

**The Efforts of Algerian Scholars in Writing Biographies
and Profiles: The Case of Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi****Smahi Rafika¹**¹ Higher Normal School of Bechar, (Algeria), smahi.rafika@ensbechar.dz**Summary:**

This research aims to examine the contributions of the Algerian scholar Abu Qasim Al-Hafnawi in his work Ta'rif al-Khalaf bi-Rijāl al-Salaf (Introducing the Successors to the Predecessors), focusing on his distinctive approach that combines historical documentation, collective biography, and literary style. The study addresses a central question concerning the methodological nature of Al-Hafnawi's work: Is it primarily historical, biographical, or literary? Through a descriptive-analytical approach, the research reveals the structure, methodology, and scholarly value of the book. One of the key findings is that Al-Hafnawi's work provided Arab researchers, especially Algerians, with a rich reference documenting the names of scholars from various regions and Arab countries, along with their diverse contributions across multiple fields of knowledge.

Keywords: Profiles, Biographies; Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi, Ta'rif Al-Khalaf, Cultural history, Thought

INTRODUCTION

The efforts of our Algerian scholars in the literary field, especially in the literature of biographies and character sketches, have been prominent during and after the colonial period, leading to abundant contributions in this area. Some of these scholars narrated their own experiences or the lives of others as travelers, while others specialized in biographies. Among these scholars was Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi, one of the most prominent Algerian names in the literary scene in Algeria at the beginning of the 20th century.

This research aims to highlight the efforts of Algerian scholars in literary and historical studies, particularly in the field of biographies and

character sketches. Our focus is on the Algerian figure Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi, especially in his work *"Ta'rif Al-Khalaf bi-Rijal Al-Salaf,"* a treasure of Arabic language in Algeria. He introduced various figures from politics, literature, and history, showcasing their works and tireless efforts in the pursuit of knowledge and understanding.

This study employs a descriptive-analytical method appropriate to the subject's nature, along with an inductive approach that seeks to examine parts of the author's work. The historical methodology, which seeks to document dates and events, and the biographical methodology, which highlights networks of scholarly relationships and collective biographies of scholars, are interwoven with a literary dimension appropriate for analyzing language, style, and the inclusion of textual evidence and quotations. The study includes several issues:

What are the contributions of Algerian scholars in biographical literature? To what extent did Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi contribute to literary studies? Did Al-Hafnawi's efforts and works benefit his contemporaries and successors? What distinguishes his work *"Ta'rif Al-Khalaf bi-Rijal Al-Salaf"*? What new aspects did he introduce?

Books of biographies and profiles represent the memory of nations and the vessel of their intellectual and cultural history. They do not merely preserve the lives and stories of notable figures but also document the movement of society across various scientific, literary, and social domains. In our contemporary era, where cultural identities are threatened by the risks of globalization and oblivion, the importance of these works magnifies. They serve as a bridge connecting new generations to their roots and a source of inspiration from the virtues and achievements of their predecessors.

Thus, Al-Hafnawi's contributions spanned various fields like knowledge, literature, history, and jurisprudence. He was widely recognized for his extensive knowledge and works that bridged the past and present, serving as a communicative bridge between the predecessors and successors, particularly in the aforementioned work.

2. The Art of Biographies and Character Sketches

2.1 Concept

Biographies are a literary genre that involves detailing the life of one or

more individuals. The depth and length of these biographies vary depending on the era in which they are written. The more a biography focuses on rhetorical style, the closer it is to literature than history¹. For instance, classical biographical works such as Ibn Khallikan's *Wafayat al-A'yan* (Deaths of Eminent Men) primarily focused on historical accuracy and chronological events, while modern biographies like Walter Isaacson's *Steve Jobs* employ narrative techniques to create a more engaging literary experience.

"*Al-Sirah*" (Character Sketches) refers to a variety of life journeys. In classical dictionaries, "*Al-Sirah*" denotes a method, tradition, demeanor, or tales of the ancients². It appears that the notion of 'method' is what narrators and historians aimed to convey with "*Al-Sirah*," understood as a series of events experienced by the individual, and their approach to handling them.

