

Chapter 2

OBSERVING ZIYARA IN TWO MEDIEVAL MUSLIM TRAVEL ACCOUNTS

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ABSTRACT

Muslim travel literature is rich with observations about worship in the pre-modern era as it took place in mosques, madrasas, shrines, tombs, and other spaces considered holy by devotees; the accounts include records of ritual—whether prayer, posture, or action—offered by believers. In addition to descriptions of *hajj*, one finds accounts by travellers who observed and/or participated in *ziyara*, i.e., visits to tombs and shrines of Muslim saints. The travel writers observed pilgrims who participated in rituals honouring the Prophet's family or Sufi holy men and women. This essay explores the writings of two such travel writers: Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta, sixth/twelfth and eighth/fourteenth centuries, respectively, who paid close attention to religious observances—their own and others—and who did not distinguish sectarian identity in what they observed. The records demonstrate an inter-sectarian devotion to saints, mediated by popular Sufi spirituality, which characterized the middle period.

Keywords: *ziyara*, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta, *rihla*, al-Qarafa (or 'City of the Dead')

MUSLIM TRAVEL LITERATURE of the medieval and early modern periods is rich with observations about political and economic realities of the pre-modern era, as well as scientific and artistic exchange. The accounts, called *rihla*, also provide precious information about worship spaces in the pre-modern era as it took place in mosques, madrasas, shrines, tombs, and other spaces considered holy by devotees; they furthermore include records of ritual—whether prayer, posture, or action—offered by believers. Modern representations of ritual (worship, liturgy) often portray it as static, popularly illustrated by the monophonic sound of chant in medieval Christian worship and the voice of the *muezzin* in the *adhan*. On the contrary, ritual is dynamic, diverse between regions, and revealing human concerns at their most vulnerable. Moreover, the *shahada* among Muslims, the *shema* among the Jews, and the Nicene Creed for Christians, all possess doctrinal and social significance as well as liturgical. In order to enhance worship while

striving to keep it within the limits of doctrinal correctness, believers among all three Abrahamic faiths have created new musical forms, drama, poetry, and public processions. In the political arena, liturgical rituals confirmed the accession of rulers; scholars regularly consult ritual texts for ideas about the nature of kingship and the state.¹ The *rihla* provide first-hand accounts of direct experience with worship and ritual.

There has been growing interest in Muslim sacred places and devotions, in particular *ziyara* or visits to shrines and tombs.² Among the recent scholarship, one study in particular examined the place of pilgrimage and worship as evidence of Shi'i sectarian identity, arguing that particularly in Kufa and Karbala, participation in public ritual, including visits to the shrines of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib and al-Husayn ibn 'Ali demonstrated community identity and sectarian loyalty.³ Haidar importantly observes how participation in public rituals not only indicated an individual's "communal membership," but also that such participation was a better indicator of sectarian identity than theological orthodoxy.⁴ Still, through a close reading of the *rihlas* of the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, one finds a class of travellers who observed and/or participated in *ziyaras* with little concern over the strict sectarian identity among the pilgrims they observed, whether those pilgrims participated in rituals honouring Shi'ite imams or Sufi holy men. Instead, the records demonstrate an inter-sectarian devotion to saints, mediated by popular Sufi spirituality, which characterized the middle period.

This essay explores the writings of two such travel writers: Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta, sixth/twelfth and eighth/fourteenth centuries respectively, who paid close attention to religious observances—their own and others—and who did not distinguish or disparage sectarian identity in what they observed.⁵ Their observations and attitudes,

1 On the use of liturgical texts and coronations, see Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). There are a number of works devoted to Turkish imperial circumcision festivals and ceremonies. See Derin Terzioğlu, "The Imperial Circumcision Festival of 1582: An Interpretation," *Muqarnas* 12 (1990): 84–100; Dana Sajdi, ed., *Ottoman Tulips, Ottoman Coffee: Leisure and Lifestyle in the Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 94–95. See also Carl W. Ernst, *Eternal Gardens, Mysticism, History, and Politics at a South Asian Sufi Center* (Minneapolis: Lerner 2003), 203.

2 Excellent treatments of the topic can be read in Amikam Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); Josef W. Meri, *The Cult of Saints among Muslims and Jews in Medieval Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999). For a comprehensive and intelligent study of the urban settings in which early Muslims worshipped, see Paul Wheatley, *The Places Where Men Pray Together: Cities in Islamic Lands, Seventh through the Tenth Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

3 Najam Haider, "Prayer, Mosque, and Pilgrimage: Mapping Shi'i Sectarian Identity in 2nd/8th-Century Kufa," *Islamic Law and Society* 16 (2009), 151–74.

