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Manifestations of the Cultural and Social Dimension in Abu al-Qasim Saadallah's Journey to the Arabian Peninsula

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Abstract

The Algerian literary scene in the modern era witnessed a remarkable flourishing of the art of travel writing, where a large number of Algerian travelers emerged, leaving behind a distinguished literary and scientific legacy. Through their journeys, they presented a vivid picture of the culture of the "Other," with all its diversity and richness, and recorded in their texts the various details they saw or heard about the nature of the countries they visited. They described with precision the landmarks of its routes and kingdoms, as well as the customs and traditions of its peoples. Thus, their writings constituted historical and cultural documents that contributed to shaping the general framework of the life of nations and societies and their social and cultural dimensions encountered during their travels.

In light of the above, this article aims to reveal the manifestations of the cultural and social dimensions in the travel literature of Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, especially his journey to the Arabian Peninsula recorded in his book Experiences in Literature and Travel, and to uncover the implicit purposes within this textual fabric and its content drawn from real experiences and the vivid observations he witnessed.

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1. Introduction

Travel literature in Algeria has constituted a rich field of knowledge that attracted the attention of writers and intellectuals of diverse orientations and aims, as they adopted it as a means to document their experiences and visions. Algerian travel writings were distinguished by the diversity of their content and the richness of their substance, for they were not limited merely to describing geographical landmarks and the topography of countries, but went beyond that to unveil the nature of peoples, their customs, and their traditions, thereby recording a living cultural anthropology. These writings also represented a mirror reflecting the fundamental transformations that societies witnessed on the political, historical, economic, and social levels, as Algerian travelers blended elegant literary narration with profound analysis. The motives for writing travel literature in Algeria resembled those of its counterparts in world literatures, while preserving the local particularity that marked this literary art.

This is what makes Algerian travel literature an integral part of the Arab literary heritage, where it played a decisive role in preserving cultural and social legacy from extinction. Through these historical travel texts, we can today explore the features of authentic Arab identity and affirm its continuity across the ages. Moreover, the study of this heritage does not aim only at documentation, but also at strengthening belonging and highlighting the role of the nation in the making of history and civilization.

Accordingly, within this context, Abu al-Qasim Saadallah is considered one of the most prominent figures who contributed to enriching prose literature in the Maghreb, where his writings were distinguished by their diversity between literary and historical issues, in addition to his notable interest in the art of travel. This interest was manifested in his important work *Experiences in Literature and Travel*, which included rich travel texts, the most notable of which was *My Journey to the Arabian Peninsula*, where he combined literary narration with historical analysis.

Thanks to these contributions, Saadallah is regarded as one of the pioneers who carried the banner of travel literature in the region, as he presented critical insights and deep personal experiences that made his writings an important reference for researchers. Hence, the research topic was chosen and entitled: *"Manifestations of the Cultural and Social Dimension in Abu al-Qasim Saadallah's Journey to the Arabian Peninsula"*, in order to study his travel experiences, starting from the importance of his works in revealing the features of modern prose literature and its development in the Maghreb, as well as their role in documenting cultural communication between Arab countries.

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Accordingly, the importance of this research lies in shedding light on this journey, in order to extract its contents and secrets, as it represents a harmonious youthful structure and a distinguished literary creation in which a variety of literary genres intertwine and harmonize. As for the objectives we seek to achieve through this article, we shall attempt to demonstrate the importance of Algerian travel literature and to revive this literary genre on one hand, and to restore recognition to Algerian scholars in the modern era through introducing their scientific legacies on the other hand, relying on the descriptive-analytical method. This article also required us to pose a set of questions as follows:

- To what extent was the travel text able to contribute to producing an image of the Other?
- Was Abu al-Qasim Saadallah able to preserve and record Algeria's history?
- How did the cultural and social dimensions manifest in his journey to the Arabian Peninsula?

2. Who is Abu al-Qasim Saadallah?

Abu al-Qasim Saadallah is considered one of the most prominent figures of thought and culture in Algeria. He became famous in the cultural sphere through his numerous works that enriched both the national and Arab libraries. No student or researcher interested in Algerian history can overlook the value of the distinguished academic works of the late scholar, which made him an indispensable reference in the study of Algerian history.

When studying his biography, we realize the greatness of his achievements and the richness of his legacy, which constituted a fully-fledged intellectual school. He was born in 1930 in Qamar, Wilaya of Wadi Souf. Abu al-Qasim Saadallah belongs to two major tribes: the Awlad Abdelkader from his father's side and the Awlad Bouafia from his mother's side. He grew up in a poor family that worked in agriculture. His family were among the first farmers who settled in the village of Bidoua and planted palm trees. It was mentioned: *"They recall at his birth that they had nothing to spread on the ground but sand, and nothing to cover them but shelters made from palm fronds*[1]*."*

His first encounter with education was at the age of five, and his first educational stop was the Qur'anic school in his village, like his peers at the time. This was an old tradition among the people of Qamar and in the Arab and Islamic world in general, where boys would enter the mosque to memorize part of the Qur'an so they could perform their religious rituals and arm themselves with the principles of Islam[2].

It seems that the tragic circumstances Algeria lived through during the French occupation pushed Abu al-Qasim

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Saadallah—like many of his generation—to join the *kuttab* (Qur'anic school), since the unjust educational laws imposed by the colonial authorities deprived Algerians of their right to formal education. His mother, as narrated, was keen on sending him to the *kuttab* to memorize the Qur'an, influenced by her brother Sheikh al-Hafnawi Hali, who had memorized the Qur'an and graduated from al-Zaytuna University, gaining a prestigious position in society. She hoped her son would follow his uncle's path and become one of the memorizers of the Qur'an and bearers of Islamic knowledge[3].

