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IDE DISCUSSION PAPER No. 634

**Imperialism, Islam, and the Transformation of
Self**
—The Pilgrimage of Nacir ed-Dine Dinet
(1861–1929)—

Shoko WATANABE*

March 2017

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Keywords: Orientalism, French Colonialism, Travel Account, Muslim Pilgrimage

* Research Fellow, IDE (shoko_watanabe@ide.go.jp)

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INSTITUTE OF DEVELOPING ECONOMIES (IDE), JETRO
3-2-2, WAKABA, MIHAMA-KU, CHIBA-SHI
CHIBA 261-8545, JAPAN

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Abstract

Orientalist travel writing has often been understood as a literate form of imperial domination in which Western travelers reproduced a stereotyping narrative of non-Westerners to reinforce the dichotomist worldview between Westerners and non-Westerners. To reconsider this view, this paper discusses the Muslim pilgrimage account written by converted French orientalist painter, Nacir ed-Dine, born Étienne Dinet (1861–1929). This paper argues that Dinet was not different from his contemporary Europeans in using stereotypical ethnic representations of the French, the British, and Arabs. However, Dinet saw that the difference which separates Europeans and Muslims was surmountable, as he believed that acquiring the beliefs and customs of others might bring people physiognomic change so that they could not be distinguished from the original holders of the culture. This worldview allowed Dinet to have hope for self-transformation, which would ultimately blur the cultural borders between the dominators and the dominated as defined in the colonial context.

Keywords

Orientalism, French Colonialism, Travel Account, Muslim Pilgrimage

Introduction

Traveling is an experience of moving across different cultures and societies, and of encountering new peoples which are alien to the travelers. Therefore, narrating travel experiences raises ethical questions which comprise not only the moral behavior or purpose of the travelers, but also issues of the representation of the “travellees” (those who are visited by travelers).¹ In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said analyzed how European political and economic hegemony since the 18th century underlay the efforts of Europeans to collect knowledge about foreign cultures in order to monopolize the image of Oriental people. By analyzing a travelogue of British orientalist William Robertson Smith (1846–94) in the Hijaz, Said examined how Western orientalists created stereotypical images of Arabs and Muslims. Through these apparently scientific images and descriptions, which systematically contrasted “us” (Westerners) with “them”

¹ Corinne Fowler, “Travel Writing and Ethics,” in *The Routledge Companion to Travel Writing*, ed. Carl Thompson (London: Routledge, 2016), p. 57.

(Orientals), the Western orientalists unconsciously emphasized European and Christian superiority.² Thus, according to Said's view, the stereotyping and essentializing narratives written by Western travelers about non-Westerners based on a dichotomist worldview were a form of colonial segregation and domination. Although Said's criticism is highly influential in studies of travel writing, other authors have focused on the unrecognized complexity of the colonial reality to provide a more nuanced view of these accusations of imperialism made against European travelers.³

In this context, this paper discusses the Muslim pilgrimage account written by French artist, Nacir ed-Dine or Étienne Dinet (1861–1929). Dinet converted to Islam while living in Algeria during a period when the region was under French colonial rule. As a Frenchman who moved from the metropole to a colony, he was a member of the dominant culture. Moreover, he was an “orientalist” painter known for his artistic works that represented people and landscapes of the Orient. Thus, his travel account is a pilgrimage account; a story of a Muslim who fulfilled his religious obligation of going to the sacred places, but at the same time, his work was also a piece of orientalist literature written by a French author who travelled across oriental lands and reported on his travels to an audience of European readers.

Dinet's travelogue highlights the unique ways in which he dealt with the tension between being European and being Muslim; between being on the politically powerful and dominant side on the one hand, and being subject to negative representations constructed by European orientalist literature on the other. I argue that, politically speaking, Dinet was nothing more than a loyal supporter of the French empire, although he claimed that France should respect and ally itself with Arab and Islamic civilization. However, Dinet saw at the same time that, in Islam, acculturation was an open possibility for everyone; Europeans could embrace the Islamic faith and integrate themselves into the Muslim community through social recognition and learning the culture. He believed that people who acquired Islamic belief and Arab customs might even experience physiognomic changes so that they could not be distinguished from the original holders of the culture. This worldview allowed Dinet to have hope for self-transformation, which blurred the cultural borders between the dominators and the dominated as defined in the colonial context.

² Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), pp. 235–237.

³ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1–11; Howard J. Booth, “Making the Case for Cross-Cultural Exchange: Robert Byron's *The Road to Oxiana*,” in *Cultural Encounters: European Travel Writing in the 1930s*, ed. Charles Burdett and Derek Duncan (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), ch. 10.

The composition of this paper is as follows. First, I explain the background in which Dinét's pilgrimage took place and his political ideas. Second, I focus on the theme of his fear of being accused as a false Muslim which repeatedly appears in Dinét's account and the transformation of this fear into a more optimistic state of mind. Third, I discuss the various levels of belonging to the community that he experienced during his journey to reveal the mechanisms behind the transformation of Dinét's discourse. Fourth, I examine the Arabic translation of Dinét's account by an Algerian Islamic reformist. The comparison between Dinét's original account and the translation reveals the difference between his ideas about acculturation and the Islamic reformist discourse about cultural authenticity. In these sections, I locate Dinét's worldview in relation to French colonialism and sense of nationalism among the colonized people. I use Dinét's original text in French, the texts of the orientalists quoted by Dinét, and the Arabic translation of Dinét's account as primary sources, in addition to a selection of secondary literature written in European languages.