4 Haidar, "Shi'i Sectarian Identity," 154–5.

5 One must say "generally" because travel writers borrowed from one another. Ibn Battuta's travel account, for example, dictated after his travels, included portions of Ibn Jubayr's account. Moreover, even among his early readers, there was some doubt about how much of his account dealing with

derived in general from direct experience, open a window to the broader Islamicate religious culture of the post-classical period.⁶

Why did they travel and why did they pay attention to ritual and worship? They had their personal reasons owing to their individual circumstances, as will be shown below, yet these united with an intellectual and spiritual climate which encouraged travel for knowledge. One Muslim tradition bids believers to seek knowledge ‘even as far as China,’ that is, to seek knowledge even in pagan lands through travel.⁷ Although this particular hadith is classed as fair and by some as possibly fabricated, the principle—that God encourages believers to seek knowledge—can be found in the Qur’an and in much stronger traditions.⁸ *Talab al-ilm*, travel for the sake of gaining religious knowledge, reflects this ethos. Like Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta, the voyagers who left written accounts usually possessed some elevated social standing—a *qadi*, cleric, or court officer, for instance—and they undertook their travels for a variety of reasons, but their accounts, or *rihla*, reflected this deeper spiritual purpose, an intention to observe and consider all aspects of the world as a part of their obedience to God. Scholar-travellers recorded discussions with believers from diverse faiths and backgrounds, a kind of intellectual and spiritual investigation—done as part of their belief that knowledge, especially religious knowledge, is one of the privileges that God has given to humanity. The *rihla* or travel account, therefore, constituted a type of scholarship and a shared literary culture across the multiplicity of Muslim states throughout the middle period.

Travel, knowledge, and ritual acts of devotion and piety bear an intimate connection in the Islamic tradition, and that connection is expressed in the language and in the literature. *Hijra* evokes literally departure, emigration, abandonment, or renunciation. In early Muslim history, several events harnessed the term *hijra* and similar terms deriving from the same root, giving them meaning for Muslim community and worship. For example, in the early period of Muhammad’s prophetic ministry, many converts, particularly converted slaves who had been persecuted by Muhammad’s opponents in Mecca, including women and children, migrated to Abyssinia during 615–622 CE where the Christian Abyssinian king offered them refuge.⁹ Most important in this context was

China was drawn from personal experience. He also borrowed from Muhammad al-Abdari al-Hihi, a thirteenth-century Moroccan *qadi* and *haji*. On these points, see Ross Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, A Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 63–64 and 313–14; and Tabish Khair et al., eds. *Other Routes: 1500 Years of African and Asian Travel Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 290.

6 Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, vol. 2. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 220–21, 255.

7 Although in hadith scholarship, this particular tradition is classed among the weaker, the principle of the value of seeking knowledge is affirmed in the Qur’an and in the practice of *talab al-ilm*.

8 “Are those who know equal to those who know not?” Qur’an 39:39. A hadith also addresses the issue. “Abu Huraira reported Allah’s Messenger—may God’s peace be upon him—as saying, ‘and he who treads the path in search of knowledge, Allah would make that path easy, leading to Paradise.’” Muslim ibn al Hajjaj al-Naysaburi, *Sahih Muslim* 2699a, trans. Abdul Hamid Siddiqui. <https://sunnah.com>.

9 Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:170–71.

the migration of the Prophet with early companions to Medina 622 CE.¹⁰ The obligation to migrate, to break ties, and reject (the local Meccan idolatry) was profound, and formative for the emerging *umma*.¹¹ Muhammad connected worship with the obligation to migrate from unbelief to belief, from doing what was forbidden to doing good by establishing the *hajj* as one of the central ritual acts of believers to be performed once if at all possible. Furthermore, the pilgrimage ritual itself encompasses more than a singular visit to Mecca and to the central sanctuary of the Ka'bah. It includes, rather, multiple migrations, i.e., visits to several locations which hold historical significance in the Qur'anic revelation, and so an itinerary of visits occur throughout the observance of the larger pilgrimage.¹² Thus to migrate, to travel, implied an obligation to physically and spiritually move consonant with Muslim religious ethos in society, and become part of the new community.¹³ Seeking knowledge (*talab al-'ilm*) through travel was therefore an honourable enterprise and a source of blessing (*baraka*), leading to the expectation that God would aid the seeker in the way to heaven.¹⁴

