

## From History to Story: The Migration of Ibn Rushd's Manuscripts East and West

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### *Abstract*

*Documentation in the Arab-Islamic culture assigned a tributary to the efforts of its intellectual and scientific renaissance. This was evident in the flourishing of the paper market, and the diversity and popularity of manuscripts, until the passengers transferred them between the Islamic cities, east and west. However, many of these manuscripts faced trials due to the opposition of the Salafist thought to them, which led some manuscripts to migrate to the Arab East, Africa and Western Europe. In such locations, stories appeared of such manuscripts in which the imaginary is mixed with the reference, and in which heroes ventured with their lives to save them from such trials, and to preserve their content from loss and damage. They are stories whose goals are attributed to the glorification of tolerance and coexistence between religions and cultures. The researcher resorted to the historical narrative and structural approaches to identify the stories related to Ibn Rushd's manuscripts, and to reveal their artistic significance in terms of their systematic narrative unity that can be identified, described and analyzed. Findings showed that each manuscript has a story that fills the voids of its written history, broadens its reading horizons, and desires interest in it. Yet, when the story is told, it becomes a form of its symbolic renewal.*

*Keywords: Ibn Rushd, manuscript, Salafism, story, tolerance.*

### **Introduction**

The Islamic heritage of manuscript has received many research interests. Some focus on the history of the manuscripts, and some other specialize in investigating its contents and commenting on them, and there are other research studies focused their efforts on examining the materials of manuscripts' manufacture.

However, all these studies did not realize the fact that every manuscript is a traveler's manuscript, as soon as it leaves the hands of its scribe, it runs in time and space. Every traveler has a story that tells his biography, and indicates that he would not have crossed the ages and reached us without being helped to overcoming the hardships of

the road. This is not often presented in the history of manuscripts, the researcher chose to test the hypothesis of the existence of a manuscript story that does not appear in its history, but it is invented by people's imagination.

To test the hypothesis, the researcher obtained the historical narration and structural approaches to investigate the stories underlying the process of saving the manuscripts of Ibn Rushd (died in 1198), due to the clear presence of these manuscripts in the cultural memory, in east and west.

The research, in addition to its introduction and conclusion, was divided into two sections. The first section distinguished between the historical heritage of the manuscript and its story. The second section studied the stories that were told about saving Ibn Rushd's manuscripts, and their role in spreading his ideas, east and west.

It has become clear to us that the rescue of these manuscripts from their ordeal with Salafi thought represented a fictional material in which fiction was mixed with the reference within a clear narrative structure. Furthermore, comprehending these stories reveals their dependency on the pillar of glorifying tolerance between religions and cultures, as well as broadening the horizons of those who perceiving them, and explaining the global interest in them.

### **Previous studies**

In this study, the researcher benefited from a group of studies that focused on the stories narrated about the heritage of Islamic manuscripts; these stories sometimes reach the level of myth and the wondrous. This study will suffice by mentioning two studies in which anecdotal material related to the manuscripts was found. Yet, the purpose of these studies were to investigate on the history of those manuscripts not what surrounded them with stories:

1. The Arabic manuscript of the Caen Library by Pierre Ageron (2008). This study aimed to carry out a thorough documentary research on the fate of a group of heritagious Arab manuscripts that events of their times led them from the Arab East or the Maghreb to Normandy, to be owned by the French orientalist Samuel Bochart (Died in 1667). Since Bochart's death, the manuscript's ownweship continously transmmitted to his family until it was donated to the University Library of Caen. Ageron (2008) states that:

In 1940, fearing of air attacks, the librarian Paul Joubert requested that the manuscripts and books be transferred from the Annex of the Caen Library to the Abbey of Monday (24 km west of Caen) .... Therefore, the manuscript part of Samuel Bouchard's collection was rescued from

the disaster of July 1944, which caused the complete destruction of the library. (p. 89).