1. Dinét in the French Empire

Born in Paris in 1861, Dinét was educated in the prestigious *école des beaux-arts* before he came to settle down in Bou Saâda, an oasis town located in southern Algeria. He painted the native people of Bou Saâda and the Saharan landscapes in his work, which became the source of his fame. During that period, from the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, it was not uncommon for French artists to find their inspiration in Algeria, the first colony France had in the Arab world, and to choose the Algerian people and culture as the subject of their works. Many French artists visited the country for the purpose of creating art, as did Eugène Delacroix (1798–1863) and Eugène Fromentin (1820–76).

However, Dinét represented a new school of orientalists which appeared in the 1880s. This school showed “ethnographic” interest in the everyday life and social customs of ordinary people, while the older generations of orientalists favored more dramatic themes, such as the harems and aristocratic life.⁴ Dinét was especially known for the efforts he made to adopt the local culture of Bou Saâda by learning Arabic and converting to Islam. In the historical context of the beginning of the 20th century, Europeans who converted to Islam were rare. Even if converting was not prohibited, it

⁴ Denise Brahimi and Kouadir Benchikou, *La vie et l'œuvre de Étienne Dinét* (Paris: ACR édition, 1984), p. 7; Roger Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics: Art, Colonialism, and French North Africa, 1880–1930* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 92–94. Benjamin compared Dinét's engagement in Algeria with Paul Gauguin's interest in Tahiti.

was clearly problematic in the context of colonial Algeria for a person of the dominant culture to adopt the culture of the dominated. After his conversion in 1913, he took the name of Nacir ed-Dine. In 1929, he headed off on a pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina with his friend from Bou Saâda, Sliman ben Ibrahim Baâmer. After the death of Dinet, his travel account of the pilgrimage was published in French under the title of *Le pèlerinage à la maison sacrée d'Allah*.⁵

When Dinet made his travels in 1929, the French empire was at its apex and held a large number of Arab Muslims in its territories, from North Africa to Syria and Lebanon. Meanwhile, the British took advantage of the First World War to intervene in the Arabian Peninsula. The unity of the Ottoman Empire collapsed, the Arabs emerged as new actors in the drama: ‘Abd al-‘Aziz ibn Sa‘ud (1875–1953) conquered Najd in 1922, then extended his rule in the Hijaz in 1925. So then, what, in this historical context, was Dinet’s political position?

In his account, Dinet showed great sympathy toward Arab leaders. Based on his experiences during his stay in Mecca and Medina, Dinet emphasized how Ibn Sa‘ud established security in the Hijaz after an age of disorder.⁶ While visiting Mecca, Dinet was invited by Ibn Sa‘ud to his palace for a conventional dinner, along with five hundred notables of Mecca.⁷ He described the palace as modest, proper, and clean. The king appeared before his guests in a simple garment of the same style worn by the majority of Bedouin people (*kūfīya* and *‘iqāl*). He looked energetic and powerful, and his gestures were natural and warm, without a trace of arrogance.⁸ His face was masculine and had an appearance typical of “the classical type of Arabs,”⁹ who were characterized by a combination of simplicity and majesty.¹⁰ Dinet also encountered Shakib Arslan (1869–1946), who had come to Mecca on his own pilgrimage, at a dinner hosted by the Hijazi Minister of Foreign Affairs.¹¹ Dinet described Arslan as a great defender of Islam and the Arabic language; the two things that Dinet was attached to. Indeed, Dinet was very well connected to political personalities. In addition to the French consuls in Jedda and Beirut whom Dinet met on his way, he was also received

⁵ Nacir ed-Dine Dinet and Sliman ben Ibrahim Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage à la maison sacrée d'Allah* (Paris: Hachette, 1930). Although the text is coauthored, I infer from the content that Dinet wrote the majority of the account.

⁶ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 23.

⁷ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 112.

⁸ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 113–114.

⁹ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 113.

¹⁰ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 114.

¹¹ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 120.

by the governor of Medina during his stay there before visiting Mecca.¹²

However, despite his compassion toward Arab leaders, he did not see any contradiction with belonging to the French empire. Indeed, Dinet was not anti-colonialist at all, as he supported the benefits that the French could bring to the Muslim world. This becomes clear when looking at his comparisons between French and British attitudes toward Muslims. While traveling across the Hijaz, Dinet was shocked to see the Hijaz railway destroyed, then blamed Colonel Lawrence for this barbarous act. Dinet criticized Lawrence's famous book, *Revolt in the Desert*, accusing him of boasting about his achievements, while French soldiers, including Muslims, contributed more to the allied forces. Dinet also criticized Lawrence for having given irresponsible promises to the Arabs to manipulate them.¹³

Another episode also reveals Dinet's Anglophobia. When returning from Jeddah to Beirut after his pilgrimage, Dinet had to undergo severe hygienic controls at the port of al-Tur on the Sinai Peninsula before embarking on his ship. He described the measures as excessive and harassing, then claimed that it was a part of the British policy against Islam,¹⁴ suggesting that France should provide more friendly policies so that Muslims would cooperate.¹⁵ Thus, for Dinet, there was no room to contest French colonialism itself, but he did express reformist ideas that would require France to be a better imperial power than the British.

