

The efforts and contributions of physicians from the Islamic West in the Eastern Islamic lands (6th–9th centuries AH / 12th–16th centuries CE)

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Abstract:

The Islamic West built strong connections with the Islamic East in many fields, especially in intellectual and cultural domains, where scholars actively promoted scientific and intellectual exchange. The Islamic East served as the main destination for students and scholars, attracting them for both the Hajj pilgrimage and scholarly pursuits. These educational journeys played a key role in revitalizing the scientific movement, leading to a rich blend and diversification of knowledge. Among those who stood out were physicians who traveled to the Islamic East. This study explores the journeys of physicians from the Islamic West to the East, emphasizing their contributions to advancing scientific activity. Through this study, we seek to introduce the physicians of the Islamic West who

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traveled to the lands of the Islamic East, and to highlight the efforts and endeavors that contributed to revitalizing scientific activity. Accordingly, the study has been divided into two periods: the first spans the 6th–7th centuries AH / 12th–13th centuries CE, while the second begins in the 8th–9th centuries AH / 14th–15th centuries CE. To this end, we adopted the descriptive approach, which relies on describing and analyzing the interests and inclinations of physicians from the Islamic West in understanding diseases and remedies, as well as in the exchange of scientific and medical knowledge

Keywords: Medicine; Physicians; the Islamic Maghreb; Al-Andalus; the Islamic Mashriq.

1. INTRODUCTION

Scholars and students of knowledge in the Islamic West continuously sought to revitalize and advance the scientific movement over successive periods. This drive led them to travel and relocate to different parts of the world, with the Islamic East being a primary destination for the pursuit of knowledge, intellectual exchange, education, and the performance of Hajj. Among those whose contributions were particularly clear and significant were physicians, who stood out in teaching, authoring, and acquiring knowledge from their counterparts in the East. These physicians were admired by scholars and doctors of the Islamic West and Al-Andalus.

This raises several important questions: What were the factors and reasons that drove physicians from the Islamic West to travel to the Islamic East? And to what extent did they contribute to stimulating the scientific movement there?

2. Factors and Reasons for the Movement of Physicians from the Islamic West to the Islamic East

The progress and development of the medical field in the Islamic East since the Abbasid era sparked admiration and amazement among the population of the Islamic West. This encouraged students to specialize in medicine, especially during the Almohad period and beyond. The rulers of the Islamic West called for cooperation and communication with Eastern physicians to facilitate scientific exchange. Overall, the movement of Western physicians to the East was driven by a set of factors, including:

2.1 The Role of the Ruling Authority in Encouraging Scientific Pursuits

The ruling authorities in the Islamic West encouraged the pursuit of knowledge in various fields, particularly in medicine, due to its direct impact on public life. This support helped intensify efforts to improve the healthcare situation in the region. As a result, students and physicians traveled in order to compile medical works and complete scientific research. They also worked to attract physicians from the Islamic East. For instance, Aghlabid prince Ibrahim ibn Ahmad (261–289 AH / 875–902 CE) commissioned the physician Ishaq ibn Imran (d. 279 AH) along with a group of scholars to establish agreements with scholars from Syria and Iraq, as a form of intellectual and cultural encouragement (Mamdouh, 1997, p. 66).

The widespread interest in the medical field led rulers to establish schools and educational centers, which soon became

destinations for Eastern scholars. This resulted in a blending and interaction between scholars from both the Islamic West and the East (Ibn Khaldun, 2009, p. 2113). Numerous Arabic and translated medical works emerged, including *The Complete Yāqūtī Epistle*, also known as *The Hārūnī Epistle* (Al-Tahiri, 2002, p. 42). The scholars of the Islamic West aspired to complete their academic development, which motivated them to engage in authorship and teaching—even in the farthest parts of the Islamic East (Al-Najjar, n.d., p. 25).

Thus, the extensive attention shown by the rulers and sultans of the Islamic West had a significant impact on shaping the scholarly character, acquiring knowledge, and exchanging learning, as a result of the broad educational formation and the provision of schools and educational institutions that served students of knowledge and supported their intellectual orientations.

