

The Image of the Baghdadis in Ibn Jubayr's Travel Account: An Analytical and Comparative Study in Light of Geographical and Historical Sources

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Abstract

The descriptive discourse of the Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 AH/1217 CE) concerning the morals of the Baghdadis presents an epistemological paradox worthy of critical examination. His sharp critical descriptions appear to conflict with the positive image drawn by historians of regions and travelers regarding the people of Iraq throughout the ages. Based on this problematique, this study seeks to re-examine the image of the "Other" in Ibn Jubayr's travel account by investigating the motives behind his critical judgment and situating it within its proper historical and social context, rather than hastily attributing it to personal bias.

To achieve this objective, the study adopts a discourse analysis approach through a cross-comparative examination of Ibn Jubayr's text and the writings of his contemporaries and predecessors, such as al-Mas'ūdī, al-Maqdisī, and Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī. It also traces changes in the structure of Baghdadi society amid the political disturbances that preceded the Mongol invasion. The study concludes that Ibn Jubayr's descriptions reflect a precise field observation of deteriorating moral and social phenomena resulting from the state of social anxiety that characterized his era. This conclusion is further supported by the variation in his judgments regarding different Iraqi cities, as evidenced by his praise of Mosul and Tikrit, which refutes accusations of generalization or prejudice and confirms that his observations constituted a response to a troubled sociological and historical reality in Baghdad at the time.

Keywords: Ibn Jubayr, Baghdad, Travel Literature, Discourse Analysis, Image of the Other, Social History.

Introduction

This study is historically framed within the sixth century AH (twelfth century CE), a period that represented a transitional phase in the history of the Islamic East. This is not the first study written on Ibn Jubayr's journey to Iraq, nor is it the first to address the image of Iraqis particularly the Baghdadis in his travel account. Almost every book or article dealing with the journey of the Andalusian jurist has referred to two recurring points: first, a description of the route of the journey; and second, an expression of surprise at his remarks concerning the morals of the people of Baghdad.

If this is the case, then this study may not offer anything fundamentally new at the level of historical knowledge. However, from the perspective of discourse analysis, it may provide readers and researchers alike with a form of intellectual provocation that encourages the reconstruction of the argument and a renewed investigation into an issue that some have regarded as prejudice, others as a personal matter, and still others as an accurate portrayal offered by the greatest traveler known to al-Andalus indeed, by the individual who is often credited with laying the foundations of travel literature in Arabic, as will be discussed in its appropriate context.

On the other hand, this study seeks to combine research and interpretation. The first objective is to present a wide range of information that may benefit interested readers, carefully compiled from various classical and modern sources and references. This may either reduce the need to return to the original texts or stimulate further scholarly curiosity and investigation. The second objective constitutes the core and essence of this study, as it engages with diverse viewpoints, whether convergent or divergent, while maintaining an objective distance from them. It then raises the questions that we consider fundamental for anyone wishing to pursue further research on this issue the image of the Baghdadis in Ibn Jubayr's travel account.

On this basis, the study begins by examining the concepts of travel and travel literature. It then moves to a discussion of travel throughout human history before focusing on Arab and Muslim travelers. A separate section is devoted to Andalusian and Maghrebi travelers, followed by an examination of Ibn Jubayr's journey, its itinerary, and his observations concerning the Baghdadis. At this specific point, the study also presents the image of Iraqis as depicted by classical historians and travelers, thereby establishing a comparison between the two portrayals and formulating the questions that constitute the central horizon of this research.

First: The Concept of Travel

Numerous definitions of travel have been proposed. Given the vast abundance of such definitions, it became necessary to select what we believe comes closest to its essence. In this context, al-Shāmī considers travel to be “an individual or collective accomplishment or act, insofar as it entails crossing the barrier of distance and removing the established separation between one place and another. This accomplishment is undertaken for a specific purpose, a purpose that corresponds to human will and to the movement of life on earth, whether directly or indirectly. Travel may be a hobby that satisfies and fulfills a human need, or it may be a profession that serves and fulfills that need. In either case, it represents a direct response to specific motives and incentives that urgently call for movement and mobility.”¹

We believe that this definition encompasses all the elements associated with travel, namely: movement, purpose, form, and motivation.

As for the value of literary travel, it is manifested, according to Ḥusnī Maḥmūd, in “the materials it presents through literary styles that elevate it to the realm of literature and raise it to the level of artistic imagination.”² This means that travel writing combines both content and a distinctive style that differentiates it from other forms of writing. Since a journey is undertaken by a traveler in the real world, physically moving from one place to another, the traveler becomes “an observer and describer of what he sees.”³ From this perspective, travel is “nothing but a living human experience through which one is trained and tested ..., emerging from it with greater understanding, more accurate observation, richer culture, and deeper reflections.”⁴

This concerns travel in general. As for travel literature, Muḥammad Shafiq Afandī maintains that the first scholar to employ the term travel literature in place of simply travel was Kratchkovsky, “when he wrote about geographical literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century; this constituted its birth certificate.”⁵

