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The works of Wadi Al-Saoura scholars during the 17th century ad –the works of Ibn Abi Mohalla as a model- A descriptive statistical study.

مؤلفات علماء وادي الساورة خلال القرن 17م
– مؤلفات ابن أبي محلى أنموذجا- دراسة إحصائية وصفية.

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Abstract:

This study, titled "The Works of the Scholars of the Saoura Valley during the 17th Century: The Works of Ibn Abi Mahalli as a Model – A Descriptive Statistical Study," aims to illuminate the civilizational and scholarly contributions of the Saoura Valley region through the works of Ibn Abi Mahalli and Abu al-‘Abbas Ahmad, who exemplify the region’s scholars that significantly advanced the writing movement in the 17th century, by presenting their identities, key works, and the subjects they explored in their writings.

Keywords: Saoura Valley, Ibn Abi Mahalla, manuscript, modern era, writing movement.

الملخص:

نحاول من هذه الدراسة الموسومة بـ " مؤلفات علماء وادي الساوره خلال القرن 17م – مؤلفات ابن أبي محلي أنموذجاً- دراسة إحصائية وصفية"، تسليط الضوء على الدور الحضاري والعلمي لمنطقة وادي الساوره من خلال مؤلفات ابن أبي محلي أبي العباس أحمد كنموذج بارز للعلماء المنطقة الذين ساهموا بشكل كبير في حركة التأليف بالمنطقة خلال القرن 17م، وذلك من خلال التعريف بشخصه، وأهم مؤلفاته، والمواضيع التي تناولها في هذه التأليف. الكلمات المفتاحية: وادي الساوره – ابن أبي محلي – المخطوط- العصر الحديث – حركة التأليف.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries CE, there was a lot of scholarly and cultural activity in the south-western region, especially in the Saoura¹ area. (Balāgh, 2015, pp. 11-21) One of the signs of this movement was the growth of educational zawāyā (religious schools/lodges) and ribātāt in the area, especially in the Beni Abbas area, where the famous shaykh Ibn Abi Mahalli settled, set up a teaching zawiya, and spread his ṭarīqa (Sufi path) throughout the area. So, who is Ibn Abi Mahalli? What are his most important pieces of work? And in what areas did he write about?

This paper aims to address these and other questions through a historical narrative and analytical method, subsequently employing a statistical approach to present a statistical and descriptive study of the most significant works of Ibn Abi Mahalli.

2. A brief look at Ibn Abi Mahalli's life

He is Abū al-Abbās Ahmad ibn Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Qāḍi ibn Abi Mahalli al-Filālī al-Sijilmasi, but most people call him Ibn Abi Mahalli or Bū Mahallā. This name comes from one of his ancestors and means "the owner of a sword whose scabbard is decorated with silver."

Al-Mawlātibint ‘Ali ibn Aḥmad ibn Abi al-Qāsim al-Barzawi is his mother. He was born in Sijilmasa in the year 967 AH / 1560 CE. He was still a child when his mother died, and his grandmother took care of him (al-kaddouri, 1991, pp. 38-39) (Mourtaḍ, 2015/2016, p. 236)

His father, Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad, was his first teacher. He had trouble teaching him because he wanted to give him a strict academic upbringing, but Ibn Abi Mahalli preferred to play and didn't care much about learning. He said, "But he—meaning my father—was very strict; he would sometimes beat me after tying me with a rope, when he saw how distracted I was, my passion for hunting birds, playing ball, going to weddings, and being the leader among my peers. "Had it not been for his sternness, I would have surely been lost". (al-kaddouri, 1991, p. 39)

After finishing his elementary school in Sijilmasa, Ibn Abi Mahalli moved to Fez to continue his studies. There, he learned from the famous Sufi Abu al-Mahasin Yusuf al-Fasi, Abu al-Abbas Ahmad al-Qudumi, al-Mizyati Abu Muhammad Abd Allah, and Imam al-Manjur. (Mourtaḍ, 2015/2016, p. 236)

Ibn Abi Mahalli subsequently retreated into a life of Sufism from 987 to

1001 AH / 1567 to 1594 CE, allegedly motivated by the death of his brother, to whom he was profoundly connected. (al-kaddouri, 1991, p. 43) Another perspective posits that this retreat was attributable to his non-participation in the Battle of Wadi al-Makhazin, where individuals who abstained were labeled as those who forsook the day of battle. To avoid this charge, as al-Bushaykhi says, he went to live with the shaykh Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad al-Za'ri al-Tastauti, where he stayed for twelve years. From there, he went on the required pilgrimage. (al-Būshikhi, 2013, p. 42)². In 1605 CE, Ibn Abi Mahalli moved to the Beni Abbas area of Wadi al-Saoura after his second pilgrimage. While he was living with al-Za'ri, the latter told him that he would one day become a sultan. This was when the idea of Mahdism really started to take shape in his mind. He had been interested in leadership since he was a child, as he writes in his book al-Aslit: "... and one of the most remarkable aspects of his conduct – meaning my father – is that he was told that the boys in their play had divided into two groups under two kings, and I was one of them, which delighted him greatly, for I was not content to be a follower among them, but a leader even in my youth". (Touati, 2022, p. 215)