The rulers of Muslim states competed with one another to attract such scholar-travellers. Furthermore, the contact between the travellers and the regions, mediated by the courts they visited, served to strengthen common Muslim culture as well as to highlight local diversity. Gellens called this phenomenon a "shifting hierarchy of learning centers" where political and economic fortunes could make them more or less attractive to travellers.¹⁵

There was good reason, therefore, for the voyagers to record their journeys in travel accounts known as *rihla*. Scholars have identified essentially three kinds: *rihla* (simple) within one's own region or state; *rihla hijaziyya*, a journey taken primarily to make the *hajj* but which could incorporate also travel beyond the *hajj*; and *rihla sifariyya* in which a writer reports on travels to foreign lands. Among the latter group, the journey could be undertaken as an embassy, a mission, or diplomatic commission. These same travel writers might also perform a pilgrimage during their journey, combining several types.¹⁶

10 Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:171–72.

11 See Muhammad Khalid Masud, "The Obligation to Migrate: The Doctrine of *hijra* in Islamic Law," in *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration and the Religious Imagination*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 29–49, at 30–32.

12 The itinerary includes, for example, circumambulation of the Ka'bah, running between the hills Safa and Marwah, travel to and encampment in the Plain of Mina, the Plain of Arafat, and a return to Mecca.

13 Masud, "The Obligation to Migrate," 31. One must remember that the *Hijra* of Muhammad is considered unique and fundamental to the establishment of the *umma*. "The Prophet said, 'There is no migration after the Conquest of Mecca, but I will take his pledge of allegiance for Islam.'" Muhammad al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari* 3078–79, trans. M. Muhsin Khan.

14 Gellens, "The Search for Knowledge in Medieval Muslim Societies: A Comparative Approach," in Eickelman, *Muslim Travellers*, 50–65, at 53–55.

15 Gellens, "Search for Knowledge," 55.

16 Abd-er-Rahman El Moudden, "The Ambivalence of *rihla*: Community Integration and Self-Definition in Moroccan Travel Accounts, 1300–1800," in Eickelman, *Muslim Travellers*, 69–84 at 70;

The style of a *rihla* as a text will fit within a broad range among other travel accounts. Some authors wrote them nearly like daily travel logs or journals, with records of notes and observations taken while still travelling. Others, like that of Ibn Battuta, are composed as literature.¹⁷ By the sixth AH/twelfth century CE, the association of *rihla* and *hajj* converged, with *rihla* as a record of *hajj* such as in the cases of the travels of Ibn Battuta and Ibn Jubayr; and *talab al-'ilm* remained a journey for the sake of acquiring religious knowledge. The *rihla* provide a record of the activities and observations made by a Muslim traveller as part of his obedience to God to acquire—and pass on—knowledge, both religious and secular. Gellens points out the convergence may reflect the reality that many of the isolated spaces where holy saints had dwelled had become formal shrines, *khanqahs*, or colleges (*madrasas*) with institutional character, or sometimes sacred spaces where a saint had lived and prayed.¹⁸

These writers of the *rihla* noticed and described formal, architectural monuments such as mosques, churches, tombs, and monumental shrines. They also noticed spaces where dwelled holy men and the communities of disciples who followed them. Ultimately, the descriptions of ritual—whether spaces or actions or prayers—demonstrate an understanding of worship that is of necessity expressed in the labour of the praying believer in posture, words, and obedient attendance, in the praise and appreciation for the art—broadly understood to include architecture, furnishings, colour, music and poetry, etc.—created to honour God, and in the reverent and intentional articulation of holy words from the Qur'an. Therefore, even as the travel writer rehearsed in words descriptions of ritual spaces and actions, he was thereby giving a form of praise. This is demonstrated by the fact that those passages end with a thanksgiving for the experience. Indeed, one aspect of worship includes rehearsing and reiterating the excellencies of God and the response of the believer to those excellencies.

This perspective of worship as the expression of the total being in response to the observed and manifested greatness and goodness of God informed the experience and written record of the Muslim travel writers. For most, it is an unanalyzed predisposition to focus on things religious; for others, for example al-Biruni, the concept of worship within the totality of the Muslim obedience was analyzed and articulated.¹⁹ Nevertheless, Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta demonstrated an intense interest in the rituals they observed and identified themselves with the piety reflected therein. Both travellers left a *rihla*, or travel account, of their journeys, and both participated not only in the *hajj* but in a number of other devotional activities, and in the case of Ibn Jubayr, he visited Shi'ite

the tripartite definition from Muhammad al-Manuni, *Al-Masadir al-'Arabiyya li-Tar'ikh al-Maghrib* (Rabat: Mohammad V University, 1983), 186–92.

