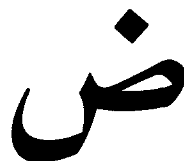
Crossings and Passages in Genre and Culture

Hg. von Christian Szyska und Friederike Pannewick



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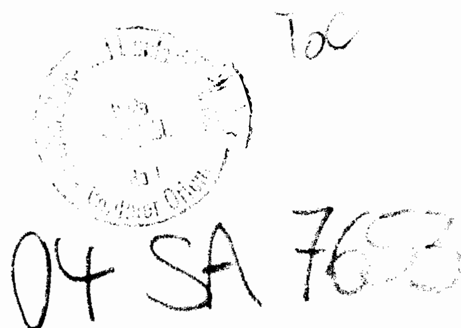

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Arabic Travelogues from the Mashrek 1700-1834.
A Preliminary Survey of the Genre's Development

Ralf Elger

In the year 1826 the Egyptian ruler Muḥammad ʿAlī sent a number of honorable men to Paris in order to study European culture, sciences and technology. Rifāʿa aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī (1801-1873), a young Islamic scholar from a rather poor family of the town of Ṭahṭā in Upper Egypt[1], accompanied the group as a moral and spiritual adviser, also being entitled to study in Paris what he did with great eagerness. Rifāʿa described this journey in his famous book "Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz" (The refining of gold and the short description of Paris) which was printed 1834 in Cairo and translated from the original Arabic version into Turkish five years later.[2] Until the middle of the 19th century it remained the only report of an Arab traveler visiting a European country and had a considerable influence on the oriental images of the West.

In writing about aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī's travelogue one can refer to a well-established tradition of research that generally considers "Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz" as the beginning of modern Arabic travel literature, in some cases even of Arabic literature in general. Several reasons for this have been mentioned: The first is that aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī employed European modes of geographical writing which were unknown among Arab authors until then. Earlier Arabic travel reports mostly tell the story of a journey in a chronological form, sometimes day by day in the manner of a diary. Rifāʿa uses this style as well, but only in the beginning of his text, in the report about the group's journey from Cairo to France, and again in the end when he describes the way back to Egypt. The major part though is dedicated to a systematic description of France, especially of the city of Paris. Several passages deal with the everyday life of the French people, others with the scientific disciplines that were taught in the universities. Rifāʿa found a model for this textual organization probably in the "Aperçu historique sur les moeurs et coutumes des nations" by Georges-Bernard Depping (1784-1853), a text that was published in Paris in 1826 and that aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī translated into Arabic in 1829.[3]

Secondly, aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī is said to have changed Arabic literary style from within. In contrast to other contemporary writers who used classical Arabic, he adopted the colloquial language as basic narrative idiom because it had more of the flexibility necessary to describe the various aspects of the life in Paris.[4] In those cases in which he employed classical Arabic writing, it was a mere concession to the taste of his readership. The reading public of the early 19th century also expected to find in a travelogue a number of poems and, very important, rhymed prose that documented the literary competence of the author.[5]

1 For the biography of aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī see e.g. Delanoue 1982: II, 384ff.

2 For this paper I use the edition of Maḥmūd Fahmī Ḥijāzī that is part of his book "Uṣūl al-fikr". A French translation has been presented by Anouar Louca, a German one by Karl Stowasser.

3 Najīb 1981: 27; Delanoue 1982: 620.

4 Stowasser gives a very detailed account of its linguistic features (1968: 29f.).

5 Stowasser 1968: 23.

Rifāʿa shows this competence in many passages of his text, for instance in the title where he constructs even a double rhyme: "Takhlīṣ al-ibrīz fī talkhīṣ Bārīz".[6]

A third statement runs counter to the second one. In an article about aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī's prose style as-Sayyid ascribes the literary change that the travelogue stands for to a renewal of classical models of Arabic narrative writing, represented by authors like al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 869) or at-Tanūkhī (d. 994). They, according to as-Sayyid, gave their texts an entertaining touch by a number of vivid descriptions and dialogues, and this inspired aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī to use a fresh language and to write an often pretty readable prose as well.[7]