This study does not hide its quest to chronicle the life of the Arabic-Islamic manuscripts, as it revealed historical narratives in it that amounted to the level of narration. However, Ageron's goal was not to look into this narrative aspect and reveal its connection to receiving the content of those manuscripts, but rather it was a historical one that did not go beyond the task of documentation.

2. The Timbuktu Manuscripts: The Secrets, Myths, and realities, by Jean-Michel Djian (2020).

The book sought to present the history of the Timbuktu manuscripts, and to explain the reason behind the forgetfulness of specialists in heritage manuscripts for a long time. Djian showed the manuscripts' cultural and historical value in terms of the fact that Timbuktu is a city that had a miraculous African history. Likewise, the manuscript of Timbuktu had represented, since the 15th century, a point of cultural and knowledge exchange between the countries of the Islamic Maghreb and West Africa. In his book, Djian has refuted the prevailing saying that the African culture is an oral culture. Despite the importance of the historical, cultural and civilizational content of this book, and its revealing of cultural facts specific to the West African region, it was not concerned with reading the parallel narratives to the history of the Timbuktu manuscripts nor was it explaining their importance in understanding their contents, similar to the emergent narratives of the private libraries that cooperated with the Timbuktu Municipal Library in preserving most of the manuscripts.

The difference between the date and the story of the manuscript

A brief concept of history

The outputs of the codification era in the history of Arabic (beginning in the 18th century AD) reveal the fact that Muslim Arabs took great care of writing before the advent of the printing. This was proved in the presence of a huge number of Arabic manuscripts that exceeded the number of Greek and Latin manuscripts together (Ageron, 2008). Some of these Arab manuscripts are preserved in Arab libraries, other are preserved in various European museums and libraries. They estimated a number of about two million manuscripts. In France, for example, there are 7274 manuscripts which are available in the National Library and 1800 manuscripts in the Interuniversity Library of Oriental Languages.

The journey of those Arabic-Islamic manuscripts had two destinations: the first destination is Arab libraries, through buying and selling, endowment for mosques and schools, or inheritance from

grandfathers to grandsons. The second destination is the Western museums and libraries. This destination began from the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century AD, and it was confirmed with the 17<sup>th</sup> century AD. Moreover, this destination depended on many ways for to bring books, including travelers, gifts or purchases of kings, diplomatic missions, and orientalist to these manuscripts. On the horizon of these two destinations, a story, whether imagined or realistic imbued with imagination, arose for the heritage of the Islamic manuscript that supports the course of its history and fills its voids. However, our use of the terms “history” and “story” in connection with the heritage manuscript raises the following question:

Is there a conceptual difference between the story and history of the manuscript? In order to answer this question, and track the concept of the story and the terminological differentiation between story and history, the research will be based on Michelet's (1880) definition of history, and the narrative statements related to the story of Bremond (1966) and Gérard Genette (1972). The word “history” in Larousse's Dictionary refers to the science that studies the human past, especially what is related to those periods for which written documents (Cf Farousse, 2014), or archaeological findings that are available and help the historian to investigate facts and trace their paths and connections. This definition coincides with the conceptual approach adopted by Michelet (1880) to define history and summarized it in the sense that history is the revival of integrated life, not in its appearance, but in its deep internal systems. It is a referential revival of the existence of previous facts and events that need to be investigated, audited, interpreted and reconstructed.

However, studying human past and its revival in terms of what is the history of facts and the history of news about them (Alearwi, 2012), such a study is an act that does not rise except on the basis of knowledge of these facts and the news related to them. Yet, this is not always available regularly, as many of the facts of the past are still buried under the ground.

Hence, the revivals are sometimes not without difficulties, especially those interruptions that permeate the chain of events and cause its lack of a condition of coherence. The historian may be unable to modify it, no matter how wide his interpretive horizons are. So the historian suffices to mention them incomplete, as did Abu Jaafar Muhammad bin Jarir al- Ṭabarī (died in, 923) in his book “The History of nations and kings,” where he said:

[...] Whatever news is mentioned in this book of mine about some of the past, which would denounce its reader, or would deplore its listener because it had no face in truth and no meaning in reality, then let the reader/listener be known that it was not given in by us, but

rather it came from someone who transferred it to us, and I narrated it in the way it was given to me (p. 9).

