

In Memoriam: Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal (1945–2026)

I never imagined that a day would come when I would have to deliver a eulogy for this noble and honourable man, so deeply devoted to scholarship and so full of love for knowledge and for life. This is not because he does not deserve such a tribute, but because I do not consider myself equal to the task. What need could a scholar of Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal's stature have of a testimony from me?

In truth, it is I who need to bear witness to him and on his behalf. For in speaking about him, I am ultimately bearing witness to myself: to the nature of my own relationship with scholarship and with scholars, and to the values that he embodied. This is one of the distinguishing marks of great figures: when we speak about them, we reveal not only their standing, but also—often without realizing it—the extent to which we have understood their worth and the position we ourselves have chosen to occupy in relation to their knowledge, their character, and their legacy.

And now I find myself compelled to speak of him in the past tense. That, in itself, is another ordeal. How can one speak in the past tense of a man who, until so recently, remained present in memory, thought, and feeling; present in our questions, books, projects, and encounters; present in the lives of his friends, colleagues, and students?

Ladies and gentlemen,

I cannot presume to offer a full account of Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal's life and career. Such a life deserves a work devoted entirely to it—one that would gather his writings, trace the stages of his intellectual journey, and illuminate its scholarly, philosophical, and human dimensions. All I can offer here are a few indications of his importance in relation to the work we do and the intellectual circumstances in which we find ourselves. I shall begin with something personal and conclude, in the manner of philosophers and sages, with an expression of gratitude.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There is something that has long troubled me, and I see no reason not to speak of it openly, even if it is uncomfortable for us, for our institutions, and for our intellectual conscience.

With the exception of a very small number of lectures at Moroccan universities, Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal did not, to the best of my knowledge, receive the invitations he deserved to lecture or to contribute to the supervision and training of students and researchers in Morocco's philosophy departments.

Even after his retirement, he continued to work tirelessly and without display. He organized meetings, delivered lectures, and took part in intellectual and scholarly events at the invitation of cultural institutions and civil-society associations, while many university departments remained largely unaware of him and of the importance of the body of work he had accumulated over several decades in one of the most distinguished environments for research in his field.

There may be a degree of harshness in saying this. Yet death sometimes forces us to look at ourselves in the mirror and to say what we failed to say when there was still time.

On this occasion, then, I offer an apology to your memory, Sidi Abdelali. We did not know how to gather the fruits of your scholarship. Through selfishness at times, narrowness of vision at others, and

for many additional reasons, we failed to enrich the premises of our own thought and work with the results of your research and the fruits of your reflection.

I do not know how those of us working on philosophy in Islam can hope to reach sound scholarly conclusions without building upon what you achieved. How can we write about Ibn Ṭufayl, syllogistic theory, Ibn Rushd's theory of the intellect, Ibn Sīnā's theory of prophecy, or the relationship between logic and grammar without reading your work, absorbing its results, and engaging with the questions it raises?

Perhaps this disregard for the accumulated achievements of major scholars helps explain the quality of much of what we publish: studies that remain disconnected from earlier scholarship and from the intellectual movement of their own time—works of which the least that can sometimes be said is that they stand outside the scholarly history of the very subjects they address.

Here ends the apology.

Ladies and gentlemen,

My first personal encounter with Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal took place in 2001 at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities in Rabat, where he gave a presentation on George Saliba's 1998 book on the origins and development of Arabic scientific thought.

Several years later, when I was preparing an edition of a manuscript by Ibn Ṭumlūs on logic, I knew that Abdelali had already produced a study of fundamental importance to the subject: "Éléments nouveaux pour l'étude de l'Introduction à l'Art de la Logique d'Ibn Tumlus (m. 620 H. / 1223)." He had presented it at the 1993 Paris colloquium of the *Société internationale d'histoire des sciences et de la philosophie arabes et islamiques*, and it was subsequently published in *Perspectives arabes et médiévales sur la tradition scientifique et philosophique grecque*, issued by Peeters in Leuven in 1997.

It was during this period that I happened to meet him in the National Library in Rabat. I saw him in his elegant djellaba, prayer beads in hand, and went over to introduce myself. Fortunately, the encounter was free of the stiffness and unnecessary difficulty that can sometimes characterize meetings between colleagues in Morocco. We immediately arranged to meet at a café he particularly liked, overlooking the Atlantic Ocean in Rabat.