According to Afifi, this literature is “the collection of literary works that deal with the author's impressions of his travels in different lands. It may include descriptions of the customs, behaviors, and morals he observed, accurate records of the natural landscapes he witnessed, accounts of the stages of his journey, or a combination of all these elements simultaneously.”⁶ From another

perspective, a travel account is that which is undertaken by a traveler to a country somewhere in the world and recorded in a description that documents his observations and impressions with a degree of accuracy, sincerity, and stylistic elegance.⁷

According to the two preceding definitions, travel literature is a work in which the author's impressions are expressed either through narration or description. These constitute the two artistic foundations of this genre and grant it its distinctive aesthetic character. This means that travel literature is a literary genre; consequently, the value of every journey lies in the fact that “it provides a subject for literary creation.”⁸ Thus, prose adopts travel as its subject matter, presenting it in a distinctive literary form, in a special language, and through an artistic structure possessing its own independent characteristics and features.⁹

Although narration, as previously noted, is one of the distinguishing features of travel literature, description remains its most prominent element. Through it, the author seeks to establish a balance “between the self and the object through a flexible content and form, with the aim of communicating with and influencing the reader.”¹⁰

Travel literature must therefore possess two essential characteristics: “first, that the person writing about journeys be naturally inclined toward travel and genuinely fond of it; and second, that he write in a style that makes his description of the journey reflect the spirit of travel and the intense desire that compels him to undertake it.”¹¹ The importance of travel literature stems from its portrayal of the writer’s encounter with a new and unfamiliar world and the impressions it leaves upon him: its people, animals, natural landscapes, and monuments.

Travel literature is thus a prose literary genre founded upon description and narration, which together constitute its independent artistic and aesthetic structure, distinct from other prose forms. Its purpose, like that of any art, is communication and influence. In artistic terms, it is “an attempt to discover the secret of things ... and to understand their composition, which sometimes resembles floating icebergs in oceans and seas, of which only one-tenth is visible while the remaining portions remain submerged beneath the water.”¹²

As for travel literature among the Arabs, Kratchkovsky argues that Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī, through his work *Tartīb al-Rihla* (Arrangement of the Journey),¹³ laid the foundation stone of travel literature.¹⁴

This concerns travel and travel literature. Regarding its benefits, we read the following statement by al-Mas‘ūdī:

“He who remains confined to his homeland, relying only on the reports that reach him from his own region, is not like one who has spent his life traversing lands, distributed his days among the vicissitudes of travel, extracting every subtle matter from its source and bringing forth every precious thing from its hidden repository.”¹⁵

What may be understood from al-Mas‘ūdī’s statement is that travel and journeys yield scientific benefits across various fields, including physical geography, economics, ethics, agriculture, and commerce,¹⁶ as well as for “historians of literature, religions, and myths. Travel accounts constitute rich sources for diverse sciences and collectively form a genuine record of the various manifestations of life and the concepts held by peoples throughout the ages.”¹⁷

Moreover, in addition to fostering an understanding of the Other, travel accounts document the diversity of civilizational features and the conditions of different peoples: their food and clothing, psychological and physical characteristics, customs and traditions, literature and architectural arts, as well as their morals, rituals, and religious practices.¹⁸

Second: Travel Accounts Throughout Human History

Human beings are travelers by nature. This has been their characteristic since their feet first touched the earth; indeed, it is an innate disposition and natural instinct bestowed upon them by God. Consequently, humans have never ceased to travel for a variety of purposes. In antiquity, Greece produced a number of travelers, the most famous of whom was Herodotus.¹⁹

The inhabitants of the vast Roman Empire also ventured far afield. Their ships reached the Canary Islands in the Atlantic Ocean, as well as India and the Far East. They likewise traversed the territories of their empire in Africa and Asia. Among the foremost of these historians was Julius Caesar.²⁰ The rulers of ancient Egypt also recorded their journeys in Asia. The expedition undertaken by the ancient Egyptians in 1493 BCE is considered one of the earliest commercial and ethnographic journeys known to history.²¹ As for the Phoenicians, they carried out major maritime expeditions, during which they “navigated the Atlantic Ocean, settled in the British Isles, and established colonies along the southern Mediterranean coast and in Spain.”²²

The Arabs inhabiting the coasts of the Arabian Peninsula had long been skilled navigators. The stories of Arab sailors, both before and after Islam, “abound with information concerning the characteristics, customs, and traditions of peoples living in distant lands such as India and China.”²³ The Holy Qur’ān also refers to the journeys of the Arabs, particularly those of Quraysh, to Yemen and Syria the journeys of winter and summer.²⁴

The Islamic era witnessed a large number of journeys owing to the expansion of the Islamic world. Muslim Arabs were passionately devoted to “traveling to distant lands, extending their vision toward far horizons, penetrating them, and crossing the heart of the desert an indication of the terrestrial, maritime, and geographical expertise possessed by the Arabs and by other neighboring peoples who embraced Islam.”²⁵