It seems that al-Ṭabarī's saying, "and I narrated it in the way it was given to me" refers to his awareness that there is something in history that is not subject to the logic of reality in terms of what may be tainted by fragmentation in the unity of the meaning of the historical event, which presented some voids in it. These voids may have seeped into its course. It indicated the incoherence of its events and the loss of integration between them, and it motivated people to fill it with stories from their imaginations to answer the question of those interruptions.

The concept of the story

Gérard (1972) indicated that the story is a narrative discourse that can be written or oral, and in narrative studies it takes three concepts of close significance, perhaps the most present of which is what came in his saying:

The word story in the first meaning - which is currently the most obvious and central in common usage - denotes the narrative utterance, that is, the oral or written discourse that undertakes the narration of an event or a series of events.

However, even if this definition is referred to the narrative dimension of the story, it does not help to distinguish between it and history in terms of the narratives on which it also rises from stories.

This is a problem that we need to overcome by familiarizing ourselves with Bremond's (1966) definition of the concept story itself, as it rises, according to what he goes to, on the pillar of three factors: unity of action, sequence of events, and integration, and these factors are integrated into a discourse:

Each story consists of a discourse that integrates a series of events of human interest into a specific action unit; yet, wherever there is no succession there is no story, ... Moreover, when there is no integration in the unity of action, there is no story at all, but only a timeline, which is a remembrance of an unintegrated set of events. (Bremond, 1966, p. 6).

In addition to the conditions of unity of action, sequence, and integration, Bremond (1966) refers in the following quotation to the condition of regularity of the story, so he reported that we have divided the narrative into a complex set of simultaneous or successive turns. Each turn is subdivided into a combination of paths. Yet, each path can be viewed through three stages of its development: the possibility of the occurrence of the event, the transition to action, and the end (Bremond, 1973).

In the opinions of Gérard (1972), and Bremond (1973), the story of the manuscript can be that discourse that people turn to in order to answer what history was could not about the journey of the manuscript from one era to another. It is a moving and developing story; its narrative material is created in history, but its events grow outside it in succession and interdependence, that is: It is developed and diversified in people's imagination.

There is no doubt that revealing the structure of the story of a traditional manuscript, and comprehending its reading, will be a way to fill in the blanks in the historical events of the manuscript itself. It also helped in order to understand its content, confirm its scientific or literary merit, and explain the locally and globally interest of such a manuscript. All in all, these are represented in the values of tolerance that surrounds it in both history and story.

It seemed to us that each of our Arabic-Islamic manuscripts has its own story, which people tell, whether in their private conversations, in the media, in cinema, or in their creative writing.

Even though the stories of some manuscripts (Aberdam and Triolaire (2013), those in which the research explored their historical biographies for reference in testing its hypothesis - differ among themselves in terms of their narrative materials, places, times, and personalities, they are all similar in their rise on the support of one narrative path, whose image is as follows:

A manuscript appears among people that differs in its intellectual or aesthetic content from the prevailing thought in its environment, yet people accept it. However, the authority of the Salafi thought in the vicinity of its reception is afraid of the possibility of its influence on the ideas of its followers and distancing them from it. So, Salafis intend to issue a fatwa prohibiting it, and orders its burning and disposal in any way. Possible, and at that moment, hero comes to protect it. That hero is usually of a different religion, intellectual system, or geographical area than the author of the manuscript, so he rescues the manuscript from the hands of Salafis, and smuggles it to a safe place with the help of a group of people. In this regard, the effort will be held in the next section on identifying the story of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts, and explaining the power of tolerance in them.