In that case, how did Dinet reconcile his sympathy for Arab leaders with his uncontested support for the French empire in this age of nationalism? Effectively, there was no contradiction between the two, since he understood both in terms of modernity as a linear process of material progression. For Dinet, Ibn Sa'ud was not a dangerous nationalist, nor a Wahhabi fanatic, but rather a modernist ruler. Dinet emphasized in his account how the Wahhabi government brought about "material progress, order, security, and religious unity for all sects which was realized by respecting the most fundamental principle of Islam."¹⁶ To make this point, he returned repeatedly to the topic of hygiene and referred to the famous European travel accounts of Johann Ludwig Burckhardt (1784–1817) and Richard Francis Burton (1821–90), who had mentioned the dirt of the

¹² Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 62.

¹³ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 59.

¹⁴ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 161.

¹⁵ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 175. Dinet also stated on the same page that cooperation with Muslims profits French national interests against Bolshevism and the Yellow Peril.

¹⁶ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 49–50.

streets of Mecca.¹⁷ Contrary to the two Europeans' descriptions, Dinet argued that the dirt had almost completely disappeared by the time Dinet made his visit, thanks to Ibn Sa'ud's policy of dispatching carts which brought away garbage every morning.¹⁸ Dinet also mentioned that the leftover animal meat from the ritual of *'Īd al-Aḍḥā* in Mina Valley was thoroughly "covered by sands and disinfectants" and he did not notice any smell during his three-day stay in Mina, contrary to Burton's description of the awful hygiene and unpleasant odor.¹⁹ Thus, Dinet emphasized the material progress realized by the king.

As Dinet witnessed first-hand, Ibn Sa'ud's rule in the Hijaz was that of reasonable modernism and technological advances. Thus, Dinet's support for the Arab leaders was compatible with French imperial thought which also emphasized values of rationality, efficiency, industry, hygiene, law, and order. Here we can see how Dinet's idea of reformist colonialism coincides with the tendencies of modern Islamic reform, including the Wahhabi movement in the 18th century and the "salafi" movement from the 19th century.²⁰ The Islamic reform movement was a project for generating new religious interpretations and practices by claiming to return to the religion's very origins, while at the same time, it was a form of reaction to European hegemony of power in a quest for new social orders in the mirror of European modernity.²¹ We will return to this point later in section 4.

¹⁷ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 111. Dinet probably read the French translation of Burckhardt, and Burton in the original English, judging from his descriptions on the two books in Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 188–193. See J. L. Burckhardt, *Voyage en Arabie contenant la description des parties du Hedjaz, regardées comme sacrées par les musulmans*, trans. J. B. B. Eyriès, 3 vols. (Paris: Arthus Bertrand, 1835) and Richard F. Burton, *Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Mecca*, 2 vols. (London: Tyston and Edwards, 1893), respectively. For the hygienic problem in Mecca Dinet mentioned, see Burckhardt, *Voyage en Arabie*, vol. 1, p. 140. Burton's descriptions about animal carcasses on the road were for outside the city of Mecca rather than inside. See Burton, *Personal Narrative*, vol. 2, pp. 178–179.

¹⁸ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 111.

¹⁹ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 141–142. Burton, *Personal Narrative*, vol. 2, p. 224.

²⁰ For the Wahhabi movement, see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 42–44. For Islamic reformism, see Malcom Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muḥammad 'Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā* (Berkeley: University of California, 1966).

²¹ For modernist aspects of Islamic reformism, see, for example, James McDougall, "État, société et culture chez les intellectuels de l'*islâh* maghrébin (Algérie et Tunisie, 1890–1940) ou la réforme comme apprentissage de 'arriération'," in *Réforme de l'État et réformismes au Maghreb, XIXe–XXe siècles*, ed. Odile Moreau (Paris: Harmattan, 2009), pp. 281–284.

Furthermore, Dinet thought that France should become the most progressive of all European countries for its cooperation with Muslims and for considering their potential political power²². He emphasized the idea that France is a country that defends human rights and the equality of races and religions.²³ He also mentioned that Napoleon Bonaparte expressed sympathy for Islamic civilization.²⁴ Islam would provide France with intellectual inspiration for its rich philosophical legacy,²⁵ as well as for the beauty of the Arabic language, which was a living language still spoken and written across the entire Arab world.²⁶ Dinet proposed that Arabic should be taught in all high schools in France, Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco for its utility and esthetic value.²⁷

As we have seen, Dinet was a defender of Islam and Arabic language, as well as of Arab modernist leaders. However, his language fell into the imperial framework, given that he never contested colonial orders and emphasized instead how France could be a good protector of Islam and Arab culture. This rhetoric is similar to the “associationist” language as known in French colonialism thought. This associationism justified patriarchal French domination over a colonized society by emphasizing the prosperity that reciprocal cooperation between the French and local society could achieve.²⁸

2. From the Fear of Accusation to a Sense of Integration

In that case, was Dinet simply a Muslim-friendly colonialist? Can we find anything more than a reflection of imperial power in his account? The most original part of the account was the spiritual transformation he recorded throughout the pilgrimage process. In the course of his travel to the Hijaz, Dinet’s language gradually shifted from that of fear and anxiety to happiness and satisfaction in terms of his relationships with other Muslim pilgrims.

