

The Devastating Plague and Its Impact on Intellectual Life in the Islamic Maghreb

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Abstract

This study examines the state of scientific and cultural activity in the major urban centers of the Islamic Maghreb during the period of the devastating plague, particularly in terms of teaching and authorship. It explores the spread of the plague in the Maghreb and Al-Andalus, the factors that contributed to its expansion, and its impact on intellectual life.

The study highlights both the negative and positive effects of the epidemic. On the one hand, it reveals the scale of the catastrophe, as scholarly gatherings declined, teaching was largely reduced to Qur'anic memorization and basic Arabic texts, and prominent scholars in various fields were lost. On the other hand, the epidemic stimulated scholarly writing on the plague itself, emphasizing the scientific value of such works in promoting preventive measures such as isolation, quarantine, and the burning of contaminated materials—practices later adopted in modern medicine from Andalusian physicians.

Keywords: Epidemic, disease, plague, devastation, authorship, scientific life, cultural life.

Introduction

Humanity has been engaged in a continuous struggle against diseases and epidemics since its existence on earth. Over time, humans identified diseases, their symptoms, and the causes behind their spread across regions and societies. They also sought to develop effective treatments and preventive measures to limit the transmission of infection among individuals. Consequently, concern for health and physical well-being has remained a central preoccupation of human thought since ancient times. Among the most dangerous of these epidemics is the plague, which proved to be one of the deadliest, claiming the lives of millions across all segments of society—young and old, male and female alike. It profoundly affected various aspects of life, including economic, political, social, and cultural spheres. Despite these devastating consequences, societies attempted to adapt to this epidemic by modifying their behavior in positive ways to curb its spread while striving to maintain the continuity of daily life.

Given that the Islamic Maghreb maintained extensive connections with the Islamic East and, in particular, the Christian world—through maritime and overland trade, diplomatic missions, and the travels of scholars, literati, and religious figures, as well as through religious conflicts and fluctuating political relations among the rulers of the Maghreb and al-Andalus—the

devastating plague spread widely across the region. It struck major urban centers and led to the loss of many prominent scholars and leading intellectual figures across various fields of knowledge.

This study, entitled “*The Devastating Plague and Its Impact on Scientific and Cultural Life in the Islamic Maghreb*,” seeks to examine the intellectual and cultural conditions in the Maghreb during the years of the plague. It explores the extent to which scholars were prompted to write on the subject of the plague, evaluates the scientific value of these works and their contribution to the development of modern medical sciences, and analyzes the methodologies they employed—such as induction, careful observation, diagnosis, and experimentation. Furthermore, the study attempts to assess the magnitude of the loss suffered by the scholarly community due to the death of eminent intellectual figures who had enriched the cultural and scientific life of the region for decades across various disciplines.

Accordingly, the following research problem may be formulated: undoubtedly, the devastating plague was a major epidemic that afflicted the Islamic Maghreb, spreading due to a combination of factors and impacting various aspects of daily life, particularly the scientific and cultural domains, both positively and negatively. How, then, can one reconstruct a comprehensive picture of scientific and cultural life in the major cities of the Maghreb and al-Andalus despite the scarcity of sources and references that adequately reflect the scale of this epidemic?

In an effort to address this problem from multiple perspectives, the study is structured into three main sections. The first defines the conceptual, spatial, and temporal framework of the term “plague,” examining its linguistic and terminological meanings and tracing its origins according to Muslim historians, while highlighting differences in dating its emergence. The second section discusses the causes behind its spread in the Islamic Maghreb and outlines features of daily life during its outbreak. The final section examines both the positive and negative impacts of the plague on the scientific and cultural movement in the region.

The Concept of Plague

A. Linguistic Definition:

The word *ṭāʿūn* (plague) is derived from the verb *ṭaʿana* (to pierce, to stab) (al-Mursi, 2000, p. 549). One says: *ṭaʿanahu ṭaʿnan* — “he pierced him with a spear or similar weapon.” Thus, the person is *maṭʿūn* (pierced) or *ṭaʿīn*. From the tribe *ṭuʿn*: “he stabbed him.” The noun *ṭaʿna* refers to the mark left by stabbing. The poet al-Hudhali said:

“Indeed, Ibn ʿAbs—you have known his rank—
Was made renowned by striking blows and penetrating stabs.”

Here, *ṭaʿn* is the plural of *ṭaʿna*.

The root letters *ṭāʿ*, *ʿayn*, and *nūn* form a sound and consistent origin, denoting penetration into something with what pierces it. From this comes *ṭaʿn* with a spear. One says: *taṭāʿana al-qawm wa-iṭṭaʿanū* — “the people fought with spears,” and they are *maṭāʿīn* in war. A man may also be described as *ṭaʿān* when he maligns others. In the ḥadīth: “The believer is not *ṭaʿān* (one who slanders).” Some reported: *ṭaʿantu fī al-rajul ṭaʿānān* — “I criticized the man verbally,” distinguishing it from stabbing with a spear. Another poet said:

“But the manifest hatred refused Except verbal attacks and speech unspeakable. (al-Razi, 1979, p. 412)”

Al-Aṣma‘ī explained: *ṭa‘n* is with the spear, while *ṭa‘ānān* is with the tongue — this is the usage of the Arabs. Thus, *ṭaṭā‘ana al-qawm ṭi‘ānan wa-iṭṭa‘anū iṭṭi‘ānan*. The term *ṭā‘ūn* also came to denote the well-known disease. A man may be called *ṭa‘ān* in people’s honor, and groups are *maṭā‘īn* (al-Azdi, 1987, p. 917).