The child Abu al-Qasim Saadallah managed to memorize the entire Qur'an in 1944 under the supervision of his teacher, Sheikh Abu al-Qasim bin al-Bariya. His father celebrated this occasion with two special honors: the first was a moral honor consisting of slaughtering two rams and holding a beautiful ceremony that gathered family and friends, during which the attendees recited the Qur'an and chanted religious praises; the second was a material honor, where his father bought him the first shirt he ever wore in his life, locally known as *al-libas al-mudhakkar*.

After completing his Qur'an memorization, Abu al-Qasim became qualified to represent his teacher in leading *Tarawih* prayers during Ramadan, a role he fulfilled for two consecutive years (1944–1946). It is mentioned that his delay in completing Qur'an memorization was due to the lack of stability of Qur'an teachers in the Bidoua area until both Sheikh Ibn al-Bariya and Sheikh al-Zubairi settled there[4].

After finishing memorizing the Qur'an and acquiring the basics of Arabic language and Islamic sciences, Abu al-Qasim aspired to continue his academic journey. He turned towards al-Zaytuna University, which at the time was the scientific destination for Algerian students. Saadallah attributed his motivation to study in Tunisia to several factors, most notably the spread of reformist ideas in Wadi Souf, especially after the historic visit of Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis in 1936.

Ben Badis' visit—by then famous as a leading religious reformer—had a profound effect on the people of the region, igniting the spirit of revival and reform among the locals, especially in his native village. This intellectual enthusiasm pushed many youths from Qamar to head to Tunisia to join al-Zaytuna. Sources indicate their numbers kept increasing steadily. These students would return to their villages during summer vacation bringing with them reformist ideas, which contributed to spreading awareness and motivating more youth to engage in education[5].

Abu al-Qasim Saadallah had the opportunity to study at several institutes and universities: al-Zaytuna in Tunisia (1947–1954), Algeria (1954–1955), Cairo (1955–1960), and the United States (1960–

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1965). He traveled to al-Zaytuna in Tunisia in 1947 with a group of students encouraged by his parents. He said: *"This was realized in 1947 when I traveled with a group of students who had preceded me, in line with and influenced by the reformist and educational trend that had spread in the Souf region at the time*[6]*."*

He stayed at al-Zaytuna between 1947 and 1954, earning the *Shahada Ahliyya* in 1951, and in November 1954, he obtained the *Shahada Tahsil*, equivalent to a high school degree in the Tunisian system of that time.

He returned to Algeria in 1954 to earn money for his travel expenses to the East to continue his studies. He worked at *al-Thabat School* in Harrach and then *al-Tahdhib School* in Algiers in 1955. In the same year, he traveled to Egypt after facing difficulties due to the harassment created by French colonial authorities against travelers. He went through Tunisia and Libya before reaching Egypt[7].

He graduated with a Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Language and Sciences in Egypt in 1959[8]. He registered in two different places to pursue his Master's: first at the Faculty of Dar al-Ulum, specializing in Literature, where he completed the diploma in the summer of 1960, but could not defend his thesis because the law did not allow it in the first year; second at the Institute of Arab Research and Studies under the Arab League, where he enrolled in the literary and critical section but did not complete the exams, as he traveled to Tunisia and from there to the United States after receiving a scholarship on November 30, 1960[9].

He earned both his Master's and PhD in modern and contemporary European history from the University of Minnesota (USA). Between 1965 and 1967, he taught at the University of Eau Claire, Wisconsin. In 1967, he joined the University of Algiers. In 1993, he received a Fulbright grant, staying for three years during which he completed editing *The Cultural History of Algeria*. He later taught at Al al-Bayt University in Jordan between 1996–2002. Throughout this academic journey, Abu al-Qasim Saadallah learned several languages[10].

Among his most important works[11]: *Encyclopedia of Algerian Cultural History* (9 volumes), Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1998; *Research and Opinions in Algerian History* (5 parts), Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1993–1996–2004; *The Algerian National Movement* (4 parts), Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1969–1992–1997; *Lectures in the Modern History of Algeria: The Beginning of Occupation*, 1st edition, Egypt, 1970, 3rd edition, Algeria, 1982; *Research in Arab-Islamic History*, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 2003; *The Green Time*, Saadallah's collection of poems, Algeria, 1985; *A Green Palm Leaf*, National Foundation, Algeria, 1986; *Studies in Modern Algerian Literature*, Dar al-Adab, Beirut, 1966; *Experiences in*

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Literature and Travel, National Foundation, Algeria, 1982[12].

He also edited several manuscripts, among them[13]: *The Tale of Lovers in Love and Longing*, Prince Mustafa bin Ibrahim Pasha, Algiers, 1982; *The Journey of Ibn Hammadosh al-Jaza'iri*, Abdul Razzaq bin Hammadosh al-Jaza'iri, Algiers, 1982; *The Published Guidance in Revealing the Condition of Those Who Claimed Knowledge and Sainthood*, Abdul Karim al-Fakkoun, 'Ammar, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, Beirut, 1987.

He also translated many books, including[14]: *Peoples and Nationalities*, Algiers, 1958; *Algeria and Europe*, John B. Wolf, Algiers, 1986; *The Life of Emir Abdelkader*, Charles Henry Churchill, Algiers–Tunis, 1982.

3. Saadallah's Method in Writing His Travels:

The writings of the historian Saadallah, in their scientific aspect, are distinguished by accuracy and objectivity—qualities that qualified them to become a model of the academic analytical spirit. The reader or researcher notices that Saadallah adopts a neutral method in presenting events and opinions, as he merely mentions facts and different points of view without imposing personal judgments or taking explicit stances on them. This balanced method is nothing but a conscious methodological choice aimed at allowing researchers and scholars to analyze the information and draw conclusions for themselves, which enriches the scientific work and stimulates critical thinking.