In his travel account, Dinet repeatedly reported the difficulty of the journey. It

²² Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 170–172.

²³ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 175.

²⁴ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 175.

²⁵ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 172.

²⁶ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 167, 169.

²⁷ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 170. Algeria (occupied by France since 1830), Tunisia (French protectorate since 1881), and Morocco (French protectorate since 1912) were under French influence by 1929.

²⁸ For association ideology in French colonialism, see Raymond F Betts, *Assimilation and Association in French Colonial Theory, 1890–1914* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

was not a matter of being physically difficult, since he and his companions, Sliman ben Ibrahim Baâmer and his wife from Bou Saâda, were endowed with enough financial resources for lodging in comfortable hotels, paying for automobiles, and hiring servants, guides, and drivers. The true difficulty was elsewhere; Dinét feared that he would be denied the status of being an authentic Muslim because of his European and non-Muslim origin. He expressed this concern repeatedly in the beginning of his travels. Upon his arrival in Jeddah from Marseille, local police did not allow Dinét to enter the city and took him to a high officer of the port authority. Only after he showed his letters of recommendation did they let him go.²⁹ Moreover, the French vice-consul in Jeddah warned that Dinét and his companions might not obtain authorization for a pilgrimage from King Ibn Sa'ud, stating that the king did not trust converted Europeans.³⁰ After an anxious night, they were informed that the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hijaz gave them the authorization to go on a pilgrimage thanks to the letters of recommendation from important political personalities which Dinét had brought.³¹ There was also another incident: at a local cafe in Rabegh, on the way from Jeddah to Medina, one of the customers stared Dinét in the face and started to ask him many personal questions, but Dinét and his party carefully avoided talking about his identity. However, a Mu'adhdhin of the Paris mosque who knew Dinét previously happened to pass by the same cafe. He was so glad to see his friend that he naively revealed Dinét's European identity. Fearing that people would become hostile toward him, Dinét and his party quickly fled the cafe to their car.³² These events further worried Dinét. When describing his visit to Medina, Dinét stated that he made every effort to behave discretely so as not to attract any attention, so he avoided crowds and stayed within reach of Hijazi official guards.³³

As a converted Muslim of European origin, Dinét knew that the sincerity of his faith was easily subject to doubt. According to Dinét, despite their thorough knowledge of Arab culture and language, Burckhardt and Burton could not enter any holy places without encountering difficulty. Burckhardt was once rejected for a visa for the sacred cities because the Muslim authorities doubted the sincerity of his conversion.³⁴ In

²⁹ Dinét and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 16–17.

³⁰ Dinét and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 17.

³¹ Dinét and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 18.

³² Dinét and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 27–28.

³³ Dinét and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 34–35.

³⁴ Dinét and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 188. See also Burckhardt, *Voyage en Arabie*, vol. 1, p. 93.

Burton's case, he confessed that he was a fake Muslim disguised as an Afghan notable.³⁵ Dinet argued that if some Europeans succeeded in entering the sacred places, it was because they received support from fellow Muslims who protected them from criticism, regardless of whether they were sincere Muslims or not.

When discussing Burton's travels, Dinet advanced the idea that the boy Muhammad, who accompanied Burton from Cairo as his servant throughout the pilgrimage until Burton left the Hijaz, played the role of protector and guarantor for Burton.³⁶ Although Burton described Muhammad as a cunning and clever boy who took advantage of the rich pilgrim to go back home to join his family in Mecca, Muhammad was more than that, according to Dinet. Muhammad, along with his family in Mecca, took care of Burton during his pilgrimage, even though he knew that Burton was not a true Muslim. Based on his own pilgrimage experience, Dinet argued that pilgrims were obliged to cooperate with other pilgrims from their homeland and help each other when they faced unexpected difficulties. If they lied about their background or tried to avoid contact with their fellowmen, people would immediately discover their fake identities. Without the protection of companions, pilgrims could never travel.³⁷ By quoting words that Dinet attributed to British scholar William Gifford Palgrave (1826–88),³⁸ Dinet concluded that no Western traveler could travel without having his true identity discovered. Muslim people knew it, but still tolerated these Western travelers as a sign of their generosity.³⁹

The fear of denial of his Muslimhood led Dinet to attempt to prove the authenticity of his faith by writing his travel account and providing readers with detailed and trustworthy information on Islam and the sacred places. This attempt was also fueled by his appreciation for the Muslim people who both morally and administratively supported his pilgrimage, since they took his faith in Islam seriously.⁴⁰ Indeed, as

³⁵ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 188. See also Burton, *Personal Narrative*, vol. 1, pp. 129–131. We do not know if Muslims in the sacred cities in 1929 were informed about deceptions by certain Europeans like Burton. However, Dinet noted a general hostility toward European authorities among local inhabitants: the French vice-consul in Jeddah reported to him of a recent stone-throwing incident involving local inhabitants in Jeddah at the French consulate. Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 21n3.