2.2 Scientific Travel

Scientific travel was a cornerstone of knowledge acquisition, as it provided access to scholarly works and compilations. In addition, the vast expanse of the Islamic world encouraged scholars to seek knowledge, continue writing, and compile new works (Ramadan, 2010, p. 87). Scholars from the Islamic West and Al-Andalus did not limit themselves to the knowledge they had initially acquired. Instead, they pursued deeper and broader understanding by traveling to various regions—especially the Islamic East—where they gathered around scholars and shaykhs, learned from them directly, and transmitted knowledge through oral narration. This exposure played a vital role in understanding and scrutinizing educational methodologies (Belarbi, 2010, p. 134).

Travel was not always undertaken solely for trade or mobility; rather, it also served as a means for seeking knowledge and intellectual attainment that fostered the growth and distinction of scholars. From another perspective, it constituted a way to search for medicinal substances and to discover remedies for intractable diseases.

2.3 The Journey to Perform the Duty of Seeking Knowledge:

The pilgrimage (Hajj) represented a valuable opportunity for students of knowledge, as it broadened their horizons and enabled them to meet scholars from various regions. This interaction and mingling led to cultural integration. Instead of relying on correspondence, they were able to sit in person with scholars of the Islamic East in their scholarly gatherings. This strengthened their relationships, enhanced their status, and elevated their prestige to its highest level. The pilgrimage enabled scholars from the Islamic West and al-Andalus to sit with prominent scholars and sheikhs in Mecca and Medina (Al-Qalsadi, 1978, pp. 134–135).

Scholars from the Islamic West received great attention in the Hijaz. Dedicated places were allocated for their residence, such as **Ribāṭ al-Maghribah**, also known as **Ribāṭ al-Muwafaq** and **Ribāṭ ‘Uthmān ibn ‘Affān**. Scholars managed its affairs, and it was even described as one of the finest ribāṭs near Mecca (Al-Qalsadi, 1978, p. 136). In addition, poor Muslims gathered there and received services. Overall, the movement of scholars from the Islamic West and al-Andalus to the East was

encouraged both by the reception they received and the flourishing medical field, with its available health facilities and educational centers.

3. Examples of Physicians from the Islamic West in the East and Their Contributions:

The relationship between the Islamic East and West was one of mutual influence. Geographic boundaries did not hinder the exchange of knowledge and intellectual communication. This motivated many to travel to the Islamic East in pursuit of knowledge and learning. Below is a sample of physicians who journeyed eastward.

3.1 The First Phase (6th–7th Century AH / 12th–13th Century CE):

This period witnessed the migration of many scholars and physicians from al-Andalus and the Islamic West to the East, due to political circumstances such as the Andalusian exodus. On the other hand, it was also driven by the pursuit of knowledge and the desire to transfer and teach their expertise and research in established scientific centers.

Abū al-Ḥakam al-Maghribī (d. 549 AH / 1154 CE):

ʿUbayd Allāh – also known as ʿAbd Allāh – ibn al-Muzaffar al-Bāhilī al-Andalusī was renowned for his excellence in philosophical sciences and mastery of the medical craft. He served Sultan Malikshāh and established for him a mobile hospital (*māristān*) that could be transported on camels during journeys. He was also a libertine poet, fond of jest and amusement. He used to sit in a medical shop in Jīrūn (an area in Damascus) where he practiced medicine. He died two hours after sunset on the night of Wednesday, the 6th of Dhū al-Qaʿdah, in the year 549 AH (1154 CE), in Damascus (al-Qifī, 2005, p. 298;

Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah, n.d., pp. 614–615; Aḥmad ‘Īsā Bēk, 1942, pp. 286–287).

Al-Sharīf al-Idrīsī (d. 560 AH / 1165 CE):

Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Idrīs, descended from Idrīs ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, was known by the title al-Sharīf due to his noble lineage. He was also known as al-Ḥamūdī, after his ancestor Ḥamūd ibn Maymūn al-Idrīsī, whose descendants ruled parts of southern al-Andalus for approximately forty years prior to the Almoravid takeover in 450 AH. He was sometimes referred to as al-Ṣiqillī (the Sicilian).