To clarify this method, one can cite what was mentioned in the seventh volume of *The Cultural History of Algeria*, where Saadallah discusses the journey of al-Qa'id bin al-Sharif, who described the French government in his writings as "ideal," even going so far as to compare it to what was stated in the Qur'an. In his analysis of this stance, Saadallah suffices with indirectly pointing out that this journey seems as if it serves French interests, or at least aligns with the official discourse of the colonial government in Algeria, where he says: *"It seems that the journey serves French interests, or at least goes in the official direction of the general government in Algeria."* From this statement, the reader can easily conclude that Ibn al-Sharif was biased toward the colonial administration, and perhaps even a tool in its hands. Nevertheless, Saadallah avoids making definitive judgments or explicit accusations, leaving the verdict to the reader in light of the context and evidence. This approach reflects his commitment to scientific neutrality, while highlighting historical contradictions without rushing into evaluation.

It is clear from the above that the method adopted by the historian Abu al-Qasim Saadallah in studying travelers and their writings is characterized by exceptional scientific accuracy. His works exhibit clear methodological coherence based on the

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logical interconnection of ideas, the precise chronological sequence of events, and the deep analysis of texts. His method is also distinguished by the diversity of sources and the multiplicity of historical references he relies upon, which lends scientific credibility to the judgments and conclusions he presents.

The most prominent feature of Saadallah's method, however, is his surpassing of the traditional narrative style in addressing the journeys of travelers. He does not stop at merely recounting facts and events but goes beyond them to offer in-depth analysis of the accompanying historical contexts. He provides precise descriptions of the social conditions experienced by the travelers and sheds light on the cultural, political, and economic dimensions that influenced their experiences and helped shape their vision. This comprehensive method makes his studies a model of integrated historical research that connects events to their various contexts. Thus, Saadallah succeeds in combining academic rigor with analytical depth, making his writings a rich reference for understanding travel history with objectivity and balance.

4. Saadallah's Journey to the Arabian Peninsula:

This scholarly journey took place in April 1977 to participate in an international symposium held in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, under the title *"Sources of Studies on the History of the Arabian Peninsula."* During this symposium, the author presented a valuable research paper entitled *"The Algerian Pilgrimages to the Hijaz during the Ottoman Era,"* which is considered a qualitative addition in the field of historical studies related to the Arabian Peninsula. After returning from this journey, the author recorded his impressions in memoirs that reached twenty pages. At the beginning, he pointed to the spiritual nature that distinguished the travel to the Arabian Peninsula, stressing that this visit occupied a special place in his life for several reasons: first, because it was his first visit to these sacred lands, and second, because of the historical and religious importance that the Arabian Peninsula holds in the Arab and Islamic consciousness.

The author noted that the material he collected during the journey would have been enough to fill an entire volume had it been processed and published. However, he preferred to focus on the most important aspects that were related to the theme of the symposium, including his various visits, scholarly meetings, official ceremonies, daily observations, and parallel readings. He began recounting his journey by expressing his discontent with the excessive inspection procedures he was subjected to at Algiers Airport, noting that many Arab intellectuals who visited Algeria had complained of similar ordeals. He then moved on to describe the delegations participating in the symposium, where he noticed the

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dominance of the Anglo-Saxon presence and the absence of representatives from Far Eastern countries, while Turkey and Iran had a notable presence. On the Arab level, several countries were absent, such as Libya, Mauritania, Lebanon, South Yemen, and Somalia. Egypt recorded the highest participation, while Syria was represented only by Dr. Kamel Ayyad[15]. As for the Maghreb countries, six researchers from Morocco and five from Tunisia took part, while Algeria was represented by only two researchers despite a larger number being invited. The author attributed this to what he called *"the intellectual laziness from which the Algerian suffers, depriving him of active contribution in international scholarly forums."*

The author praised the excellent organization of the symposium, especially with regard to punctuality, which contradicted the stereotypical image of Arabs being careless about time. He also lauded the level of research presented, though with variation in quality, and commended the freedom of discussion that characterized the symposium sessions. Among the prominent scholarly figures he met was Sheikh Hamad al-Jasir, owner of the famous magazine *Al-'Arab* and a member of the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo.

The journey also included a detailed description of the city of Riyadh, which left the author with the impression that it was one of the greatest modern world capitals, with special praise for the library of Riyadh University and the National Museum. The visit to the Two Holy Mosques left a profound impact on him, one that words failed to express[16]. For Saadallah, traveling to the Arabian Peninsula was unlike traveling anywhere else:

"If in other journeys you prepare materially for tourism, or for attending an international meeting, or to carry out an official mission, then with regard to the Arabian Peninsula you first prepare spiritually, whatever your material purpose of travel may be—especially if it is your first journey there, as was the case for me. For long had the thought of traveling there haunted me, in response to an inner spiritual call, out of love for study and exploration, and in order to connect the past with the present[17]."

Thus, it was the determination of Dr. Saadallah to fulfill his long-standing wish, as he began both spiritual and material preparation, saying: *"I dreamed of visiting the sacred places, of seeing the land from which Islam sprang forth, and from which caravans of jihad spread the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah to the East and West of the earth[18]."*

The main theme of this journey, *"The First International Symposium on Sources of Studies on the History of the Arabian Peninsula,"* was an extremely broad subject that covered the sources of Arabian Peninsula history throughout different eras

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in all its manifestations. Perhaps this is what led the symposium organizers, at its conclusion, to decide to dedicate the next symposium specifically to the history of the Arabian Peninsula.

Dr. Saadallah, in what he recorded about this journey, was content with documenting and reviewing aspects of the scholarly symposium he was invited to, and what was connected to it in terms of visits, ceremonies, observations, conversations, readings, and especially visits related to the Two Holy Mosques.