In the ḥadīth: “The destruction of my community will be through *ṭa‘n* and *ṭā‘ūn*. (Ibn Mandhour, 1414 AH, p. 265)” Here, *ṭa‘n* refers to killing with spears, while *ṭā‘ūn* refers to the widespread disease and epidemic that corrupts the air, thereby spoiling temperaments and bodies. The meaning is that the predominant causes of the community’s demise are civil strife involving bloodshed and epidemic disease.

B. Terminological Definition:

Sharf al-Dīn al-Nuwayrī, in his *al-Minhāj fī Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj*, quoting Ibn Ḥātim in his *al-Jarḥ wa-al-Ta‘dīl*, provides an important definition of plague based on the Prophetic traditions concerning it. He states:

“As for the plague of devastation (*ṭā‘ūn al-jārif*), it was so named because of the multitude of deaths it caused among people. Death was called *jārif* (sweeping) because it sweeps away people, just as a flood is called *jārif* because it sweeps across the land. *Al-jarf* means the removal of what is upon the surface of the earth. As for plague, it is a well-known epidemic: a painful swelling and pustule that emerges with burning heat, turning the surrounding area black, green, or a murky purplish-red. It is accompanied by palpitations of the heart and vomiting (al-Nouiri, 1312 AH, p. 165).

Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalani further describes plague as:

“Ulcerations that appear in the folds of the body, rarely leaving the afflicted alive. The term *maṭ‘ūn* (pierced) refers to one who dies of plague, considered a martyr. The phrase ‘he began to *yaṭ‘an* with his hand’ means he struck with its head, or pierced it with a stick. (al-‘Asqalani, 1379 AH, p. 143)”

Iyadh stated that the original meaning of plague refers to sores or ulcers that appear on the body, whereas epidemic denotes diseases in general. It was called plague due to its resemblance to such afflictions in terms of causing death. Thus, every plague is an epidemic, but not every epidemic is a plague.

Al-Nawawi held that it consists of eruptions and extremely painful swellings accompanied by a burning sensation. The surrounding area turns black, green, or intensely red with a dark purplish hue. It is associated with palpitations and vomiting, and it most frequently appears in the groin and the armpits, although it may also occur in the hands, fingers, and throughout the rest of the body.

A group of physicians, among them Avicenna, believed that the plague is a toxic substance that produces a lethal swelling, occurring in the softer parts of the body and in its folds, most commonly under the armpit, behind the ear, or near the nose⁷ (Abadi, 1415 AH, p. 255).

Ibn al-Khatib described the nature of the plague as an acute disease of hot origin and toxic matter. It first affects the spirit through the air, then spreads through the veins, corrupting

the blood and transforming bodily humors into toxic substances. This is followed by fever and hemoptysis, or it may manifest externally in the form of abscesses characteristic of plague. He further identified a remote cause, namely astral influences such as planetary conjunctions affecting the world, and a proximate cause, namely the corruption of the air, which either initiates the disease or facilitates its transmission (al-Gharnati, 2018, pp. 65-66).

This view was supported by Ibn Khaldun, who considered that epidemics are generally caused by corruption of the air due to dense urbanization, as the air becomes mixed with decay and putrid moisture. When this vital element for the spirit becomes corrupted, the corruption spreads to the bodily temperament, leading to disease in the lungs—these being the plagues and their associated illnesses, which are particularly linked to pulmonary conditions. If the corruption is less intense, putrefaction still increases and multiplies, leading to frequent fevers, bodily illness, and death.

He further explained that the abundance of putrefaction and corrupt moisture is primarily due to dense urbanization and its expansion at the end of a state. Therefore, it becomes evident that it is wise and necessary for open and uninhabited spaces to exist between urban centers, allowing the movement of air to disperse corruption and decay produced by human and animal interaction, and to bring in healthy air. For this reason, mortality is far higher in densely populated cities than elsewhere, as in Cairo in the East and Fez in Morocco (Ibn Khaldun, 2004, pp. 499-500).

2. The Sweeping Plague in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb

a. Point of origin of the sweeping plague:

Scholars face a scarcity of sources that would allow them to reconstruct the precise point of origin of the sweeping plague that emerged in 749 AH. This plague spread along the same communication and trade networks that had facilitated the expansion of Islam and contributed to the cultural unity of its territories. Historical sources authored by Muslim historians, physicians, and literati indicate that the plague originated in China or southern Central Asia and then advanced westward. However, its effects in China and in the Mongol-controlled regions of Asia remain largely unknown (Byrne, 2014, pp. 390-391).