The fundamental distinction between historical and literary biographies lies in their approach to narrative. Historical biographies prioritize factual accuracy and chronological documentation, while literary biographies employ stylistic devices such as dialogue, metaphor, and dramatic reconstruction to transform the reader's engagement from passive reception to emotional participation in the subject's life story³.

The term was first used in the context of Prophet Muhammad's life and later extended by the late 3rd century Hijri when the Egyptian Ahmed Ibn Yusuf Ibn Al-Daya wrote about Ahmad Ibn Tulun, marking the first shift from using "*Al-Sirah*" for the Prophet to others³.

Understanding these historical definitions and developments remains crucial for contemporary literary scholars. It provides essential context for analyzing the evolution of biographical writing and enables comparative studies that trace the continuity and transformation of narrative traditions across different historical periods and cultural contexts.

2.2 Divisions

2.2.1 Autobiographical Biographies

These are works written by authors about their own lives, recording events and experiences from their childhood, youth, and adulthood. Notable examples include Taha Hussein's *Al-Ayyam* (The Days), Ahmed Amin's *Hayati* (My Life), with one of the earliest being Ibn Sina's (Avicenna's) autobiography. Other classical examples include Al-Suyuti's account in *Husn al-Muhadarah*, Al-Sakhawi's in *Al-Daw' al-Lami' li Ahl al-Qarn al-Tasi'*, Ibn Khaldun's in *Al-Ta'rif*, Al-Maqqari's in the first part of "*Nafh al-Tayyib min Ghusn al-Andalus al-Ratib*," and others⁴.

Autobiographical biographies hold significant value as they provide an

intimate, first-person perspective crucial for understanding an individual's personal worldview, the societal norms of their era, and the broader intellectual history they inhabited.

A fundamental distinction between autobiographies and biographies written by others lies in their unique qualities and inherent challenges. Autobiographies offer an authentic internal voice and privileged access to the subject's private thoughts and motivations. However, they face the challenge of potential subjectivity, selective memory, and self-justification. In contrast, biographies written by others strive for objectivity and critical analysis but may struggle with interpretive bias or a lack of direct insight into the subject's inner life.

The tradition of autobiographical writing remains influential and popular in modern Arabic literature. It continues to serve as a powerful medium for exploring personal and national identity, as well as for documenting and critiquing social and political transformations from a personal vantage point, evident in a wide range of contemporary works.

2.2.2 Biographies of Others

These are written by authors about the lives of others, from birth to death. Examples include Ibn Hisham's "Prophetic Biography," Abbas Mahmoud Al-Aqqad's "Al-Abqariyat," Muhammad Hussein Heikal's biographies of Abu Bakr and Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, and general biographies like "*Mu'jam Al-Adibba*" or "*Irshad Al-Arib ila Ma'rifat Al-Adib*" by Yaqut Al-Hamawi, and "*Wafayat Al-A'yan*" by Ibn Khallikan⁵.

2.2.3 Autobiographical Biographies

These are written by authors about their own lives, recording events, and news from their childhood, youth, and adulthood. Examples include Taha Hussein's autobiography in "*Al-Ayyam*," Ahmed Amin's "*Hayati*," the earliest being Ibn Sina's autobiography, Al-Suyuti in "*Hasan al-Muhadara*," Al-Sakhawi in "*Al-Daw al-Lami' fi*

2.3 Origin

The Arabs and Muslims paid exceptional attention to writing biographies. Ancient Arabic biographies surpassed others in foreign literature, both ancient and modern, in terms of their abundance, precision in naming, verification of lineages, and citing sources. The Prophetic biography was the earliest and most comprehensive in Islamic literature, attracting significant attention from writers and historians.

Among the most famous early biographies of the Prophet are Ibn Hisham's

(died 213 AH) "*Sirat Rasul Allah*" (Biography of the Messenger of Allah), which became the focal point around which the life of Islam, its origins, expansion, evolution, and spread through battles and conquests revolved. Similarly, Ibn Saad's (died 230 AH) "*Tabaqat*" (The Categories) followed, marking the genesis of biographies for narrators of Prophetic traditions, initially brief, focusing solely on the narrator's value and position in the chain of transmission. One of the earliest books in this field is Al-Bukhari's "History".