All three positions agree on one point, namely that aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī's text does not belong to the tradition of Arabic travel reports of the 18th century, but rather breaks with it. This thesis is consistent with a general paradigm of Arabic literary historiography stating that the classical period of Arabic literature faded out in the 14th century and was followed by a long phase of decline stretching from around 1400 to 1800. In the 18th century, when Europe experienced a period of fully fledged enlightenment and invented not only new forms of traveling but of travel writing as well, the Middle Easterners still rested in their self sufficient scholastic literary traditions. Only in the beginning of the 19th century, European models of writing inspired Arab authors to search for new ways of literary expression.[8]

But there is one problem with this view on Arabic literary history in general and the travelogues in particular. The 18th century texts are not very well known until now, most of them are not edited, let alone analyzed. So it is difficult to say what is new in the text of aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī, what originates from classical Arabic literature, and what from 18th century tradition. In this paper I am not able to advance a satisfying answer to this question, only some aspects of 18th century Arabic travel writing shall be discussed. Secondly, I will present excerpts from the texts in order to give both the specialist and the non-specialist reader an impression how these travelogues look like. My aim is to show that they generally do not fit into the negative picture of the genre constructed by literary historiography and that, at least in terms of literary style, many of them are not very different from aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī's book.

I have to make several remarks in the beginning: What I am going to say will concern travelogues from the Mashrek, i.e. the Asian regions of the Arab world, and Egypt. Excluded are texts by authors from the Maghreb, the North African lands west of Egypt.[9] Secondly, I will not deal with texts written by Arab Christians.[10] Thirdly, I consider all texts as "travelogues" which consist of a first person narrative of one or more journeys and which the author or the copyist either name with the Arabic term *riḥla*, meaning "travel" as well as "travelogue", or with similar terms like *safar* or *siyāḥa*.

6 For other traditional literary features of the text see Wagner 2000.
7 as-Sayyid 1993: 259.
8 Stowasser 1968: 3.
9 See for those texts e.g. El Moudden 1990.
10 See for some of these ʿĀnūtī 1971: 221 f, Kilpatrick 1997.

The travelers

The genre of Arabic travelogues in the 18th century is characterized by a remarkable variety. One aspect of this are the different personalities of the travelers or, better, the first person narrators in the texts.[11] None of them presents himself as a ruler or a merchant.[12] Also the figure of the scientific explorer, characteristic for European enlightenment, does not appear among the Arab travelers of the 18th century. Instead they belonged to three other categories. Some of them were *udabā'* (sing. *adīb*), a term not easy to translate. Generally speaking, it means a cultivated man of letters who has a broad range of knowledge, but is especially interested in poetry and certain prose genres, the travelogue, the *maqāma* (short stories in a highly elaborated rhymed prose), historical and moralistic treatises. An example of this type of intellectual is the traveler Murtaḍā al-Kurdī.[13] As an officer in the service of the governor of Damascus, and later the governor of Egypt, he belonged, like a number of other *udabā'*, to the administrative-military class of the Ottoman Empire. Another *adīb* was something like a boon companion of a higher Ottoman officer with whom he traveled from Istanbul to Edirne (Anonymous). Other *udabā'* among the travelers of the 18th century were not connected to the sphere of a court, but to the circles of religious scholars (*'ulamā'*, sing. *'ālim*) and the Sufis (Islamic mystics), (al-Adhamī, al-Laqīmī, al-Mūsawī). But although these persons worked as a judge, a legal adviser, an official in a mosque or were active in a Sufi-brotherhood for at least a limited period of their life, it is important to emphasize that an *adīb* was not so much defined by his profession but moreover by his literary capabilities.

On the other hand, some of the travelers, in their self-presentation, stress their scholarly and especially mystical position though they also show vivid literary interests. They represent the second category of authors discussed in this paper. An-Nābulusī, the leading contemporary mystical philosopher, belonged to it as well as al-Bakrī[14] who guided a number of mystical adepts. Finally, the third category of travelers was characterized by a certain knowledge of the religious and literary sciences and pursued also mystical activities, but they belonged to a rather low stratum of intellectuals and did not produce other texts beside one travelogue (Ṭāhā al-Kurdī, al-Laṭīfī).

Routes and motives for traveling

Most of the travelers' itineraries were restricted to the eastern Ottoman Empire, the area between Istanbul, Cairo, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Iranian border which was in these

11 Often we have no other information about the life of the authors than those included in their travelogues. In these cases it is not possible to check their self-presentation in these texts with other material. It is to be taken into account, when I say that a traveler did this or that, that I refer to his report.