Furthermore, the expansion of the Islamic world made communication between its eastern and western regions a necessity, particularly for Maghrebi and Andalusian travelers. In fact, as we shall see, the Andalusians were more passionate about travel than many others.²⁶

Historians generally agree that the flourishing of Islamic civilization, the dominance of Muslims on land and sea, and the nature of Islam itself all served to encourage travel and exploration.²⁷

As for the writing of travel accounts, it began among the early Muslims as early as the third century AH (ninth century CE). However, they rarely recorded their journeys in independent works. Most authors incorporated accounts and reports of their travels into historical writings or geographical treatises. Travel writing in its proper literary sense may be said to have emerged during the fifth century AH (eleventh century CE).²⁸

While the fourth century AH was distinguished by the large number of travelers it produced, the sixth century AH was marked by the exceptional caliber of those travelers, the importance of the works they left behind, and the methodologies they adopted in collecting information and recording observations. This represented a major civilizational advancement in the field. Among the most renowned travelers of this century were Abū Bakr Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 542 AH/1148 CE), the first to use the term *riḥla* (journey) in the title of a work, naming his book *Tartīb al-Riḥla li al-Targhīb fi al-Millah* (“Arrangement of the Journey for Encouragement in the Faith”).²⁹ Other notable figures include Nāṣir Khusraw (d. 542 AH/1060 CE),³⁰ al-Idrīsī (d. 560 AH/1162 CE), Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 AH), under whose pen the essential features of Arabic travel literature reached maturity, and Usāmah ibn Munqidh³¹ (d. 584 AH).³²

With regard to journeys undertaken by Maghrebi travelers to the East, these were generally more numerous than journeys undertaken by Eastern travelers to the Maghreb.³³ The longing and yearning of the Maghrebis for the holy places possessed a unique character, arising from the great distance separating their lands from the Ḥijāz and from the hardships they endured in reaching it. For them, arriving at the sacred sites represented the ultimate aspiration and the fulfillment of their highest hopes.³⁴ Their travel accounts are usually classified as Ḥijāzī journeys.³⁵ These accounts have been catalogued and carefully preserved so as to remain accessible to researchers and students of knowledge.³⁶

Third: Ibn Jubayr's Travel Account

1. Ibn Jubayr and His Three Journeys

He was the distinguished man of letters, ascetic, and virtuous scholar Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Jubayr ibn Sa'īd ibn Jubayr ibn Muḥammad ibn Marwān ibn 'Abd al-Salām ibn Marwān ibn 'Abd al-Salām ibn Jubayr al-Kinānī, whose ancestor entered al-Andalus with Balj al-Qushayrī in 113 AH.³⁷ He was born in Valencia in 540 AH/1145 CE and studied under his father and other scholars of the age in Ceuta and Granada. He later entered the service of Abū Sa'īd ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min, the ruler of Granada.³⁸

Ibn Jubayr undertook three journeys, the most important of which was his first journey, recorded in *Tadhkirah bi al-Akḥbār 'an Ittifāqāt al-Asfār* ("Memoir of Reports on the Occurrences of Travels"). This journey lasted three years (578–581 AH / 1183–1185 CE).³⁹ Concerning this work, Ibn al-Khaṭīb remarked: "It is an engaging and delightful book that stirs the souls toward those landmarks."⁴⁰ Its date indicates that it took place during the period of the Crusader occupation of the Levant.⁴¹ The purpose of the journey was Ibn Jubayr's departure to the East to perform the pilgrimage.⁴²

His second journey lasted two years (585–587 AH / 1189–1191 CE) and was undertaken after Ibn Jubayr learned of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī's liberation of Jerusalem in 583 AH/1187 CE.⁴³ Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb writes:

"When the joyous news of the conquest of Jerusalem by Sultan al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb ibn Shādhī became widespread, his determination to undertake a second journey was strengthened. He departed Granada on Thursday, the ninth day of Rabī' al-Awwal in the year 585 AH, and returned to Granada on Thursday, the thirteenth day of Sha'bān in the year 587 AH."⁴⁴

As for his third journey, he undertook it to the East in his old age. The death of his wife had deeply saddened him, and after this journey he never returned to al-Andalus. He remained in Alexandria until his death in 614 AH/1217 CE. It should be noted that only the details of his first journey have survived in a separate work, which he composed after his return in 581 AH/1185 CE.⁴⁵

Regarding Ibn Jubayr's character, Ibn al-Khaṭīb states:

"He was a brilliant man of letters, an accomplished poet, an upright Sunni scholar, noble in aspiration, refined in spirit, generous in character, and elegant in handwriting. Correspondence took place between him and a number of the literary figures of his age, through which his brilliance and mastery became evident. His virtues were many, his reputation renowned, and his travel account unparalleled in its kind, spreading far and wide. May God have mercy upon him."⁴⁶