Biography writing was not limited to the Prophet Muhammad. In the early 5th century, Ibn Al-Jawzi wrote biographies of several great figures such as Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Umar ibn Abdul Aziz, Ahmad ibn Hanbal, etc. Other significant works include Yaqt Al-Hamawi's "**Mu'jam Al-Adibba**" (Dictionary of Writers), Al-Safadi's "*Al-Wafi bil-Wafayat*" (The Complete Book of Deaths), and Ibn Al-Imad Al-Hanbali's famous biographical work "*Shadharat Al-Dhahab fi Akhbar Man Dhahab*" (Golden Fragments of the News of Those Who Have Gone)⁶.

Initially, biographical writers were meticulous in citing their chains of transmission and sources. However, they later omitted these for brevity, with many adhering to objectivity and strict adherence to truth. The arrangement of figures in old Arabic biographical literature varied: some followed alphabetical order, while others adopted different methods. In modern Arabic biographies, there is complete attention to accurate naming, a feature not found in the history of global biographies.

From the 18th century, biographies and character sketches began to be influenced by global developments in politics, trade, and industry. Democracy leveled the playing field, leading to biographies of both prominent and ordinary people. New methods emerged, aligning with the contemporary spirit of writing and thought. Twentieth-century Arabic biographies evolved from merely narrating scholars' and narrators' sayings or compiling news to studying the subject's environment, portraying their life, and analyzing their circumstances⁷.

2.4 Purpose

The art of biographies and character sketches in Arab culture is influenced by the Quran, which deepened their historical awareness with stories of the past and histories of previous nations. These stories were meant to serve as lessons and sermons. Omar Ibn Qaina believed that the literary genre of character sketches had a religious origin, influenced by the Quran, especially the stories of prophets, kings, and regions.

The emergence of this genre in Arab culture is attributed to the Arabs' eagerness to preserve their identity and history, and to honor the righteous deeds of their ancestors. Therefore, the Arabs historically had a profound interest in the

art of biographies and character sketches for various reasons: religious, historical, educational, moral, and advisory. The goals included:

- A. Commemorating these figures by recording their noble deeds, events, wars, and various incidents they experienced or participated in, for moral and advisory purposes.
- B. Emulating these great figures, using their lives as motivation for lessons and examples, influencing subsequent generations in different life situations, their way of creating events, and directing affairs.
- C. Satisfying the need for entertainment, amusement, and wonder.

The Prophetic biography paved the way for premonitions that led to Prophet Muhammad's mission, detailing events before his birth, his upbringing, his prophethood, his call to Islam, the opposition he faced, the conflicts between him and his opponents, both verbally and through warfare, and those who responded to him until the truth triumphed and the flame of faith shone brightly. These wars, known as battles and military expeditions, initially focused on the wars in which the Prophet participated but later evolved to encompass the history of his life and that of his companions⁸.

3. An Introduction to Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi

Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi, whose full name was Muhammad Al-Hafnawi ibn Abi Al-Qasim Al-Deisi ibn Ibrahim Al-Ghoul, was born in 1852 AD (1269 AH) in the town of Deis near the city of Abi Saadah. He received his education at the Zawiya of Ibn Ali Dawud in Zawawa, then at the Zawiya of Tolga and Hamel. He participated in the editing of the official newspaper "Al-Mubashir" from 1884 AD (1301 AH) to 1926 AD (1344 AH), and began teaching at the Grand Mosque of Algiers starting from 1897 AD (1314 AH). Later, he assumed the position of Maliki Mufti in 1936 AD (1355 AH)⁹.

Al-Hafnawi was a distinguished scientific personality who played a role in teaching, authoring, and journalism. A prominent figure in southern Algeria, he did not receive formal education in French public schools, nor did he graduate from the Thaalibia School in Algiers or the Kattania School in Constantine, unlike contemporaries such as Muhammad ibn Abi Shanab, Muhammad ibn Mustafa ibn Al-Khoja, and Muhammad Al-Said ibn Zakri. Instead, he studied on the mats of his teachers, moving between renowned learning centers within the country.

