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Amīn ar-Rayḥānī's *The Heart of Lebanon* as an autoethnography

Abstract

Amīn ar-Rayḥānī (1876–1940) was one of the most prominent figures of Al-Mahḡar literature, having successfully published in Arabic and English, delving for inspiration in Eastern and Western traditions. The chapter provides an analysis of Ar-Rayḥānī's last and probably one of the least known and studied works, i.e. *The Heart of Lebanon* (published posthumously in 1947). The analysis suggests that the book may be read not only as a travelogue or memoir. The insider/outsider perspective of its narrator, meticulousness of his descriptions and depth of his analysis, combined with his storytelling talent, make *The Heart of Lebanon* a precursory example of an autoethnography, where observations on Lebanese landscapes and culture, as well as wider Levantine and Arab heritage, are intertwined with reflections on Ar-Rayḥānī's stance as a Lebanese patriot.

Keywords: Amīn ar-Rayḥānī, Lebanon, travel literature, autobiography, autoethnography

Amīn ar-Rayḥānī (1876–1940) was one of the most prominent figures of Al-Mahḡar literature, an imaginative prosaist, poet and dramatist, accomplished translator, charismatic intellectual, passionate advocate of religious tolerance, equality and mutual respect between nations and peoples, as well as an influential proponent of Arab and Lebanese nationalism. He successfully published in Arabic and English, delving for inspiration in Eastern and Western traditions, as well as benefiting from his fluency in both aforementioned languages and his thorough knowledge of their philosophical and literary heritages. This linguistic and cultural proficiency was

possible not only because he migrated from the Lebanese village Al-Frayka to New York relatively early in his life, but also because he never cut ties with his narrowly and widely defined homelands: Ġabal Lubnān and Al-Waṭan al-‘Arabī, respectively. On the contrary, throughout his life, he sailed regularly between Lebanon, Europe and the Americas. He also travelled extensively around the Middle East and North Africa.¹

People with knowledge and experience similar to Ar-Rayḥānī’s are often called in-betweeners in contemporary humanities, and the hybrid nature of their identities is frequently highlighted.² This condition often reveals two antithetical sides: estrangement or even exclusion in a particular or all locations where an in-betweener lives, as well as belongingness and a sense of familiarity with at least two disparate places. The aforementioned aspects of in-betweenness may simultaneously collide with and overlap each other. It is also possible that, principally in the course of time, the positive consequences of the complex and fluid identity of migrants prevail over the destructive ones and are harnessed in the process of building bridges between cultures and societies. This transition is clearly visible in the life and writings of Ar-Rayḥānī.³ In one of his earliest publications, and also the first novel written in English by an Arab author, namely *The Book of Khalid* (1911), the protagonist and alter-ego of Ar-Rayḥānī struggles with both Eastern and Western conventions. However, in the text that Ar-Rayḥānī was working on near the end of his life, i.e. the autobiographical *The Heart of Lebanon (Qalb Lubnān, 1947)*, the narrator seems to feel confident with his hybrid identity, regardless of his often strained relations with both Lebanese and American society.⁴

¹ For a detailed biography of Ar-Rayḥānī see: Nijmeh Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani: The Humanist Ideology of An Arab-American Intellectual and Activist*, London–New York 2010; The Rihani Museum, Office for Research and Studies (ed.), *Ameen Rihani: Biography and Intellectual Achievements*, Freike 2021, Viewed 30 August 2023, <<https://ameenrihani.org/>>.

² One of the most prominent theorists of hybrid identities is Homi Bhabha, whose works have considerably influenced postcolonial studies; see: Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London–New York 1994.

³ From among the plethora of studies which discuss Ar-Rīḥānī’s intellectual legacy as a plea for intercultural dialogue between East and West see i.a.: Nathan C. Funk, Betty J. Sitka (eds.), *Ameen Rihani: Bridging East and West. A Pioneering Call for Arab-American Understanding*, Lanham 2004; Nijmeh Hajjar, ‘An Arab-American Intellectual Engaging East and West’, *Literature & Aesthetics*, 18/2 (2008), pp. 120–137; Leyla Dakhli, ‘The *Mahjar* as literary and political territory in the first decades of the twentieth century: The case of Amīn Rīḥānī’, in: *The Making of Arab Intellectual: Empire, public sphere and the colonial coordinates of selfhood*, ed. Dyala Hamzah, London–New York 2013, pp. 164–187.