From that time onward, our scholarly and personal exchanges continued. I visited him on many occasions at his second home in Mohammedia. He did not hesitate to place at my disposal his preliminary edition of Ibn Ṭumlūs's *Kitāb al-Taḥlīl*, so that I could benefit from it in preparing my own edition of the complete work, later published by Brill in Leiden.

It appears that he had also prepared a preliminary edition of the *Kitāb al-Qiyās*, which was unfortunately lost. This may explain the words he wrote in his own hand on the copy of the *Kitāb al-Taḥlīl* that he sent me: *hādhā min al-nuṣūṣ al-nājiya*—"this is one of the surviving texts." That brief note, which might at the time have seemed almost incidental, now carries for me a particular resonance.

I, in turn, invited him to Dar al-Hadith al-Hassania, where he genuinely helped us establish and consolidate the teaching of philosophy, as well as to other conferences and meetings in Rabat, Salé, and Marseille. Whenever Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal was present, the success of the gathering was assured—not only intellectually, but also humanly.

He carried his learning without ever making it a burden upon others. He combined the dignity of the scholar with the simplicity of the human being, the rigor of the researcher with the gentleness of the

friend. His presence gave scholarly meetings seriousness and distinction, but it also brought warmth, affection, and tranquility.

Abdelali was not one of those who turn knowledge into a barrier between themselves and others, or who use specialization as a means of asserting superiority. He loved meeting people and was passionate about dialogue. He knew how to listen and was generous in sharing information, documents, and advice. He understood that scholarship is not preserved through possession and exclusion; it grows through circulation, cooperation, and intellectual care.

Ladies and gentlemen,

There are many Moroccans who work on philosophy and the history of philosophy, but figures such as Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal are exceedingly rare. One need only examine his publications to appreciate the degree of devotion he brought to his vocation, from his earliest activities in 1974 to the last work he completed.

Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal worked on several intellectual fronts and remained faithful throughout his career to the demands of scholarly research, with an unwavering concern for precision, textual investigation, and academic integrity.

A substantial part of his scholarly career was spent at the *Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (CNRS), where he attained the rank of *Directeur de recherche*. He worked at the *Centre d'histoire des sciences et des philosophies arabes et médiévales*, in the Paris region, within one of the most distinguished scholarly environments devoted to the study of Arabic and Islamic philosophy, science, and intellectual history.

Another aspect of his intellectual trajectory deserves particular emphasis. His higher education was initially shaped within the French academic system and was, in this sense, largely Francophone. He studied philosophy in France, notably at the Sorbonne and the *École normale supérieure de Saint-Cloud*. What is particularly remarkable about his subsequent development, however, is the depth of mastery he acquired of classical Arabic, and especially of the highly technical and demanding language in which the major philosophical, logical, and scientific works of the Arabic tradition were written.

Through sustained study and prolonged engagement with these texts, he became an accomplished reader of classical Arabic, capable of approaching some of the most difficult works of philosophy, logic, and science directly and with remarkable precision.

This double formation was, in my view, one of the sources of his scholarly strength. He did not merely move between two languages; he brought two traditions of learning and research into sustained conversation. His command of classical Arabic gave him direct access to the texts themselves, while his French philosophical and philological training provided him with another set of methods, questions, and scholarly tools. He could thus move with rare assurance between the Arabic textual tradition and the French and European traditions of scholarship in which he had initially been formed.

He also worked in proximity to some of the most eminent scholars in the field of Arabic and Islamic philosophy, including Pierre Thillet, Jean Jolivet, Muḥsin Maḥdī, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, and others.

He did not merely leave us important publications. More importantly, he left open fields of inquiry, questions, and problems that now require us to continue the work of reflection and research.

He completed a major doctoral thesis on Aristotelian logic and Arabic grammar, published in 1983, which became a foundational study in its field. He also supervised doctoral dissertations on subjects relating to Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Ḥanbal, Ibn Sīnā, and Thomas Aquinas.

He directed and coordinated important conferences and collective volumes devoted to al-Kindī, Ibn Sīnā, language and philosophy, and Arabic, Latin, and Hebrew perspectives on the Greek scientific and philosophical tradition.

Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal also contributed to major encyclopedic projects, notably the *Encyclopédie philosophique universelle*, published by the Presses Universitaires de France, as well as the *Dictionnaire des philosophes antiques*, published under the auspices of the Centre national de la recherche scientifique.

Among his other important initiatives was the series of *Symposium Averroicum* meetings devoted to Ibn Rushd. The first was held in Fez in 1989, the second at Harvard in 1990, the third again in Fez in 1992, and the fourth in Cologne in 1996. These meetings created a genuine space for collective research into Ibn Rushd's philosophy, its historical contexts, its later developments, and its place within the broader history of philosophy.

He published dozens of distinguished studies in French and Arabic on Ibn Ṭufayl, al-Ghazālī, al-Kindī, Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn al-Khaṭīb, Ibn Ṭumlūs, and many others. There is no room here to list their titles or discuss them in detail. Yet anyone working on philosophy in Islam has no alternative but to read them and incorporate their findings into future research.

We must also mention the ambitious intellectual and scholarly project that Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal had been developing, one aspect of which he inaugurated several years ago with a lecture at Dar al-Hadith al-Hassania on Ibn Rushd's jurisprudence and philosophy. A series of lectures and meetings devoted to this project followed.

It was a great honour for me to have been the first to invite him to lecture at Dar al-Hadith al-Hassania, and I was equally delighted to invite him to participate in a number of meetings both in Morocco and abroad.

I remember particularly that he did not hesitate to accept my invitation to come to Marseille in 2019 for a *journée d'étude* on *Philosopher en islam aujourd'hui*. He never treated scholarly invitations as matters of courtesy or mere attendance. He transformed every meeting into a genuine opportunity for dialogue, the exchange of knowledge, and the creation of enduring human relationships.

In addition to all this, Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal was a determined defender of philosophy—or *ḥikma*, as he preferred to call it—and of its rightful place in history. He understood the importance of texts and documents, the necessity of the scholarly community, and the value of intellectual mentorship in forming researchers and ensuring the continuity and accumulation of knowledge.

He knew that scholarship cannot be sustained by isolated individual efforts alone. It requires established traditions, supportive institutions, and communities of researchers whose members cooperate, engage in dialogue, correct one another, and enable each generation to build upon the achievements of those who came before it.

This is only the briefest account of the rich and exceptional career of a man whom I consider, for both scholarly and personal reasons, to have been exceptional. To say this is not so much to praise him as it is to criticize ourselves, our institutions, and our failure to benefit properly from scholars who lived and worked among us.

In my view, it is precisely the continuity and richness of this scholarly career that make Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal one of those thinkers whose work belongs not only to the past, but also to the future.

Through the experience he accumulated and the intellectual, scholarly, and human resources he acquired, he became part of the horizon toward which we aspire and within which we seek to move. His thought therefore does not lie behind us, confined to our past; it stands ahead of us. We must approach it with care and good faith.

The man has departed, but the questions he raised, the works he completed, and the intellectual doors upon which he knocked remain before us. We must read him attentively, take up the questions he posed, and build upon the conclusions he reached.

Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal has undoubtedly entered the history of scholarship through the cumulative force of his many studies, dozens of which were fashioned with something of the delicacy of embroidery and engraving, so precise, patient, and attentive were they to detail. Yet this achievement imposes a duty upon us, the generation that followed him: we must continue it and refuse to retreat to a point preceding his results.

In this respect, his work establishes an entire horizon of research for us. He left writings that raised more questions than they answered. He opened many doors, and it is now for us to continue his work, in the hope that those doors may open fully for us or for those who come after us.

Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal was a true beacon in the study of the history of philosophy in Muslim contexts. For me, at least, every conversation with him was an occasion for guidance and orientation.

With his breadth of thought and far-reaching vision, he was the touchstone against which I tested my ideas in order to distinguish them from my illusions; he was the bond by which I strengthened my resolve to continue working. Today, in his absence, I feel that I have lost one of those intellectual references whose very existence reassured me, and to whom I could return in order to test my questions and reconsider my ideas.