2. Ibn Jubayr's Journey to Iraq

Ibn Jubayr provides a masterful description of the road to Mecca, detailing its stopping places and watering stations. He then proceeds to depict the Iraqi cities, beginning with Kufa.⁴⁷ He continues

his descriptions and observations of the lands through which he traveled until he reaches Baghdad on the third of Şafar in the year 580 AH. He devoted a lengthy chapter to this city.⁴⁸

Concerning the significance of this journey, Ḥusnī Maḥmūd Ḥasan states that through it Ibn Jubayr “elevated this form of literary composition to a high level, prompting many scholars to regard it as one of the highest achievements attained by travel writing in Arabic literature. Geographers, historians, and later travelers greatly benefited from it and admired its eloquent expressions.”⁴⁹

Regarding Ibn Jubayr’s style, he adds that it “is characterized by great vitality and ease of expression. His overall presentation seeks refinement and elegance, and he frequently employs rhymed prose, which he handles with considerable skill without excessive affectation or burdening the reader with difficulty in comprehension. He also enriches his writing with literary quotations and subtle allusions, requiring a certain degree of knowledge and learning on the part of the reader in order to be fully appreciated.”⁵⁰

Al-Shawābkh likewise observes that although the travel account is predominantly geographical and descriptive in nature, it was written in a graceful literary style that reflects Ibn Jubayr’s literary talent.⁵¹

From these observations, the following conclusions may be drawn:

A) At the level of content, Ibn Jubayr’s travel account is distinguished by its sincerity and truthfulness, qualities consistent with a pious and ascetic jurist.

B) At the artistic level, it represents a model of expressive elegance and stylistic beauty.

C) In terms of value within its genre, it stands as one of the highest achievements of Arabic travel literature.

If this is indeed the case, then how are we to understand what Ibn Jubayr wrote about the Baghdadis remarks that some have considered prejudiced and others excessively harsh, as noted earlier and as will become apparent later?

In order to place Ibn Jubayr’s observations concerning the Baghdadis of Iraq within their proper historical context, it is necessary to recall what some of the most prominent classical authors wrote about them before and after Ibn Jubayr that is, both before and after 612 AH.

A) The Image of the Iraqis in the Writings of Those Who Preceded Ibn Jubayr (Examples: al-Mas‘ūdī, al-Maqdisī, and al-Bakrī)

Al-Mas‘ūdī (283–346 AH) states in *Murūj al-Dhahab*, beginning with Iraq:

“Iraq is the beacon of the East, the navel and heart of the earth. To it the waters descend; within it verdure is sustained; and there equilibrium comes to rest. Thus the temperaments of its people became refined, their minds subtle, their thoughts acute, and their joys abundant. From this emerged intelligence and shrewdness; their intellects grew strong and their insights became firm. Iraq is the heart of the earth, chosen since ancient times. It is the key to the East, the pathway of light, and the delight of the eye. Its cities are al-Madā’in and the lands surrounding it. Its people possess the most balanced complexions, the purest fragrances, the finest temperaments, and the most receptive dispositions. In them are gathered the virtues and the qualities of benevolence. Its merits are many owing to the purity of its substance, the pleasantness of its breeze, the moderation of its soil, the abundance bestowed upon it, and the prosperity of life within it. God has divided the earth into regions and favored some over others; among them Iraq is the most excellent. It is the master of horizons and has been inhabited by generations and nations endowed with perfection.”⁵²

In *al-Tanbīh wa al-Ishrāf*, he further praises the Iraqis, considering them to be:

“People of sound intellects, praiseworthy desires, balanced dispositions, and excellence in every craft. Their bodily forms are well proportioned, their humors balanced, and their complexions of a moderate brown hue the most balanced and temperate of colors. The moderation of their internal constitutions is evident from the complexion visible upon them and from the harmony of their physical forms. They are among the most handsome of people in appearance and countenance, the most complete in forbearance and understanding, and they are the people of knowledge and virtue.”⁵³

In Aḥsan al-Taqaṣīm, al-Maqdisī (336–380 AH) writes that the Iraqis possess:

“Distinctive qualities and elegance, intelligence and refinement; a delicate climate and profound knowledge. Every excellence is found there, every beauty resides within it, every skilled person emerges from it, every refinement belongs to it, and every heart is drawn toward it.”⁵⁴

Likewise, al-Bakrī (404–487 AH) writes that Iraq is the heart of the earth and the pathway of light, the seat of splendor, and that its people possess the most balanced complexions and the clearest minds.⁵⁵

B) The Image of the Iraqis in the Writings of Those Who Came After Ibn Jubayr (Examples: Yāqūt, al-Ya‘qūbī, al-Ḥimyarī, and Ibn Ḥawqal)

Yāqūt (574–626 AH) transmitted from al-Aṣma‘ī the statement:

“The gardens of this world are three: the Ghūṭa of Damascus, the river of Balkh, and the river of al-Ubulla. The foul places of the world are five: al-Ubulla, Sīrāf, ‘Umān, Ardabīl, and Hīt.”⁵⁶