³⁶ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 190.

³⁷ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 181.

³⁸ Dinet indicated that these were the words of W. G. Palgrave, *Une année dans l'Arabie centrale, 1862–1863*, trans. Emile Janveaux (Paris: Hachette, 1869). However, since I was unable to find the quoted sentences in the book, I assume they were from Dinet's summary of the book.

³⁹ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 197.

⁴⁰ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 18–19.

Dinet's travels continued, he became even more confident in his faith and felt like he was a part of the global Muslim community, as he also belonged to other political, regional, and cultural communities. The next section deals with his discovery of his multiple identities.

I argue here that Dinet's language gradually changed from insecure to confident⁴¹ and that the change was a result of an accumulation of Dinet's exchanges with other pilgrims and local people. On the way from Jeddah to Medina, Dinet's party had difficulties after they took the wrong road and got stuck in a puddle. On each of these occasions where they experienced hardship, they were able to find aid; local Bedouins showed them the right way,⁴² while a group of "Sudanese" (possibly pilgrims from sub-Saharan Africa) who were going the same way on foot because of limited resources, helped Dinet and his party pull their car out of the mud.⁴³ The theme of hospitality from fellow Muslims appears repeatedly in Dinet's account, which contrasted more and more with the offensive attitudes Europeans had against Muslims. As we saw earlier, Dinet and other pilgrims who were on their way back from the Hijaz had to go through humiliating hygienic measures when boarding their ship. Dinet blamed European prejudices against Muslims, stating that the European powers that controlled the ports imposed severe hygienic measures on Muslim pilgrims in particular, while Christians and Jews coming to Jerusalem were not subject to such measures.⁴⁴ Even in Suez, the authorities forced the ship carrying Muslim pilgrims to wait from the early morning to the afternoon until finally granting them permission to pass, whereas ships stocked with commercial products and fuel were allowed through without delay.⁴⁵ Yet following these descriptions of unfair treatment, Dinet depicted a cathartic scene:

Then, we met a touching surprise. Our ship, so disregarded a while ago, was recognized as a ship of pilgrims by workers on the two banks of the canal. All of them dropped their tools of earthwork to raise their arms for us, to cheer us with the most moving enthusiasm.

All the long of the canal, these acclamations followed us [...].⁴⁶

⁴¹ Dinet stated that his party's smooth visit in Medina helped them overcome their fear of joining the crowds around the Ka'ba temple in Mecca, suggesting his growing sense of safety. Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 74n2.

⁴² Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 23.

⁴³ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 26.

⁴⁴ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 162.

⁴⁵ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 162–163.

⁴⁶ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 163.

The sense of his integration in the Muslim community and reciprocity he had with other Muslims makes Dinet's account unique among European literature on the Muslim pilgrimage. It was shared experiences like this that gave Dinet a sense that he truly belonged to the Muslim community.

3. Identities and Physiognomy

Like many pilgrimage accounts,⁴⁷ Dinet's travelogue reflects the traveler's multiple levels of identity, from the global to the local. In this section, I discuss the issue of identity in order to explore how Dinet was able to find where he belonged at different levels of the community. Curiously, Dinet related the sociocultural belonging of others to their physical features. This argument about the physical dimension of belonging is tightly associated with his ideas about identity transformation.

As a Muslim who converted in Algeria, Dinet noted the tension between "Wahhabi" interpretations of Islam implemented by King Ibn Sa'ud and the practice of saint worship, which was common during this period in the Maghrib. In the face of this tension, Dinet showed a nuanced attitude: he recognized the legitimacy of Wahhabi interpretations of Islam, while apologizing for those who were attached to traditional practices of saint worship, as were the majority of Maghrebian people. In his descriptions of Medina, for example, Dinet stated that during his visit, the Mosque of the Prophet was protected by metal bars and two "Wahhabi" guards standing behind them. These measures were for preventing pilgrims from approaching too closely to the grave of Muhammad and to keep them from touching the bars. The guards would intervene as soon as they saw any action of worship toward the Prophet, such as pilgrims prostrating themselves, kneeling down, or reciting the *al-fātiḥa* with their hands on their chests. The Hijaz authorities considered these acts as inappropriate forms of worship which contradicted the Islamic principle of admiring only God.⁴⁸ In observing these measures, Dinet expressed no strong objection. He agreed with the Wahhabi principle from a religious perspective, in the idea that saint worship was not in the original Islamic creed. Like the contemporary Islamic reformists, Dinet was critical of idol worship and saw this practice as superstitious and non-Islamic. However, he claimed that distinction should be made between those who expressed their religious

⁴⁷ Abderrahmane El Moudden, "The Ambivalence of *Rihla*: Community Integration and Self-Definition in Moroccan Travel Accounts, 1300–1800," in *Muslim Travelers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 69–84.

