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Disorienting Encounters

TRAVELS OF A MOROCCAN SCHOLAR
IN FRANCE IN 1845-1846

THE VOYAGE OF
MUḤAMMAD AṢ-ṢAFFĀR
II

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY
SUSAN GILSON MILLER

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*To my family, who has
traveled with me*

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2

OUR JOURNEY BY LAND
FROM MARSEILLE TO PARIS

You should know that according to the rules of the road in this country, the traveler need not carry with him either food or bedding, or any of his worldly possessions. He need only take with him his *dirhāms*, *riyāls*, or gold, for he can buy whatever he wants along the way.¹ This is because most of the way is populated and the traveler leaves one settled place only to enter another. In each town, he will find a marketplace where everything he needs is sold, and a place to spend the night, called either a *locanda* or a *posada*.² If there

1. Travel in Morocco was described by foreigners as dangerous and exhausting. Those journeying under the auspices of the Sultan received the *mūna*, or provisioning by local officials; however, the *mūna* was not always forthcoming, and voyagers often had to carry their own food, buy it, or forage for it. Hay, *Journal*, p. 17. Carrying money was also risky because of the prevalence of brigands. Laroui, *Origines*, p. 36. The *dirhām* and the *riyāl* (from the Spanish *real*) were basic units of Moroccan coinage. See Ch. 3 note 21, below.

2. In Arabic, *al-uwkanta* (vocalized in aṣ-Ṣaffār's text), from the Italian *locanda*, a tavern with rooms for lodging. Aṭ-Ṭaḥṭāwī describes it as a "restaurant . . . sometimes including places to sleep." *Takhlīṣ*, p. 114; *L'or*, p. 148. Aṣ-Ṣaffār says it is a place for sleeping, with food bought outside, which was closer to Moroccan practice. James Grey Jackson described an

is a place for sleeping and eating, it is the second; but if there is only a place for sleeping and one must bring food from the marketplace, it is the first.

This is a large house with many rooms, each with windows as tall as a man, which overlook the streets and markets below. In each room are one or more beds with sheets, a cover, and a mattress, all very soft and clean. The floor is usually carpeted with a fine rug which one walks on while wearing shoes, for it is not their custom to remove them except when getting into bed. The windows are covered with a curtain made of something like silk. There are also chairs for sitting, for they know nothing about sitting on the floor, nor would their clothing allow it because of the tightness of their trousers. In the middle of the room is a table of fine wood or marble for writing or reading. There is also a wardrobe made of wood that shines like a mirror and has drawers for keeping clothes or other things of value. Under each bed is a little box, and inside is a clean pot for relieving oneself.

Most of the large rooms are lit by many candles held in a cluster like stars. They also have one or two large mirrors on the wall, each so clear and tall that someone not paying close attention would think it an open way. Each room must have a pitcher for water set in a basin along with small, clean, folded towels for washing. In most of the rooms are pictures of the countryside, trees, people, animals, boats and the sea, and the like. This is a very important matter with them and they do not leave any place bare. The room

inn (*funduq*) of Fes as follows: "Three stories high, . . . [with] 50 to 100 apartments. . . . As the mode of travelling is to carry bedding with one, they do not provide beds in these inns, but leave you to make use of what you have got, providing only a mat; and if you want any refreshment you cannot order a meal, but must purchase it at a cook's shop, or procure it at the butcher's." *An Account of the Empire of Morocco and the District of Suse* (Philadelphia, 1810), p. 123. The *funduq* was mainly for country folk; people of aṣ-Ṣaffār's class usually stayed in private homes when visiting another city. The Spanish *posada* (Arabic *būṣāḍa*) was a place where travelers spent the night and changed horses.

might also have vases of flowers made of paper and covered with glass, so that their color will never fade, and sometimes a piano,³ which is one of their amusements and ways of making music.

Each room must also have a small stove⁴ built of marble or the like in a pleasing shape, where a wood fire burns in cold and rainy weather. It has a chimney open to the outside. The room is not bothered by smoke in the least because the chimney is well made and the wood is clean and dry. This is a necessity in every room, whether its owner is humble or well-to-do. The room may also have an inkpot and pen and other implements for writing. All these things are the furnishings of their rooms, although there may be variations depending on the owner's wealth.