He learned jurisprudence at the Zawiya of Sheikh Ibn Abi Dawud in Jabal Zawawa, Arabic at the Zawiya of Tolga, and heard Hadith and Tafsir at the Zawiya of Hamel. Distinguished by his broad culture, he did not limit himself to the traditional education he mastered but expanded his intellectual horizons with

modern studies, mastering the French language of the colonizers, and delving into various natural, cosmic, and medical sciences. He also excelled in journalism.

Muhammad Basker observed that Al-Hafnawi's writings, characterized by economic, scientific, and historical themes, aimed to alert his people to the importance of being aware of modern Western discoveries. He adapted most of his published work from French sources, translating and arabizing them with a refined literary style and precise wording. Despite their scientific nature, his articles had a literary touch. In economics, for instance, he rephrased a report sent by the French consul in Derna to his government, detailing the trade imports of Western countries with the Ottoman Empire, concluding that France ranked third after England and Germany.

This report was published in "Al-Mubashir" in a series in 1888 AD. In another article, he discussed Louis Pasteur's discovery of a rabies treatment and wrote a comprehensive study spanning several pages on astronomy¹⁰.

Al-Hafnawi authored several treatises and translated some books from French to Arabic, including the work of the sage Rieser on beekeeping and honey production, titled "Daf' Al-Mahal fi Tarbiyat Al-Nahl" (The Remedy for Honey in Beekeeping). He also co-translated with the Frenchman Mirant a book on health management, named "Al-Khair Al-Muntashir fi Hifz Sehat Al-Bashar" (The Widespread Good in Preserving Human Health) and authored "Al-Qawl Al-Sahih fi Manaf' Al-Talaqih" (The Correct Saying in the Benefits of Vaccination).

However, his most significant work is "Ta'rif Al-Khalaf bi-Rijal Al-Salaf," a unique and massive compilation of biographies of Algerian scholars and literati. The book is characterized by its abundant content and extensive quotations from historical, biographical, and narrative books such as Ibn Khaldun's History, Nashr Al-Mathanie, Wafayat Ibn Qunfudh, Nil Al-Ibtihaj, and others. It chronicles the scholars of Algeria during the Ottoman era and the early colonial period, drawing on numerous manuscripts, documents, and correspondences.

He engaged with scholars and heads of zawiyas, gathering information through listening and writing. He particularly benefitted from *Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Rahman Al-Deisi*, who provided him with biographies of some of the Algerian southern scholars¹¹.

4. Description and Analysis of the Work "Ta'rif Al-Khalaf bi-Rijal Al-Salaf"

Abu Several editions of the book have been published, including a version by Pierre Fontana's Eastern Press in Algeria in 1906, another in Tunis at the Sheikh Khair al-Din Library around 1920, and a more recent edition in 2007 by Moufm Publishing in Algeria. Al-Hafnawi crafted the title in the style of the ancients,

employing rhymed phrases in their titles. The reasons that drove him to write the book include¹²:

His personal desire to write and his love for learning and being connected with the history of the predecessors.

Support from the French government and its General Governor, Charles Jonnart, in publishing the book and encouraging intellectual and journalistic works.

His aim to highlight certain names and figures to prevent them from falling into obscurity, and to shed light on their compositions and cultural contributions in both prose and poetry.

Enlightening the new generation and guiding them to the biographies of notable individuals and scholars in Algeria.

As for the sources and references that Abu al-Qasim al-Hafnawi relied upon in his work, which he mentioned in his book, they are as follows¹³:

Sidi Ali bin Ahmad bin al-Hajj Musa lent him the following books:

"Rabih al-Tijarah fi Manaqib Sidi Ahmad bin Yusuf al-Rashidi al-Milyani", "Silk al-Durar wa Nashr al-Mathani", "Kitab al-Malali fi Manaqib Sidi Muhammad bin Yusuf al-Sanusi alTilmasani", "Anwan al-Daraya wa al-Bustan"

Sidi Ali bin al-Haddad al-Jazairi lent him:

"Jadwah al-Iqtibas wa Kifayah al-Muhtaj li Ma'rifah Man laysa fi al-Dibaj"

Sharif bin al-Sharif al-Sayyid Abu Taybah bin al-Hajj lent him:

"Al-Yaqutah al-Wahajah"

Mr. Muhammad al-Hawari, the merchant, lent him:

"Mukhtasar al-Najm al-Thaqib li Ibn Sa'd".