⁴⁸ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 36, 41–42.

feelings for God through gestures of admiration for persons or things that they associated with God, and the “true fetishists” who worshipped saints or idols. For example, Dinet qualified pilgrims who admired the black stone in Mecca as “ignorant,” but he expressed his sympathy toward them by interpreting their gestures as admiration for a symbol of God’s power.⁴⁹

Why would Dinet defend the practices of those “ignorant” people? I argue that Dinet was speaking here as a Muslim who came from the Maghrib, where saint worship was very common. He explained that Maghribian pilgrims should be especially shocked by the destruction of the *qubba* of Malik ibn Anas at the *al-Baqī’* cemetery because they admired him as the founder of their school of law.⁵⁰ In order to legitimize the Maghribian people’s admiration for the historical actors of Islam, Dinet explained that people considered these personalities as heroes rather than saints.⁵¹ Dinet justified his opinion by comparing these historical personalities with Napoleon, whose grave was visited by many French people, but has never been an object of saint worship.⁵² Still, in making these claims, Dinet did not forget to apologize to his readers in case his statement hurts their convictions.⁵³ This ambivalent attitude Dinet had toward Wahhabi interpretations of Islam reflects the tension between Dinet’s modernist understanding of Islam and his strong attachment to Maghrebian culture.

Despite his nuanced attitude toward interpretations of Islam, Dinet experienced his pilgrimage as an occasion to confirm their belonging to a universal religion. While making a circuit around the Ka‘ba temple during the ritual of *tawāf*, Dinet was seized by an overwhelming feeling that all pilgrims were united in the same Muslim nation. He emphasized that this unity was in spite of the great variety of people who made up the crowd: people of different skin colors, social classes, education levels, ages, and genders, all gathering together as equals and making solemn prayers in the “purest Arabic language”.⁵⁴ He also observed that ‘*Ajams* (non-Arabs) were more numerous than the Arabs in Mecca. He argued, then, that despite the variety of their backgrounds and physical characteristics given by birth, even the non-Arab people living in Mecca became Arabized through the al-Qur’an, the Hadith, Arabic language, and the gestures and customs they had learned since childhood, making them barely distinguishable from the original Arab inhabitants. Dinet further advances the idea that the similarity in

⁴⁹ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 81–82.

⁵⁰ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 49.

⁵¹ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 48.

⁵² Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 49.

⁵³ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 89–91.

physical characteristics and behaviors that were built into Muslims were observable in Muslims all over the world. He pretended that, during World War I, one could easily distinguish Muslim Indians from non-Muslim Indians since only the former acquired “Arab” behaviors which resembled those of southern Algerians.⁵⁵ Dinet also stated that the similar “Arabic mark (*empreinte arabe*)” was observable in Spanish people as well, due to their historical intercourse with Arabs, even five centuries after the Reconquista.⁵⁶

Thus, Dinet believed that people’s physiognomy was not just given by birth, but was also determined by the social environment and especially the culture they belonged to. This idea provided hope for Dinet, who greatly feared being distinguished from other Muslims at the start of his travels. Indeed, he felt physically integrated into groups of Muslim pilgrims as he continued his pilgrimage.

In Mecca, he also had an occasion to reinforce his sense of belonging to Algeria. Before departing for Mount ‘Arafat, Dinet and his companions had a joyful meeting with other Algerian pilgrims who had just arrived in Mecca. Even though they had never met before, they celebrated together that their dream to finish the pilgrimage was now coming true. There were some people from Bou Saâda in the group who charged Dinet and his companions with commissions for their families back home after they learned that Dinet’s party would be able to return earlier than they.⁵⁷

These experiences of solidarity reinforced Dinet’s identity with Bou Saâda, Algeria, the Maghrib, and the global Islamic community, all at the same time, and despite his European and non-Muslim origin. When he claimed that all European pilgrims needed the protection of their Muslim companions, his language reflected his own experience, which confirmed his bonds with his friends and with the people he encountered during his pilgrimage. Instead of assuming himself to be an autonomous observer, Dinet humbly accepted the fact that he could only live in the world within these relationships. Moreover, the authenticity of his faith depended on these social relations. His descriptions of the ‘*Ajams* suggest his belief that when someone became sufficiently acculturated to the host society, they would be physically identified with it.

4. Comparison with Islamic Reformism

Several years after its publication, Dinet’s account was translated into Arabic by Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū (1911–56), an Algerian novelist and Islamic reformist, who published a

⁵⁵ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 108–109, 109n2.

⁵⁶ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 109n1.

⁵⁷ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 121–122.

series of articles on Nasr ed-Din Dinet in Saudi magazine *al-Manhal* in the 1930s.⁵⁸ In these pieces, Ḥūḥū translated selected parts of Dinet’s travel account for Arabic speaking readers. In this section, I analyze what was included and what was excluded in this Arabic translation, to discuss the differences between Dinet and the contemporary Islamic reform movement.