In this place are many servants, both male and female, as well as cooks and a kitchen⁵ containing all sorts of cooking equipment. When someone enters they take him upstairs to one of the rooms. If he desires food, he orders the servant to bring what he wants in the way of main dishes, fruits, and sweets. When he finishes eating and is ready to leave, the servant gives him a paper telling the price he must pay. If he wants a place to stay, he may choose whatever room he likes, according to his means. The servant brings everything and it is not necessary to call him for every small task, or to move from one's place when doing so. Inside every room is a rope, and each rope is connected to another. When it is pulled, its movement causes a bell to sound, bringing the servant quickly. The servant recognizes from which room it comes by a sign known to him.

As we have mentioned, travelers in that country need not carry provisions with them. Another rule is that travelers do not ride on the backs of saddled animals, or journey on foot, unless they are

3. *Santir*. Dozy 1:694.

4. *Kānūn*, a charcoal brazier, placed in the center of the room to heat it in winter; also a grill for cooking meat. Harrell, p. 60; L. Brunot, *Textes arabes de Rabat*, 2 vols. (Rabat, 1952), 2, glossary, p. 703.

5. *Qashīna*, from the Spanish *cocina*, "kitchen." Dozy 2:473.

soldiers or poor people. Travel is by stagecoach or wagons⁶ drawn by horses. There are various kinds. One type is square and holds four people sitting two-by-two on benches facing each other, so that they can stretch out their legs underneath the opposite bench. It has windows of clear glass so the traveler can see the road, the world, and the people along the way. He can open them if he does not mind the heat or cold or the dust; but if he is bothered by them, he can close them, and the light and the view will stay with him. On each bench is a small cushion, and inside [the bench] is a place for putting a few small things. Everything is made from fine, unblemished wood—the floor, the sides, even the ceiling. In fact, it is like a room, and the rider need not fear wind or rain, heat or cold, because he is inside his room. If he wants to hide himself so that no one will see him, or if he is annoyed by the rays of the sun, he may lower the curtain over the windows.

Outside in front is a place for the driver, and in the rear a seat for another person, perhaps the driver's helper, or the servant of one of the passengers. The height [of the coach] is about two cubits⁷ from the ground, so that it is higher than that [type of] small cart⁸ which is hitched to one or more horses. The driver can also ride one of the horses drawing the coach. He holds a switch in his hand to spur the animals to a fast gallop, for their speed is breakneck, like a cavalry charge.

6. *Karrūša*, from the Spanish *carroza*. A four-wheeled cart drawn by a horse. Dozy 2:456. Nineteenth-century travelers to Morocco remarked on the absence of wheeled vehicles. J. H. D. Hay saw "on the road-side a wretched wheeled vehicle, ruder even in construction and form than a very ancient Egyptian cart which I saw shortly after its discovery on the banks of the Nile. This is the only wheeled carriage I have met with in all Morocco." *Western Barbary: Its Wild Tribes and Savage Animals* (London, 1861), pp. 121–22.

7. Arabic *dhirā'*, literally "forearm," the distance between the elbow and the tip of the middle finger, equal to about half a meter.

8. *Karrīša*, from the Spanish *carreta*. A small two-wheeled cart. Dozy 2:453; al-Ghassānī, *Iftikāk*, p. 39.

There is a long type [of vehicle] which accommodates a large number of people going in the same direction. If a person wishes to get off along the way, the driver will let him get down and then he will go on with the others. Most people who travel together in this way are related, such as a man and his wife, his children, and relatives, or a fellow and his friends, so they remain together during the journey. This type may have two levels, one on top of the other, or even separate compartments. They sometimes put the traveler's personal belongings or his wares on top, covering them to protect them from the elements. Another type accommodates just two people, and of this type there are many different kinds.

Yet another type is for carrying goods and heavy loads. It has no roof, but they cover it to keep off the rain by skillfully making arches from thin strips of wood and then stretching over them a heavy cloth, like the cloth for [making] sails. This cloth is then pulled tight and nailed down so that the goods are sheltered from the rain, as if they were in a tent. The driver also makes a place for himself under this covering, and the rain does not bother him either. In short, rain does not hinder travel in this country in any way, for it disturbs neither the traveler nor his goods; nor does it affect the road, as I am about to mention.

Other carts are made for carrying heavy loads such as stones or iron or the like. These are pulled by many horses hitched together, the number of horses depending on the quantity of weight to be drawn. This is not a great toil or labor for them. Even if the load is extremely heavy, only one person is needed to harness the animals or unhitch them. As for transferring goods, it is not necessary to unload them except at the end of the journey, for their weight rests on the cart harnessed to the draft animals and is pulled along by them.