Al-Sharīf al-Idrīsī was born in the city of Sabta (Ceuta) or possibly Tétouan in Morocco in the year 493 AH (ca. 1100 CE), where he studied religious sciences, literature, and poetry. He likely completed his studies in geography and medicine in Córdoba. From a young age, he was passionate about travel, journeying across al-Andalus, North Africa, southern France, Egypt, the Levant, Asia Minor, and Greece. These travels enriched his understanding of the geography, cultures, lifestyles, and plant life of the regions he visited.

He was a contemporary of Roger II, King of Sicily, during a time when the Sicilian court still flourished with Islamic culture and Arabic sciences. The court hosted scholars from various backgrounds. King Roger invited al-Idrīsī to Sicily, where he was granted high status and respect. Al-Idrīsī reciprocated this favor by crafting a silver globe depicting a world map and writing a geographical book titled *Nuzhat al-*

mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq (The Pleasure of Him Who Longs to Transverse the Horizons), in which he documented the geography of the lands he visited in both the East and the West.

Al-Idrīsī passed away in 560 AH (1165 CE), either in Sabta or Sicily. He also authored a botanical encyclopedia based on his observations of the plant life in the countries he visited. The work was arranged alphabetically and included names of plants in different languages, such as Persian and Indian. The famous botanist Ibn al-Bayṭār frequently cited this work in his *Compendium on Simple Medicaments and Foods* (al-Samarra'ī, 1990, pp. 185–187).

Ibn al-Badhūkh al-Maghribī (d. 576 AH / 1180 CE):

Abū Ja'far 'Umar ibn 'Alī ibn al-Badhūkh al-Qala'ī al-Maghribī was a skilled and insightful physician, well-versed in both simple and compound drugs. He demonstrated keen judgment in diagnosing and treating illnesses. He lived in Damascus, where he operated a perfumery shop in the al-Labbādīn market. He treated those who came to him for consultation and prepared a wide variety of compound medicines on site, including pastes, tablets, and powders. These medicines were sold and widely used by the people (al-Qifṭī, 2005, p. 298; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, n.d., pp. 614–615; Aḥmad 'Īsā Bēk, 1942, pp. 286–287).

He was devoted to medical books, deeply engaged in studying and verifying the descriptions of diseases and treatments mentioned by earlier scholars. He even produced glosses (*hawāshī*) on **Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine*** (*al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb*). In addition, he had an interest in ḥadīth studies and poetry. He lived a long life and passed away in Damascus in either 575 or 576 AH (1179–1180 CE) (Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, n.d.,

pp. 630–635).

Ḥakīm al-Zamān ‘Abd al-Mun‘im al-Jilīyānī al-Andalusī (d. 603 AH / 1206 CE):

He was Abū al-Faḍl ‘Abd al-Mun‘im ibn ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ḥassān al-Jilīyānī al-Ghassānī al-Andalusī. He made significant contributions to teaching and medical treatment for students and patients. He was considered the leading scholar of his time in medicine, ophthalmology, and related sciences. He came from al-Andalus to the Levant and resided in Damascus until his death. He lived a long life and maintained a medical practice in the al-Labbādīn market.

Sultan al-Nāṣir Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb (Saladin) valued and respected him. Al-Jilīyānī also engaged in alchemy and poetry. He left behind a son who was an oculist, a poet, and a composer of panegyrics. Al-Jilīyānī died in the year 603 AH (1206 CE). He authored several works, including a treatise on compound drug prescriptions (*ta‘ālīq*) (Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah, n.d., pp. 630–635).

Ḥakīm Quṭb al-Dīn al-Maghribī al-Miṣrī (d. 618 AH / 1221 CE):

He was Ḥakīm Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad al-Salamī al-Maghribī, known as Quṭb al-Miṣrī. Originally from the Maghrib, he later settled in Egypt, and from there he traveled to Khurāsān. He studied under Fakhr al-Rāzī and became one of his most prominent students.