5. The Motives of Abu al-Qasim Saadallah's Journey to the Arabian Peninsula:

The motives that drive a person to undertake journeys vary and differ according to individuals and circumstances. Every traveler has his own reasons that push him to leave his homeland and discover new worlds. In the case of the traveler and thinker Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, we can identify a set of intertwined motives that formed the main incentive for his exploratory journeys, including scientific, religious, economic, cultural… and others. Abu al-Qasim Saadallah had a strong incentive for traveling and discovery, with a specific purpose and goal, and he was among those travelers who had passion and ambition to fulfill their wishes. His journey to the Arabian Peninsula was motivated by both scientific and religious factors.

5.1 Scientific Motives:

The journey represented for Abu al-Qasim Saadallah a high-level scientific means and an integrated research approach for gathering scientific material from its original sources. He considered it a valuable opportunity for direct communication with an elite group of scholars and thinkers, and a space for creative intellectual dialogue that enriches thought and develops knowledge. His invitation to participate in the international symposium in Riyadh under the title *"Study of the History of the Arabian Peninsula"* was the main motivation for this distinguished scholarly journey.

The objectives of this symposium revolved around deep research into the history of the region and the study of its archaeological and historical sources. Saadallah found in this scholarly occasion a golden opportunity to shed light on the contributions of Algerian travelers in documenting the history of the Arabian Peninsula. He chose to present an innovative research paper entitled *"The Writings of Algerians on the Arabian Peninsula"*, as he saw that *"the most suitable topic for this symposium is to reveal the writings of Algerians about the Arabian Peninsula by researching Algerian Hijazi journeys during the Ottoman era."*

This journey turned from mere participation in a conference into an integrated research project in which

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Saadallah combined archival research in historical documents, field interviews with specialists, participant observation of the cultural scene, and analysis of scientific material in its historical context[19].

Thus, his journey went beyond the concept of traditional travel to become an intellectual and scientific journey par excellence, through which he provided a qualitative addition to the historical library and uncovered a neglected aspect of the history of cultural relations between Algeria and the Arabian Peninsula.

5.2 Religious Motives:

The religious motive for Abu al-Qasim Saadallah represented a state of integration between worship and knowledge. He set out on his journey to the Hijaz with a deep spiritual drive to fulfill the obligation of Hajj as one of the five pillars of Islam, and to visit the grave of the Prophet ﷺ in Medina. He expressed this spiritual longing by saying: *"The thought of traveling there was in response to an inner spiritual call and out of love for study and exploration[20]."*

He viewed Mecca—the Sacred Land—as the first source of Islam from which the message of monotheism emerged. He described its status, saying: *"It is the Sacred Land from which Islam sprang forth, and from which caravans of jihad departed, spreading the Noble Qur'an and the Prophetic Sunnah to the East and West of the earth[21]."*

This description reflects his insightful vision of the historical and religious status of the Two Holy Mosques, where he combined in his perspective both the devotional dimension and the civilizational one. His journey was therefore a unique blend of fulfilling religious duty, satisfying spiritual longing, achieving scientific ambition, and studying the civilizational, cultural, and social dimensions of Islam. This integration makes his journey a model of the scholarly traveler who does not separate knowledge from religion, but rather considers them two sides of the same coin in understanding Islamic civilization and its history.

6. The Two Dimensions: Cultural and Social in Abu al-Qasim Saadallah's Journey to the Arabian Peninsula:

The travel text of Saadallah is characterized by richness and depth, as it reveals the various aspects of social life in all its diversity and complexity. The cultured traveler, especially if he possesses broad experience and a sensitive perception, has an insightful vision that enables him to observe the finest details and record the different life aspects of the societies he visits. His interest is not limited to social aspects only, but extends to include cultural, geographical, economic, as well as historical and religious dimensions. This lends his writings a comprehensive character, making them an anthropological

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document rich in insights and analyses. Thus, the travel text of Abu al-Qasim Saadallah becomes a reflective mirror of civilizations and a preserving vessel of the heritage of nations and their unique characteristics.

6.1 The Cultural Dimension:

The cultural dimensions in Abu al-Qasim Saadallah's journey were diverse, manifesting in interwoven social and religious aspects through which the outward and inward features of those cultural systems were revealed, showing the depth of the acculturation between Algeria and the Arabian Peninsula. This journey represented a challenge in reception due to the interlacing of its events and the complexity of its systems, *"as cultural events, and thus grasping their dimensions and their systemic implications which appear in complete connection with the cultural contexts and historical circumstances that produced them."* Every event in the journey cannot be understood apart from being a cultural event that carries within it profound systemic connotations, closely linked to the cultural environment and historical conditions in which it originated[22]. Accordingly, the journey emerges as a rich cultural text that reflects the civilizational interaction between Algeria and its Arab surroundings, and reveals the intellectual and social implications that shaped the identity and course of the journey.