12 This is a difference to Turkish travelogues. See for these Vatin 1995.

13 See Elger 2000 b. For the authors and their travelogues see the first part of the bibliography at the end of this paper.

14 See Elger 2000 a.

times *grosso modo* marked by the river Tigris. The reasons for this are different, according to the character of the neighboring lands. Iran, to begin with the eastern border, represented for the travelers, who were all Sunni Muslims, a foreign and hostile country inhabited by Shiite apostates. Only a few went there, among them the only one who was, like aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī, on an official mission. I am speaking about the ʿAbd Allāh as-Suwaidī from Baghdad who in the year 1747 was sent to the city of Najaf by an Ottoman pasha in order to lead a theological disputation with Shiite scholars.[15] Another traveler who crossed the border, Muṣṭafā al-Laṭīfī, presents himself as a fearless fighter for the true Sunnite faith who has violent struggles with Shiites.

Al-Laṭīfī's text, in some aspects quite exceptional among 18th century travelogues, is the only one that describes journeys to India, to the Balkans, Tataristan, Yemen and Ethiopia, as well as to the Maghreb. The other travelers apparently saw no reason to visit these lands. They were not globetrotters like al-Laṭīfī, but had rather limited motives for their journeys. Among these, the pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina was particularly important (Ibn al-ʿAlawān; an-Nābulusī), also the visit of the tombs of prophets, famous scholars and holy men that are scattered all over the Middle East (al-Bakrī; an-Nābulusī). Especially attractive for Islamic mystics, but also for other believers, was the tomb of the famous saint ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Kīlānī (d. 1166) in Baghdad.

Places like these could obviously not be found in non-Islamic countries. But even the Islamic Maghreb with its large amount of tombs was not attractive enough for the pilgrim-travelers to go there. One reason for this may have been that the pilgrimage represented just one motive for their journeys, and not the most important one. Regularly the travelers also searched for scientific discourses with scholars whom they often encountered in a *majlis*, an informal meeting where also food and drinks was served. An-Nābulusī gives the following account of such an event that took place in a Sufi lodge of the Maulawiyya order (the dancing dervishes) in Tripolis/Lebanon:

> I went there and saw the beauties of the place and the splendid buildings. A number of friends were present, distinguished men and notables. I had scientific discourses and literary discussions with them. Also songs where sung that pleased the ear and jokes where told that roamed around like the waves of the sea(an-Nābulusī: At-tuḥfa an-nābulusiyya, 74)

Though such meetings were also common in other parts of the Muslim world the travelers described in this article definitely preferred the eastern Arab lands. They did not visit the Maghreb countries with their important schools for higher education – like the Zaitūna in Tunis or the Qarawiyyīn in Fez – and their famous scholars, most probably because they regarded the western Islamic culture as inferior compared to their own. Even less they esteemed the Islamic lands in Black Africa, the Balkans and India. The Sufi masters outside the Mashrek were also not visited by the easterners who instead regarded Jerusalem (al-Laqīmī), Mecca (al-Laṭīfī), and Cairo (al-Bakrī: An-niḥla an-naṣriyya) as the main Sufi centers.

Generally the search for a spiritual master was an important motive for traveling. Less common were, the other way round, the journeys of a master in order to initiate and edu-

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15 Fattah 1998: 56.

cate adepts at different places (al-Bakrī). Some travelers, like Murtaḍā al-Kurdī, had more practical motives:

> God decided that I had to leave my home. My problems and my misery aggravated and my sorrows grew. The door of pleasure was closed for me and my situation became really bad, in a way that the poor and the rich hated me and my house emptied. (Murtaḍā al-Kurdī, 1b)

The reason for the hardships was a large group of his creditors and other enemies in his hometown Damascus. After they had destroyed Murtaḍā's social position there he had to look for a new one abroad. But he was ready to make the best out of this crisis and enjoyed the journey because he could satisfy his curiosity for new and interesting things.