Ibn Abi Mahalli wanted to become king, so while he was in Beni Abbas, he got his followers and disciples to join him in forming an army. He convinced them that he was the Mahdi they had been waiting for. (Moussaoui, 2014, p. 287)^{**3} He marched on Marrakesh with this army, hoping to overthrow the Saadian monarchy. He did manage to take control of the city after besieging it, and he was able to sit on the Saadian throne after kicking out the Saadian sultan Mawlay Zidan

He deposed Mawlay Zidan between the years 1019–1022 AH / 1610–1613 CE, before the latter returned, regained his throne, and succeeded in killing him with the support of the Haha tribes under the leadership of Shaykh Abu Zakariya 'Abd Allah ibn Abd al-Munim al-Hahi, thus

putting an end to the career of a shaykh who had been the subject of much controversy, just as he was himself known for his polemics and criticisms of the scholars of his time.

3. The writings of Ibn Abi Mahalli

Ibn Abi Mahalli is considered one of the most important scholars of his time. He was a jurist, poet, and Sufi with a lot of knowledge and a sharp mind. He was one of the most important religious reformers of the eleventh century AH, and he was known for his eloquent and fluent style. (Ben Mansour, 1990, pp. 291-292) All of these traits made it easier for him to write and be an author. He left behind a collection of works, most of which he wrote after moving to Wadi al-Saoura. As Professor Moussaoui Majdoub points out, there are two exceptions: *Jawāb al-Kharūbi*, which he wrote in the Draa region, and *Al-Qistās al-Mustaḳim fi Marifat al-Ṣaḥiḥ min al-Saqim*, which he wrote in the area of al-Shallāla al-Zuhrāniyya while he was with Shaykh Abd al-Qadir ibn Muhammad al-Samāhi, also known as Sidi al-Sheikh. (Moussaoui, 2014, p. 287)

Ibn Abi Mahalli's writings include the following:

- *Al-Isḥlit al-Kharib fi QaṭBalūm al-Ifrit al-Nafrib*.
 - *Minjaniq al-ṢukhūrlihadmBinā Shaykh al-Ghurūrwa Ras al-Fujūr*.
 - *Al-Waḍḍāḥ li-FaḍḥkullMutamashdiq Faddah*
 - *Al-Sahm al-Bāriq and al-Sahm al-Rāshiq*.
 - *Samm Sāa fi TaqṭiAmāMufāriq al-Jamāa*.
 - *Salsabil al-Ḥaqqiḳawa al-Ḥaqq fi Sabil al-Sharia lil-Khalq*.
 - *MihrāsRuūs al-Juhhalah al-MubtadiawaMidrāsNufūs al-Safalah al-Munkhadia*.
 - *Al-Asad's Tahyij*.
 - A treatise directed at tribal leaders, exhorting them to engage in jihad against the Spaniards who had occupied Oran.
- Ibn Abi Mahalli's works cover a lot of important ideas, which can be summed up like this:

3.1. The book *Al-Isḥlit al-Kharit*:

Professor Abdelmajid Al-Qaddouri edited it and gave it the title "Ibn Abi Mahalli, the Rebel Jurist, and His Journey Al-Islit al-Kharit." This book tells the story of Ibn Abi Mahalli's journey to the Hijaz to go on pilgrimage. In it, he talks about his life, the scholars from whom he learned, and some legal issues, like Mahdist thought and the ruling on smoking tobacco.*⁴ (Moussaoui, 2014, p. 291)

3.2. The book *Al-Qistās al-Mustaqim fi Marifat al-Ṣaḥīḥ min al-Saqim*:

How important it is to know things and act on what you know, as well as the caliphate and how it should be set up and who should be in charge of it. He also talked about Sufism, and during that time, he attacked Sheikh Abd al-Qādir al-Samāḥi, who was also known as Sidi al-Sheikh.**⁵

3.3. The book *Manjaniq al-Ṣukhūr li-Hadm Binā Shaykh al-Ghurūrwa-Ras al-Fujūr*:

He talked about the shameful things that the Akkākiza tribe does, especially the immoral things they do, especially when it comes to women. As he said, they thought of women as things to be enjoyed together, as shown by their saying, "A woman is like a prayer rug: pray and give it to your brother." He also went after Sidi al-Sheikh in this book. Ibn Abi Mahalli penned additional works intended to critique Sheikh Abd al-Qādir al-Samāḥi (Sidi al-Sheikh) and to caution individuals against his following. Some of the most important ones are *Al-Sayf al-Bāriq maa al-Sahm al-Rāshiq* and *Mihrās Ruūs al-Juhhal al-Mubtadiawa-Midrās Nufūs al-Safala al-Munkhadia*. (Touati, 2022, pp. 210-223)