4.1 External Description of the Book

The book's cover features a decorative black frame, with the cover itself in red blended with yellow. At the top, it bears the following phrase: "Wilaayah Amoom Al-Jaza'iriyah" (General Governorate of Algeria). Below it is a wavy line, followed by the state symbol in black: a crescent moon above a star. Then comes the book's title: "Kitab Ta'rif Al-Khalaf bi-Rijal Al-Salaf" (A Book on Defining the Successors through the Men of the Past). Directly below the title, the full name of the author appears: "Written by: *Abu Al-Qasim Muhammad Al-Hafnawi bin Al-Sheikh bin Abi Al-Qasim Al-Deisi, son of Sidi Ibrahim Al-Ghoul.*" Below the author's name, there is the following phrase: "May Allah assist him with His kindness and

protection." Finally, at the bottom of the cover, the book mentions the printing press, publishing house, and location: "Printed at the Pierre Fontana Eastern Press in Algeria." The front cover is followed by a thick white page that contains the same information as on the cover, followed by the book's introduction.

4.2 Internal Description and Analysis of the Book

The selected book for the study consists of two sections: the first section spans from page 03 to page 207, while the second section covers pages 03 to 624.

The author begins the introduction of the first section with the customary Islamic phrases "Bismillah" (In the name of Allah) and "Al-hamdulillah" (Praise be to Allah), and sends blessings upon the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). He then lays the groundwork for the intellectual efforts that were made in Algeria in the past. The scholars of Algeria illuminated its history with their significant, well-documented, and meticulous contributions. However, over time, they were forgotten, and people stopped mentioning them. The author felt the need to introduce and remind people of these scholars.

The author also includes some Arabic poetry in his introduction, such as¹⁴:

A person after death becomes a tale,

He perishes, but his traces remain.

So, the best state is that of a person

Whose renown becomes good after his death.

He then discusses the motivations behind writing the book, emphasizing the prominent role played by the General Governor (Jonar) who showed great interest in the Muslims of Algeria, encouraged them to seek knowledge, provided them with both financial and moral support, and even built the Tha'labiyyah School. The author explains the reason for the school's name and goes on to describe the Arabic verses on the right side of the school, composed by Al-Hafnawi himself. On the left side of the school, the author mentions the date of the school's construction in French. Additionally, he provides detailed information about the arrangement of the rooms and the inscriptions on the walls inside the school.

The author then lists the references he relied on in writing the book, as mentioned earlier. He also outlines his plan for the book, dividing it into two sections: the first section focuses on the biographies of scholars whose names are recorded in the Tha'labiyyah School. The second section includes biographies of other scholars from Algeria and other regions, such as Sudan.

Under the heading "Tanbih" (Note), the author explains his approach and

methodology in his work. He mentions that under each scholar's name in the book, he includes the source or reference from which he obtained the biography. This demonstrates his commitment to academic integrity. He also points out that some of the references he mentioned earlier were avoided in parts, as they contained distortions in many words. For example, he mentions that he refrained from quoting from "Al-Bustan" and "Ain al-Dariyah" due to the significant distortions in most of the words, except for what he was absolutely sure of or what he extracted through lengthy efforts if he couldn't find it elsewhere¹⁵.

The author further notes that printed books in Morocco often contain errors in letters and numbers. However, despite these errors, they carry valuable content within their subject matter.

