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The Genre of Rihla from the Middle Ages to Postmodernism

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Abstract. The article is devoted to the history of the medieval Arabic travelogue – rihla as a genre. The purpose of the study is to show the significance of this genre for Arabic national culture over the centuries, its influence on modern Arabic prose. The authors described the distinctive features of rihla against the background of similar travels in other cultures and in other time periods, thus substantiating the legitimacy of introducing the term ‘rihla’ itself, despite the already existing in scientific circulation terms ‘travel literature’, ‘travel description’, ‘travelogue’. At the same time, the authors draw parallels between the Arabic rihla and *A Journey Beyond the Three Seas* by Afanasy Nikitin. The deep rooting of the phenomenon of rihla in the Arab culture, and its close connection with religion and science, in the opinion of the authors, did not allow the genre to disappear in the Middle Ages. Therefore, one of the objectives of the work was to trace and generalize the history of rihla in the Modern era and later. The work substantiates the conditions for the formation of the genre, describes its transformation by the 19th century, explains the role in the emergence of late national fiction, found an appeal to it in the latest literature, an attempt was made to present various types of its authorial implementations based on the works of modern Egyptian writers (N. Mahfouz, G. Al-Gitani, Yu. Zeidan). All this allowed us to build a single thread of the genre’s history, to show that the emerging Arabic novel relied on it in many ways, and that the experimenters of Arabic postmodernism, which coincided in time with the wave of rising national consciousness, preferred to turn to it. At the same time, the connection between modern literature and the genre of richliis established preserving one of its two most important characteristics – closeness to scientific factography or the presentation of travel as a spiritual test.

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Жанр «рихля» – от Средневековья к постмодернизму

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Аннотация. Арабский травелог — рихля — посвящен путешествиям восточного человека по миру. Цель исследования — показать роль данного жанра в развитии арабской национальной культуры на протяжении веков, его влияние на современную арабскую прозу. Авторы выделили отличительные черты рихли на фоне подобных записей путешествий в иных культурах и в других временных периодах, обосновав таким образом правомерность введения термина «рихля», несмотря на имеющиеся уже в научном обороте «литература путешествий», «описание путешествия», «травелог». Вместе с тем найдены параллели между арабской рихлей и «Хожением за три моря» Афанасия Никитина. Глубокое укоренение этого феномена в арабской культуре, его тесная связь с религией и наукой, по мнению авторов, не дали жанру исчезнуть в Средневековье. Поэтому одной из задач стало проследить и обобщить историю рихли в Новое время и позже. В работе обоснованы условия зарождения жанра, описана его трансформация к XIX веку, объяснена роль в появлении поздней национальной беллетристики и арабском возрождении в целом, показано развитие данного стиля в новейшей литературе, сделана попытка представить различные виды авторских реализаций травелога на материале произведений современных египетских писателей (Н. Махфуза, Г. Аль-Гитани, Ю. Зейдана). Все это позволило выстроить единую нить истории жанра, показать, что на него во многом опирался зарождавшийся арабский роман, к нему предпочитали обращаться экспериментаторы арабского постмодернизма, совпавшего по времени с волной подъема национального самосознания. При этом связь современных произведений с жанром рихли устанавливается при сохранении одной из двух его важнейших характеристик — близостью к научной фактографии либо

представлением физического путешествия как духовного испытания, духовного пути.

Ключевые слова: арабская литература, жанр, роман, травелог, рихля, арабский постмодернизм, наука, религия