3.4. A letter to the chiefs of the tribes and the Turks, in which he urges them to wage jihad against the Spaniards who had seized Oran.⁶ (Al-Idris, 2017, pp. 44-62) (Al-Idrisi, 2017, pp. 44–62)

It is made up of prose and poetry that Ibn Abi Maḥalli wrote after the Spanish took over the city of Oran. In it, he urged the tribes of western Algeria, such as the Zanāta and Banū Hilāl, to fight the Spaniards and protect the city. The shaykh of Banū Rāshid,

Abd al-Qādir al-Rāshidi, sent him a message in August 1607 through Shaykh Aḥmad Būrways, and this letter was written in response to that message. (Al-Idris, 2017, p. 48)

Some of the most important parts of this letter are: (The letter included several lines of poetry)

"Let this be sent from me to the tribes of Āmir, especially those who now live under an infidel.

And to every brave warrior from the champions of Rāshid, led by their master Abd al-Qādir and wearing crowns.

And to every strong man among the lions of the forest, all the way to the mountain whose cubs are like the Berbers.

And to their Arab neighbors, who were all of noble birth, long-spear men who were loyal and steadfast in battle armor. **

Until he says:

"O chiefs of the Arab tribes from the lineage of Hāshim, And others—by God, how can any patient soul remain patient?

O assembly of the Turks, O people of knowledge, and every guardian who follows God's rules,

I beg you by God—what excuse can any of you give God for Oran, the mother of all disasters?

How could God shame you? How could you let the daughters of the noble be taken captive? (Al-Idris, 2017, pp. 51-58)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ibn Abi Maḥalli was a well-known scholar, jurist, and Sufi whose brilliance was recognized by many of his peers, later scholars, and modern researchers. However, he was also motivated by a desire for power and political authority. This is clear from his claim to Mahdism and from how he used his students and followers as an army to achieve his goal of becoming a ruler, which ultimately led to his downfall and sped up his death.

Most of what he wrote was harsh attacks and strong insults aimed at Shaykh Abd al-Qādir al-Samāḥi, who is also known as Sidi al-Shaykh. This animosity may stem

from the esteemed status of Sidi al-Shaykh among the Ottoman rulers of Algeria, the Saadian rulers of Morocco, and the populace, coupled with his refusal to endorse Ibn Abi Maḥalli's efforts to dismantle the Saadian dynasty.

Many of Ibn Abi Maḥalli's works also have titles that are strange in both meaning and wording. These titles often have to do with violence or war, like "the sword," "the arrow," "poison," "the catapult," and "the battering ram."

5. CONCLUSION

This study yields a series of findings, the principal one being that the Saoura region in the 17th century was not insulated from the cultural influences that shaped western Algeria and eastern Morocco. This is mostly because it is in the middle of these two areas, especially because it is close to Tlemcen, Sijilmāsa, and Figuig. In addition, the Wādi al-Saoura area was a safe place for scholars who were afraid of the ruling authorities or who didn't agree with them, like Ibn Abi Maḥalli, because it was far away from both the Ottoman center of power in Algeria and the Saadian center of power in Morocco. This distance may have pushed Ibn Abi Maḥalli to move there while he got ready to overthrow the Saadian sultan. He did this by starting his campaign from Beni Abbès and taking control of Marrakesh, the Saadian capital.

The Saoura region had a lot of cultural history going back to the Zayyanid period in the central Maghreb and the Marinid period in the far Maghreb. This made it a popular place for students and scholars to visit. The growth of zāwiyas and scholarly ribāṭs, especially in the Touat area, made this even stronger.

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west and the wilaya of Adrar in the south. El Bayadh and Naâma are to the north, Tamanrasset is to the east, and the Kingdom of Morocco is to the west.

¹ The Saoura region, also known as the Saoura Basin, is the area that now stretches from the wilayas of Béchar and Béni Abbès in the east to the wilaya of Tindouf in the

² Al-Bushaykhi says that to hide this big mistake—turning away on the day of battle—he left the sight of those who were blaming him and eventually settled with the shaykh Sidi Abu ‘Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Mubarak al-Za‘ri al-Tastawati. He stayed there for twelve years, which was hard on the shaykh because of his bad temper and extreme ecstatic outbursts.

³ Professor Majdoub Moussaoui states that after Ibn Abi Mahalli moved to the Beni Abbas area, more people started to follow him. He also began writing to tribal leaders and scholars in different countries, telling them to follow the Sunna and spreading the word that he was the awaited Mahdi and a descendant of al-‘Abbas ibn ‘Abd al-Muttalib, may God be pleased with him.

⁴ Okaz Publications in Rabat, Morocco, published this book in 1991. Al-Qaddouri wrote it as a dissertation for the Higher Studies Certificate in History at the University of Rabat in 1984.

⁵ The General Library in Rabat, Morocco, has the manuscript with the number 570 Q.

⁶ Professor Abdallah Hammadi Al-Idrisi scrutinized this letter through analysis and examination in his article titled “Ibn Abi Mahalla and his incitement of the Algerians and the Turks to liberate Oran from the grip of the Spanish Christians.