After the introduction, the author moves on to the text of the first section of the book, where he presents the biographies of the scholars whose names are documented in the Tha'labiyyah School. There are 51 scholars in total, and he arranges them alphabetically by name. He starts with the name of the scholar, followed by their title or renowned name. The list begins with "Al-Alim Ibrahim bin Abi Bakr Al-Tilimsani" and concludes with "Muhammad bin Al-Tayyib Al-Qadri." Notably, under each scholar's name, the author mentions the source or reference from which he obtained the material. The names of the scholars are also accompanied by titles that indicate their school of thought or their affiliation with their country, such as "*Al-Tilimsani*", "*Al-Fayqiqi*", "*Al-Nadrumi*", "*Al-Sudani*", "*Al-Milyani*", "*Al-Msili*", "*Al-Tha'alibi*", "*Al-Qadri*."

In his biographies of these scholars, Al-Hafnawi provides information about their lineage, birth, significant milestones in their lives, and their deaths. He also highlights their contributions and includes any relevant poetic verses, if available.

The author often consulted with elders who were relatives of the scholars he was translating, gathering their statements and what they had reported about their relatives. Additionally, he utilized the references from which he collected the translations, as mentioned earlier. However, the author did not include a conclusion in the first section or the study's findings. After translating the biography of "Al-Qadri," he immediately provides an index of the book specific to the first section. Following the index, there is a table in which he rectifies some errors, such as "Aba 'Imran" corrected to "Abi 'Imran" and "Al-Rawiyya" corrected to "Al-Rawiya."

Therefore, the first section of the book stands out for its realism, comprehensiveness, truthfulness, and the author's meticulous attention to documenting the biographies with sources and references. Despite being a compilation of information, the author refrains from expressing his opinion or viewpoint on any scholar in this section.

Al-Hafnawibegan the second section of the book with praise and blessings upon our Prophet Muhammad, followed by an introduction in which he mentioned the references he relied on in this second section, in addition to those previously mentioned. He stated, "I saw it necessary to mention here that this second section is an excerpt from various sources, including 'Kofiyyat al-A'yan' (The Accounts of Notables), 'Fawat al-Wafayat' (Deaths of the Faithful), 'Al-Juburti' (The Daring), 'Aqd al-Juman al-Nafis' (The Precious Necklace), 'Al-Malali' (The Flawless), 'Al-Sabbagh' (The Dyer), 'Mukhtasar al-Najm al-Thaqib' (The Concise Star of Guidance), 'Rawdat al-Nasrin' (The Garden of Roses), 'Magnaatis al-Durr al-Nafis' (The Magnetic Precious Pearl), 'Al-Rihlat al-Wartilaniyya' (The Wartilanian Journey), and 'Al-Yaqootah al-Wahajah' (The Shining Ruby) in the genealogy of Sidi Muhammad ibn Ali, the patron of Majajah, and others collected from the responses of admirers"¹⁶.

In this section, Al-Hafnawi mentioned 369 scholars, starting with the scholar (Ibrahim ibn Ahmad al-Fayqiqi) and concluding with the scholar (Ya'qub ibn Yusuf al-Zawawi). He followed the same alphabetical arrangement by the scholars' names, starting with the scholar's name, followed by their titles or famous names. However, unlike the first part, he did not include the source or reference from which he obtained their information. The translations varied, with some scholars receiving lengthy translations (such as Sidi Abu Madin al-Ghawth al-Tilimsani), while others had translations that did not exceed two lines (like Sulayman al-Wahrani).

He concluded this section with a prayer and provided an index for the second part, followed by a table of errors and corrections, including cases like (al-Nizam and al-Sawab, al-Nathim and al-Nathimah, Fiql and Faql, and Akhihi al-Adib and Akhuhi al-Adib).

Al-Hafnawi approached the translation of each scholar with details about their lineage, birth, significant life events, and their contributions. Many of the translations included poetic verses either composed by those scholars or attributed to them.

The writing style of Al-Hafnawi in his work is straightforward, clear, and reflective of his extensive knowledge. He draws upon references from the Quran and Hadith, highlighting his commitment to preserving cultural heritage. His work is a valuable resource for researchers interested in the field, as it gathers a significant number of scholars. While the text may contain repetitions and an abundance of poetic verses that may not directly align with the book's purpose, it lacks critical analysis.