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Introduction

Medieval Arabic texts written in the genre of travelogues, on the one hand, represent the most important layer of the verbal heritage of the Arabs. On the other hand, the texts of this genre are studied primarily by historians of different countries, including Russia, as sources, since on some issues of history, ethnology, geography and culture they are the only documents. Here their value is difficult to overestimate, whereas they played an outstanding role in establishing ethnogenesis (Kovalevsky, 1950, p. 265). Moreover, from the point of view of linguistic and literary studies, these texts are far from all and far from fully studied by domestic Russian specialists. Thus, the founder of the Soviet school of Arabic studies I.Yu. Krachkovsky in the preface to the translation of *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to the Volga* (1939) – the most studied text of the genre, wrote that the work he had done was only the first step, there were still many questions that were subject to study, including by philologists (Krachkovsky, 1939, p. 5). Later, in Russian Arabic studies, this work was examined by philologists more in the direction of sociolinguistics than literary criticism (Alnaddaf, 2018; Al-Rahbi, Zarytovskaya, & Faizova, 2021). It is possible that if the rihla genre had not become the basis on which new Arabic prose was formed, and some of its canons had not been used by the classics of the 20th century as a technique, then these texts would have been of interest exclusively for source studies. However, the historical-typological and structural-typological analysis of texts in order to identify universal mechanisms for the formation and functioning of narratives, traditions, genres (studies by Yu.V. Mann, G.S. Pomerants, etc.), taking into account the accumulated experience of researchers of the travel genre in general

(Ponomarev, 2013; Shachkova, 2008), and rihla in particular (Halifi, 2002; Newman, 2019), allows us to trace the formation of rihla, substantiate the place and time of its origin, establish formal and substantive features against the background of other travelogues and discover its further, modified, presence in modern literature. The historical approach allows us to present rihla as a dynamically developing, ‘unquenchable’ genre for Arabic literature. The work attempts not to describe a particular work of the genre, but to establish connections between the Arab Middle Ages and Arab postmodernism. As texts that were directly influenced by the genre, modern Egyptian novels that have received wide recognition and have been well-studied by domestic and foreign orientalists and literary scholars, primarily V.N. Kirpichenko and M.N. El-Gibali, are taken for analysis.

Results and Discussion

The Middle Ages and the heyday of the genre

The genre of rihla (from Arabic – travel, wandering) developed in the Arabic verbal tradition in the early Middle Ages, when the Arabs began active trading with the East and the West and, no less importantly, when Islam had already spread over the Middle East, not earlier than the 9th century (Halifi, 2022, p. 5). Oral folklore in the form of stories of merchants, caravanners, pilgrims and travelers, with the addition of a fantastic element, formed the basis of fairy tales, and with attention to scientific (geographical, ethnographic, etc.) facts generated the genre of travel description – rihla. The genre naturally emerged in the environment of nomads, the nature of which “was specifically reflected in the internal configuration of Islamic doctrine, predisposing to the spatial dynamics of Muslims” (Gusenova, 2022, p. 59). It is no coincidence that the final formulation of the genre took place in the era of the Caliphate, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indian Ocean, when the concept of ‘ummah’, the nation as a Muslim supranational structure, emerged. At that time, the medieval Arab-Muslim civilization turned into a global center of knowledge not only for Muslim scholars, but also for scholars from all over the world. Thus, travel in search of knowledge became a phenomenon and a normative feature of medieval Muslim education (Guseynova, 2022, p. 59).

Not every description of travel can be attributed to the rihla genre. Otherwise, such an ancient Egyptian text as *The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor* (20–17th centuries BC), which is considered a prototype of the adventure genre of world literature, would also fall under this genre. It is also impossible to compare with the Arabic rihla either the wandering tales

common in the pre-Petrine era in Russia, or the author's oriental travelogue, such as *The Enchanted Wanderer* by N.S. Leskov.

Experts note the synthetic nature (Shachkova, 2008, p. 280) and heterogeneity of world travel literature, emphasizing that it is united thematically rather than structurally, and therefore does not correspond to traditional ideas about a literary genre, but can be considered as a 'conglomerate of genres', understood as a special supra-genre formation with traditional genres within the system (Ponomarev, 2013, p. 10). Travel literature includes journeys with predominantly religious and legendary character, business reports, diplomats' article lists, scientific reports on expeditions, travel diaries and chronicles, correspondence, memoirs, all kinds of guidebooks and reference books, fiction texts with corresponding plots, etc. (Russian Travelogue, 2016, p. 10). Examples of travel literature include Homer's *Odyssey*, notes by medieval Western diplomats about Russia, and N. Grech's *Travel Letters from England, Germany, and France*, published in 1839, *Letters from the Russian Traveler* N.M. Karamzin, I. Goncharov's *Frigate Pallada* written in 1854–1856, etc.