He authored many books in medicine and philosophy and wrote a complete commentary on the general principles

(kulliyāt) of Ibn Sīnā's Canon of Medicine. He was later killed in the massacre at Nīshāpūr, when the city was overrun by the Mongols (Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, n.d., p. 471; Aḥmad 'Īsā Bēk, 1942, p. 58).

Ibn al-Bayṭār al-Andalusī (d. 646 AH / 1248 CE):

He was the sage Ḍiyā' al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad, a botanist, pharmacist, and physician from al-Andalus. He was born in **Málaga** and studied botany under the renowned scholar **Abū al-'Abbās al-Nabātī**. He traveled extensively across North Africa and then journeyed to the East.

There, he met the famous physician-translator **Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah**, who supported him in his study and collection of Syrian plants. Ibn al-Bayṭār spent his final years in Damascus, where he died in 646 AH (1248 CE). Among his notable works are:

- *al-Jāmi' li-mufradāt al-adwiya wa-l-aghdiyya* (The Compendium on Simple Medicaments and Foods), arranged alphabetically in two volumes,
- *Mīzān al-ṭabīb* (The Physician's Balance), and
- *al-Mughnī fī al-adwiya al-mufrada* (The Enricher on Simple Drugs) ('Akkāwī, 1993, vol. 2, p. 92).

Based on the foregoing, it becomes clear that physicians of the 6th–7th centuries AH / 12th–13th centuries CE were deeply concerned with collecting medical treatises and studying them with great precision, in order to advance into a new phase—namely, the practical stage involving the treatment of chronic and intractable diseases. In addition, they demonstrated a clear interest in pharmaceutical preparation, medicinal substances, and the collection of medicinal plants. This prominence drew the attention of the ruling authorities, who

granted them access to royal courts, listened to their opinions, and benefited from their knowledge and expertise.

2.3 Physicians of the Islamic West in the Mashriq during the 8th–9th centuries AH / 14th–15th centuries CE:

Abu Ja‘far Ahmad ibn ‘Ali ibn Muhammad ibn Khātima al-Ansari (d. 770 AH / 1369 CE) was one of the prominent jurists and physicians in al-Andalus during the 8th century AH. He was renowned for his extensive knowledge in the field of medicine, especially regarding infectious diseases and epidemics. This is clearly reflected in his writings, which addressed public health phenomena such as contagious diseases and their dangers. The works of Ibn Khātima al-Ansari left a significant impact on the scientific movement in the Islamic East, particularly in the context of the plague that swept the region, and his treatises became a valuable scientific reference for Mashriqi physicians (Ibn al-Khatib, n.d., p. 240).

Hasan ibn Yusuf ibn Hasan ibn Salih al-Ansari al-Marwi – referring to Almeria in al-Andalus – al-Maliki, practiced medicine and astronomy as well as jurisprudence and grammar under Ahmad al-Qassar. He arrived around the year 890 AH, performed the Hajj from Damascus, and settled in the holy sites before returning to Cairo, where he remained until he met me (i.e., al-Sakhawi) during the year 896 AH and heard from me (‘Akkaoui, 1993, p. 240).

Abu al-Hasan ‘Ali ibn ‘Abd Allah ibn Haydur al-Tādili (d. 816 AH / 1413 CE) was among the most notable scholars of the 9th century AH. Ibn al-Qadi referred to him as “*the imam of*

inheritance law and arithmetic” (Ibn al-Qadi, 1973, p. 475). He authored three medical works that served as a vital link between the Maghrib and the Mashriq (Boubidi, 2024, p. 162).

3.3 Permanent and temporary residence of doctors from the Islamic Maghreb in the countries of the Islamic East:

The doctors of the Islamic West in the countries of the Islamic East who continued to flock to the region, some settled there and made it their home, and others left it. As for the rest, we are content to mention their scientific contributions there. This is only to clarify and demonstrate one of their rights over us, that they have a passion for knowledge, and they are its people and have a high position in it, and people of trust among others from far away, and this is explained in the following table:

Maghrebi Physicians Permanently Residing in the East

Name	Journeys	Residence	Death	Medical Skills and Contributions
Ahmad ibn Hatim al-Sanhaji al-Fasi, al-Maliki	Tlemcen, Constantine, Tripoli (West), Mecca, Jerusalem, Syria, Cairo	Cairo	9th century AH	Distinguished in medicine.
Ibn Hud al-Sufi al-Mursi, Husayn ibn Ali	Damascus	Resident of Damascus	699 AH	Practiced medicine and philosophy.
Al-Hajj Azzuz al-Sanhaji al-	The East	The East	8th century AH	Genius in medicine.

