p. 13.

²⁹ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi (1500-1830)*, Société Nationale de Publication et de Distribution, Algeria, Vol. 1, p. 428.

³⁰ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Al-Tabib al-Rihala Ibn Hamadush* [The Physician-Traveller Ibn Hamadush], p. 10.

³¹ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Mawsu'at A'lam al-'Ulama' wa al-Udaba' al-'Arab wa al-Muslimin* [Encyclopaedia of Notable Arab and Muslim Scholars and Men of Letters], p. 207.

in the sciences such as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and others, alongside the line of the scholars of his age".³² This is attested by his own words, in which he says: "Today praise be to God - I am a herbalist, a pharmacist, and a physician in certain ailments".³³ It is noteworthy that Ibn Hamadush, in his travelogue, did not confine himself to a single domain but extended his coverage to many fields: "Ibn Hamadush described scholarly life and aspects of political and economic life in the Maghreb, which he visited at least twice, and recorded his observations and judgements in his memoirs, also known as the travelogue *Lisan al-Maqal*".³⁴ This travelogue is also considered "an important source for the life of the author - indeed, it is almost the only known source about him to date".³⁵

Section Three: Exploratory and Political Journeys and Their Cultural Dimensions

In addition to religious and scholarly purposes, Algerian travelers documented exploratory and political experiences that reveal important geographical, social, and historical realities. These accounts provide valuable insights into regional dynamics and the interaction between power, space, and society.

First Requirement: Exploratory Journeys

Exploratory journeys played an important role in expanding geographical knowledge and in documenting regions that were largely unknown or insufficiently described by contemporaries. These journeys often combined observation, description, and political or strategic interests, particularly during the colonial period, when travel writing was sometimes linked to exploration and the expansion of influence.

1. The Journey of al-Hajj Ibn al-Din al-Aghwati

The travelogue of al-Hajj Ibn al-Din al-Aghwati is considered an exploratory narrative with an Orientalist orientation. It was written at the request of the American consul William Hodgson, with the apparent aim of extending influence over the Algerian Sahara. The author composed the text in Arabic, after which the consul translated it into English, and it was later published in the *North American Review* in 1832.

Hodgson explains: "I have prepared a translation of a short journey in North Africa undertaken by al-Hajj ibn al-Din al-Aghwati. This journey was written by its author at my request, and I paid him for it".³⁶ He further emphasizes its value, stating: "I believe that this journey contains information of regional geographic interest, such that it may be of use to travellers in the future. Most of the peoples of whom Ibn al-Din speaks are not well known - indeed, some have not been mentioned by any previous European traveller or geographer, not even Leo Africanus himself".³⁷

³² - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 1, p. 445.

³³ - Al-Husayn al-Wurtilani, *Nuzha al-Anzar fi 'Ilm al-Tarikh wa al-Athar*, p. 164.

³⁴ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 1, p. 399.

³⁵ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Al-Tabib al-Rihala Ibn Hamadush*, p. 77.

³⁶ - Al-Aghwati al-Hajj ibn al-Din, *Majmu' Rihlat Jaza'iriyya* [A Collection of Algerian Travelogues], translated and edited by Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, Al-Ma'rifa for Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, Special Edition for Tlemcen - Capital of Islamic Culture, n.d., 2011, p. 85.

³⁷ - Al-Aghwati al-Hajj ibn al-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

The stated purpose of this work reveals its exploratory and strategic dimension, as it aimed to gather geographical knowledge about the Sahara, its resources, and the customs of its populations, with particular attention to linguistic aspects. Hodgson also notes: "My aim in obtaining this manuscript is to ascertain the extent of the Berber language. The manuscript fortunately demonstrates that this language is the tongue of the inhabitants everywhere in North Africa".³⁸

According to Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, this travelogue is highly significant as a historical source, containing valuable social, economic, geographical, genealogical, and linguistic information about the regions it describes. Hodgson himself acknowledged that it includes data previously unknown to European travelers and geographers.³⁹

Due to its perceived importance, the text was quickly translated and circulated in Europe. It was translated into French by M. d'Avezac, who presented it to the French Geographical Society in Paris in 1833, accompanied by annotations and supplements. The French scholarly interest in the manuscript reflects the broader European competition over African exploration and knowledge production during that period".⁴⁰

The travelogue provides detailed information about several Algerian Saharan cities, including Laghouat, Ghardaia, Touggourt, Ouargla, Timimoun, and others, as well as descriptions of trade routes, customs, and relations with neighboring regions such as the Sahel, Morocco, Tunisia, and Sudan.

2. Exploratory Travel Writing and Its Political and Geographical Dimensions

Exploratory travel writing in this context reflects a broader intellectual and political framework in which travel narratives were not merely descriptive texts but also instruments of knowledge acquisition and influence. Such writings contributed to mapping unknown territories, documenting their resources, and analyzing the social and linguistic characteristics of their inhabitants.