6.1.1 Topography of Places and Their Cultural Dimensions:

Abu al-Qasim Saadallah carried out a survey of the terrain of the Two Holy Mosques, leaving no corner or place without carefully contemplating it, recording every landmark and sanctity that caught his eye. He wandered among the corridors of the mosque, its spacious courtyards, its walls, and its platforms, and stood in reverence before the pure shrine of the Master of Creation, Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, where he was overwhelmed by profound feelings of awe and humility. He could hardly believe that he was walking on the soil of Mecca, that blessed land which witnessed the birth of the noble Prophet, the descent of revelation, the downfall of disbelief, and the establishment of the Maqam of Ibrahim (peace be upon him). Despite the hardships of travel, the fatigue, and the body's need for rest and food, *"the feeling that one is walking on the land where the Prophet was born, where revelation descended, where disbelief was defeated, and where the Maqam of Ibrahim stood, made every fatigue seem light, and every worldly need diminish[23]."*

This journey was a test of faith and a reminder of the greatness of Islamic history, where feelings of joy mixed with responsibility, and gratitude intertwined with the desire to emulate the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. How great it is for one to find oneself in this sacred spot, which reminds him of the origins of his religion and

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renews within him the resolve to adhere to the guidance of the noble Prophet ﷺ. Saadallah attached immense importance to the holy places in his journey to the Arabian Peninsula, as they help in *"grasping what is essential in them, namely the set of values and meanings associated with them*[24]*."*

A. Mecca al-Mukarramah:

The sanctity of the Holy Kaaba is embodied in its being the first house placed for mankind to worship Allah Almighty. It represents the holiest place on earth for all Muslims, where hearts and eyes turn toward it in prayer, and bodies circumambulate it in Hajj and Umrah. The importance of the Kaaba is not limited to being the qiblah of Muslims alone, but it is also the spiritual center of the Islamic world, the point where the feelings of believers from all corners converge, where hearts yearn for it and souls cling to it, making it a symbol of Islamic unity and a center of worship that gathers Muslims scattered across time and place. Since Saadallah set foot on the land of Mecca, Abu al-Qasim Saadallah became deeply engrossed in contemplating the sacred sights with a heart filled with humility, describing them in a style brimming with reverence and glorification, as he saw in them the place of revelation and the cradle of the Muhammadan message where the nucleus of the Islamic state was formed.

At the first hour of dawn (around two o'clock in the morning), he describes the moment of heading to perform Umrah by saying: *"The guide led us to the Haram to perform Umrah… It was around two o'clock in the morning, the weather was humid, and the soul was eager despite the need for sleep and food. Nevertheless, the feeling that one is walking on the land where the Prophet was born, where revelation descended, where disbelief was defeated, and where the Maqam of Ibrahim was erected made every fatigue lighten and every worldly need diminish*[25]*."* These words reveal a unique spiritual experience, where the visit turned from a mere journey into an emotional encounter with Islamic history, during which the visitor feels a kind of spiritual purification and moral healing from illness, and cleansing from defilement, as if his feet tread upon a different land that carries in its soil the secrets of prophecy and the eternal memories of monotheism.

"Abu al-Qasim Saadallah" highlights a vibrant, active personality, constantly moving and visiting, which drives him to stop at sacred places with religious connotations tied to the history of the Islamic state. These places are well-known and defined, visited by everyone equally—no difference between rich and poor, white and black, ruler and ruled. *"And I noticed after performing Umrah, one of those scholars—the Moroccan Sheikh al-Kettani—pointing out the extent of the*

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diversity of Muslims' Sunnahs, and the differences in their forms, clothes, and colors. He answered me with affirmation and simplicity: That is the Islamic community the Prophet ﷺ wanted; despite the diversity of its elements and the multiplicity of its lands, its people gather around the Kaaba in a solid block, with no superiority for an Arab over a non-Arab except by piety[26]."

During Saadallah's stay in Mecca, he mentioned a group of prominent religious and historical landmarks that he visited during his journey, noting in his memoirs: *"Then a car drove me to the famous places such as Jabal Hira, Arafat, Mina, and Muzdalifah[27]"* and other sites of religious and historical importance. It appears that the purpose of this documentation goes beyond mere geographical narration to the preservation of the collective memory of the nation and its cultural dimensions, as these places stand as living witnesses to events that shaped Islamic history. This concern reflects the scholar's eagerness to link the present with the past through documenting landmarks that embody Islamic identity and its deep-rooted history.

B. Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah:

Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah appears in the Islamic consciousness as a symbol of brotherhood and unity, for it was the city that witnessed the unique historical moment when the Prophet ﷺ established brotherhood between the Muhajirun and the Ansar. There is no doubt that Saadallah had a deep spiritual connection with Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, which manifested in feelings imbued with multiple cultural dimensions. It was a connection overflowing with joy and happiness, elevated by a spirit of tranquility and reverence. Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah—with all its sacred sites—arouses in the visitor the noblest faith-filled emotions, especially at Al-Masjid al-Nabawi al-Sharif, which houses the purified Rawdah and the shrine of the Seal of Prophets and Messengers ﷺ. This mosque holds a great position in Islam, as it is considered the second most sacred mosque after Al-Masjid al-Haram, making it the focus of Muslims' attention and the beating heart of the city.

Abu al-Qasim Saadallah expressed his overflowing emotions toward this blessed city and the connection that bound him to its sacred places, describing the moment of his arrival by saying: *"I could not believe that I was walking on the soil of Al-Madinah, looking at its mountains, its palm trees, and its buildings… After we washed and changed our clothes, we immediately went to the Haram, where we fulfilled the right of the mosque and the right of the grave of the Prophet ﷺ. I cannot, in this brief moment, describe the emotions that overwhelmed me as I saw the mosque from afar, then as I entered it from near, and also when I stood at the pure shrine[28]."*

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The traveler's visit was not limited to the spiritual aspect, but extended to the intellectual aspect, where he emphasized his interest in *"two things: first, getting to know the archaeological sites… and second, the libraries*[29]*."* His visit was thus a unique spiritual experience encapsulating within it meanings of love and reverence for this sacred place, reflecting his comprehensive vision of Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah as both a center of religious radiance and civilizational enlightenment at the same time.