Ibn al-Khatib, in tracing the origin of this epidemic and the time of its first appearance on earth, stated that it began in the lands of *Khitā'* and China around the year 734 AH. This was reported by several trustworthy travelers, including the renowned judge and traveler Ibn Battuta, who mentioned the presence of numerous corpses left after warfare in those regions. These bodies decomposed, following a massive fire that had previously swept through the region, destroying vegetation and trees over a distance of nearly ten stages. As a result, the air became corrupted, and proximate causes combined with remote causes, leading to widespread mortality and a strange epidemic characterized by its rapid spread and gradual transmission to distant lands (al-Gharnati, 2018, pp. 75-76).

Ibn Battuta also reports that he witnessed the Great Plague in Damascus toward the end of the month of *Rabi' al-Thani* in 749 AH. Among the remarkable practices of the people of Damascus was their veneration of the Mosque of *al-Aqdām*. The governor, Arghun Shah, ordered a public proclamation that people should fast for three days and that no food should be

prepared in the markets during daylight hours, as most inhabitants relied on market-prepared food. The population fasted for three consecutive days, ending on a Thursday. Thereafter, princes, nobles, judges, and all social groups gathered in the mosque until it became overcrowded. They spent the night between prayer, remembrance, and supplication. After performing the dawn prayer, they proceeded on foot, carrying copies of the Qur'an; the princes walked barefoot, and all the inhabitants—men, women, young and old—joined them. Jews carried their Torahs, Christians their Gospels, accompanied by women and children, all weeping and beseeching God through His scriptures and prophets. They gathered at the mosque, remaining in supplication until near noon, then returned to the city and performed the Friday prayer. Thereafter, God alleviated their suffering, and the number of deaths declined to approximately two thousand per day, whereas in Cairo and Egypt it had reached twenty-four thousand deaths in a single day (Ibn Battuta, 1417 AH, pp. 325-326).

Ibn al-Wardi also referred to the plague in Aleppo in 749 AH, indicating that its initial focus was in the “Land of Darkness,” a term referring to an unknown region. He noted that it had appeared fifteen years prior to its arrival in Aleppo. In his account of the events of that year, he wrote that the epidemic reached Aleppo in the month of Rajab, and he composed a treatise entitled *Report on the Epidemic*, in which he stated that it originated from the “Land of Darkness,” spreading gradually over fifteen years. It reached China, India, Sind, and the lands beyond the Oxus, then advanced into Persian territories, moved westward into the lands of the Romans, crossed the islands including Cyprus, and eventually struck Cairo, devastating populations across vast regions (Abu al-Fida, 1999, p. 174).

Al-Maqrizi described the sweeping plague across various regions and territories, stating: “The epidemic spread throughout the lands of Qirman and Caesarea, affecting all their mountains and districts, annihilating their inhabitants, livestock, and animals. The Kurds fled in fear of death but found no land free of corpses, so they returned home and perished entirely. Mortality was severe in the lands of Sīs, and in Takfur, 180 people died in a single location, leaving Sīs and its territories deserted. In the lands of Khitā', unprecedented rainfall occurred outside its usual season, causing the death of their animals and livestock until complete devastation, followed by the death of humans, birds, and wild animals, leaving the lands of Khitā' empty. Sixteen rulers perished within three months. In China, the population was largely wiped out, leaving only a few survivors, while in India, the mortality was lower than in China. The plague also struck Baghdad, where people would awaken with marks on their faces, and if they merely touched it with their hand, they would die suddenly” (al-Maqrizi, 1997, pp. 79-80).

Some European historical sources recall that the sweeping plague appeared in October 1348 in Sicily, seemingly out of nowhere. The scale of the disaster was unprecedented, with no available treatment, and every infected individual died a horrific death. This epidemic was capable of devastating Europe over the next three hundred years, claiming millions of lives.

According to the account of the monk Michael from the town of Biacca, the first outbreak of the sweeping plague occurred on twelve ships arriving from Genoa, Italy, reportedly originating from Crimea and entering the port of Messina in Sicily. The crews carried the contagious disease. The account states: “...every person who interacted with them contracted

a fatal illness, from which there was no escape. The infection spread to anyone in contact with the patient, and those infected felt burning pain throughout their bodies....” Notably, the crews themselves were initially in good health, showing no symptoms. Once the people of Sicily recognized the epidemic, the ships were expelled from the port, forced to sail to Giudea, where the disease quickly spread, eventually reaching other parts of Europe and the Islamic world (Scott & Duncan, 2014, pp. 21-22).

This narrative is largely consistent with that of Sheldon Watts in his book *Epidemics and History: Disease and Imperial Power*, who adds that by the end of 1348, the plague began affecting populations along the Atlantic and Baltic coasts, later spreading along rivers, corridors, and fields, reaching deep inland European populations. Estimates suggest that mortality ranged from one-eighth to two-thirds of the regional population, approximately 24 million people. This epidemic remained the deadliest disease disaster in Europe since the fall of the Roman Empire. Mortality in the Islamic world was similarly severe, with roughly one-quarter to one-third of its population perishing (Watts, 2010, pp. 65-66).