Yet great scholars never disappear entirely. Their presence endures in their books, in their students, in the questions they raised, in the methods they taught us, and in the horizons they opened for those who would follow.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I cannot imagine that anything I have said could do justice to this man. My inability to find adequate expression is evident enough. In such a state, I find no refuge and no means of fulfilling even part of what we owe him except in the words of the sages and philosophers—the texts that are our daily bread and occupation and, in a certain sense, our form of worship.

I do not wish to burden you with the long passages I had once selected in order to thank him while he was still among us. Yet the meaning carried by those passages has today become more urgent and more present than ever.

Al-Kindī reminded us that gratitude is due to those who share with us the fruits of their thought, because their work becomes a path and an instrument through which we are guided toward truth. Aristotle taught us that the merit of our predecessors does not lie only in the sound opinions they transmitted, but also in the ways in which they prepared our minds and trained us in the disciplines of inquiry and reflection.

Ibn Rushd expressed this meaning in words that seem to me especially fitting today as we remember Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal:

“The ancients stand in relation to the moderns as fathers to sons, except that their begetting is nobler than that of fathers: fathers give birth to our bodies, whereas scholars give birth to our souls. Our gratitude to them is therefore greater than our gratitude to our fathers; our duty toward them is more binding, our love for them stronger, and our obligation to follow their example more compelling.”

How greatly we need to recall these words today as we bid farewell to Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal. He was one of those scholars who participate in the formation of our minds, refine our questions, and broaden the horizons of our thought.

Our gratitude to him cannot be expressed through words alone. It must take the form of caring for his work: reading it, collecting it, publishing it, and continuing the research he opened before us. Loyalty to him cannot consist merely in enumerating his many virtues. It requires us to preserve his scholarly legacy, introduce it to new generations of researchers, and make his writings part of philosophical and intellectual education in our universities and institutions.

Perhaps the form of gratitude most proper to him—just as Ibn Rushd described the gratitude owed to Aristotle—is to devote ourselves to his writings, to elucidate them and make them known: to care for his publications, documents, and unfinished projects, and to complete, as far as possible, what time did not allow him to complete.

Yes, Morocco has every right to take pride in having produced a scholar of such learning, breadth, and distinction as Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal. Moroccans have the right—indeed, the duty—to regard him as an example of devotion to scholarship, patience in research, humility, integrity, and fidelity to the most rigorous intellectual traditions.

Yet to continue relying upon exceptional individuals alone is extremely dangerous. Nations and scholarly institutions do not advance by waiting for rare individuals to appear from time to time. They advance when they create the conditions under which scholarship becomes an established tradition, intellectual care an institutional practice, and the accumulation of knowledge a collective responsibility.

Morocco’s scholarly and cultural institutions therefore have a duty to preserve the legacy of Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal: to collect his studies published in Arabic and French, care for the papers and projects he left behind, and organize a scholarly gathering worthy of his stature and of his contribution to the study of philosophy in Islam.

There is nothing more painful than discovering the value of our scholars only after their death, and nothing more severe than beginning to collect their work after we have lost the opportunity to listen to them while they were among us. Yet to remedy part of our neglect is better than to persist in it, and preserving this man’s legacy is one part of what we owe him.

In closing, I address you, Sidi Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal:

You left us today, but you have bequeathed to us a body of scholarship, a life of work, and a noble memory that will keep you present among us. Your writings will remain witnesses to your devotion. Your questions will remain open before future researchers. And your image—with your elegant djellaba, your prayer beads, your smile, and your generosity—will remain alive in the memory of all who knew and loved you.

Perhaps one of the cruelest things about death is that it makes us recover the small details we once considered fleeting, only to discover that they are the most enduring things in memory: a meeting in a library; an appointment in a café overlooking the ocean; a manuscript generously placed in the hands of a colleague; an invitation accepted with affection; a scholarly gathering transformed by the presence of one particular person.

May God reward you abundantly for all that you gave to scholarship and to scholars. May He accept your work, place the fruits of your thought and learning in the balance of your good deeds, envelop you in His mercy, and grant you a place in His eternal gardens.

May He grant your wife, your family, your friends, your students, your colleagues, and all who loved you patience and consolation, and may He preserve for them the goodness of your memory and the lasting beauty of your example.

At your departure, I offer you my deepest gratitude, esteem, and fidelity.

Farewell, Sidi Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal.

Peace be upon you.

Tangier, 6 August 2026

Fouad Ben Ahmed