C. The Mosque:

The mosque in Islamic law represents the nucleus of spiritual and social life, as it embodies the highest meanings of sanctity as a house of worship and a place of drawing near to Allah through prayer and supplication. The religious texts gave the mosque immense importance, making it the cornerstone in the formation of Islamic cities and villages, and even a criterion distinguishing the Islamic identity of societies. For this reason, travelers refer to it wherever they go, as it is the center of the nation's cohesion and unity. This is what the traveler Abu al-Qasim Saadallah noted in his journey, where the mosque was present in his observations as a pivot of communal unity and a source of faith. This concern was manifested in his repeated use of the term *"al-Jami'"* (the congregational mosque), which reflects the social function of the mosque in uniting the community, as in his description of the Friday prayer: *"We performed ablution and went out all together under the scorching sunlight, its brilliance blinding the eyes and dazzling us with the whiteness reflected on the white soil and on the walls. We headed to a mosque near the hotel and attended the sermon*[30]*."*

The presence of the mosque in the journey was not limited to the devotional aspect, but also appeared as a historical witness to great Islamic events. Saadallah recounts: *"A car took us on a tour to the site of the Battle of the Confederates and the location of our master Hamza, and to Quba Mosque and Banu al-Najjar Mosque, and we also saw several mosques said to have been built there*[31]*."* Saadallah's observations about mosques were marked by a focus on their religious and historical value, while overlooking the architectural and engineering aspects. This reflects his intellectual priorities and his interest in the civilizational and cultural dimension of the mosque more than its material form.

D. The Markets:

Markets represent a fundamental element in shaping the mental image of the Arabian Peninsula, as they offer the reader a vivid picture that reflects the economic, social, and cultural activity of Saudi society. They are not merely spaces for commercial exchange, but constitute an integrated system that includes crowded roads, sellers, buyers, workers, and other components of the urban scene. In this

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context, the traveler presents a detailed description of one of the modern markets (supermarché) he visited, saying: *"I entered one of the public markets (supermarché), and it had everything in the European and American style. I saw several couples there, Arabs and non-Arabs, buying and then going out to their cars waiting outside. Judging by their outfits… As for the workers in this market, most of them were Yemenis. On the way, I passed by several shops playing their vital role in daily economic life*[32]*."*

This description reveals to us several cultural dimensions, including:

- **Urban Dimension:** The market is depicted as a modern space combining European and American styles.
- **Social Dimension:** Population diversity appears through the presence of Arabs and non-Arabs, reflecting different lifestyles and revealing the living standard.
- **Economic Dimension:** It unveils the nature of daily commercial activity and documents consumption patterns.
- **Geo-Social Dimension:** It points to the composition of the workforce (Yemeni workers), showing the class stratification of society.

E. The Hotel:

The hotel is that enclosed place to which the traveler resorts in search of rest when he finds no shelter in the land he has arrived at. This is exactly what happened with the traveler Saadallah when he reached Riyadh, where he found in the "Zahret al-Sharq" Hotel a safe haven after a tiring journey that had exhausted him physically and mentally. After the hardship of long travel, Saadallah and his companions—despite their extreme fatigue—felt that they had reached the shore of safety when the hotel cars were waiting for them upon arrival. He says in describing this moment: *"And we felt, despite the fatigue, that we were now in safe hands that led us to cars which were waiting for us. They took us to the 'Zahret al-Sharq' Hotel where we stayed… We also found a number of the symposium members in the hotel lobby, coming and going. We received the keys, and each of us threw himself on his bed, almost unconscious from fatigue and lack of sleep*[33]*."*

Thus, the cultural dimension of the hotel is highlighted here as a shelter providing travelers with safety and psychological stability, especially for those exhausted by travel, like Abu al-Qasim Saadallah. It was not merely a place to sleep, but a refuge where they regained their strength after the hardship of the road, which confirms the vital role such places play in the lives of travelers.

F. The Library:

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The library is a closed sacred space where the researcher soars in search of knowledge, and through it the highest cultural and scientific purposes are realized. It is the intellectual treasury of society, supplying it with vessels of knowledge in its various specializations. Among its frequent visitors is the thinker Abu al-Qasim Saadallah, who made of it a platform to satisfy his cultural appetite and achieve his intellectual aspirations.

In his research journey, Saadallah seized a precious opportunity to visit the Library of Riyadh University with some colleagues, where he says: *"I took advantage of some time and went with some members to the Library of Riyadh University… It consists of two sections, one for printed books and the other for manuscripts. I wanted to visit the second section in particular, but the shortness of time only allowed us to visit the first section*[34]*."*

His passion for manuscripts was constantly driving him, as he earnestly searched for them, devoting all his time to research and study, and to meeting people of knowledge. His research effort did not stop there, for he was able to visit the Awqaf Library adjacent to the Haram, describing his experience as follows: *"As for the second library I managed to enter, it was the Awqaf Library adjacent to the Haram. There, too, I found several readers, and I asked about the catalog of its manuscripts. I was told that they were compiled by higher order, and I sought permission from its director, Sheikh Muhammad Bakir al-Maghribi… He allowed me one or two catalogs, but the shortness of time did not help me. I am always in a struggle with time whenever I meet with books*[35]*."*

These testimonies reveal to us several facts and dimensions:

- The central place of the library in Saadallah's intellectual project.
- His great passion for manuscripts and the written heritage.
- The challenges he faced in his research, especially the lack of time.
- His scientific methodology in research and verification.

This experience highlights for us the cultural dimension of the library: it is not only a place for storing books, but a vital space for intellectual interaction, a meeting place for researchers, and a center of cultural radiance. It also reflects the depth of the relationship between the researcher and sources of knowledge and reveals the real struggle of the serious researcher in his pursuit of knowledge.

6.2 The Social Dimension:

The social dimension forms a vital fabric that frames all manifestations of human behavior within any society, as this dimension is manifested through an integrated system of social norms that regulate the paths of human interaction.