Ibn Khatim reported two differing accounts regarding the region where the sweeping plague originated, attributed to Christian merchants. The first account stated: “Some trustworthy sources among Christian merchants arriving from Almeria informed me that its origin was the lands of Khitā’, which in the language of foreigners refers to China, according to what I received from travelers from Samarkand, reliable and truthful.” The second account indicated: “Some Christians arriving informed me that its initial outbreak was in the land of Abyssinia and that it spread from there to adjacent regions, ultimately reaching Egypt and Syria” (Ibn Khatima, 1013, pp. 143-144).

b. Spread of the plague in the Islamic Maghreb:

The plague initially emerged in the 1330s in its isolated origin in Central Asia, spreading eastward to China and southward to the Indian subcontinent. It appeared in the eastern regions of the Islamic world in the 1340s, extending southwest along the Black Sea and reaching the western shores of the Mediterranean.

A major factor in its spread in the Maghreb was the movement of traders, caravans, armies, pilgrims, and diplomatic missions, as well as the transportation of goods and passengers by ship from plague-affected regions such as Sicily, Marseille, Genoa, and Alexandria to coastal cities of the Islamic Maghreb. From there, it spread inland via carts, roads, horseback, and pack animals to cities in the Maghreb and al-Andalus¹⁸. This view aligns with that of Al-Hasan al-Wazzan, who stated: “The epidemic in the lands of the Berbers appears every ten, fifteen, or twenty-five years. When it arrives, it claims many lives because no treatment is effective, except for the application of Armenian soil to the plague swelling. In Numidia, it had not appeared for a hundred years and had never appeared in Sudan”¹⁹ (Ibn al-Wazzan, 1983, p. 85).

Ibn al-Khatib confirms this, noting: “In coastal cities enjoying safety, the plague would only appear once it arrived via the sea from another region already affected. Reports consistently indicated that areas disconnected from major roads and isolated from human contact remained safe from the epidemic” (al-Gharnati, 2018, p. 73).

Travel by the inhabitants of the Islamic Maghreb, especially scholars, was a major vector for transmitting the plague from one region to another. Interaction with diverse populations, observation of their customs, behaviors, traditions, laws, religions, and governance systems often provided a basis for comparison. Generally, travelers from the Maghreb and al-Andalus journeyed eastward more frequently than those from the Mashriq. The pilgrimage center in the Mashriq, along with the strong desire of Maghrebi travelers to meet scholars and teachers, created a pressing motivation. The pursuit of knowledge and the effort to attain it was a common objective for all (Mu'nis, 1986, p. 11). This is evidenced by historical, biographical, and travel works, which introduce these individuals, document their intellectual contributions, and trace the paths of their journeys.

Maghrebi and Andalusian scholars exemplified perseverance in long absences and endured hardships to pursue knowledge. They often opted for group travel to ease the burden and extended their journeys over long periods, dedicating their time to study. Some undertook multiple trips to the Mashriq, demonstrating their strong desire to enrich their scientific knowledge and secure their share of proximity to holy sites in Mecca and Medina (al-Mazru', n.d., p. 72). Some maintained prolonged, uninterrupted stays, greatly enhancing both their own learning and their contributions to knowledge, and thus Maghrebi travelers played a role in transmitting the plague between regions, except for those who traveled and settled in the African desert: "Reports confirm the safety of inhabitants and Arab travelers in Africa and other regions due to the lack of stagnant air and minimal potential for corruption" (al-Gharnati, 2018, p. 74).

The presence of densely populated cities such as Fez, Tlemcen, Béjaïa, Kairouan, Tunis, Granada, and Córdoba, coupled with the lack of urban planning and the absence of open spaces and greenery, contributed to the rapid spread of the plague in Maghrebi cities. Ibn Khaldun described this devastation: "In the mid-eighth century, the sweeping plague afflicted urban centers east and west, annihilating populations, erasing much of the beauty of urban life, and affecting states at the height of their prosperity. Wealth and infrastructure deteriorated, populations declined, and cities, factories, roads, and landmarks were destroyed. In the Mashriq, similar effects occurred proportionate to the extent of urbanization. The universe seemed to call for contraction and decay, and divine will reshaped the world, requiring chroniclers to document these changes in creation, territories, generations, and customs."

Political events in the Maghreb in 749 AH also influenced plague dynamics. Observing the movements of Marinid armies between Tunis and central Maghreb, Ibn Khaldun notes that Abu al-Hasan al-Marini arrived in Algiers from Tunis in the mid-eighth century after Ibn Tafarkin and his companions had abandoned the city. The local authorities took control, destroyed the residences of the court, and the sultan landed with his fleet in Rabi' al-Thani, finally establishing firm control (Ibn Khaldun, 1988, p. 526).