Al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 897 AH), in his history, devoted a section to the Iraqis, beginning with the openness and brilliance of their minds:

“Until they surpassed other peoples in knowledge and understanding, literature and reflection, discernment, commerce, industry, acquisition, mastery of every craft, perfection of every profession, and excellence in every trade. There is no scholar more learned than their scholar, no reciter more knowledgeable than their reciter, no physician more skilled than their physician, no musician more accomplished than their musician, no artisan more refined than their artisan, no scribe more proficient than their scribe, no speech more eloquent than theirs, no worshipper more devout than their worshipper, no ascetic more awe-inspiring than their ascetic, no judge more learned than their judge, no orator more eloquent than their orator, no poet more gifted than their poet, and no libertine more daring than their libertine.”⁵⁷

Regarding Iraq and its inhabitants, al-Ḥimyarī (d. 900 AH) writes:

“Its climate is temperate, its soil pleasant, and its water sweet. The morals of its people became refined, their faces radiant, and their minds open, until they excelled over other peoples.”⁵⁸

Ibn Ḥawqal (943–988 CE) regarded Iraq as:

“The greatest of the regions of the earth in status, the most distinguished in quality, the richest in revenues, the most abundant in income, the finest in people, the wealthiest in resources, the most admirable in virtues, and the most outstanding in craftsmanship. As for its inhabitants, they are the most abundant in intellect, the broadest in forbearance, and the keenest in insight.”⁵⁹

What Conclusions Can Be Drawn from This Survey?

The first observation that may be recorded is that all the authors mentioned above spoke of the Iraqis in general terms as Iraqis. None devoted a specific discussion to the Baghdadis in the manner of Ibn Jubayr.

A second point is that, whether the authors preceded Ibn Jubayr or came after him, they all except Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī established a connection between the nature of Iraq and the character of its inhabitants, as though they were describing a direct influence of the environment upon human beings.

The common denominator among them regarding the nature of Iraq was the moderation of its climate and soil, the sweetness of its water, and the pleasantness of its breeze. These factors were believed to affect complexion, physique, temperament, intellect, mental capacity, and craftsmanship. Al-Ḥimyarī alone explicitly employed the term “morals,” stating: “Their morals became refined.”

3. The Baghdadis as Seen by Ibn Jubayr

Before examining Ibn Jubayr’s portrayal of the Baghdadis, two preliminary observations should be noted:

A) Like the other authors who wrote about Iraq, Ibn Jubayr first discussed the nature and condition of the land before turning to its inhabitants. This appears to have been a common literary convention among classical writers when describing cities and regions.

He described Kufa as follows:

“It is a large and ancient city, most of which has fallen into ruin. Its deserted areas exceed its inhabited ones. Among the causes of its decline is the neighboring tribe of Khafāja, which continues to inflict harm upon it.”⁶⁰

Just as he described al-Ḥillah, he also described Baghdad, stating:

“It is the ancient city which, although it remains the seat of the ‘Abbāsīd Caliphate and the center of the Qurashī Hāshimī Imamate, has lost most of its former features. Nothing remains of it except its famous name. Compared with what it once was before the blows of time bent it and before the calamities of fate turned their gaze upon it, it resembles a deserted ruin, an effaced trace, or the standing image of a fading vision. There is no beauty in it that arrests the eye or compels the thoughtful observer to pause.”⁶¹

He later returned to describe its western quarter:

“As for the western side, ruin has overwhelmed and dominated it, although it was formerly the inhabited part.”⁶²

Regarding the eastern side, he wrote:

“The construction of the eastern side is relatively recent; yet despite the prevalence of ruin, it contains seventeen quarters, each of which is like an independent city.”⁶³

He also described the city of Sāmarrā’ (Surr Man Ra’ā), saying:

“Today it is truly a lesson for whoever beholds it: where are its al-Mu‘tašim, its al-Wāthiq, and its al-Mutawakkil? A great city over which ruin has prevailed, except for certain areas that remain inhabited today ... nothing remains of its former splendors except their traces.”⁶⁴

The most significant observation to be made here is the pervasive image of decline and ruin that characterized the Iraqi cities visited by Ibn Jubayr.

B) Ibn Jubayr, like the other authors from whom we have cited descriptions of Iraq and its people, customarily discussed the inhabitants of a locality immediately after completing his description of its physical setting, a point to which we shall return in due course.