The translator, Ḥūḥū, was a member of the Association of Algerian ‘Ulama, which was founded in 1931 by a group of religious scholars who adopted the “salafi” school of thought as promoted by Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, Muhammad ‘Abdu, and Rashid Rida. Algerian Islamic reformism was not political nationalism, in that the association refrained from politics.⁵⁹ Rather, the association’s activities were concentrated on reforming religious practice in Algeria by criticizing generalized saint worship and religious conservatism of Sufi orders. It also promoted Arabic language and Islamic sciences among Muslim children to create cultural unity between Algerian Muslims.⁶⁰ In colonial Algeria, French authorities made use of Sufi orders as mediators between the colonial administration and local society, and excluded Arabic and Islamic sciences from public education for the benefit of European settlers. Therefore, the French authorities regarded the activities of the Association of Algerian ‘Ulama as hostile to the French, and the association was subject to colonial repression. Ḥūḥū lived between the Hijaz and southeastern Algeria and devoted himself to Arabic literature (in the form of short novels) and theater plays, which provided him with a method of educating the popular masses. How did this Algerian Islamic reformist relate to Dinet in order to present him to Arab readers?

Ḥūḥū selected four parts of Dinet’s account for a rough translation. The subjects discussed in the four parts are as follows:

- (1) European orientalist misinterpretations of Islamic doctrine and the nature of

⁵⁸ In this paper, I refer to the reprinted version of the articles: Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū, *al-A‘māl al-Kāmila li Aḥmad Riḍā Ḥūḥū*, 2 vols. (Algiers: Mūfam li al-Nashr, 2015), vol. 2, pp. 7–33. Since I use this reprint as a source, my analysis has some limitations: the reprint does not mention exact dates of publication or what issues of the magazine published the original translation, nor does it reflect the actual forms (layout, heading, etc.) of the original translation. All these conditions make the analysis of this section and its conclusions tentative.

⁵⁹ For Algerian Islamic reformism, see Ali Merad, *Le réformisme musulman en Algérie de 1925 à 1940: Essai d’histoire religieuse et sociale* (Paris: Mouton, 1967); James McDougall, *History and the Culture of Nationalism in Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁶⁰ Merad, *Le réformisme musulman*.

Arabic language⁶¹

(2) Dinet's critical review of European pilgrim literature⁶²

(3) Dinet's impression of King Ibn Sa'ud when they met in Mecca⁶³

(4) Arabic as a living language and the beauty of Arabic literature⁶⁴

This selection of texts reflects what Dinet and Ḥūḥū shared, that is, a defense of the values of Islamic religion and Arab culture from critiques by Westerners. However, comparing the original French text with the Arabic translation reveals some differences in the interests of both authors.

First, in the translated version of the second text that concerns European pilgrim literature, the title of the chapter was replaced. In the original version, Dinet titled the chapter "Observations on some stories of pilgrims in Mecca,"⁶⁵ putting as an epigraph the al-Qur'anic verse "It is not for the idolaters to inhabit God's places of worship" [9: 17]. It seems that in translating this chapter Ḥūḥū put this epigraph in place of the original chapter title.⁶⁶ For Arab readers, the epigraph has stronger effects than the original title, and they will read it as indicative of the author's categorically negative stance toward Europeans who attempted to visit the Islamic sacred places. Ḥūḥū effectively stated in the summarized translation of Dinet's text that European travelers who pretended to have entered sacred cities could not only not enter the cities without their real identities being revealed, but also the "majority of them could not enter the two cities, but only wrote about imaginary travels, in which they gave alleged true information."⁶⁷ However, in the original text, Dinet did not discuss it in this sense, even though he did indeed claim that some of the European travel accounts describing the sacred cities were not trustworthy. For example, according to Dinet, a French diplomat and Arabist, Léon Roche (1809–1901), copied his account from the one written by Burckhardt.⁶⁸ In addition, journalist Albert Le Boulicaut (1877–1920) gave a particular curious account where the author pretended to have recorded his own conversations with Bedouins, when in fact he was not capable of speaking Arabic, according to

⁶¹ This part corresponds to pp. 177–179 of Dinet's account.

⁶² Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 187–197.

⁶³ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 112–114.

⁶⁴ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 167–170.

⁶⁵ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 187.

⁶⁶ According to the reprinted text appearing in Ḥūḥū, *al-A'māl al-Kāmila*, vol. 2, p. 17.

⁶⁷ Ḥūḥū, *al-A'māl al-Kāmila*, vol. 2, p. 17.

⁶⁸ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 193–194.

Dinet.⁶⁹ However, his central concern was not to judge whether or not those people entered the sacred places. Rather, Dinet's point was that despite the pretensions of many European travelers to have succeeded in penetrating Muslim sacred places without being discovered by Muslims, no European could enter unless he had support from Muslims who believed his sincerity and protected him. Even though Ḥūḥū did not dismiss this argument in his translation, the replaced chapter title and the passage on imaginary travels suggest that his interest resided in questioning the authenticity of the Orientalist literature.

Second, Ḥūḥū apparently understood that Europeans could be distinguished from Muslims by their physical characteristics, whereas Dinet held a more nuanced understanding of the subject. In the translation of the above-mentioned chapter on European orientalists, Ḥūḥū translated the expression “[Burton's] quality of European (*sa qualité d'Européen*)” into “European physiognomy (*hay'ata-hu al-urubbīya*),” which suggests that visual features of Burton were European.⁷⁰ However, Dinet's understanding of the relationship between physical appearance and inner truth was different from Ḥūḥū's. I argue that, as a painter, Dinet associated a person's moral character with their outward appearance and their physical gestures. His depictions of Algerian people and landscapes reflected his ethnographic interest in the society, including his interest in local habits and attitudes, and even the religious sentiments of the people.⁷¹ Interestingly for Dinet, since morality and social habits can change, visual features can as well because we associate them with a person's inner features. When Dinet claimed in his travel account that ‘Ajams of Mecca became Arabized, or that Muslims all over the world became physically similar, as we saw above, he was confirming his belief that there was a link between a person's outward appearance and their inner morality.