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These norms are not limited to setting general frameworks of behavior only, but extend to forming a symbolic and cognitive structure that grants the human experience its profound meanings, diving into the depths of the collective unconscious to shape individuals' vision of the world and determine their ways of dealing with realities. It is a cultural lens that reconfigures reality and draws the boundaries of the possible and the impossible within a specific social space. Thus, social norms become an indispensable interpretive framework for understanding cultural contexts. The travel text of Saadallah came filled with portrayals of the social reality of the places he visited and their people, comparing them with what they used to be in the past.

The movement of social exchange among members of the same society, or between different societies on a broader scale, represents one of the most prominent phenomena that drew the attention of the traveler and thinker Abu al-Qasim Saadallah during his visit to the Arabian Peninsula. He carried out precise observations of the various forms of social relations, which were manifested in customs and traditions, intellectual structures, and the collective behaviors of those societies.

Through his journey, Saadallah revealed aspects of administrative neglect that he faced, pointing out that the local government showed no concern for his arrival despite prior coordination. In this regard, he mentions: *"Although the company assured us that it had telegraphed about our arrival, we thought matters would become complicated, for there was no reservation for us there… and there was no dinner*[36]*."* The travel text revealed the accuracy of his observation and the depth of cultural integration he possessed, as he conveyed to us a vivid panorama of the scenes he experienced during his journey. He gave special attention to recording the civilizational manifestations represented in traditional dress, considering it a cultural sign indicative of collective identity.

In this context, he presents a precise description of the arrival scene, saying: *"When we crossed the threshold of the airport, we found a welcoming delegation dressed in the full details of the national Arab attire, which gave the moment a festive character and confirmed the authenticity of the reception*[37]*."*

He also presents to us a rich cultural image of Arabian society through his accurate observation of hospitality customs and folk arts that form the core of social identity. In a precise anthropological description, Abu al-Qasim Saadallah shows how social occasions turn into a mosaic of rituals that begin with serving Arabic coffee—which represents a symbol of generosity and ancient traditions—then move on to the stage of communal dining with large trays of rice and meat that reflect the values of social solidarity, and conclude with the

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ritual of tea which represents the stage of intimacy and communication. The climax of this festivity is represented in the performance of the traditional sword dance, which becomes a unique cultural show, where the traveler describes the scene by saying: *"The delegations lined up in a large arc on carpets and couches, and Arabic coffee was served to them before dinner. Then trays of rice with meat were lined up, followed by tea… and then a traditional Saudi troupe came to perform the (sword dance)* [38]*."* The sight of busy hands exchanging dishes indicates the strengthening of social bonds, reflecting the harmony that unites authenticity with organization, while the sword dance represents a scene that embodies the fusion of past with present. This description does not stop at recounting events but reveals the deep cultural structures governing social relations, where daily customs turn into rituals indicative of a complete value system, while folk arts become a living collective memory expressing the spirit and identity of society.

Abu al-Qasim Saadallah was impressed by the tolerance and noble manners he observed among the people of Al-Madinah al-Munawwarah, where he found in their dealings an exemplary model of social coexistence based on affection and solidarity. He also noted that the nature of life in the city was characterized by ease and smoothness, with abundant means of transportation and the continuous influx of visitors from all corners of the earth, giving the place a unique vitality. The picture was not much different in Mecca, where the traveler recorded the simplicity of life that marked the inhabitants, clearly reflected in their clothing adapted to the conditions of the desert environment. He says in a precise description: *"Clothing is sufficient if it covers the body, the foot is satisfied with a simple open sandal, and for covering the head, whatever is light enough to protect from the sun suffices. Soon your limbs dry after ablution, and your clothes after washing, and food and drink also seem simple*[39]*."* These observations reveal Saadallah's deep understanding of the social and environmental characteristics distinguishing the Two Holy Mosques, where simplicity in appearance translates into depth in social content, and the ability to adapt to climatic conditions manifests in the daily patterns of life, forming a unique civilizational fabric combining authenticity with functionality.

What also drew Saadallah's attention was the unique human mixture characteristic of Mecca, where he witnessed a striking demographic diversity represented by a large African community encompassing different social strata. In the streets and corners of Mecca, one could see African workers toiling in their jobs, migrants who had made the city their new home, along with groups of pilgrims coming from various African countries, and merchants roaming the markets with their diverse

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goods. The visitor cannot fail to notice this dense African presence that gives the city a unique global character, with African families spread across it and universities filled with African students. The traveler also noticed the vitality and activity in Mecca that never subsides, day or night, saying in a precise description: *"Movement there is alive throughout the night, and security is comprehensive, and people perform their tasks, each in his own way*[40]*."*

This vivid picture reveals the depth of social integration in Mecca, where races and cultures converge in unique harmony, while highlighting the central position of the city as a global meeting point attracting people from everywhere, whether to perform rituals, to seek knowledge, or for work and trade. All this occurs within a framework of security and stability that facilitates people's movement and eases the fulfillment of their needs.

During his tour through the historic neighborhoods of Mecca, specifically in the Night Market (*Suq al-Layl*) and Suq Abi Sufyan, Professor Saadallah's attention was drawn to a striking cultural scene during his visit to the Maghrebi portico, where he encountered a situation reflecting the intertwining of religious beliefs with daily practices. He recounts: *"I entered this portico and found in it a Moroccan from Casablanca, who objected to my wearing a wedding ring, saying to me that whoever wears gold will be branded with it on the Day of Judgment. I found him feeding cats with meat*[41]*."* A practice that appears outwardly contradictory between strictness on the matter of gold and kindness to animals.