Ibn Khaldun traces the movement of the Marinid armies in a narrative indicating that 'Alī ibn Muḥammad, the chief of Banū Nafāl, was known for his opposition and resistance toward Sultan Abū Sa'īd and his son Abū al-Ḥasan. At the beginning of his reign, Abū al-Ḥasan compelled him to descend from his stronghold after besieging him, and incorporated him under his authority and command. He remained under his protection until he perished in Tunis

following the Battle of Kairouan during the sweeping plague, after which his sons assumed leadership of their people until their eventual extinction (Ibn Khaldun, 1988, p. 272).

Around the same period, Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan entrusted the domains of Banū ‘Abd in the Maghreb to his mamluks, granting authority to Abū al-Ḥamalāt ibn ‘Ā’id ibn Thābit during the time of the sweeping plague, and he appointed Ibrāhīm ibn Naṣr over the Tha‘āliba (Ibn Khaldun, 1988, pp. 65-66).

Undoubtedly, this rapid movement of Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Marīnī with his armies between Fez, Tlemcen, and Kairouan contributed to the accelerated spread of the plague among population centers in the Maghreb. This, in turn, led to the devastation of urban life in the region, as described by Ibn Khaldun in his account of the state of civilization in both the Mashriq and the Maghreb during this pandemic.

3. The Impact of the Sweeping Plague on Scientific and Cultural Life in the Islamic Maghreb

Given the magnitude of this plague, which spread across both the eastern and western regions, its victims included large numbers of scholars, literati, and rulers who had animated the scientific and cultural life of the Islamic Maghreb. Their religious, cultural, literary, and intellectual influence extended across major urban centers such as Kairouan, Tlemcen, Béjaïa, Fez, Marrakesh, Granada, and Córdoba, where they specialized in various religious, literary, historical, and geographical sciences.

This resulted in a significant decline in scholarly gatherings, whether those held in the courts of sultans under their patronage and support, or those convened in the great mosques of the Maghreb. Consequently, this had a negative impact on Maghrebi society across multiple dimensions—social, cultural, scientific, and economic.

This is confirmed by Ibn Khaldun, who states: “From my youth, I devoted myself to the pursuit of knowledge, striving to acquire virtues, and attending scholarly circles, until the sweeping plague struck. The leading figures and eminent scholars perished, including my parents—may God have mercy on them. Thereafter, I attended the sessions of our teacher Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Ābillī and devoted myself to study under him for three years, until I attained some proficiency” (Ibn Khaldun, 1988, p. 533).

Aḥmad al-Maqqarī al-Tilimsānī, citing Ibn Khaldun and other historians, describes the scholarly life in Fez during the sweeping plague: “We did not witness in the eighth century anyone in Fez following the path of critical scholarship, nor in these regions generally, due to the decline of the teaching tradition. There was little interest in travel, and ambitions were limited to memorizing the Qur’an and studying basic texts. Some foundational elements of Arabic were learned from Andalusian scholars arriving from Ceuta and elsewhere, at the request of the Marinid rulers. However, none among the scholars of Fez rose to teach ‘al-Kitāb’ as was customary in al-Andalus, such as Ibn Abī al-Rabī’ and al-Shalūbīn, owing to the strong grammatical tradition in al-Andalus” (al-Tilimsani, 1939, pp. 26-27).

Among the prominent scholars of the Islamic Maghreb who perished during the sweeping plague, the following may be mentioned:

a. Abū Mūsā ‘Īsā ibn al-Imām:

His elder brother was Zayd ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān. Their father had been an imam in one of the mosques of Barshak in Tlemcen. After their father’s death, the two brothers traveled to Tunis at the end of the seventh century AH, where they studied under a disciple of Ibn Zaytūn and trained in jurisprudence under the students of Abū ‘Abd Allāh ibn Ṣa‘b al-Dukkālī. They later returned to the Maghreb with extensive knowledge and settled in Tlemcen, where they disseminated learning. Abū Mūsā made notable contributions to theoretical sciences, and Sultan Abū Ḥammū Mūsā I honored them for their scholarly standing, even establishing a madrasa named after them.

When Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Marīnī conquered Tlemcen in 737 AH, the brothers had already gained widespread fame. He brought them close to his court, elevated their status, and took pride in their presence. They accompanied him in the Battle of Tarifa. After their return, the elder brother Abū Zayd passed away, and Abū Mūsā ibn al-Imām died during the sweeping plague in 749 AH, after being sent back to his homeland by Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan following his conquest of Tunis (Ibn Khaldun, 1988, pp. 517-518).

b. ‘Abd al-Muḥaymin ibn Muḥammad al-Ḥaḍramī (al-Maknassi, 1973, pp. 352-353):

Known as Abū Muḥammad, he was among the leading officials and chief secretaries in Fez, renowned for his integrity, prestige, and noble lineage. He excelled in hadith, literature, history, language, and prosody, and was known for his constant intellectual effort. He was born in Ceuta in 676 AH and served as chief secretary under Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Marīnī. He died during the sweeping plague in 749 AH while accompanying his patron in Tunis, where he was buried. Ibn Khaldun attended his sessions and received from him authorization and transmission of major works, including the six canonical hadith collections, *al-Muwatta’*, the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq, and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ’s introduction to hadith studies.