⁴ Ameen Rihani, *The Book of Khalid: A Critical Edition*, ed. Todd Fine, Syracuse 2016, Kindle edition; Amīn ar-Rayḥānī, *Qalb Lubnān: Riḥālāt ṣaġira fī ġībālīnā*, Bayrūt no date; Ameen Rihani, *The Heart of Lebanon: Brief Excursions into Our Mountains and History*, Roger Allen (trans.), Syracuse 2021, Kindle

As a creative and versatile thinker and author, Ar-Rayḥānī was also a prolific and acclaimed travelogue writer. His accounts and essays on Arabia, Iraq and the Maghreb remain the most popular both among Eastern and Western readers, and the researchers.⁵ Although *The Heart of Lebanon* is without any doubt equal to the above-mentioned travelogues in its rich informative content and elegant literary style, it has not yet attracted similar scholarly attention, which it certainly deserves.⁶

The Heart of Lebanon is an unfinished text released posthumously in its Arabic original by one of Ar-Rayḥānī's brothers and the custodian of his intellectual legacy, Albert. In the author's intention, the book was supposed to describe his seventeen journeys across his first and, unquestionably, most beloved homeland, i.e. the Mount Lebanon range and its surroundings.⁷ However, only nine chapters of the book had been finished before the author's sudden death. Eight of them are the accounts of journeys through space: to the Sacred Cedars near Bišarrī, around Mount Ṣannīn, to Byblos, to the cedars of Ġaġ, as well as to the villages of Al-Laqlūq, Afqā, 'Amšīt and Ġarzūz. The last completely edited section of the book recounts the history of Mount Lebanon from antiquity to the era of the Ottoman mutasarrifate. Although the remaining chapters are merely drafted or even left void, the titles or jottings suggest the itineraries of Ar-Rayḥānī's travels: "Springs from Baskintā to Fārayā", "Aš-Šūf", "Ġazzīn and below", "Marġ'uyūn and beyond", "The South: Ġabal 'Āmil and its villages", "Frayka Valley", "From 'Āliyah to Šartūn", "Kisrawān", "Qādīša Valley", "Sīr" and "Tripoli".⁸

As a result of conventional reading and analysis, *The Heart of Lebanon* may be classified as an example of travel literature. Similarly to the majority of travelogues, it contains meticulous accounts of Ar-Rayḥānī's itineraries and modes of travel,

edition. Although during my work on this chapter, I studied both the Arabic original and English version of *The Heart of Lebanon*, all quotations provided here come from the excellent Allen's translation.

⁵ Ar-Rayḥānī published six books in Arabic and English which are related to these travels: *Mulūk al-'Arab* (*Kings of Arabia*, 1924), *Tārīḥ al-Naġd al-ḥadī* (*History of the Modern Najd*, 1926), *The Maker of Modern Arabia* (1928), *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (1930), *Arabian Peak and Desert* (1931), *Fayṣal al-Awwal* (*Faysal the First*, 1934), *Qalb al-'Irāq* (*The Heart of Iraq*, 1935), *Al-Maġrib al-Aqṣā* (*The Furthest Maghrib*, 1952, posthumously) and *Nūr al-Andalus* (*The Light of Al-Andalus*, 1952, posthumously); The Rihani Museum, *Ameen Rihani: Biography and Intellectual Achievements, passim*; Nijmeh Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani*, pp. 35–58.

⁶ To the best of my knowledge, no study is dedicated exclusively to *The Heart of Lebanon*. However, the travelogue is mentioned in several works on Ar-Rayḥānī's legacy and Arabic travel literature, i.a.: The Rihani Museum, *Ameen Rihani: Biography and Intellectual Achievements*, pp. 27–28; Nijmeh Hajjar, *An Arab-American Intellectual Engaging East and West*, pp. 124–125; Nijmeh Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani, passim*; Leyla Dakhli, 'The *Mahjar* as literary and political territory in the first decades of the twentieth century', p. 173.

⁷ The Rihani Museum, *Ameen Rihani: Biography and Intellectual Achievements*, p. 27.