Thus they handle huge loads easily, without difficulty or strain, and they carry nothing on the backs of animals. What one animal carries on its back, another could pull ten times over provided that the road is good. This is one of the sciences which they engage in—

the science of pulling heavy loads—and they have books written on it. Along their roads you hear only the sounds of heavy loads and the rattling of the chains used to draw them. The movement of freight is slow, unlike the movement of the passenger vehicles, which is very swift.

Speed is easy for them because of the smoothness of the roads, and their excellent state of repair. This is a great concern of theirs and a guiding principle in all matters. Their roads are like the floor of a room, with no bumps, holes, brambles, or stones to be seen. Wherever it begins to loosen up, they hurry to fix it, for they do not neglect its maintenance. Everywhere we passed we found piles of stones on both sides of the road to be used for repair. They crush them into jagged bits to strengthen their bond. If there is a hole somewhere, they fill it with these stones. The carts smooth out the road by grinding the stones into place when they pass, making it even firmer than before.

If the sides of the road have a slope, they build supports into them, and in most places the edges are planted with great trees which shade the road. There is not a river, ditch, or canal that does not have a bridge over it, and the entire length of our way we did not see one person fording a river on foot or on horseback.⁹ You will not find any obstacles on the road either. All is smooth and level, with nothing to upset an animal or a cart. Their concern about this is so great that in certain places we found people with brooms

9. Bridges were rare in Morocco in the 1840s, but not entirely unknown. On his trip to Marrakesh in 1846, J. H. D. Hay passed two well-constructed bridges, a five-arched one reportedly built by a Spanish mason in the Shawiya region, and another closer to Marrakesh that had twenty-five arches. But most rivers and streams had to be forded or crossed by boat. Moving his small party across the Wad Sebou near Mehdiya took an entire day: "The embarkation immediately commenced of both horses and baggage in . . . one wretched boat. . . . The river is a wide and rapid stream, and the boat has only two oars, so that each passage has occupied upward of two hours; and though we commenced at break of day, we had not finished until sunset." Hay, *Journal*, p. 20.

in their hands, smoothing over the tracks of the carts, lest others follow in them and make ruts that would ruin the road.

Another example of their concern is that nearly every town has scales to weigh the wagons. The way they do it is with a thick wooden board mounted on something underneath that feels the weight, and descends according to it. They have marks for one *qin-ṭār*,¹⁰ for two, and so on up to ten. As the weight increases, the board goes down. Every cart arriving at that place must pass over this board. The horses are taken off, and the wagon is weighed. Then they examine the wheels¹¹ [to see] if they are proper for carrying that weight, because they have a limit for the wideness of the rim in proportion to the weight it bears. If the rim of the wheel is narrow and the load heavy, the wheel leaves a deep rut that will eventually cause damage to the road. They have another purpose in weighing carts, and it is to see whether the load is more or less than they say. The reason for this is that they have to pay taxes on certain goods on entering or leaving a town.¹² They weigh them to make sure they do not carry anything hidden on which no tax was paid.

10. From a Greek word meaning "hundredweight" (cf. Latin *centenarium*). In Morocco it was equal to 100 *raṭls*, or about 50 kilograms. The weight of a *raṭl* changed from one region to another, and could vary according to the item being weighed; usually it meant a weight of about 500 grams. Laroui, *Origines*, pp. 49–50; Dozy 2:413.

11. In Arabic, *nā'ūra*, literally "noria" or "waterwheel." Since wheeled transport was rare, there was no commonly used Arabic word for cart wheel; the local word for "wheel" was often taken from the word for waterwheel. G. S. Colin, "La noria marocaine et les machines hydrauliques dans le monde arabe," *Hesp.* 14 (1932): 22–49; Thomas Glick, *Islamic and Christian Spain in the Early Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1979), pp. 236–39.

12. The word *aṣ-Ṣaffār* uses here is *maks*. In Morocco, the *maks* was a special duty imposed by the Sultan, separate from the Koranic taxes on land and income. Usually it was a "gate tax," levied on goods entering and leaving town, and thus *aṣ-Ṣaffār* associates it with the French *octroi*. The Moroccan *maks*, like the *octroi*, was greatly resented, especially by urban dwellers; often it was the spark that ignited popular uprisings. Al-Manūnī, *Mazāhir* 1:297–301; *SEI*, s.v. "Maks"; E. Michaux-Bellaire,

5

OUR STAY IN THIS CITY

Concerning what we saw, our audience with their Sultan, and other matters.