Rihla certainly belongs to travel literature and represents a separate genre within the framework of Arabic national literature. It can be argued that rihla has a number of features that allow it to be singled out as a separate genre with a name that does not require translation, emphasizing its specificity. Among these features are the exclusion of the fiction element, strict documentary style, narrative, the tactics of which consist in recording what was seen, close to scientific notes, often by dates, meticulous recording of geographical points (rivers, mountains, settlements), names of monetary units, tribes, names of rulers, climatic conditions, etc. In terms of plot, the author's movement in space is obligatory, and in terms of content – highlighting the unusual, going against the ideas and beliefs of the Muslim author. At the same time, the author's 'I' with its psychologism, subjectivity, introspection is minimized (Hamed, 1995). The narration of rihla is conducted in prose and resembles a chronicle, where the story is limited to the time of travel, and the author is the only subject. Most of the texts of the rihla genre can be compared to travel notes with a bias towards scholarly pursuits.

...I have seen dirhams Bukhara of various kinds, including dirhams called al-ghitrifiya. They are made of copper, red copper, and yellow copper. Of these, the quantity is taken without weight, one hundred of them for a dirham of silver...

(from *The book of Ahmed Ibn Fadlan...* by A.P. Kovalevsky)

A little later, from the second half of the 12th century, as researchers point out, *rihla* also acquired a prosopographical character (Newman, 2009, p. 147), i.e. the focus shifted to the figures of rulers of a certain era and locality.

Since “in the Arab tradition, the idea of travel has always had a certain additional color” (Abdunabiev, 2024, p. 30), because it was perceived as the fulfillment of a Muslim’s duty to seek knowledge, overcome difficulties, accustom oneself to humility, and one of the pillars of Islam is the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), *rihla* invariably had a spiritual dimension, and in it the author appropriately shared his thoughts on morality and ethics. Researchers emphasize that in *rihla* the traveler writes, associating himself not with a particular ethnic group or region, but with Islam, i.e. as a Muslim (Newman, 2009, p. 145).

Once, indeed, a severe cold came upon us. Tekin was riding next to me, and next to him was a man from among the Turks, who spoke to him in Turkic. And Tekin laughed and said: “Really, this Turk says to you: “What does our Lord want from us? Here he is killing us with cold, and if we knew what he wants, we would certainly give it to him”. Then I said to him: “Tell him: ‘He wants you to say: “There is no god but Allah”. And he laughed...

(from *The book of Ahmed Ibn Fadlan...* by A.P. Kovalevsky)

In fairness, it should be noted that the genre of *rihla* that we have designated also includes medieval travel literature in Turkish and Persian. Therefore, it would be correct to say that the genre was widespread throughout the Middle East, and not only in the Arab East. It is enough to mention among the works of the genre the pearl of Iranian literature *Safarnama*— a work set out in the 11th century by Nasir Khusraw (1004–1088). It is also necessary to mention that in classical Arabic literary criticism, *rihla* is classified as geographical literature and is divided into subtypes according to a purely territorial feature — Maghrebian, Hijazi, etc.

Among the famous texts of the genre of its classical, medieval period are *The Journey of Salam at-Turjuman* (9th century), the purpose of which was to find the legendary wall erected to protect the civilized world from the raids of the wild and fierce tribes of Yajuj and Majuj (the biblical Gog and Magog); *The Journey of as-Sirafi by Sea to the Indian Ocean* (9th century); *The Travels of the Enlightened Writer, the Virtuous, the Perceptive Abu-l-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr...* (12th century), written by a poet at the court of the Almohad governor in Granada, which included

the hajj to Mecca, travels to Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Sicily and captured the struggle of Muslims with the Crusaders and the historical figure of Saladin; describing the north of Africa *Moroccan Journey* by Muhammad al-Abdari (14th century); a description of Spanish Andalusia in *Zeal for Pacification and Jihad* by Ahmed al-Ghazzal (17th century), etc. In total, according to some sources, 48 travelers left about 60 descriptions of travels in various directions, not only to Europe, but also to Brazil, Russia and the United States (Newman, 2009, p. 154).