⁸ Ar-Rayḥānī, *Qalb Lubnān: Riḥalāt ṣaġīra fī ġībālīnā*, pp. 547–581.

detailed descriptions of nature, ancient ruins and contemporary architecture, as well as captivating narratives about conversations and adventures that took place during his journeys. Extensive explanations of the historical intricacies, as well as comprehensive depictions of the Lebanese customs and manners included in *The Heart of Lebanon* indicate that Ar-Rayḥānī was also a committed chronicler, observant ethnographer, and an imaginative storyteller:

I am going to take the reader on a long journey back in time through Lebanese history, some four thousand years. As is the case with journeys on earth and in space, we will be making use of both history's lamp, however faint the light may be, and informed and solid imagination. Using them, we will penetrate the obscurities of times past and pass by those stations where history paused for a hundred or hundreds of years, waiting for humans to emerge from the dark recesses of apathy and ignorance and the calamities of war and injustice. So, dear reader, let us take wing like the light from the stars. Shake off the dust of lethargy and resignation from your wings. Forget the convictions and certainties you have inherited, the knowledge and doubts you have acquired, and the traditions and myths you have so cherished. Come on, let us fly away from the political mire of this age with its social and religious exploitation; let us fly instead through time's own firmament to those major stopping points in the tragedy of civilization, to the dawn of history that concerns us here. Come, let us fly, if only for the sheer pleasure of flight and discovery.⁹

Nijmeh Hajjar suggests that Ar-Rayḥānī's travelogues "may be considered as biographies of city and country", since the author focuses on human aspects of place.¹⁰ In a letter to his brother Yūsuf, written in 1939, Ar-Rayḥānī seems to corroborate this notion, and explains the reasons that led him to work on "The Heart of Lebanon":

This is a part of the debt I owe to our native mountains and our forefathers there. I have written books on every section of Arabia, and my Lebanon friends have complained – rightly so – that I haven't yet written anything about Mt. Lebanon. The book is to be free from any controversial matter, religious or political. It is a book of little journeys to out of the way places in the mountains, where the old life, with its quaint traditions and manners, remains almost intact. It's going to be one of my best Arabic books as I'm putting all my heart in it.¹¹

⁹ Rihani, *The Heart of Lebanon*, Kindle edition.

¹⁰ Hajjar, 'An Arab-American Intellectual Engaging East and West', pp. 124–125.

¹¹ The Rihani Museum, *Ameen Rihani: Biography and Intellectual Achievements*, p. 27.

Undeniably, in accordance with the author's wishes, vibrant and poetic language makes *The Heart of Lebanon* a sophisticated memoir, one of the milestones in modern Arabic autobiographical literature. However, the intellectual background of Ar-Rayḥānī, his philosophical perspective and emotional attitude towards Lebanon and its people, provide an impulse for a reinterpretation of his work. In the following chapter, I read and analyse *The Heart of Lebanon* as an autoethnographic study, where observations on Lebanese landscapes and culture, as well as wider Levantine and Arab heritage (*turāṭ*), are intertwined with reflections on Ar-Rayḥānī's stance as a Lebanese patriot in the time when his country was still struggling for independence and different, often contradictory, visions of this sovereignty were considered.

Through almost six hundred pages of *The Heart of Lebanon*, we accompany Ar-Rayḥānī, nearly sharing the hardships and dangers of his excursions, when he is traversing the mountainsides on a mule in his childhood and youth or crossing the valleys by car in the 1930s. We listen to Ar-Rayḥānī's companions, from simple mountain guides and village residents, who recount local legends and popular wisdom, to his well-educated or even aristocratic friends, with whom he discusses Lebanese heritage and current politics. We rest in modest houses, participate in sumptuous meals and become acquainted with Lebanese hospitality, which Ar-Rayḥānī considers the epitome of his homeland culture:

You might think that, when it comes to Lebanese hospitality, drinks and hors d'oeuvres are a kind of trick being played on the guest, something needed to keep him busy while the meal is being prepared. There is something untoward about that idea. The hors d'oeuvres can amaze you with the sheer number of shapes and colors, simple and complex: cooked greenery, extracted from the sea and beyond, from various orchards and different countries. There is American pork, French pate, Italian sardines, Dutch cheese; pickled eggplant from Damascus, pistachios from Aleppo, edible sea algae from Beirut, raw liver from Beit Chabab, and grilled kidneys. Above all, there are the mixed nuts, the real poem of the hors d'oeuvres. Along with all that, the drinks include arak, beer, whisky, and soda. Our host and friend truly has "the Kurd's saddlebag" from the well-known tale in *A Thousand and One Nights*. "Bring it on, bag servant! Here's to you, bag owner!" So our host, who has already excelled in matters of taste and hospitality, now proceeds to give you the biggest surprise of all: an invitation to take "a bite" at the table, some hour and a half after your arrival!¹²

¹² Rihani, *The Heart of Lebanon*, Kindle edition.

One of the main subjects of Ar-Rayḥānī's book is the alluring beauty of Lebanese nature. The author draws dramatic mountain landscapes and blooming valleys in sharp outlines and vivid colours. He attracts the reader's senses through evocative comparisons and metaphors:

After going a little way down the winding track we pass through mulberry orchards and vines until we reach rocky clefts covered in gallnut bushes and valonia oak. All around are clumps of gorse, bramble, and laurel. You are greeted by their yellow and violet flowers, their red-and-purple clusters, and their fresh, gentle scents. They welcome you not only by the side of the track but also in the cracks between the rocks and hillocks. There is an omnipresent perfumer who mixes aromas, blending the dewy scents from the earth with those from the damp trees and fragrant plants. The flowering shrubs left after the dry season (few of whose names are unknown) still manage to exude a lovely, complex, and amazing fragrance, one that botanists and chemists have been unable to analyze. Here there exists an eternal artist, one who can blend the earth's greenery with the sky's azure blue, the sun's gold, and the clouds' translucent silver. In the realms of color art, he achieves the very limits of impossibility, something that artists aspire to achieve, but in vain. In various parts of the valley you can see traces of the Great Sculptor.¹³

Ar-Rayḥānī repeatedly ponders the sanctity of Lebanese nature, not only the cedars, which are mentioned in the Scriptures, but also rocks, caves, rivers and springs, that – according to the folk tales – heal bodies and souls:

Among the attributes of these rivers and caves is one of sanctity, its seeds long since sown by shamans, developed by devout people of faith, and magnified by the censors of time. People of both the East and West have planted along the banks of these rivers seeds of legend and folktale and have given it a national religious tinge.¹⁴

Moreover, romantic notion of the eternal unity between the people and their land is expressed in *The Heart of Lebanon*. According to Ar-Rayḥānī, nature shapes the Lebanese physique and psyche:

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

Lebanese people who cling to their mountain rocks are just like those mountain heights in their roughness, their breezes, and their springs. They are that perfumed breeze in all its gentle softness, that limpid, clear spring flowing so liberally. Beyond that you can say what you like; they are still the hand of charity in exquisite balance.¹⁵

Sketches of landscapes that were admired by the traveller, his or her observations on the character of local people, commentaries on customs that he or she participated in, as well as stories about his or her adventures are typical themes of travelogues, even if they are seldom as sophisticated in comparison with the above quotations. But, as Albert Ar-Rayḥānī writes in his preface to the 1975 edition of the Arabic original, *The Heart of Lebanon* offers its readers more than the majority of the travel literature does, namely an almost metaphysical experience:

(...) it is a return to the ancient land, to the beloved terrain, to Mother Nature; a return to the secret of that emotional tie that binds humanity to the geographical location where they belong, to the sweet fragrance that they inhale, to the waterwheels and springs where they wash, and to the trees beneath which they sit and contemplate. On the pages of this book Rihani is summoning those who inhabit their ancient land, calling them, consorting and conversing with them, recrafting with them both past and present, and designing the outline of the future.¹⁶

This complex and mysterious connection with his homeland that Ar-Rayḥānī preserved throughout his life, in combination with extensive theoretical and practical knowledge of the West, provided him with the ability to observe and describe Lebanon from simultaneously insider and outsider perspective. In his reflections, he engaged both the sensibilities of the Lebanese patriot and the analytical tools of the cosmopolitan intellectual. Although Ar-Rayḥānī was not a professional scholar, as Nijmeh Hajjar points out with regard to history, he was aware of the methodologies of modern humanities, in their recognition not only of political but social, economic and cultural aspects as well.¹⁷ Apart from his best-known Arabic and English books on Arabia, Iraq and the Maghreb, Ar-Rayḥānī proved it in his history of Syria, significantly entitled *An-Nakabāt* (The Catastrophes, 1928). In this work, he focused on the “struggle of the ordinary people against injustice and oppression” of autocratic