We have already noted that we arrived in Paris on Sunday, the 28th day of Dhū al-Ḥijja, and our departure took place on Monday, the 19th day of Ṣafar.¹ The length of our stay was fifty days. Not only was our visit brief but we rarely ventured out, leaving our place of residence only when invited somewhere special, such as to an evening in their hospitality, or to the theater. The reason for this was that we wished to preserve our reputation, our pride, and our dignity. Praise be to God, we were valued in their eyes and considered with respect. We could have been commonplace by coming and going frequently, but we were opposed to that. As Ardashīr²

1. The arrival was Sunday, 28 December 1845, and the departure Monday, 16 February 1846.

2. Founder (d. 242) of the Sassanid dynasty of pre-Islamic Persia, and the inspiration of an oral tradition on princely duty that passed into Arabic literature and was "cited whenever worldly wisdom and circumspect behaviour in politics or war were in question." C. E. Bosworth, "The Persian Impact on Arabic Literature," in A. F. L. Beeston et al., eds., *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 488; *EI* 2, s.v. "Ardashīr."

said to his son, "Don't let people gain power over your soul; the boldest one with the lion is he who sees him the most."

Just as new clothes become threadbare through overuse,
So do searching eyes wear out the man.

Moreover, we never ventured out by ourselves, because of our ignorance of the place and the language, but were always in the company of a guide. Therefore we should be excused for a lack of details about this city and its inhabitants.

When we arrived in Paris we were settled into a house prepared for us on the famous Champs-Élysées mentioned above, which means "garden of paradise" in their language. It is one of their favorite places for strolling, relaxation, and amusement, with its straight rows of splendid trees. It runs along the river, and extends from the Sultan's garden at one end to a lofty arch built by Bonaparte at the other.³ Its length exceeds six thousand paces.⁴ Despite its great length, it is so straight and level that if you stand at one end you will see the other directly opposite. They selected a house for us there because of its superb location. On a sunny day, and especially on Sunday, which is their day of leisure, everyone in the city comes there to promenade and relax with his companions. They arrive in carriages or on foot, but mostly in carriages; they leave their carriages waiting and continue on foot, walking to their heart's content. From time to time one sees young maidens there, giving intense pleasure and distraction to the eye.

When we entered the house we found that they had readied it with the very finest things for us. It was reserved for us alone, for it was not a hotel open to the public. They had installed the richest furnishings, the most priceless clocks, the brightest chandeliers, and the most willing servants to demonstrate their high esteem for us.

3. The Arc de Triomphe, begun under Napoleon in 1806, completed in 1836.

4. The pace (*khaṭwa*) is the length of a stride, about one yard.

They also assumed the costs for all our needs, food and otherwise, and even had carriages waiting for us whenever we went out. Each day our expenses for food and the rest came to about two hundred *riyāls*.⁵ Twenty servants were provided to us, and each had a special duty. For our chief they set aside the best bedchamber with the finest appointments; we also had a salon where we all gathered. Every two or three of us had a separate chamber for resting and sleeping, and each had his own bed. Every chamber was equipped with writing instruments, [washing] vessels, and comfortable chairs.

The day of our arrival we rested. The next day, we received a summons from their Sultan to an audience at ten o'clock the following [morning], and we spent the whole day preparing for our meeting. In the morning his chief of protocol⁶ arrived, accompanied by a general and four coaches. The largest one, for our chief, was drawn by ten horses and adorned with silks and rich brocades inside and out. Following it was another drawn by eight horses for other dignitaries, and then a third and a fourth for the different ranks of our party. Each of us rode in a coach, and each coach stood out because of its magnificence.

The [people] knew we were coming, and they thronged the streets and avenues, eager to catch sight of us. When we reached the palace, they honored us by having us pass beneath the arch reserved for the Sultan and his family; we entered a vast courtyard where we were met by soldiers standing at attention. They stood in groups,

5. Or 1,000 francs, a considerable sum. Beaumier said that the daily cost of food alone was about 600 francs. AAE/ADM/Voyage, Beaumier to "Mes chers amis," no date.

6. *Qā'id al-mashwar*. See Introduction, note 106. This event was reported home in a letter from Ash'āsh to his brother in Tetuan, who in turn forwarded the news to the court. See, for example, DAR 17579, 'Abd al-Qādir Ash'āsh to his brother 'Abd Allāh, dated 1 Muḥarram 1262/30 December 1845. In the handwriting of Muḥammad aṣ-Ṣaffār, this letter recounts the reception at the palace in language resembling that used here, suggesting that Ash'āsh and aṣ-Ṣaffār worked together in composing at least some parts of the *riḥla*.

dressed in their finest uniforms and bearing arms. In front of each [group] stood an officer, who held an unsheathed sword. Hardly had we arrived when music broke out. We alighted from our carriages and entered the palace, where they had some light refreshments readied for us, and then we climbed the stairs.