Examples of the genre from the period of its flourishing, which have received worldwide fame, are the *Message*— a journey to the Volga by Ahmed ibn Fadlan, undertaken in 921–922, as a religious mission to the Volga Bulgaria on behalf of the Abbasid Caliph al-Muqtadir, which was translated into Russian twice (in 1939 by Academician I.Yu. Krachkovsky and in 1956 by Professor A.P. Kovalevsky), *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travelling* by Ibn Battuta (1304–1377), who set out in 1325 from Tangier in the Maghreb to Mecca and visited a large number of countries over 29 years, including African ones that had not been described before, and also visited the capital of the Golden Horde (Sarai) and supposedly the Volga Bulgaria. It is worth noting that both texts, significant for Arabic literature, include descriptions of lands on the territory of Russia and remain the most important documents on the early history of Russia in source studies.

Rihla about Russia and the Russian travelogue

As for the description of Russia, in addition to the travels of Ibn Fadlan, who dwelled in detail on the funeral rite of the Rus, and Ibn Battuta, who mentioned the Slavs, *The Journey of the Antiochian Patriarch Macarius to Russia* (1652–1659), compiled by his son, Archdeacon Paul of Aleppo, as well as the work of the head of the Department of Arabic Language and Literature at Saint Petersburg University, Sheikh Muhammad at-Tantawi (1810–1861) *A gift to the Intelligent with Messages about the country of Russia* deserve attention.

The genre of travel descriptions was not characteristic of Russian literature to the same extent and in those forms. But perhaps it would be appropriate to compare the Arabic rihla with Afanasy Nikitin's *Journey Beyond Three Seas* (1468–1474) both according to the formal features of rihla that we have outlined above (factography, recording of dates) and as texts that reflect medieval thinking, distinguished primarily by their religiousness. The notebooks left by the merchant of Tver of the 15th

century tell of a physical feat that he accomplished by the will of fate – a long journey from his native Tver to India through Arab countries, including Iraq, Hormuz and Omani Qalhat (in Nikitin's notes– Galat), which no longer exists after a catastrophic earthquake in the 16th century, and a moral feat – to preserve one's faith and understand Islam as a faith in one God, a heavenly and righteous faith, which was a breakthrough in thinking for a Russian person of that time. "For Afanasy Nikitin, faith is a symbol of the homeland. He firmly holds on to it in a foreign land, but does not condemn infidels" (Adrianova-Peretz, 1958, p. 117).

Rihla was no less an advanced trend in medieval Arab literature than the phenomenon of *Journey Beyond Three Seas* in Russian. Arab critics, in turn, emphasize that the rihla genre anticipated the socio-philosophical trend of accepting the other (Halifi, 2022, p. 6), understanding the multiculturalism and diversity of the world, and developing the concept of tolerance. One can also trace in Ibn Fadlan an attempt to find common ground with the Turks in understanding the divine. To do this, when conveying the words of the heroes of the story, he uses typical religious formulas in Arabic (for example, *la illahi illa alla wa muhammad rasul allahi*) or translates something close to this from the Turkic language, or thoroughly explains on his own behalf that this is, by and large, the same thing both in Arabic and in the Turkic language (Al-Rahbi, Zarytovskaya, & Faizova, 2021, pp. 763–764). It was within the framework of the rihla genre that the Egyptian writer and political figure of the last century Muhammad Hussein Heikal (1888–1956) wrote in his work *East & West* about the knowledge of the other.