Nevertheless, it holds a significant place among the sources of biographies

and translations in Algeria and serves as an encyclopedic work to introduce scholars and their contributions in the Arab world. The clear writing style makes it easy for researchers to grasp the knowledge contained within.

5. Critique of the Book

In his work « Ta'rif Al-Khalaf bi-Rijal Al-Salaf », Abu al-Qasim al-Hafnawi employed a distinctive methodology, characterized by a « non-linear organization » of material rather than a strict chronological structure. His prose is marked by its simplicity, clarity, and accessibility, often relying on eloquent literary embellishments—particularly rhymed prose (saj')—in the tradition of classical authors, especially in the book's introductions, conclusions, praises, and elegies. For instance, he asserts: It appears that the Algerian region exerted efforts in seeking knowledge through various means, and they attained knowledge from all sources, comprehending its principles and details. Knowledge during their time was comprehensive, and their insight was elevated...¹⁷

Furthermore, his narrative is frequently interspersed with digressions, at times incorporating lengthy poems and verses that functioned primarily as rhetorical embellishments rather than serving the core analytical purpose of the work. He also frequently employed repetition to emphasize certain points. A significant scholarly shortcoming, however, is his inconsistent citation of sources; while he provided references in the first part of the book, this practice was not maintained throughout.

Al-Hafnawi's writing style, while straightforward and comprehensible, reflects his erudition through the integration of Qur'anic verses and Hadiths to substantiate his content. The text is further enriched with proverbs, wisdom, and popular sayings, underscoring his deep connection to the cultural and intellectual heritage of his society. His dedication to preserving the legacy of Algerian scholars and notables remains a central and commendable theme of the work.

A primary critique of his approach, however, is its lack of critical analysis. Al-Hafnawi predominantly reported narratives uncritically, without subjecting them to sufficient scrutiny. This is particularly evident in his treatment of stories that contained elements of popular belief, including those which, as noted by Khair al-Din Shtara, featured exaggerated testimonies and descriptions of figures that resembled the attributes accorded to prophets and angels according to Khair al-Din Shtara¹⁸, Al-Hafnawi did not apply the necessary critical lens to these potentially problematic narratives.

Despite these limitations, al-Hafnawi's work is an indispensable document of its historical context. It emerged during a period of intense intellectual and cultural constriction under French colonialism, which actively sought to suppress

Algerian thought, the Arabic language, and Islam. In this climate of ideological thirst, al-Hafnawi's prolific writings affirmed a steadfast commitment to the nation's past, its cultural heritage, and its scholarly achievements. Therefore, while the work may lack analytical depth, its value as a symbol of cultural resilience and a repository of collective memory is undeniable. It stands as a crucial testament to the perseverance of knowledge and identity in the face of colonial erasure.

6. CONCLUSION

The work of Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥafnāwī, Taʾrīf al-Khalaf bi-Rijāl al-Salaf, stands as one of the most significant biographical encyclopedias in modern Algerian scholarship. It preserves the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the country by compiling the lives of scholars, jurists, saints, and social figures across centuries. A descriptive and analytical reading of the text reveals that it is not merely a collection of names and dates; rather, it is a complex narrative that blends historical documentation, collective biography, and literary representation. The dominant approach adopted by al-Ḥafnāwī is the historical-documentary method, as evidenced by his concern with chronology, genealogies, scholarly lineages, and contextual connections with broader political and social settings. Closely related is his reliance on the biographical-collective method, whereby individual lives are situated within larger scholarly networks, producing a tapestry of Algeria's religious and intellectual history. The literary dimension, though secondary, enriches the text with rhetorical elegance and devotional praise, yet also introduces an element of idealization that requires critical scrutiny. Thus, the book can be regarded simultaneously as a historical source, a social document, and a literary text, offering researchers a multilayered insight into the dynamics of Algerian scholarly life

Some of the most notable findings of this study include:

1. Abu Al-Qasim Al-Hafnawi was a journalist, historian, literary figure, and encyclopedic scholar, as well as a translator.
2. Al-Hafnawi adhered to scholarly integrity and documentation in his work without any exaggeration or omission, which enhanced his credibility.
3. He presented scholars' opinions with absolute objectivity.
4. His work was characterized by clarity, fluency, and simplicity, steering clear of ambiguity, verbosity, and obscurity.
5. He referenced famous sayings and poetic verses in multiple instances.
6. The biographies encompassed scholars from various regions, including Algeria and

beyond, such as Sudan.