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Hajjar, *The Politics and Poetics of Ameen Rihani*, pp. 50–52.

tyrants as the pivot of argumentation.¹⁸ On the other hand, his commitment to pondering philosophical and anthropological questions is expressed in the very beginning of *The Heart of Lebanon*:

For the human soul, a return to the past is both soothing and troubling. When we recall events from the past, we feel refreshed and pensive; we smile, then feel depressed. That said, we thank God because we can invoke memories of the past, and yet that same past can never return. Which of these memories are entirely cloudless? Which of them restore for us whiffs of life's perfume without any trace of pain or shadow of error? Which memories can revive a happy feeling and renew some previous sense of delight without at the same time provoking nostalgia and a wistful sadness that inevitably accompanies it?¹⁹

In the *Heart of Lebanon*, Ar-Rayḥānī's universally humanistic attitude to specific places and people is enriched by his profound and multifaceted interpretation of the phenomena that make up the Lebanese culture. From this multi-angled perspective, he reflects on his personal experiences and sentiments towards Lebanon, as well as its heritage and future. Thus, the book becomes precursory to the genre of autoethnography that emerged in the second half of the 20th century. Although Ar-Rayḥānī's autoethnographic attitude is never verbally expressed, it seems in compliance with contemporary definitions of autoethnography:

Stemming from the field of anthropology, autoethnography shares the storytelling feature with other genres of self-narrative but transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation.²⁰

(...) *autoethnographic stories* – are stories of/about the self told through the lens of culture. Autoethnographic stories are artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience.²¹

In his autoethnographical approach to Lebanese heritage, Ar-Rayḥānī analyses the most important phenomena of his homeland's culture and recalls the pivotal moments in its history. As the son of a silk manufacturer, he describes the past and present of this craft, which was crucial for the Lebanese economy until the end of the 19th century. As an emigrant, he ponders the supersession of the manually operated

¹⁸ Ibidem, pp. 52–53.

¹⁹ Rihani, *The Heart of Lebanon*, Kindle edition.

²⁰ Heewon Chang, *Autoethnography as a Method*, London–New York 2008, p. 43.

²¹ Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography*, New York 2015, p. 1.

looms that were used in Lebanon by the mechanical ones popular in Europe and the consequences of this change for Lebanese society and diaspora.

However, Ar-Rayhānī's intimate attitude towards his homeland history is probably the most evident in those excerpts of *The Heart of Lebanon* in which he deliberates on the very heart of Lebanese identity – the cedar tree. During the long and tiring journey to one of the few remaining cedar forests in the vicinity of Bišārī, the author, enchanted by the national myth, anticipates a transcendental experience, but he becomes bitterly disappointed when he finally reaches the place:

You Cedars of Lebanon, we have reached you safe and sound! However, when we looked down on your majesty heaped beneath the mountain's rim, hope came crashing down from above, imagination veered from its firmament, and heart swerved in its faith and affection. I had envisioned you as being spread across mountain heights, camped on top of plains and hills, and rising high like a rainbow over valleys and flatlands. Your sweet scent would waft the perfume of blossoms and sweet basil, and every kind of verdant plant would cluster in your shade, extending your splendor over the water's surface, among the rocky streams, and at the concourse of ravines and mountain trails. I had imagined the Cedars in this all-inclusive guise of glory. But what I saw instead was a secluded spot huddled in a bend by the edge of a drainage ditch. I had imagined the mountains as being in the shadow of the Cedars, but instead the Cedars were in the mountains' shadow. I had imagined that time itself would be embodied in the cedar forest, whereas I saw the Cedars belittled by the hand of time. I had imagined a green landscape, one where the human gaze would balk at its own inadequacy and eagles' wings would crack as they soared toward its widespread roots. Instead, I saw a blackened patch of ground on a gloomy bend, with eagles' wings outspread arrogantly overhead. I had imagined a splendor engulfing the mountains far and wide, high and low; from its heights it would emit a scent to perfume the meadows, an essence to anoint the plains. I had imagined a splendor with the sun's gleam at its door and moonlight in its sanctum. It would be sending them sacred sounds, to be repeated over generations and times. I had imagined silken splendors on golden thrones in divine precincts. I had imagined all of this before I stood by the gate, feeling a sense of shock and burning despair. Are the Cedars a page from history? Are the Cedars a poetic ode or prophetic canticle? Are the Cedars lines in a much-beloved book? Are the Cedars frankincense in the censer of time? Are the Cedars a sign from a pen or a drawing on a flag?²²