This was an imposing palace of marvelous construction and unusual decor, with lofty domes and the finest furnishings, superb statues, exquisite vases, crystal-clear mirrors, and rich ornamentation. It was the palace of a king who knows no limit or constraint: [in it] was everything that gives pleasure in this life. "Yearn not for that which We have provided some wedded couples to enjoy of the splendors of this world, that We may thereby try them."⁷ We passed from one vast room to the next until we reached the chamber of the Sultan, which was the most splendid and ornate of all. We found him seated on the throne of his kingdom, surrounded by the great men of state. His throne had three steps and was encircled by a golden rail, and from above hung silken draperies fringed and corded with gold.⁸ The dress⁹ of the Sultan was like that of the others about him, not exceptional in any way. He wore a sword and a hat¹⁰ while the others were bareheaded, which is their practice when standing before their superiors.

Their custom in greeting is that the envoy contrives¹¹ some

7. Koran 20:131. The rest of the verse reads: "The provision of thy Lord is better and longer lasting."

8. Ibn Khaldūn noted that one of the marks of kingship is a raised throne, symbolizing the superiority of the monarch over others. *Muqaddimah* 2:53.

9. *Kiswa*, literally "cloth"; especially, the richly embroidered cloth covering the Ka'ba, within the great mosque at Mecca; also, the cloth covering on the tomb of a saint. Dozy 2:469; SEI, s.v. "Ka'ba."

10. *Barnīṭa*, from the Italian *berretta*. In the Moroccan dialect, a European-style hat. Dozy 1:80.

11. The Arabic verb root is *z-w-r*. Used in the second form, it has the sense of "falsifying" or "forging," bearing out the motif of dissimulation that underlies this account of the meeting with the King. The Arabic text of Ash'āsh's speech is found in AAE/MDM 4/135-36.

choice expressions, writes them down on a piece of paper, and recites them upon meeting the Sultan; the Sultan then responds in a like manner. Our chief prepared such a speech, writing it down on a piece of paper, which he took out and read in Arabic. His words were as follows: he praised and complimented the Commander of the Muslims,¹² may God grant him victory and think well of him, since it was he who sent [us] to this Sultan. He also complimented the [French] Sultan with appropriate words, and mentioned his subjects, lauding them for their civilized and proper conduct in worldly affairs, and the kindness and good intentions shown [us] since our arrival in his country, along with other topics required at such occasions. As they say, "Don't insult a host in his own house." The blessings of God upon him who said:

He who fails to dissimulate in many matters
Will be pierced by the eyetooth
And flattened by the foot of destiny.

And another said:

Greet with gladness if you are unable to engage in combat,
Conquer thusly if you are unable to succeed by arms.
Meet the enemy courteously during his happiness,
Until his world is overturned.

And another said:

God rewards the wise man
Who takes fate in his stride,
Who recompenses friends with good deeds
And puts the enemy aside until the right time,

12. *Amīr al-muslimīn*, a title of the Moroccan Sultans. Compare with al-Ghassānī's account of his meeting with King Carlos II. *Iftikāk*, pp. 42-44.

Who clothes destiny in pleasing garb
And dances with the monkey in his house.

And another said:

If weaker than your enemy but in his house
Make merry if it is seemly;
For fire is put out by water,
But together they cook, though its nature is to burn.

Blame or reproach [were out of place] here. As it says in the Hadith: "Let us smile outwardly, while in our hearts [we] despise them."

After he had ended his speech and the interpreter translated it, the Sultan gave us his reply, saying, among other things, that he praised God for the renewal of the truce¹³ and friendship between him and the state [*dawla*] of the Sultan of the Maghrib, and said he would not issue any order opposing the state of Marrakesh and the Maghrib. He spoke in his own language, and the interpreter translated it into Arabic. We then handed over the letter of our Sultan and he took it with great feeling. After that, we left him and were presented to his wife, his daughters, and his other female relations. They were very polite and spoke pleasantly with us until our departure.

When we arrived home, we found invitations to honor them with our presence at dinner. That evening we went to [the palace] and found the rooms lit by huge crystal chandeliers whose brilliant reflections captivated the eye. The walls were hung with great mirrors, taller than a man, which caught in the clarity of their glass the chandeliers and everything else, so that one imagined seeing a second room just like this one. All of his ministers and notables, their wives and daughters, and all his sons and their wives were there, about seventy people in all.

~~We entered the dining room and found a huge table, long enough~~

13. *Muhādana*, an armistice.