Maknasi, Muhammad ibn Abd al- Aziz				
Ibn al-Qub‘a al-Ja‘fari al- Tunisi, Abu Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Abd al- Rahman	Cairo	Cairo	738 AH	Excelled in various sciences including medicine, taught at the Cairo maristan as deputy medical head.
Ibn al- Maghribi, Chief Physician, Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Muhammad	Egypt	Cairo	776 AH	Chief physician in Cairo.

Maghrebi Physicians Temporarily Residing in the East

Name	Journeys	Residence	Death	Medical Skills and Contributions
Hasan ibn Yusuf al- Ansari al- Marwi	Damascus, Hejaz, Cairo	Al-Andalus	after 896 AH	Practiced medicine.
Abd al- Rahman ibn	East, Egypt,	Fez	956 AH	Practiced medicine.

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Ali Ahmad al-Qasri al-Fasi	Kano in Sudan and others			
Ghalib ibn Ali ibn Muhammad al-Lakhmi al-Shughuri	East, Hejaz, Cairo	Fez	741 AH	From a family of physicians, practiced in Cairo's maristan, served Abu Mu'in and later Abu al-Hasan al-Marini.
Sharif Sayyid Qasim ibn Muhammad al-Tunisi	Damascus	?	1193 AH	A medical expert who taught at the Mansuri Maristan and twice served as Shaykh of the Maghrebis

From the table above, it becomes clear that the doctors of the countries of the Islamic West and the Islamic East remained in contact, drawing from each other knowledge and experience, and teaching it to students of knowledge in various countries.

Despite the intellectual progress and prosperity, most physicians in the Islamic West during the 7th–9th AH / 13th–16th centuries AD focused their attention on infectious diseases and epidemics. These spread throughout the region due to natural conditions—such as floods and droughts—as well as the conflicts and wars witnessed by the Islamic West. This included the struggle against the Christians, as seen with the inhabitants of Al-Andalus, for whom migration became the sole refuge in search of a safe and stable environment to continue their social and scholarly lives. Furthermore, internal conflicts arose between the countries of the Islamic Maghreb, leading to sieges intended to tighten the grip on specific regions. A prominent example occurred during the Zayyanid state with the Siege of

Tlemcen within the walls of Mansoura; hunger and pestilence ravaged the Zayyanid society to the point that they found nothing to eat and were forced to consume animal dung, leading to the widespread outbreak of diseases and plagues.

The Maghrebi Review of Manuscripts

4. Conclusion:

What has been presented here is but a glimpse of a much larger reality—selected examples of outstanding scholars from the Islamic West who journeyed to the East, some of whom eventually settled there. They excelled in medicine, were deeply passionate about it, and many of them combined it with other sciences. This reflects their scholarly nature: a blend of encyclopedic knowledge and specialization. They earned both knowledge and honor in their homelands and in the Mashriq alike—even among the People of the Book who were their adversaries. Their reputations spread far and wide, and they were honored and welcomed. They gave generously of their knowledge through teaching, research, critical editing, scholarly debate, authorship, manual practice, and supervision of medical institutions.

It is worth noting—based on the findings highlighted in this study—that the majority of these travelers from the Maghrib islamique and al-Andalus. The primary destination of their journeys was typically the Levant, especially Damascus. One researcher conducted a statistical study on Maghribi travelers to the Levant who specialized in various disciplines and professions *excluding medicine* during the period from the end of the 5th century AH to the end of the 9th century AH. The study identified several key motives that led to migration from one region to another. This finding aligns closely with our own research, which shows that the majority of these journeys took place actively and significantly from the 5th century AH through the 10th century AH.

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