As for the people of Baghdad the central issue of this study Ibn Jubayr writes:

“As for its inhabitants, one scarcely encounters among them anyone who does not affect humility out of hypocrisy while inwardly swelling with self-admiration and pride. They look down upon strangers and display arrogance and haughtiness toward those whom they consider beneath them. They belittle the reports and traditions of all others and imagine in their minds and convictions that the whole world is insignificant in comparison with their city. They deem no dwelling in the inhabited world worthy of honor except their own, as though they believed that God had created neither lands nor people besides themselves. They trail their garments in vanity and conceit, yet do not seek to

remove wrongdoing for God's sake. They imagine that the height of glory lies in dragging one's robe, unaware that, according to the transmitted Prophetic tradition, its reward is the Fire. They lend gold to one another on interest, while few among them properly observe the obligations imposed by God. In that city, one hears of nothing but a dinar lent out, only to be presented before the scales diminished in weight. Rarely does one find among its distinguished inhabitants a person of piety and chastity, nor among those responsible for weights and measures anyone who has not earned the warning contained in *Sūrat al-Muṭaffifīn*. They are unconcerned by such faults, as though they were remnants of Madyan, the people of the Prophet Shu'ayb. A stranger among them finds no kindness, only increasing expenses; he encounters nothing but hypocrisy in his dealings, or friendliness motivated by personal benefit and self-interest. It is as though they had collectively agreed upon this reprehensible trait as a condition for mutual harmony among themselves. Thus, the unpleasantness of their conduct outweighs the favorable reports heard concerning their city and its people."⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Ibn Jubayr excluded from this criticism the jurists, scholars of ḥadīth, and preachers. He spoke of them in terms befitting their status and described some of their scholarly gatherings, including that of Raḍī al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī. He also attended the lectures of Ibn al-Jawzī and spoke favorably of both men.

Concerning al-Qazwīnī, for example, he wrote:

"The first scholarly gathering we attended among them was that of the Imām Shaykh Raḍī al-Dīn al-Qazwīnī, leader of the Shāfi'īs, jurist of the Niẓāmiyyah School, and the foremost authority in the foundational sciences."⁶⁶

At this stage, we are confronted with several legitimate questions, some of which may be formulated as follows:

Were the morals and social conduct of the Baghdadis different from those of their fellow Iraqis during that period? If so, how may this difference be explained?

If we compare the image of the Iraqis presented by authors who preceded Ibn Jubayr with that offered by those who came after him, we find a portrayal that differs considerably from that found in his travel account. Was Ibn Jubayr's era therefore an exceptional period in the moral and social history of Baghdad? If so, what factors produced this exception?

Do Ibn Jubayr's descriptions of the gatherings of repentance, which were attended by large numbers of Baghdadis, actually corroborate his depiction of their "poor morals"? After all, those who came before a shaykh or jurist to repent were seeking to abandon forms of behavior they themselves considered blameworthy.

Since Ibn Jubayr's journey took place during a period characterized by political instability and military pressures that afflicted the 'Abbāsid state in its later years, as well as increasing tensions in the East in the decades preceding the Mongol invasion of Baghdad, can the descriptions he provided of the Baghdadis be regarded as a natural reaction within a society experiencing a state of existential anxiety? A society that sensed threats to its civilizational identity and the decline of its influence may have turned inward upon itself, producing forms of defensive or elitist behavior that Ibn Jubayr viewing matters through the lens of an ascetic Andalusian jurist interpreted as arrogance and hypocrisy.

Or was the matter, quite simply, a consequence of the perspective of an Andalusian jurist unfamiliar with the character of Easterners in general and Baghdadis in particular? In that case, might the differences between the two environments and cultures have been responsible for this "distorted"

image if the term may be used especially given that he remained in Baghdad for no more than thirteen days?

Or was his portrayal indeed the result of prejudice and excessive severity stemming from a personal grievance? If so, how could such a judgment have come from a pious ascetic jurist whose integrity, righteousness, and truthfulness were acknowledged by both scholars and ordinary people alike?

These are legitimate questions that we seek to approach through a close reading of Ibn Jubayr's travel account and by attempting to connect its various parts to one another. Before doing so, however, it is useful to present the opinions of some scholars concerning Ibn Jubayr's description of the Baghdadis.

Shawqī Ḍayf regarded it as "a severe prejudice against the people of Baghdad."⁶⁷ He further considered it to be "an excessively harsh condemnation, which in all likelihood stemmed from personal causes. A historian, however, ought to set aside personal inclinations when judging a people."⁶⁸

Similarly, Zakī Muḥammad Muḥsin stated that:

"Ibn Jubayr was harsh toward the people of Baghdad, in a manner reminiscent of the harshness of the physician Ibn Riḍwān (6th century AH/12th century CE) toward the Egyptians in general, when he exaggerated in describing them as cowardly, miserly, and the like, to the point of observing that their dogs were less courageous and their beasts weaker than those found in other regions."⁶⁹

On the other hand, Aḥmad Ramaḍān viewed Ibn Jubayr's travel account as "the most truthful mirror of the age in which its author lived."⁷⁰ Likewise, Ḥusayn Mu'nis described it as "the finest testimony ever provided by an eyewitness among those who wrote about the Crusades."⁷¹ As is well known, Ibn Jubayr's travels coincided with the era of the Crusades. If this assessment is accepted, then his portrayal of the Baghdadis can hardly be dismissed as prejudice, harshness, or excessive severity.