c. Al-Wādī Āshī (al-‘Asqalani, n.d., pp. 413-414):

He is Muḥammad ibn Jābir ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Ḥassān al-Qaysī al-Wādī Āshī al-Andalusī, known as Shams al-Dīn, later associated with Tunis, and a jurist of the Mālikī school. He was born in Tunis in 673 AH. He was well-versed in jurisprudence according to the Mālikī doctrine and was distinguished by his broad scholarly participation, with expertise in grammar, language, hadith, and Qur’ānic recitation. He died in Tunis in the month of Rabī‘ al-Awwal during the year of the plague, 749 AH. Ibn Khaldun described him as “the man of two journeys,” as he traveled twice to the Mashriq. He studied with him the work of Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, with only minor omissions from the Book of Hunting, as well as the entire *al-Muwatta’*, and portions of the Five Major Collections. He authorized him to transmit numerous works in Arabic and jurisprudence and granted him a general authorization (Ibn Khaldun, 2009, p. 39).

d. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn al-Najjār:

He is Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā ibn ‘Alī al-Najjār, from Tlemcen. He acquired knowledge in his hometown from its scholars, particularly from al-Ābillī, under whom he excelled. He later traveled to the Maghreb and met in Ceuta the scholar Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Hilāl, commentator on the *Almagest* in astronomy, and studied in Marrakesh under Abū al-‘Abbās ibn al-Bannā’, a leading authority in astronomy and its applications. He returned to Tlemcen with extensive knowledge and was appointed by the state. After the death of Abū

Tāshfīn and the accession of Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan, he was incorporated into his circle and granted a stipend. He accompanied him to Ifriqiya, where he died during the sweeping plague in 749 AH (al-Timbukti, 2011, p. 409).

e. al-Ḥasan ibn ‘Alī al-Khaṭīb:

He is the father of Ibn Qunfudh al-Qusantīnī. Among his teachers were Abū ‘Alī Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bijā’ī, Ibn Gharīyūn, Abū Ḥayyān the grammarian, Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī, and Abū ‘Alī ibn Ḥasan al-Bijā’ī. The cause of his death was the turmoil associated with the sweeping plague and the disagreement among his students regarding whether to flee from those infected. He authored a work entitled *al-Masnūn fī Aḥkām al-Tā’ūn* and another titled *al-Masā’il al-Masṭūra fī al-Nawāzil al-Fiḥhiyya*. He died of the sweeping plague in 750 (al-Khatib, 1983, pp. 355-356).

f. Qāḍī Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Nūr:

From the region of Nedroma, he was distinguished in Mālikī jurisprudence, having studied under the sons of Ibn al-Imām. When Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Marīnī took control of Tlemcen, Ibn al-Imām recommended him to be included among the jurists of the royal council. He was brought close to the court, appointed as judge of the army, and remained in this position until he died in the sweeping plague in Tunis in 749 AH (Ibn Khaldun, 2009, p. 58).

g. Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Salām al-Hawwārī:

He is Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Salām ibn Yūnus al-Hawwārī al-Munastīrī, a Mālikī jurist and one of the leading scholars of Tunis in his time. He was appointed judge of Tunis in 734 AH and remained in that position until his death at the beginning of the plague that struck his city in 749 AH. Among his works are a commentary on the *Ummahāt* of Ibn al-Ḥājjib and a collection of legal opinions (al-Khatib, 1983, p. 354).

h. The son of ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun:

He is Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Muḥammad ibn Jābir ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Khaldun. He turned away from military and administrative service toward scholarship and spiritual discipline, following the guidance of Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Rundī, known as “the jurist,” who was a leading authority in Tunis in his time. He excelled in Arabic language and had a strong appreciation for poetry and its arts. People would bring their disputes and literary questions to him. He died during the sweeping plague in 749 AH (Ibn Khaldun, 1988, p. 510).

Authorship in the Islamic Maghreb during the year 749 AH turned toward raising awareness of the dangers of this epidemic. Scholars, jurists, historians, physicians, and literati devoted considerable attention to writing about the plague. Among the most notable works are three Andalusian treatises that provided precise scientific definitions of the disease, traced its origin and spread across both the Christian and Islamic worlds, distinguished between its different types, and described their symptoms in great detail. They also explained the modes of transmission, the factors contributing to its rapid spread, and proposed treatments and preventive measures such as quarantine, isolation, and the disposal of contaminated clothing and materials. These works employed various stages of the scientific method, including diagnosis, careful observation, induction, and experimentation in order to reach accurate conclusions. These treatises include:

- A treatise by Ibn al-Khatib¹, written during the plague of 749 AH, entitled *A Convincing Response to the Questioner about the Terrifying Disease*.
- *The Attainment of the Seeker's Purpose in Explaining the Incoming Disease* by Ibn Khatima al-Anṣārī², composed in 749 AH following the outbreak of the plague in Almeria.
- *Restriction of Counsel*, also known as *Verification of the Report Concerning the Epidemic*, by Abū 'Abd Allāh 'Abd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Shaqūrī³.