In many cases, these journeys were closely linked to colonial interests, where geographical exploration overlapped with strategic objectives aimed at extending influence over the Sahara and other regions. Consequently, exploratory travel literature became part of a wider Orientalist discourse that combined scientific curiosity with political ambition, shaping European perceptions of North Africa and its societies.⁴¹

Second Requirement: Political and Military Journeys

Political and military journeys represent a form of travel writing closely linked to the exercise of authority and the consolidation of state control. Unlike purely descriptive or exploratory journeys, these narratives are associated with campaigns, taxation missions, and the

³⁸ - Al-Aghwati al-Hajj ibn al-Din, *Majmu' Rihlat Jaza'iriyya*, p. 85.

³⁹ - Al-Aghwati al-Hajj ibn al-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

⁴⁰ - Al-Aghwati al-Hajj ibn al-Din, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

⁴¹ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Tarikh al-Jaza'ir al-Thaqafi*, Vol. 1, p. 387.

extension of political influence, particularly during the Ottoman period in Algeria. They combine geographical description with military documentation and political reporting.

1. The Journey of Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad ibn Hittal al-Tilimsani (d. 1219 AH)

This travel account is associated with the military expedition led by the Ottoman governor Bey Muhammad the Great, while the narrative itself was recorded by Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad ibn Hittal al-Tilimsani. The journey was undertaken with the objective of extending Ottoman authority over the Saharan south of Algeria, primarily through the collection of taxes and levies imposed on local populations.

The inhabitants of these regions were largely nomadic Bedouin groups, characterized in the text as difficult to control due to their mobility and resistance to centralized authority. The author describes them in vivid terms, stating: "As if they were nations that remained as their ancestors left them, or a free woman who rebelled against her husband - so he prepared himself resolutely, determined to repel the estrangement and aversion that afflicted them".⁴²

Bey Muhammad the Great mobilized a large military force and departed from Mascara, passing through mountainous and strategic regions such as al-"Amur, Aflou, and Laghouat, which he entered by force. The significance of this travelogue lies in its comprehensive documentation of geographical, social, political, military, and literary dimensions, making it an important historical source".⁴³

The military nature of the expedition is further emphasized in the author's description of the departure: "He assembled his retinue, commanders, and banners -and it was no more than that his army consisted of his household and servants - and he set out on Thursday of Rabi‘ al-Awwal with his people and his forces".⁴⁴

The narrative also illustrates the psychological impact of the campaign on local populations, as described in the following passage: "When the people of that village saw him, they knew that they had neither the power nor the strength to confront him, so they all departed, taking nothing of their possessions or provisions, leaving it empty upon its rafters - a captive in the hands of one they despised - and he entered it without siege or battle".⁴⁵

It further highlights the displacement and fear experienced by inhabitants: "When the people of both - men and women - heard of his coming before his arrival, they fled with their persons and offspring and scattered to the mountain peaks".⁴⁶

2. The Nature and Functions of Political and Military Travel Writing

Political and military travel writing served as a documentary tool for recording state authority, military movements, and administrative practices during campaigns. These narratives

⁴² - Ahmad ibn Hittal al-Tilimsani, *Rihla Muhammad al-Kabir* [The Journey of Muhammad the Great], edited by Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karim, 'Alam al-Kutub, Cairo, 1st ed., 1969, p. 36.

⁴³ - Abu al-Qasim Sa'dallah, *Abhath wa Ara' fi Tarikh al-Jaza'ir*, p. 280.

⁴⁴ - Ahmad ibn Hittal al-Tilimsani, *Rihla Muhammad al-Kabir*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ - Ahmad ibn Hittal al-Tilimsani, *Rihla Muhammad al-Bay al-Kabir* [The Journey of Muhammad the Great Bey], p. 51.

⁴⁶ - Ahmad ibn Hittal al-Tilimsani, *Rihla al-Bay Muhammad al-Kabir* [The Journey of Bey Muhammad the Great], p. 42.

often combined geographical description with political reporting, offering detailed insights into the organization of expeditions, the behavior of ruling authorities, and the reactions of local populations.

Such texts reflect the broader role of travel literature as an instrument of governance and control, where journeys were not merely acts of movement but expressions of power and territorial consolidation. Consequently, political and military travel accounts constitute valuable historical sources for understanding the mechanisms of authority, resistance, and spatial control in pre-modern Algeria.

Conclusion:

This study has shown that Algerian travel literature constitutes an important literary and historical source for understanding the cultural, intellectual, and social life of Algerian society across different historical periods. It also demonstrates the significant role played by Algerian travelers in promoting cultural exchange and strengthening links between Algeria and the wider Arab-Islamic world.

First: Findings

1. Algerian travel narratives reveal a diversity of purposes, including religious, scientific, exploratory, and political motivations.
2. These travel accounts contributed significantly to documenting the intellectual, social, and cultural realities of their time.
3. Travel literature played an important role in preserving and expressing Algerian cultural identity.

Second: Recommendations

1. Encourage the editing, publication, and preservation of Algerian travel manuscripts.
2. Promote comparative studies between Algerian travel literature and other Arabic and Islamic travel traditions.
3. Integrate Algerian travel narratives into contemporary historical and cultural research as valuable documentary sources.

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