Moreover, Ibn Jubayr was not the only author to describe the Baghdadis or Iraqis more generally in such unfavorable terms. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī states, referring to the Iraqis:

"Treachery predominates among them because of the abundance of wicked people and the deceptions of day and night ... Their people are especially known for their dislike of strangers, particularly foreigners."⁷²

Could it be that the Baghdadis regarded Ibn Jubayr as an outsider and therefore displayed toward him the behavior that he subsequently described?

After this necessary digression, we return to Ibn Jubayr's travel account in the hope of shedding further light on this problem. The discussion may be organized in the form of observations and questions:

1. If Ibn Jubayr was indeed prejudiced against the Baghdadis or excessively harsh in describing them, it is noteworthy that elsewhere in the same travel account he offers a highly favorable image of the people of Mosul. He writes:

"The people of this town follow a commendable way of life and practice acts of charity. One encounters among them only cheerful faces and gentle words. They show generosity toward strangers and welcome them warmly, and they display fairness in all their dealings."⁷³

Likewise, he remarks concerning the people of Tikrit:

"Its inhabitants possess better morals and greater fairness in weights and measures than the people of Baghdad."⁷⁴

2. When Ibn Jubayr attended the gatherings of religious exhortation, he painted a vivid picture of those seeking repentance and spiritual renewal. Referring to the preachers, orators, and religious admonishers whom he explicitly exempted from his criticism he writes:

“May God forgive me, except for their jurists who transmit traditions and their preachers who remind the people. Truly, through their methods of exhortation and admonition, their continual efforts at guidance and enlightenment, and their perseverance in warning and cautioning against fearsome punishment, they occupy stations that bring down upon them God’s mercy, removing many of their burdens, extending the mantle of forgiveness over their faults, and preventing overwhelming calamity from descending upon their land. Yet despite all this, they strike cold iron and attempt to split solid rocks. Hardly a Friday passes without a preacher speaking among them, while the fortunate among them spend all their days in gatherings of remembrance. In this they adhere to a blessed and established practice.”⁷⁵

While describing the assembly of al-Qazwīnī, he writes:

“The fervor of his exhortation penetrated souls until it caused them to soar in humility and overflow with tears. The repentant hastened to throw themselves before him. How many forelocks were shorn, and how many hearts among the penitents were pierced and moved by the sermon! Through the station of such a blessed shaykh, sinners receive mercy, offenders are enveloped in forgiveness, and divine protection and salvation are sustained.”⁷⁶

Following one of Ibn al-Jawzī’s sermons, he records:

“A great uproar arose, and the penitents cried out loudly, falling upon him as moths fall upon a lamp. Each person presented his forelock with his own hand to be shorn, while the preacher passed his hand over his head in supplication. Some fainted and were carried to him in the arms of others. We witnessed an awe-inspiring scene that filled souls with repentance and remorse and reminded them of the terrors of the Day of Resurrection.”⁷⁷

Before recording our final observations, it is necessary to undertake a brief reading of Ibn Jubayr’s descriptions of the Baghdadis.

Some scholars who have analyzed Ibn Jubayr’s travel account have objected to his characterization of the Baghdadis, basing their criticism on two principal points. First, his descriptions do not correspond to those provided by earlier geographers and historians, nor even to those offered by later writers. Second, his stay in Baghdad lasted no more than thirteen days.

On the one hand, such an objection may appear reasonable in light of these two considerations. Yet Ibn Jubayr’s judgment of the Baghdadis’ character did not necessarily require a prolonged residence among them. In terms of commercial interactions, a single tour through one of Baghdad’s markets could have sufficed to produce such impressions. Likewise, manifestations of pride and ostentation do not require an extended period of observation to become apparent.

On the other hand, a close examination of Ibn Jubayr’s activities in Baghdad reveals no contradiction in his account that would justify viewing it as an act of prejudice, at least not on the basis of the evidence available. In addition to being an ascetic and a man of piety, Ibn Jubayr was also a jurist. This circumstance led him to attend gatherings of religious exhortation and moral instruction. During these gatherings, he describes both the Baghdadis who attended them and the preachers who led them, and neither image fundamentally contradicts his broader characterization of the city’s inhabitants.

The preachers, in his view, occupied multiple spiritual stations not merely a single one in “the practice of exhortation and admonition, the continual effort of guidance and enlightenment, and

perseverance in warning, cautioning, and instilling fear.” In other words, they employed every available means of moral and religious deterrence. This suggests that they themselves were aware of a deteriorating moral condition among the Baghdadis, manifested in forms of conduct inconsistent with religious values.

Indeed, these preachers, fearing the consequences of the people's behavior, sought to invoke for them “God’s mercy, which would lighten many of their burdens, draw the mantle of forgiveness over their evil deeds, and prevent devastating calamity from descending upon their dwellings.” In other words, the jurists and preachers perceived the actions of the Baghdadis as sins deserving divine punishment in this world and the next, much like the earlier peoples mentioned in the Qur’ān who were struck by calamities as a consequence of what their own hands had earned.