In the central Maghreb, however, writing on plague literature was less prominent, although a few works did exist, including:

- al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Qusantīnī, author of *al-Masnūn fī Ahkām al-Ṭā'ūn*.
- Ibn Abī Ḥijla al-Tilimsānī⁴, author of *al-Ṭibb al-Masnūn fī Daf' al-Ṭā'ūn*.

¹ Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'īd ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sa'īd ibn 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Salmānī, originally from Córdoba and later associated with Toledo, Loja, and Granada, was known as Abū 'Abd Allāh and bore the title Lisān al-Dīn. He was an Andalusian Mālikī jurist, as well as a statesman, physician, man of letters, and historian. He was born in Loja in 713 AH and raised in Granada, where he studied under numerous teachers, acquiring knowledge in Qur'ān, jurisprudence, exegesis, language, transmission, medicine, and scholarly accreditation. He served several rulers, including Abū al-Ḥajjāj and Sultan Muḥammad V (al-Ghanī bi-llāh), and maintained relations with scholars of the Maghreb such as Ibn Khaldun. After the death of the Sultan of the Maghreb in 774 AH, he lost his protector, was later imprisoned, and ultimately executed and burned in 776 AH. He authored numerous works, including *Ādāb al-Wizāra*, *al-Iḥāta fī Akhbār Gharnāta*, *Jaysh al-Tawshīh*, *Raḡm al-Ḥulal fī Naẓm al-Duwal*, *Rawḍat al-Ta'rīf bi al-Ḥubb al-Sharīf*, *Rayḥānat al-Kuttāb*, and *Maqāla Muqni'at al-Sā'il 'an al-Maraḍ al-Hā'il*. See: Muḥammad ibn al-Khaṭīb al-Salmānī al-Gharnāṭī, 1424 AH, *al-Iḥāta fī Akhbār Gharnāta*, 1st ed., Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, editor's introduction, pp. 5–12.

² Aḥmad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn Khātima, Abū Ja'far al-Anṣārī al-Andalusī, was a physician, historian, and distinguished man of letters from Almeria in al-Andalus. He held a teaching position at the Great Mosque of Almeria and visited Granada on several occasions. Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb noted that he was still alive as of 12 Sha'bān 770 AH, while Ibn al-Jazarī reported that he died at over seventy years of age. During his lifetime, a major epidemic broke out in Almeria and spread widely across many regions, known in European sources as the Black Death. Among his works are *Maziyyat al-Marīya 'alā Ghayrihā min al-Bilād al-Andalusiyya* (on the history of Almeria), *Rā'iq al-Taḥliya fī Fā'iqa al-Tawriya* (literature), *Ilḥāq al-'Aql bi al-Ḥiss fī al-Farq bayna Ism al-Jins wa 'Ilm al-Jins*, *Rayḥāna min Adwāḥ wa Nasma min Arwāḥ* (his poetry collection, preserved in the Rabat manuscript collection, no. 269 Kattānī), and *Taḥṣīl Gharḍ al-Qāsid fī Tafṣīl al-Maraḍ al-Wāfid*. See: Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, 2002, *al-A'lām*, vol. 7, 5th ed., Dār al-Malāyīn, Beirut, pp. 176–177.

³ He is known by the kunya Abū 'Abd Allāh and referred to as al-Shaqūrī, in attribution to the city of Shaqūra, from which his family originated. He served as a physician at the court of the emirate. He studied under his paternal grandfather, as well as under the physician and vizier Khālīd ibn Khālīd, one of the scholars of Granada, and under the distinguished scholar Abū Zakariyyā' ibn Hudhayl, with whom he maintained close association and from whom he benefited greatly. He also followed the Sufi master Abū Muḥadhdhab 'Isā al-Zayyāt, and subsequently his brother, the virtuous Abū Ja'far al-Zayyāt, adhering to their spiritual path and manifesting its influence. He authored several notable works, including *Tuḥfat al-Mutawassil fī Ṣinā'at al-Ṭibb*, *al-Jihād al-Akbar*, and *Qam' al-Yahūdī 'an Ta'addī al-Ḥudūd*. He was born in 727 AH. See: Muḥammad ibn al-Khaṭīb al-Salmānī al-Gharnāṭī, 1424 AH, *al-Iḥāta fī Akhbār Gharnāta*, vol. 3, 1st ed., Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Beirut, pp. 136–137.

⁴ Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā ibn Abī Bakr ibn 'Abd al-Wāḥid, Shihāb al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās al-Maghribī al-Miṣrī al-Ḥanafī, known as Ibn Abī Ḥijla, was an accomplished scholar, jurist, litterateur, and poet. He was born in Tlemcen in the Maghreb, in the zawiya of his grandfather, the shaykh Abū Ḥijla, around 726

It is also important to note that during the sweeping plague, which claimed the life of Ibn Khaldun's father and most of his teachers, Muḥammad al-Ābillī was among the few who survived. Ibn Khaldun continued to attend his sessions and devoted himself to study under him for three years. This period of seclusion, imposed by the plague, was one of the main factors that led him to compose *Kitāb al-ʿIbar*, including its famous introduction.