In a similar way some of the other travelers mention their curiosity to see foreign places and people. But this is never advanced as the sole motive. Al-Laqīmī from Dimyāṭ in Egypt who says in the beginning of his travelogue that he left his home because of curiosity later adds that his real intention was to visit a Sufi master in Jerusalem. Other authors explicitly state that traveling could be a rather frivolous passion if it was not motivated by serious reasons. In this respect al-Laṭīfī makes clear that he undertook his long journeys only on his spiritual master's command, and al-Bakrī, before he traveled, normally waited for a favorite oracle. One example is his first journey from Damascus to Jerusalem in the year 1709 that was preceded by the following event:

> Often I felt eagerness and desire to visit Jerusalem that is a good place. But my fate hindered me until the time was ripe to go there. ... One day I sat with my master ʿAbd al-Laṭīf when suddenly two verses came to my mind announcing the future journey that was not yet planned that time. This happened two or three years before my master died. I recited the verses:
>
> - We are the people of Jerusalem * and the most holy place.
>
> - The meeting place of the nearness to god gives us shelter, * in the elevated sphere (i.e. the holy city of Jerusalem) is my meeting place.
>
> The shaikh prayed that these words would come true ... In the following night I heard the verses in a dream and added others to them. When I woke up I knew that this was the permission to leave. (al-Bakrī: Al-khamra, 3a)

Objects of description

In the research literature Arabic travelogues are often particularly regarded as sources for investigations in historical geography, ethnography or history.[16] But it has been remarked that they are rather disappointing in this respect[17], and in recent years the interest has shifted to the literary features of the texts that are now more and more considered as a kind

16 E.g. Busse 1968; al-ʿAsalī 1992.

17 ʿĀnūtī 1971: 236.

of *belles lettres*.[18] Though this view is correct, it should not be ignored that the variety of objects, which are described in the travelogues, is quite broad. Since I do not think it appropriate to give even a nearly complete list of all of them in this article I will only refer to some of the most important objects.

Landscape often is described by the travelers, though rarely in detail and with a geographical interest. It is above all to complain about the difficulties of their journeys that they speak about the mountains they have to climb or the deserts they have to cross. Sometimes plants or animals are mentioned, mostly in connection with a garden scene. The garden attracts the interest quite often because it was the favorite place for meetings with other intellectuals. Additionally, holy places have a certain importance as objects of description since most of the travelers were thoroughly pious men. Very rarely they mention contacts with persons of low social status, with the exception of Bedouin robbers who were a common danger on nearly all routes in the Middle East during the 18th century. Rather the travelers seemed to have met persons who belonged to the ruling class, for instance Ottoman governors, high officials, and military men who granted them hospitality (an-Nābulusī), or accompanied them on the way (Anonymous). But above all, the travelers longed for contacts to scholars and holy men, persons similar to themselves. Political developments and military conflicts, like those between the Ottoman power and rebellious tribes, are sometimes described, most notably by Murtaḍā al-Kurdī who, as a representative of the administrative elite, had first-hand knowledge about these issues. He is also the only one who gives an insight into the administration of the countries he crossed. Often he mentions district-borders and the places where governors or other officials had their residences.

Unlike the other travelogues that are constructed as "realistic" narratives, al-Laṭīfī's text includes a vast number of *mirabilia*. One example is the following account of the land of Sarandīb (Sri Lanka):

> There is a source where the animals that live around go to drink. These are lions, pumas, hyenas and others. But the water is poisonous because of the blossom of a yellow flower ... Because they cannot drink the water the thirsty beasts and birds wait until an animal appears, big like a mule with a horn beneath its eyes. When it goes to the water, dips his horn in and shakes it to the left and to the right the poison disappears. This animal is called al-Karkand. After it has treated the water as I told, the other animals come to drink as long as the Karkand stays in the water. After he leaves the source they have to wait until it returns. (Al-Laṭīfī, 35b)

Also strange are al-Laṭīfī's stories about mythic places like the island Wāqwāq, the Yājūj wa-Mājūj (Gog and Magog) and a marvelous city he allegedly visited in India.

18 Already by Krachkowski 1987. For the older travelogues see Netton 1995; Grotzfeld (2000) recently expressed the same opinion in an article about the texts of ʿAbd al-Ghanī an-Nābulusī.