Ibn Rushd's Manuscripts: "thoughts have wings"

Ibn Rushd is mentioned in Arab and Western intellectual studies and research except as one of the pillars of enlightenment, tolerance, and rationality in the world. He is, according to what we read in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "the greatest symbol of philosophy in Islamic contexts, and a fundamental source for post-classical European thought." This prestige is due to his books that

migrated from Cordoba to the Arab East, and to European capitals, after the issuance of a regulation to burn them was by the Almohad caliph, Al-Mansur (Died in 1199) at the behest of some of the jurists of his palace who opposed the rational ideas of Ibn Rushd (Angel Gonzalez Palencia, 2011).

#### A brief history of Ibn Rushd manuscripts

During the journey of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts to the European West, they were translated into Hebrew beginning in the first half of the 13th century by a group of Jewish translators, the most important of whom was Samuel Ben-Yehuda Al-Marsili (died in 1294). Because of that translation, Ibn Rushd replaced Aristotle among the Jews.

He had become the thinker whose philosophy was explained, his views were summarized, and even detailed in order to meet the needs of teaching (Renan, 1882). From Hebrew some of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts were transferred to Latin (Langhade, 2019), and spread in some countries of western Europe beginning in the 13th century. The desire for Ibn Rushd's manuscripts increased and was reached the top at the 17th century, when "Europeans became aware of the value of those books, and they showed a strong desire to translate oriental manuscripts: i.e., Arabic, Persian,....(Ageron, 2008 p. 77).

This is a brief history of the journey of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts. However, we found in it an understanding of the content of those manuscripts and their translations into European and Hebrew languages, the history remained silent about two questions: Who saved those manuscripts from the holocaust that befell them in Cordoba?

How they were smuggled to France, Marrakesh, and the Arab East? Arab-Islamic history, although it tends to be scientifically oriented in its reporting of facts, is described as being mostly official, and is subject in many cases to pruning in its facts and refinement in line with the desires of the existing authority that frames and recognizes it, and from there the writing of the historical report was confused, and subject to a set of factors starting from "the impact of political and partisan currents, to the role of retribution in them, to the impact of populism, to religious influences (Al-Douri, 2005, p. 9).

Therefore, we may not find in this history the complete truth, the whole truth, but we may find a truth parallel to its facts that art creates for it, because it is the nature of art that it moves within a symbolic universe in which it says what it wants to say in its own ways. This coding is what people's imagination resorted to answer the question: How did Ibn Rushd's manuscripts reach Western Europe and the Arab East? In this regard, stories appeared to them that rely on the history

of those manuscripts to fill in the gaps in it, and support it in interpreting the journey of Ibn Rushd's thought outside Cordoba.

#### The story of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts

Among the stories told about the journey of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts from Andalusia to the Arab East and Western Europe, the researcher mentions two: the first story narrates that when Musa bin Maimon (died in, 1204) fled from the Almohads to Cairo, he contacted the court of Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi (died in, 1193) and became his physician. In Musa's escape, he carried Ibn Rushd's books with him because of his passion for the ideas they contained. Henceforth, there was the opportunity for those books to be translated into Judaism, and then into Latin.

The second story appears in the movie "Destiny" by the Egyptian director, Chahine (1997). It is a story that tells of the clash of two religious schools of thought: a Salafist current that rejects every intellectual endeavor represented by "Sheikh Riyad", one of the jurists of at the court of Caliph al-Mansur and he was influenced by the philosophy of al-Ghazali (died in, 1111). It is a school that rejects the use of reason to consider matters of Sharia. The second religion school is an open and tolerant represented by Ibn Rushd, and calls for diligence in reading religious texts to be a portable reading in a demonstrative discourse.

This film discussed the issue of Salafi thoughts and their role in stifling free thought during the Almohad caliphate. It depicted what most Arab countries experienced from the growth of religious extremism since the 1990s of the last century. It also showed what such school caused in terms of restricting thought, perpetuating the dependency of the predecessors, rejecting tolerance, and disrupting for the movement of peoples to achieve their civilizational renaissance. The research chose three extracts from this film, in which they displayed a sequence of events which are the core of the film's story. They summarize the story of burning Ibn Rushd's manuscripts, saving copies of them, and smuggling them out of Cordoba, and the details of that are as follows:

The first extract: Ibn Rushd's students decide to smuggle his books to Marrakech, Egypt and Paris after they felt what Sheikh Riyad was plotting against their teacher Ibn Rushd (Chahine, 1997, from 01:02:07 into 01:03:04).