From another perspective, the Baghdadis appear, in Ibn Jubayr’s account, to attend these gatherings only superficially and for appearances' sake, reflecting the same hypocrisy and ostentation that he believed characterized their dealings with strangers and with one another. Although the preachers occupied numerous stations of guidance and instruction, they were, as he put it, “striking cold iron” or attempting “to split solid rocks.” Despite the fact that “hardly a Friday passed without a preacher delivering an exhortation,” only the truly fortunate among them remained steadfast in gatherings of remembrance throughout their lives. The implication is clear: there was neither a receptive heart for the admonition nor an attentive ear for the reminder.

When Ibn Jubayr writes of al-Qazwīnī that “the fervor of his exhortation penetrated souls until it caused them to soar in humility and overflow with tears, and the penitents hastened to throw themselves before him,” this description does not merely indicate the popularity of the preacher. It also contains a clear indication of the social reality of Baghdad, where, according to Ibn Jubayr’s own terminology, “sinners” and “offenders” were numerous.

The same image reappears in his account of Ibn al-Jawzī’s assembly, where he witnessed “an awe-inspiring scene that filled souls with repentance and remorse and reminded them of the terrors of the Day of Resurrection.” A soul is not filled with “terror,” nor overcome by “remorse,” except when it perceives itself as having committed wrongdoing.

Thus, Ibn Jubayr’s descriptions of the Baghdadis within these religious gatherings appear entirely consistent with his descriptions of them outside those gatherings. There is no evident contradiction in his account.

The lingering question remains: how did the Baghdadis acquire these characteristics during this particular period of their history, especially when their fellow Iraqis in Mosul and Tikrit, according to Ibn Jubayr himself, differed from them so markedly?

The moral portrait drawn by the traveler bears little resemblance to the “assemblage of virtues and qualities of beneficence” or the “balanced dispositions” described by al-Mas’ūdī. Nor does it correspond to al-Ya’qūbī’s assertion that among them were found “the most devout worshippers, the most inspiring ascetics, and the most learned judges.” Likewise, it seems far removed from the “good morals” later attributed to them by al-Ḥimyarī.

Yet some elements of Ibn Jubayr’s account appear closer to what Yāqūt had observed when he remarked that “treachery predominates among them because of the abundance of wicked people and the deceptions of day and night,” and that “their people are particularly known for their dislike of strangers, especially foreigners.”

This observation by Yāqūt particularly his remark concerning hostility toward strangers may be especially useful in understanding Ibn Jubayr’s testimony. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī (574–626 AH) was a

contemporary of Ibn Jubayr (540–614 AH) for approximately twelve years, and it is difficult to regard the similarity between their descriptions as mere coincidence.

This consideration lends further legitimacy to the question posed earlier, which may now be reformulated as follows: How are we to explain the character of the Baghdadis as described by Ibn Jubayr, a traveler renowned for his truthfulness, piety, and asceticism?

The answer to this question lies beyond the scope of the present study. This is not an evasion of the issue, but rather an acknowledgment that it properly belongs to the domain of general historical inquiry, or more precisely, to the field of anthropology.

The most important observations that may be recorded concerning Ibn Jubayr's portrayal of the Baghdadis, and concerning the assessments offered by scholars who have discussed his account (at least those upon whom this study has relied), are the following:

1) It is difficult to believe that a traveler whose honesty was acknowledged by both classical and modern scholars would deliberately choose the path of prejudice against the people of Baghdad. Consequently, the characteristics he attributed to them should be understood within the context of the impressions they left upon him, even though an impression does not necessarily constitute an objective representation of the Other.

2) There is no evidence that Ibn Jubayr harbored negative feelings toward Iraqis in general. On the contrary, he praised the inhabitants of Mosul and Tikrit and even drew an explicit comparison between the people of Tikrit and those of Baghdad, a comparison whose implications are self-evident.

3) Ibn Jubayr described the preaching assemblies of both al-Qazwīnī and Ibn al-Jawzī, emphasizing above all the arrival of people seeking repentance and spiritual renewal. While repentance does not necessarily imply previous wrongdoing, the image he presents of these gatherings suggests a powerful desire among attendees to abandon forms of conduct that, after hearing the sermons, they had come to recognize as inconsistent with Islamic values.

4) Finally, an important observation must be noted: Ibn Jubayr mentions such preaching assemblies only in Baghdad. Their prevalence suggests, at least in our view, that the preachers and moral exhorters recognized the existence of a widespread ethical and moral disorder within Baghdadi society.

5) By saying this, however, we do not imply that the Baghdadis themselves consciously recognized this moral disorder as being contrary to the Sharī'ah and the ethical teachings of Islam. It is possible instead as suggested earlier that the phenomenon reflected a psychological condition produced by wounded dignity and collective pride, both of which had suffered greatly as a result of struggles for political power and sectarian conflict. These conflicts had left Iraq in general, and Baghdad in particular, deeply scarred, despite the city's status as the greatest center of learning known to the Arab East and, indeed, to the Islamic world as a whole.

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