This incident reveals several layers of cultural analysis: First, it highlights the diversity of religious interpretations among Islamic schools of thought, where some Moroccans adopt a literal interpretation of the prohibition of gold for men. Second, it reflects the human contradictions in dealing with religious texts, between strictness in some aspects and flexibility in others. Third, it shows care for animals as a firmly rooted value in Islamic culture, even among those who adopt strict positions in other matters. This unique scene offers a living model of the cultural complexities embedded in the historic places of Mecca.

In the context of observing social transformations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Saadallah recorded precise notes revealing signs of remarkable social openness, contrary to the stereotypical image then prevalent about the country. He noticed the spread of shops selling magazines containing artistic journalism rich with celebrity news and pictures of actresses. He also followed local television programs dedicated to women's beauty and displaying images, indicating a change in Saudi media discourse. In the entertainment aspect, Saudi society showed clear enthusiasm for following football matches on the small screen, while the

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traveler noticed the absence of public cinemas despite the presence of exclusive film screenings in luxurious hotels such as the "Zahra" Hotel in Riyadh where he stayed. These multiple observations led him to conclude the occurrence of a profound social transformation in the structure of Saudi society, which he confirmed by saying: *"One of the symposium members noticed that Saudi society is undergoing a great social transformation, and that the results of this transformation will appear soon*[42]*."* These observations reveal a unique transitional phase in Saudi social history, where the features of modernization began to appear gradually in various fields, while society maintained its fundamental identity. They also reflect the natural contradictions accompanying any societal transformation, where manifestations of openness coexist with certain traditional restrictions, in a historical process testifying to the dynamism of Saudi society and its ability to adapt to the changes of the age without abandoning its constants.

In speaking about his first impressions upon arriving in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the traveler recorded a remarkable observation regarding the courteous treatment he received from security personnel at Jeddah International Airport. He expressed his deep admiration for the high professional conduct of the passport officer, describing this situation in detail, saying: *"During my passage through the passport police, the officer looked for the Arabic letter in the passport but did not find it, so he raised his eyes to me and said with utmost politeness*[43]*."* This reflects the high level of professionalism enjoyed by Saudi security personnel at border crossings, and reveals the deep-rooted authentic values in Saudi society, which place mutual respect and good treatment at the core of official dealings. The courteous treatment noticed by Saadallah represents a living model of the "civilized face" policy adopted by the Kingdom in its dealings with visitors and newcomers, where routine procedures turn into an opportunity to showcase the humane face of the state.

Through this simple experience, Abu al-Qasim Saadallah realized that politeness and eloquence in speech are not merely individual traits, but are part of an institutional culture adopted by the state and instilled in its employees, especially those who represent the first face of the country before foreign visitors. This explains his deep positive impression of the Kingdom from the very first moments of his arrival.

Abu al-Qasim Saadallah's journey to the Arabian Peninsula was distinguished by a keen vision of the social and cultural reality of the countries he visited, where he presented a vivid description reflecting the diversity and richness of societies. In the lands of the Two Holy Mosques and Riyadh, he observed with the eye of a social expert the major transformations that

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the region was experiencing, focusing on the interaction between authenticity and modernity.

In his observations, his great admiration stands out for the unprecedented urban renaissance that transformed the face of the Saudi capital, as he says: *"It is witnessing a massive urban renaissance[44]."* Civilizational progress appears clearly in the advanced transportation system connecting cities with paved roads built to the latest international standards[45]. His description did not stop at the urban aspect, but extended to observing the social and cultural dimensions and patterns of this development, where he noted:

- The integration between modern infrastructure and local identity.
- The impact of urbanization on daily life patterns.
- The reflection of urban development on social relations.
- The preservation of cultural particularity despite the wave of modernization.

This comprehensive vision reveals the traveler's methodology in linking material manifestations with social transformations, making his observations a highly significant historical and social document for understanding the major transformation phase experienced by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the modern renaissance era.

As for beliefs and intellectual heritage, Saadallah did not fail to point out some practices and behaviors he observed among some pilgrims, which he saw as deviating from the essence of true Islam. He said: *"There one sees exaggerated things that are not of religion at all… You see the weeping and wailing, the kissing of stones and iron, and calling upon other than Allah. The police forbade some of these acts, but to no avail[46]."* The continuation of these practices contrary to Islamic law is due to the negligence of Islamic governments in performing their awareness-raising role. Had these governments been keen on educating Muslims with correct Islamic culture and explaining the teachings of religion as they are without distortion or exaggeration, we would not have found such deviations. It was obligatory to raise Muslims' awareness of the true meaning of worship and to guide them toward the correct understanding of monotheism and the etiquette of visiting the House of Allah, so that they would not fall into practices contrary to the spirit of Islam. Thus, addressing these phenomena requires intensive efforts by governments and religious institutions to spread legal awareness and correct misconceptions, so that Muslims perform their rituals in accordance with the Prophetic Sunnah, far from innovations and superstitions.

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In conclusion, it seems that Dr. Abu al-Qasim Saadallah's concern—within the framework of his comprehensive anthropological research—was reflected in his study of the Arab societies in the Arabian Peninsula through his precise observation of the various aspects of their daily and exceptional lives. He paid utmost attention to analyzing the personal and collective traits that distinguished the members of these societies, focusing on their moral system deeply rooted in authentic Arab traditions. He also traced, with the eye of an expert, the familiar and exceptional customs and traditions practiced during religious occasions and various social seasons. He did not neglect studying the daily interactions in markets, gatherings, and streets, which he saw as a living embodiment of the prevailing social system.

This multi-dimensional concern stemmed from his scholarly pursuit to decode the collective identity of these peoples and uncover the deep characteristics shaping their distinctive personality. Hence came his focus on documenting social life in all its complex dimensions, seeking to highlight the hidden structures that govern social relations and regulate the movement of society between the constant and the variable, between the authentic and the imported, in a scientific vision combining the accuracy of observation with the depth of analysis.

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