²² Rihani, *The Heart of Lebanon*, Kindle edition.

The passage about the cedars of Bišarrī may serve as an example of Ar-Rayḥānī's struggle between romantic and sceptical approaches, not only towards the symbol of Lebanon, but also his own faith in national myths. Like modern scholars, he deconstructs these myths by providing a long history of the cedar forests devastation initiated by the most revered ancestors of the Lebanese, i.e. the Phoenicians:

So I entered the historic sacred forest, probing its awesome solemnity, a footstool for the perplexed heart, a sanctum for the humble soul (...).

There I heard some ancient tones of love, some strange accents of eloquence, some loving whispers of celebration, all of them falling like cedar needles into the welcoming bosom of immanence, or like April rains on mulberry leaves.

Different kinds of sound: some of them soft and expansive, others loud and harsh, still others like the echoes of evening bells in the mountains, like the cooing of doves in the dawn quietude, like the whisper of trees on the riverbanks, like the lion's roar in the midday heat, like waves crashing on to rocks.

I heard the Phoenician describing the beauties of cedarwood in Egypt so the pharaoh could hear: a solid, polished wood, with lovely colors and veins, and aromatic; an adornment of temples and palaces. Time has no power over it, worms do not go near it. An amazing wood, dry as rock, smooth as glass, lovely as the rose (...).

I heard the sound of axes and scythes in the forests and sounds of hammers and saws working in the factories of Tripoli and Byblos (...).

The owners of the forests were Phoenicians, as were the wood merchants and the boatbuilders. Yes indeed, my child! Those times were not devoid of loyalists devoted to their homeland. Some folk spread rumors about people who put their own interests above those of the homeland. Noisy grumbles and protests could be heard. And yet, my child, commerce goes on, and in every time and place! (...) We are all for the homeland, all for the flag!²³

This kind of subtle irony, which seems characteristic of Ar-Rayḥānī's writing, is common in many autoethnographies. In *The Heart of Lebanon*, the humoristic perspective is often aimed at the prejudices of the author or his social milieu²⁴. He uses irony as a sophisticated methodological tool for the analysis of

²³ Ibidem.

²⁴ *The Heart of Lebanon* is dedicated to Charles Corm, Ar-Rayḥānī's close friend and a leader of Phoenicianism, a movement which the author of *the Heart of Lebanon* criticised, see: Asher Kaufman, 'Tell Us Our History': Charles Corm, Mount Lebanon and Lebanese Nationalism, *Middle Eastern Studies* 40/3 (2004), pp. 1–28.

Lebanese nationalism at the time when the borders of Lebanon as an independent country were still being drawn on the map of the Middle East by both Arab intellectuals and Western powers. Thus, Ar-Rayḥānī scrutinizes diverse concepts of Lebanese identity and evocatively warns against sectarianism.

The Heart of Lebanon may be considered not only the most important text about Lebanon published by Ar-Rayḥānī and a crowning achievement of his lifelong intellectual campaign for the country and its people. The book seems also to be one of the most mature autobiographical works among Ar-Rayḥānī's publications, a profound analysis of the author's identity as a Lebanese patriot and a testament that was supposed to guide his readers through the rough road leading to the complete independence of their homeland. Therefore, *The Heart of Lebanon* is certainly more than a travelogue or memoir. The insider/outsider perspective of the narrator towards the subject of the book, meticulousness of his descriptions and depth of his analysis, combined with his storytelling talent, make Ar-Rayḥānī's book, a pioneering example of autoethnography, even if an unconscious one.

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