The second extract: The Crown Prince Al-Nasser, one of Ibn Rushd's students who sympathized with him in his ordeal, appears as he gives "Joseph" a young Christian a book of Ibn Rushd and asks him to preserve it and deliver it to France, saying: "This is the most important book written by my uncle Ibn Rushd, please make sure to deliver it



safely to France. Al-Nasser adds, “you have to tell people in France that the greatest attributes of the Arabs are sincerity.” Joseph answers him, saying: “And you reminded the Arabs here in Cordoba that the greatest attributes of Christians is loyalty.” These are two sayings that the film wanted to show that religions can coexist with each other and serve each other, in addition to preserve the human cultural and intellectual heritage despite the different identities of its owners (Chahine, 1997, from 01:07:24 into 01:07:59).

The third extract: We see the young man “Joseph” swimming across the river, saving one of the most important books of Ibn Rushd, which Al-Nasser, the crown prince of the Almohad caliphate, recommended him to preserve. (Chahine, 1997, from 01:16:27 into 01:17:24).

The plot of the movie “Destiny” clearly shows that it is built on the technical conditions that the most knowledgeable narrator defined the story in terms of its rise on the pillar of an oral discourse that undertook to narrate a series of events called succession, interdependence, integration, and unity of action. It is a story that triumphs in its content for the demand for diligence in reading the Sharia, and calls for intellectual tolerance. In the context of this demand, we found it giving Ibn Rushd's ideas wings that flew them outside Cordoba, away from the fires of Caliph Al-Mansur, thanks to heroes whom history did not mention, i.e., Ibn Rushd's students. From there, it is permissible for us to say that the story of the film is not the story of the life of the philosopher Ibn Rushd, and that the title “Destiny” does not refer to the fate of Ibn Rushd himself, as his fate is known in history. Rather, the dimensions of the story is the life of Ibn Rushd's ideas, and the fate is their fate after they flew towards the Arab East and Maghreb in the contents of their manuscripts, and then landed in the countries of Western Europe.

### **Conclusion**

The researcher concluded in this research, which devoted to investigating the narratives that explain the journey of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts from Cordoba to the countries of the Arab East and Western Europe since the 12th century AD. The purpose of the research revolved around answering a question with which we directed our entire work, and its dimensions revolved around the fact that even if we find a historical journey of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts recorded in the books of researchers and historians. There are spaces in the pages of that same history that make it difficult to know how those manuscripts moved outside Cordoba prior to the ordeal of burning them under the guidance of the Almohad caliph Al-Mansur at the instigation of the jurists of his court. It is the query that we found

people's imagination responding to by creating stories that filled the blanks of the history of those manuscripts, and explained the reason for the demand for their translation into Hebrew and many European languages. Those manuscripts confirmed the need to establish a culture of tolerance and intellectual coexistence between religions to ensure that the world's religions are in harmony with each other. This research distinguished between the recorded history of Ibn Rushd's manuscripts and the story of their journey, which took place in the movie "Destiny" by Youssef Chahine, and showed how the imagined story of the Ibn Rushd's manuscripts' journey filled the voids of its history. In the meantime, the researcher relied on conceptual statements of history and the art of the story.

In this context, we see the story of saving the manuscripts of Ibn Rushd in the 12th century AD, similar to it in the 21st century, when the Islamists of the "Ansar al-Din Movement" in 2012 destroyed many Arabic-Islamic manuscripts in the Timbuktu library, which prompted one of the city's residents to resort to protecting them. Thus, they write the story of their protection, which is a story of heroism that needs other studies that stand by analysis and interpretation on its artistic, content and cultural aspects.

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