Modern Era

As we have already indicated, rihla developed on the basis of folk art and stood apart from other literary genres, which allowed it to organically become the predecessor of Arabic fiction. For many centuries, only poetic genres were recognized as high genres of Arabic literature; even medical treatises and sailing directions were written in verse. "Against the general background of passion for commentaries and reviews, historical and geographical literature stands out favorably, which departed from ponderous forms with complex grammatical and syntactic constructions and various stylistic tricks, thereby contributing to the emergence of fiction", wrote Russian historian and orientalist I.M. Filshtinsky (Filshtinsky, 1987, p. 404), in fact, asserting that modern Arabic fiction also stems from rihla, along with the medieval folk novel, which was nevertheless created for rhythmic recitation.

For centuries, the ideas about high and low genres in Arabic literature did not change, and the traditional concept of genres was preserved, since creativity that violated it was not allowed. By the end of the 19th century, Arabic literature was influenced by the Western European novel, and the genre of *rihla* noticeably began to gravitate toward fiction from documentary and chronology, the ‘center of gravity’ shifted to the artistic sphere. Against this background, the book that opened the era of the Arab Renaissance (an-Nahda), authored by Rifaa at-Tahtawi, *The Extrication of Gold in Summarizing Paris* (1834), gained wide popularity. The author, in a form close to fiction, describes not only the route to Paris, but also the customs, life and laws of the French, the events of contemporary European history. For example, section six, devoted to *How the French, after the turmoil, mocked Charles X and their dissatisfaction with what had been achieved*:

Know that shortly before the beginning of this unrest, news arrived of the capture of Algeria. The French did not receive the news with much enthusiasm, although they expressed joy about it. The leader of the viziers, Polignac, as soon as he learned of what had happened, ordered a celebratory cannonade. He was right who said: “As joy is often followed by sorrow, so the world is arranged”.

He walked around the city with a proud air, as if he wanted to show everyone that it was thanks to him and his government that the French had defeated Algeria. But it was not long before the French had won an even greater victory over him and his king. So Algeria was completely forgotten...

(At-Tahtawi, 2009, p. 158)

It is most fair to attribute to the *rihla* of this period the words of the genre researchers that “Arab travelers who returned to their homeland brought ideas for the development of their countries. They absorbed the experience of their Western contemporaries and tried to imitate the best things they saw on the trip” (Abdunabiev, 2024, p. 32). In the *rihla* of the Modern Era, the author draws attention to technical and technological innovations, Western ideas of social structure that could modernize Arab countries. Thus, *rihla* played its role in the Arab Renaissance, becoming a conductor of Western material and spiritual cultures and the first to absorb the canons of the Western novel.

Contemporary times

Until the end of World War II, travel remained the prerogative of Arab intellectuals and the elite. Perhaps the last of the authors of *rihla*, close to its classical version with the recording of facts, concern for preserving

faith, the desire to understand the world, etc., was the Egyptian Muhammad Thabit (d. 1958), who made about 8 trips to European countries, Afghanistan, Australia, Hawaii between 1926 and 1946 and wrote several books about it.

But the genre was not completely forgotten with the emergence of fiction in the foreground in the 20th century. V. Shklovsky's idea that "the history of literature moves forward along an intermittent, broken line" (Shklovsky, 1929, pp. 227–228) is also true in relation to the genre of rihla. In the Arab literary tradition, this genre was not only more widespread than travelogues in other national literatures, but also proved to be more tenacious, having undergone a transformation and eventually becoming part of Arab postmodernism, or at least one of its widespread techniques.

In modern literature, the genre is getting a 'second wind' due to the fact that, in the context of the growth of national self-awareness in the second half of the last century, it is taken into the arsenal of Arab authors who resort to experimentation. As the literary scholar and arabist V.N. Kirpichenko wrote, "now, when the avalanche of mass culture is growing, when the cult of individualism is being vigorously introduced into people's consciousness, writers from many countries are turning to the priceless heritage of their peoples, trying to protect the world from the loss of cultural memory" (Kirpichenko, 1992). It also seems reasonable to suggest that the structure of the rihla and its tools made it possible to enrich Arabic postmodernism, for which it was ideally suited: "The image of reality is reproduced through the prism of another text with the vocabulary, style, and phraseology characteristic of that text, intertextuality, quotation, playing with someone else's word, reinterpretation of its meaning, that is, what is considered the characteristic features of postmodernist literature" (Kirpichenko, 1999).