Also in the translated article on King Ibn Sa'ud, some of the figurative expressions that Dinet used to describe the king's appearance were omitted by the translator. In the original text, Dinet stated that the king's gestures and words were natural and warm, without any signs of arrogance, which differed from the frosty

⁶⁹ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, pp. 195–196. Dinet also wrote that Burckhardt's descriptions of sacred places were too “cold”, as he was focused on the dimensions of the temple and number of pillars rather than the magnificence of the religious ritual itself (Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 188). Ḥūḥū misunderstood this part by translating that Dinet doubted the fact that Burckhardt traveled to the sacred places (Ḥūḥū, *al-A'māl al-Kāmila*, vol. 2, p. 18).

⁷⁰ Ḥūḥū, *al-A'māl al-Kāmila*, p. 18.

⁷¹ Benjamin, *Orientalist Aesthetics*, pp. 92–95.

attitude of Anglo-Saxon puritans.⁷² Dinet also compared King Ibn Sa‘ud to the four *rāshidūn* califs who combined simplicity with majesty.⁷³ Moreover, in his footnotes, Dinet contrasted the simplicity of the attitudes and clothing of King Ibn Sa‘ud with the luxurious costumes and theatrical posing of Louis XIV as painted by Rigaud.⁷⁴ All these parts were completely left out of Ḥūḥū’s translation.⁷⁵ Ḥūḥū might not have made this omission intentionally, but may have been trying to shorten the length of the text to fit the page limits of the periodical it was published in. However, these omitted parts play an important role in Dinet’s text. When Dinet compared “warm” Arabs with “cold” Anglo-Saxons, he was attaching essentialized and visualized images to each group. The “cold” image of Anglo-Saxons should be understood in terms of his claim of British hostilities toward Islam. In this context, Dinet’s appreciation of King Ibn Sa‘ud was more than diplomatic. Describing the king as a simply dressed, naturally behaving person, Dinet suggested that he was honest and credible, contrary to the conspiratorial British or ornamental Bourbon French. Intentionally or not, Ḥūḥū completely ignored this esthetic aspect of Dinet’s account by seeing in his descriptions only formal praise for the majesty of the king.

Third, Ḥūḥū only focused on Dinet’s appreciation of Islamic values and Arabic language, thus ignoring many other aspects of the account. The first omission was Dinet’s defense of pilgrims who were attached to important personalities in Islamic history. The second omission was Dinet’s reformist imperialist ideas, which justified French domination in part of the Muslim world by claiming French protection over it.

When Islamic reformist discourse made use of Dinet’s account, it ignored what did not agree with the ideas of Islamic reformists. This fact suggests that although there was confluence between Algerian Islamic reformist thought and Dinet in some aspects, the two differed in other areas. Both shared an admiration for the Islamic religion and Arab culture as powerful sources of modern civilization. However, they differed in their attitudes toward saint worship and French imperialism, as well as in their understanding of the power of faith which could change people’s lives. As long as Islamic reformism turned to Arab and Islamic civilization for a form of cultural authenticity on which their sense of nationalism was based, then the separation between the West and the East would be enforced. The possibility of moving between the two faded behind this concern for nationalism.

⁷² Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 114.

⁷³ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 114.

⁷⁴ Dinet and Baâmer, *Le pèlerinage*, p. 114. The painting in question is Hyacinthe Rigaud, “Louis XIV en grand costume royal,” 1701.

⁷⁵ Ḥūḥū, *al-A‘māl al-Kāmila*, vol. 2, p. 30.

Conclusion

A unique characteristic of Dinét's travelogue was that it dealt with a converted Muslim's self-transformation. This transformation was first of all psychological, since the author acquired the conviction that he was a part of the Muslim community as his pilgrimage advanced. This conviction was also associated with a feeling of belonging to the local communities in which he lived. While Dinét was a pessimist and evasive at the beginning of his pilgrimage, he learned to be optimistic through his observations in the sacred cities. He became optimistic in his belief that people's identities, including their physical characteristics, were transformable in accordance with the development of their inner morality and acquisition of language and behaviors. Dinét's descriptions of Arabs, Anglo-Saxons, and the French were, indeed, prejudiced. However, for Dinét, these stereotypes were only separated by indefinite, moving borders. This belief created hope, and through this utopian vision he combined his identity as a supporter of the French empire with his identity as a Muslim. While Dinét's language did not contest colonial domination, it dealt with the tensions between being European and being Muslim in order to work out a solution. As a painter and orientalist, Dinét's worldview was different from that of Islamic reformism, which tried to replace negative representations that Europeans had attached to Arabs and Islam with positive and nationalist ones. Dinét's travel was a project of expanding his self to embody Muslimhood and Arabism, thus bridging the gap between travelers and "travellees" by looking for the possibility of self-transformation.