Narrative style

The texts of the first two categories of travelers I have mentioned above, *'udabā'* and the high ranking *ʿulamā'*, are written in an elaborate classical Arabic (an-Nābulusī, al-Bakrī, al-Adhamī).[19] Those of the third category, the modest intellectuals, apparently destined for a public that had a different literary taste, use a rather simple style that is close to colloquial Arabic. (Anonymous, Ṭāhā al-Kurdī and al-Laṭīfī) Al-Laṭīfī even has a dialog scene in which the expressions of a Syrian and an Egyptian speaker are clearly discernible.

The two types of texts, the "classical" and the "colloquial", differ also in respect to narrative techniques. In the first type these are rather simple. The sentences quite often start with the phrase *thumma* ("and then") which is the most important means of structuring the narrative. Pointing to this feature, the Syrian literary historian ʿĀnūtī criticizes all the 18th century travelogues. As he says, they only "present a string of events occurring in the course of the journey like a diary without having an artistic aspect that could impress the reader".[20] ʿĀnūtī obviously does not take the texts of the second type into consideration that employ an impressive variation of narrative techniques.

For instance, al-Laṭīfī often interrupts the chronologically narrated story to look back to events of the past or to point to one of his adventures that is to happen in the future. Sometimes he becomes an omniscient narrator reporting an event in every detail although he did not witness it nor has been told about it. Other literary devices he borrows from the genre of the fairy-tale. A good example for this is the recurrence of parallel narrative elements employed in the following passage:

> I reached a man who was 95 years old. His name was shaikh ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib. I greeted him and he greeted me. He welcomed me with a friendly smile and told me to sit down. He served thyme that he passed me with his fingertips. He said to me: "All your wishes will be fulfilled in this place. " I answered: "I have no need except for god and his prophet. Beside this I want to meet shaikh ʿAbd al-Laṭīf so that he enlightens me and leads me into a *khalwa* (the Sufi praxis of temporary reclusion) " He said: "Get up quickly! God may fulfill your wishes. " I left him and came to a cave, which I entered. I saw two old men, greeted and they greeted me. They said to me: "Sit down". I sat down with them. They asked me: "Why have you come here and what are your wishes? " I replied: "I have no need except for god and his prophet. Beside this I want to meet shaikh ʿAbd al-Laṭīf. " I asked for their names. The first man said: "I am ʿAbd ar-Raḥmān from the house of al-ʿUjaīl and this is Shaʿbān who is more than 130 years old. I myself, I am 92 years old. " Then they served me roasted and salted peas and thyme. I ate a bit of this. They prayed for me. Then I got ready to leave. They said: "You should visit the cave next to ours. Because if you go there you will find a man whose name is shaikh Maḥmūd, 112 years old. He is the son of shaikh ash-Shādhilī. Near to this in another cave lives shaikh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAidarūs who is 99 years old." I answered: "God may reward you. Pray for me an appropriate prayer. " They recited the Fātiḥa.
>
> Then I went to shaikh ash-Shādhilī. He asked for my desires. I said: "Allāh and the prophet." Then he prayed for me and recited the Fātiḥa. After this I went to the cave of shaikh ʿAbd al-Qādir al-ʿAidarūs. I greeted him and he greeted me with a friendly smile. Then he asked for

19 Grotzfeld (2000) describes these features in his study of an-Nābulusī.

20 ʿAnūtī 1971: 235.

> my desires. I said: "Allāh and the prophet." He prayed for me and recited the Fātiḥa. Then he said to me: "You have to visit shaikh Mūsā al-Ḥawwāmī. He belongs to the Turks of the land Rūm. His age is 113 years. He will direct you where you want to go." I said: "I obey." I went to him and found him sitting directed towards Mecca. I greeted him. He smiled and asked: "You, what do you want?" I said: "Allāh und his prophet." (al-Laṭīfī, 15a f.)