The most striking examples of this are the novels of the 20th century Egyptian classics: *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1983) by the 1988 Nobel laureate in literature Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006), *The Call of the Unknown* (1992) by Gamal al-Ghitani (1945–2015), *Azazel* (2008) by the internationally recognized Arab Booker Prize laureate Yusuf Zeidan (b. 1958).

In *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1983) N. Mahfouz gives the traditional genre of rihla a philosophical and social dimension. The plot basis of spatial movement is reinterpreted by him as a journey through time, through the history of human civilization, a journey through social

formations, etc. The main character, Qandil, observing vices and injustice all around him, sets off from the country of Islam around the world in search of moral perfection and thus passes through all possible social utopias of humanity. The hero experiences one disappointment after another.

– *Look, all the houses are the same. There are no palaces, no mansions, no larger or smaller houses. The difference in earnings is insignificant. Everyone is equal, except for those who have distinguished themselves in their work. The smallest salary is enough for a respected person to have housing, to be able to feed himself, dress himself, study, visit cultural institutions and have fun.*

(Mahfouz, 2009, p. 126)

However, the hero's admiration is suddenly replaced by horror: individual freedom is punishable by death, the powers of the head of state are unlimited, and the history of the country is filled with blood.

The hero's movement in his journey is a plot find for establishing systemic and syntactic links between local texts – criticism of one or another social system. The plot is thus subject not to the logic of a real route, but to reflections showing the path of humanity from pagan worship to worship of the ideal Creator. 'Disembodied' technique of N. Mahfouz (poverty of everyday details, exclusion of historicisms and archaisms from the dictionary and other techniques) makes the reader lose spatial and temporal reference points, which creates the illusion of today in the coordinates of the medieval genre.

Gamal al-Ghitani also turns to the genre of rihla as a lifelong spiritual journey. In his novel *The Call of the Unknown* (1992), the hero dictates to the chronicler a description of his fantastic journey through the desert from Cairo to Maghreb, his stops – a kind of turning points in the history of Egypt. The fantastic journey of Ahmed ibn Abdullah across the desert from Cairo to Maghreb is reconstructed by him from memory and recorded from his words by the chronicler of the Maghreb sultan, and in fact by another hypostasis of the hero, his double Gamal ibn Abdullah. Joyce's stream of consciousness and Sufi 'vision' create in their fusion an image of a spiritual journey the length of a life. The time of life is identical to the path traveled. And the stops in the 'oasis of Umm as-Saghir', in the 'land of birds', where Ahmed was elected king, in the camp of the 'crutchers', in the 'city of shadows' – these are both stops on the hero's path to the truth, and stages of Egyptian history refracted in a whimsical way by the hero's 'vision'... The novel is certainly postmodern, hybrid, with many codes:

“images from ancient legends and traditions, *One Thousand and One Nights*, Sufi writings – magic numbers, magical talismans, strange creatures, are woven into a whimsical pattern, behind the ligature of which one can vaguely discern the outlines and problems of today’s world, historical realities, moments from the biography of the author of the novel, and the motives of his earlier works” (Kirpichenko, 1996, p. 46).

Another task, as we can assume, was set by the famous Egyptian historian, the head of the Manuscript Center at the Library of Alexandria, Yu. Zeidan, in his novel *Azazel* about the events of the first centuries of Christianity: to recreate the everyday and ethnic flavor of the era of the inhabitants of Egypt and the Eastern Mediterranean. Researchers note that the author “incredibly accurately managed to highlight the events of Christian Egypt of that time” (Tikayev, & El-Gibali, 2012, p. 78). “The notes of a wandering monk made it possible to create pictures of life in different places in the fifth century AD. The sheets of parchment recreated the life of people of different classes, so this information is interesting historical and ethnographic material” (Vlasova, & Vavichkina, 2023, p. 51).