7. The book was a treasure trove of knowledge and intellectual richness, albeit lacking in critical analysis.
8. The prevailing framework is historical-biographical, with the literary aspect serving as a stylistic supplement rather than the core.
9. Documentary Value: The work provides relatively precise data on dates, teachers, disciples, travels, and scholarly functions, making it an indispensable source for reconstructing Algeria's intellectual history.
10. Collective Biography: Rather than isolated accounts, the book maps out an interconnected network of scholars, Sufi shaykhs, and jurists, thereby reflecting a collective scholarly identity.
11. Literary Style: Al-Ḥafnāwī employs a laudatory and rhetorical tone, frequently invoking Qur'anic verses, poetry, and honorific epithets to elevate the status of his subjects.
12. Textual Critique: Certain portrayals, particularly of Sufi figures, are idealized and lack rigorous historical corroboration. This necessitates cross-referencing with other sources to ensure balance and accuracy.
13. Research Value: The book transcends mere biography; it is a cultural archive that illuminates the interplay of religion, education, and society in Algeria across centuries.
14. Future Directions: Comparative studies with other Maghribi and Mashriqi biographical dictionaries, as well as critical stylistic analyses of al-Ḥafnāwī's rhetorical strategies, would deepen scholarly understanding of the genre.

In conclusion, we recommend researchers to show a general interest in Algerian literature, specifically in biographies and translations. It is vital to appreciate the writings of our scholars and their extensive efforts in literary studies, such as Al-Ghbarini, Ibn Sa'd Al-Talmasani, and Al-Hafnawi. Moreover, there should be a focus on some of their manuscripts that have yet to see the light of publication.

Among the recommendations that emerged from this research are as follows:

- Encourage researchers and enthusiasts of Algerian literature to explore ancient manuscripts and works, revitalizing their significance.
- Organize awareness campaigns aimed at motivating students to take an interest in their country's history and analyze and interpret the writings of Algerian scholars in their academic research.

- Stimulate the role of publishing houses in handling manuscripts, ensuring their publication, and caring for their preservation.

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¹ Committee of Arab Countries' Writers, "Biographies and Character Sketches," Dar Al-Ma'arif, 1955, p. 09.

² See: Ibn Mandur, "Lisan Al-Arab," Volume 3, Part 64, Dar Sader, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st edition, 2000, pp. 2169-2170.

³ Reynolds, D. (2012). *The biographical tradition*. Oxford University Press

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- ³ See: Committee of Writers from Arab Countries, "Biographies and Character Sketches," p. 27.
- ⁴ See: Previous reference, pp. 25-26.
- ⁵ See: Committee of Writers from Arab Countries, "Biographies and Character Sketches," pp. 14, 40, 44.
- ⁶ See: Previous reference, pp. 18-19, 21.
- ⁷ See: Committee of Writers from Arab Countries, "Biographies and Character Sketches," pp. 14-15.
- ⁸ See: Ibrahim Al-Saafin, "Methods of Literary Expression," Dar Al-Shorouk, Amman, Jordan, 2000, p. 193.
- ⁹ See: Adel Nweihed. "Encyclopedia of Algerian Personalities from the Dawn of Islam to the Present Era," Nuweihed Cultural Foundation, Beirut, Lebanon, 2nd edition, (1400 AH- 1980 AD), p. 121.
- ¹⁰ See: Mohamed Basker, "Abu Al-Qasim Muhammad Al-Hafnawi as a Journalist, Translator, and Author," Abdelhamid Ben Badis's page, Wednesday, January 9, 2019, accessed on 04/07/2021, link: <https://binbadis.net/archives/8916>
- ¹¹ See: (Previous reference).
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- ¹³ See: Previous source, pp. 07-08.
- ¹⁴ See: Previous source, p. 03.
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- ¹⁶ Previous source, p. 02.
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