In Ṭāhā al-Kurdī's text the narrator sometimes addresses the reader directly, as in the following passage that renders the discussion between a young boy and a shopkeeper, a friend of the traveler. They sat in the shop for a while and chatted. Then the boy

> wanted to leave. He took some coins from his pocket and deposed them in the till. My friend said: "What for are the coins? " He thought that the boy wanted to buy something. But the boy said: "I do not want to buy anything. " The shopkeeper answered: "Then, why do you give me the money? " The boy replied: "I want to give it to you because I spent some time with you. "

Al-Kurdī now proceeds:

> Oh you mortal man, would you give somebody money only because you had a conversation with him? Did anything like this come to your mind in your life? No, certainly this never happened to you. (Ṭāhā al-Kurdī, 162)

In the first type of travelogues scenes like these are not found. They are, on the other hand, characterized by frequent interjections, which are missing in the "colloquial" type. The travelers of the *udabā'* and scholar/Sufi categories thus document the range of their knowledge. One of these is al-Adhamī who says in introduction to his report:

> I traveled from Dimyāṭ to Tripolis, Damascus and Aleppo where I met prominent scholars and literati. We discussed literary questions and problems of the Arabic language. Each time an interesting topic was mentioned, I wrote it down. Also I noted anecdotes that were told in the course of the meetings. I did this until I had gathered an amount of nice things that will delight every connoisseur. (al-Adhamī, 2a)

In this travelogue the interjections consist in the first place of poems and literary reflections. Other texts present also theological or juridical discourses, especially those of the scholars/Sufi travelers, and include letters that they sent or received. When speaking about visits of holy tombs the traveler sometimes interrupts the narration in order to tell the life-story of a saint and to mention some of his miracles. After the arrival at a village or city, often a poem celebrating it is recited; afterwards the linguistic features of the place's name may be discussed.

Poetry is always appropriate for an interjection. We find poems about places as well as many panegyrics dedicated to important personalities. Also unpleasant situations are described in verses, for instance the trouble with flees in a hostel or a donkey that bellows the whole nightlong. Al-Bakrī, after he complained about the difficulties of the way from Damascus to Qunaiṭra in prose, adds the following verses:

- To Qunaiṭra we went * and were bothered by the uneven ground.
- It hurts every beast that walks on him, * the stones are sharp like swords. (Al-Bakrī: Al-khamra, 5a)

Functions of the travelogues

To talk about the travelogues' functions would, strictly speaking, require to leave the area of pure textual analysis and to focus on the relation between text and public. Two of the most relevant questions in this respect are: What did the travelogue mean to the public and how did they use it? It is difficult to give an answer yet, since our knowledge about the social context of travel writing in 18th century Middle East is very limited. Especially we only have very few comments on the travelogues by their contemporary readers. Insofar the only solution is, though from the methodological point of view somehow unsatisfying, to turn again to the text and look what it says about its functions.

Generally, it can be said that the texts are written for milieus especially interested in religious edification and literary entertainment. A number of them offer practical information, similar to European pilgrimage books. The most prominent example, Ibn al-ʿAlawān's *riḥla*, meticulously describes the *ḥajj*-route from Damascus to Mecca including the hours to walk between the rest houses on the way. In a similar way, an-Nābulusī's texts can be used as guides to the tombs of holy men. This author's travelogues, as well as those of his friend al-Bakrī, both of them prominent Sufis, were certainly also written to impart the spiritual experiences of the narrators to mystical adepts and to serve as spiritual guidebooks.[21]

Al-Mūsawī refers to the entertainment function of his text quite clearly in the title: "Pleasure for the participant in a salon and what the merry literate wishes" (Nuzhat al-jalīs wa-munyat al-adīb al-anīs). His travelogue, with its many poems and well-selected prose examples, indeed must have been a good reading for contemporary intellectuals. The same can be said of many other 18th century travelogues, and even Ibn al-ʿAlawān's account, which begins as a dry itinerary, becomes in the second part a pretty amusing story of the traveler's adventures.

The travelogues and the literary tradition

Since the travelers embody, in their self-presentation, the traditional roles of the scholar, the mystic, and the man of letters (somehow similar to European travelers of the Middle Ages and early modern times), it is not surprising that the texts are heavily influenced by literary traditions. They are not only modeled after precursors in the genre of the travelogue but also draw stylistic features from a broad variety of other literary genres. The geography of holy graves for instance, with its long tradition in Arabic literature, has a thorough influence on an-Nābulusī's travelogues that extensively render citations espe-

21 Sirriya 1985: 96.

cially from al-Harawī's "Ziyārāt", one of the most prominent texts of this genre.[22] The hagiographic genre inspired many descriptions of scholars and Sufis, both living and dead that can be found in nearly all travelogues of the 18th century. Portraits of cities and towns in these texts depend to a large extent on the *faḍā'il* (merits) - literature. Finally, in al-Laṭīfī's story we find not only traces of the *'ajā'ib* (curiosities) - books which describe strange and unusual things, but also stylistic features of popular romances.[23]