At the turn of the century, globalization, accessibility of information, the Internet, the ability to travel around the world, and waves of refugees raised the question of the continuation of the rihla genre (Uqeil, 2014) and what texts could be attributed to it. The mentioned works, in which we saw the transformation of this genre, retain one of the main dimensions of Arabic rihla – a spiritual movement, through contemplation of social formations or through personal growth, or a pseudo-scientific approach. The majority of fiction novels of the 21st century, in which the plot includes travel, and sometimes even moving, tend to be introspective, to describe what the main character feels, what he thinks, how the Western world appears to him (*An Iraqi in Paris* (2005) by Samuel Shimon (b. 1956), *Chicago* (2007) by Ala al-Aswani (b. 1957), *Ice* (2011) by Gerasimov Institute of Cinematography graduate, Egyptian writer Sanalla Ibrahim (b. 1937), *Brooklyn Heights* (2010) by Miral al-Tahawi (b. 1968), etc.), while omitting educational material, and factual distortions may be allowed, which contradicts the canons of the genre. Also adjacent to the genre of travel description, without being rihla in the strict sense, are journalistic notes about life in other countries (education, human rights, racism, etc.), which gained popularity at the end of the last century. It is in this sector that the voices of representatives of women’s prose are especially loud – *Rihla. Diary of an Egyptian student in America* (1987) by

the writer and critic Radwa Ashour (1946–2014) and *My Travels around the World* (1991) by the Egyptian feminist, nicknamed the Arab Simone de Beauvoir, Nawal al-Saadawi (1931–2021).

Thus, the theme of travel in one form or another is noticeably present in modern Arab fiction and journalism. Moreover, interest in the rihla genre is maintained in the Arab world. If at the dawn of the genre, authors from North Africa prevailed, and during the Arab Renaissance – from Egypt, then at the end of the 20th century, travelers from the cradle of the Arab world – the Arabian Peninsula – made a name for themselves, among them the Saudi historian and writer Mohammed Nasser al-Abbudi (1926–2022), who has compiled about 120 travel descriptions since the 1980s. In addition to the fact that the genre has acquired its own award – The Ibn Battuta Award (UAE), established in 2003 and awarded for achievements in geographical literature, outstanding research in the genre, translations, as well as modern works written in this genre, the Emirati publishing house *Dar al-Suwaydi* has launched a corresponding genre series of both world-famous and little-known monuments, which, according to the plan, should include 100 books.

Conclusion

Thus, Arabic (Middle Eastern) rihla is part of world travel literature. At the same time, it is distinguished as a separate subgenre by a number of features, in addition to the area of distribution and time of existence. The main formal features are documentary nature, minimization of the author's 'I', scientific (humanitarian) focus, recording of historical and other facts. The content reflects the views and worldview of a medieval Muslim, and the journey itself is perceived as his duty, his personal growth.

It is no coincidence that rihla arose among the descendants of nomads with the expansion of the borders of the Caliphate from sea to sea and for centuries – from the 9th to the 18th – retained the strict framework of the genre. But even after this, it did not completely disappear, playing a huge role in the development of Arabic national literature and the Arab Renaissance. In the Modern Era, rihla as a prose descriptive genre began to gravitate towards fiction and formed the basis of the modern novel. Later, when Arab authors followed the latest trends in Western European literature, elements of rihla were used as an artistic device. Travel became a canvas for connecting the incompatible and creating a multidimensional text in the works of the most important writers of the second half of the

20th century, such as N. Mahfouz and G. al-Ghitani. At the same time, thanks to rihla, Arabic literature remained original and preserved national features. The theme of travel, even in those texts that according to the canons cannot be attributed to rihla or imitation of it, is noticeably present in modern Arab fiction and journalism. Moreover, public organizations in Arab countries, in particular in the UAE, are making efforts to preserve this genre. A series of reprints of works of the genre is launched, a system of incentives for authors working in it and translators who pass on this heritage to other peoples is introduced, thus attracting world attention to rihla.

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