The *Muqaddima* is an encyclopedic work and represents a major intellectual effort. It forms part of a seven-volume composition and is a synthetic work that brings together elements of Islamic intellectual heritage at a time when much of its brilliance had declined. It organizes these elements within their historical frameworks and transforms them into general theories explaining the development of human society over time. In this way, history becomes the foundation of the sciences. After the French translator Deslane translated the sections concerning the history of the Berbers into French, as well as the first part under the title *Prolegomena*, this contributed to the development of both historical and sociological thought, making historical thinking more rational and material in nature, sometimes diverging from religious perspectives (Zaghloul, 1983, pp. 39-40).

In this context, Ibn Khaldun states: "What befell civilization, both in the East and the West, in the middle of the eighth century, was the sweeping plague, which devastated nations, wiped out populations, erased many of the achievements of urban life, and struck states at the height of their development. It diminished their power, weakened their authority, and led to the decline of their wealth. With the decline of populations came the ruin of cities, industries, roads, and landmarks. Dwellings were abandoned, states and tribes weakened, and populations changed. It is as if the East experienced a similar fate to the West, in proportion to its level of development. It was as though the universe itself called for contraction and decline, and the world responded accordingly. When conditions change completely, it is as though creation itself has been transformed, and the entire world becomes a new creation, requiring historians to document the transformations of societies, regions, generations, customs, and beliefs. My intention in this work is to record what I can about the Maghreb, its peoples, dynasties, and conditions, as I lack sufficient knowledge of the East" (Ibn Khaldun, 2004, pp. 42-43).

Conclusion:

After examining the research topic entitled "*The Sweeping Plague and Its Impact on Scientific and Cultural Life in the Islamic Maghreb*," and addressing its various aspects,

AH. He was raised in the Maghreb before moving to Cairo, where he became head of the Madrasa of Amīr Manjak al-Yūsufī. There, he taught and contributed extensively to scholarship, excelling in multiple disciplines, though he was particularly distinguished in literature and poetry. He composed refined poetry and authored numerous works, reportedly numbering around sixty. Among them are *Dīwān al-Ṣabāba* and *al-Sukardān*. He also composed five collections in praise of the Prophet and seven poetic compositions totaling approximately seven thousand verses. His poetry is noted for its originality, richness of meaning, creative expression, and stylistic elegance, as well as his prolific output and sharp wit. He died in Cairo on Thursday, at the beginning of Dhū al-Ḥijja in the year 776 AH, at the age of fifty-one. See: Yūsuf ibn Taghrī Birdī, n.d., *al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa al-Mustawfi ba'd al-Wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn and Sa'īd 'Abd al-Fattāḥ 'Āshūr, vol. 2, Egyptian General Book Authority, Cairo, pp. 259–260.

including the factors that accelerated its spread across the major urban centers of the Maghreb and al-Andalus, as well as its positive and negative effects on the cultural sphere, and the state of stagnation that followed its outbreak—particularly its impact on the intellectual class of scholars, jurists, physicians, and historians, especially in directing intellectual production toward the central issue of the time—the study arrives at the following conclusions:

- The sweeping plague was a widespread and devastating epidemic that affected all regions of the world, including both the eastern and western parts of the Islamic world. It had profound consequences on social, cultural, economic, and living conditions, causing demographic losses estimated at between one-quarter and one-third of the population of the Islamic world, according to some historical sources, despite the scarcity of precise data regarding its spread in the Maghreb.
- The political disturbances that characterized the major cities of the Islamic Maghreb during the mid-eighth century AH—particularly the rapid movements of the Marinid armies between Fez, Tlemcen, and Kairouan to suppress rebellions against Sultan Abū al-Ḥasan al-Marīnī—contributed significantly to the spread of the plague. Biographical and historical works record numerous prominent scholars who perished during the plague, especially in the events of Kairouan in 749 AH.
- Scientific and cultural life in the Islamic Maghreb experienced significant stagnation following the outbreak of the plague. Scholarly gatherings, previously supported by sultans through material and moral patronage and held in the major mosques of Maghrebi and Andalusian cities, declined drastically or disappeared altogether. Educational institutions such as mosques, kuttāb schools, and madrasas became largely limited to Qur’ān memorization and the teaching of basic texts in Arabic language and Mālikī jurisprudence.
- The engagement of scholars in the Islamic Maghreb with writing on the plague had a positive impact, as it contributed to guiding individual behavior in confronting the disease. These works later served as important references in medical studies, particularly regarding modes of transmission and preventive measures such as isolation, quarantine, and the destruction of contaminated clothing and materials.

Finally, it can be stated that the seclusion of the eminent historian Ibn Khaldun, along with his close association with the scholar Muḥammad al-Ābillī, had a positive impact on the organization of the scholarly material of his encyclopedic work *Kitāb al-‘Ibar*. Its first volume, the *Muqaddima*, played a significant role in the development of both historiography and sociology.

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