Despite its affinities to tradition, the possibilities of individual shaping in 18th century travel literature should not be overlooked. In the first place, the techniques of self-representation seem to me quite interesting, though it has sometimes been stated in the scientific literature that 18th century travel writers generally did not express their emotions and more personal feelings about what happened to them.[24] This is on the whole correct, but there are passages in the texts that at least seem to include some rather personal commentaries. E.g., Ṭāhā al-Kurdī gives a detailed account of his spiritual development that started in his native village in Kurdistan.[25] Murtaḍā al-Kurdī, after having left his beloved hometown Damascus, expresses his disappointment about the world in general and the people of the city in particular. Later, in the course of the journey his pessimism vanishes, and a more optimistic attitude appears:

> A clever man with an ability to take his destiny in his own hands always finds a way out of his sorrows. (Murtaḍā al-Kurdī, 61b)

And actually, in the last part of his journey the traveler obtains a new position in the world as an official at the court of the Ottoman governor of Egypt.

Though in the other reports the travelers rarely talk about their emotions, we notice that the narrating Ego is always present and its moves are important objects of description. These consist mostly of meetings with scholars or ruling class people in the *majlis*, but sometimes also more mundane events happen which are not very different from those travelers in today's Middle East may experience. One example are the problems Ṭāhā al-Kurdī faced at the gate of Aleppo:

> We reached the city in the middle of the day. Then a customs official appeared and stopped our animals. He said: "Dismount so that I can have a look at your luggage and see what you carry with you. " We answered: "Fear god, we are pilgrims on the way to Mecca. We have nothing to sell. " But he would not let us go before we had dismounted and insisted on inspecting all our belongings. He said to us: "I am a servant and I am afraid of my superior". (Ṭāhā al-Kurdī, 67)

A more unpleasant adventure had Ibn al-'Alawān in Mecca. A thief stole his shoes but luckily he was captured and brought before the judge's court. (Ibn al-'Alawān, 109a)

In several cases the self-descriptions of the travelers are obviously based on traditional stereotypes of personal behavior, e.g. when they show their courage during Bedouin attacks or act as pious pilgrims visiting holy graves. Also regarding episodes that seem more

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22 See for this text Sourdel-Thomine 1957.

23 A short overview gives Petrácek 1987.

24 'Ānūtī 1971: 235; especially for an-Nābulusī see Sirriya 1979: 56; Busse 1968: 84.

25 Barbir 1990:42.

individualistic one cannot be sure that they do not represent narrative clichés. Therefore we should not necessarily understand the texts as expressions of individual experiences. But even though it is difficult to consider the figure of the narrator in the texts as an individual person, certainly the authors demonstrate individuality by the specific strategies they use for the construction of their travelogues. They employ the traditional literary models in very different ways, choose some clichés and leave others aside, combine them and arrange them in a certain hierarchy. For instance, Murtaḍā al-Kurdī's text is the only travelogue that, to my knowledge, has the structure of an "Al-faraj baʿda sh-shidda" (rescue after hardship) - story, a narrative type otherwise very common in Arabic literature: First the hero finds himself in a crisis. He has to leave his home in order to solve his problems and succeeds in the end. Another striking example is al-Laṭīfī's text whose originality can be seen in its use of the narrative strategies of the romance-literature, for the first time, as far as I know, in an Arabic travelogue.

This leads me back to Rifāʿa aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī and his text. Its position in the genre of the Arabic travelogue should now be a bit clearer than in the beginning of this paper. Certainly original is the explorative aspect of his journey. His narrative style yet has its predecessors in 18th century travel writing: Colloquialisms, lively descriptions, all this is present already there, though not in all texts and not in the same intensity. On the whole we have to keep in mind that Arabic travel literature in the 18th century is a complex genre, and although some of the texts certainly are quite strange for the taste of a modern reader they all have in one way or another their interest and literary value. Regarding the variety of the genre we can say that it was something like a laboratory for experiments during the whole century preceding aṭ-Ṭahṭāwī, and therefore it would not be surprising if the period of "modern" Arabic literature started with a text of this genre.

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