¹⁷ Dunn, *Adventures of Ibn Battuta*, 253.

¹⁸ Gellens, "Search for Knowledge," 53.

¹⁹ Al-Ghazzali, *The Mysteries of Worship in Islam*, trans. from *Book of the Ihya*, Edwin Elliot Calverley (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1925; repr. 1977); Al-Biruni, *The Chronology of Ancient Nations, an English Version of the Arabic Text of the Athār-ul-Bākiya of al-Biruni or Vestiges of the Past, A.H. 390–1, A.D. 1000*, ed. and trans. C. Edward Sachau (London, 1879; repr. Frankfurt: Minerva, 1969).

shrines in the newly conquered Ayyubid sultanate of Salah ad-Din (Saladin), a champion of Sunni orthodoxy. Their accounts provide information about actual ritual practices and their attitudes about the devotional acts they observed.

Among the rituals they observed were the *ziyara*, visits made by pilgrims to tombs of prophets, including the tombs of Abraham and the Prophet Muhammad.²⁰ The *ahl al-Bayt*, the family of the Prophet, attracted devotees; the tombs of 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, and his sons Hasan and Husayn, the latter and his family and supporters, as the victims and martyrs of the Ummayyad massacre at Karbala. Pilgrims, moreover, made *ziyara* to the tombs of revered Sufi masters. By the time Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta travelled, the multiplication of monuments and spaces associated with Sufi *tariqahs* made it possible for medieval Muslims throughout *dar al-Islam*—the poor and uneducated as well as the gentlemanly, literary classes—nearly universal, allowing them to, as Shahab Ahmed expressed it, “benefit from the cosmic economy of the Sufi’s *barakah* or spiritual power.”²¹ Hence, a traveller and author of a *rihla* was at once the recipient of blessings from his own enterprise, and also broadcaster about the “cosmic economy of blessings” received by pilgrims making *ziyara*.

The *rihla hijaziyyah* of Abu al-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad Jubayr al-Kinan, author of *Tadhkirat al-akhbar 'an ittifaqat al-asfar* [*Relation of Events that Befell upon Certain Journeys*], is frequently given as *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*.²² Ibn Jubayr was an officer in the court of the Almohad dynasty in Ceuta and Granada. After being coerced to drink wine by his lord, he travelled for expiation of his unintentional sin as a pilgrim to Mecca and Medina, AH 578–582/ 1183–1185 CE, including Sardinia, Crete and Cairo in his travels. He returned to Granada, then he travelled twice more: 585–587/1189–1191 and 614/1217. During the final journey, he again travelled to Mecca, and also to Jerusalem, ultimately dying in Alexandria, Egypt. Because he travelled so much by sea, his chronicle is an important source for sea travel, ports, navigation and shipping practices in the Mediterranean in the twelfth century. His travels took him through Ayyubid territory, in particular Egypt and Syria, where he wrote accounts rich in descriptions of urban architecture, including religious monuments and shrines. Ibn Jubayr focused on Muslim sites, but he also gave attention to monuments and shrines which belonged to the era

²⁰ The practice of *ziyara* generated a separate genre of literature: manuals written to guide pilgrims in their itineraries to and through holy sites. The guidebooks instructed the pilgrims about recommended prayers and postures, about the sacred biographies of the holy men and women whose tombs they visited, and what blessings to expect. Aliaa Ezzeldin Ismail El Sandouby, “The *Ahl al-Bayt* in Cairo and Damascus: the Dynamics of Making Shrines for the Family of the Prophet,” PhD dissertation, University of California-Los Angeles, 2008, 22.

²¹ Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 78.

²² Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr from a MS in the University Library of Leyden*, ed. William Wright (Leyden, 1852); rev. ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1907; Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, trans. R. J. C. Broadhurst (London: Jonathan Cape, 1952). Excerpts can also be found in *Voyageurs Arabes: Ibn Fadlan, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta et un auteur anonyme*, trans. Paule Charles-Dominique, 1995. Though the term *rihla* does not occur in Ibn Jubayr’s title, his account is normally discussed as such in scholarship.

before Muslim conquest of Egypt. Although he always extolled the superiority of Muslim sacred art and architecture, and the creative power of God in nature, he nevertheless expressed his wonder and admiration for the local natural landscape and secular art.²³ After he left Ayyubid territory, he travelled through the Latin Crusader states, including Acre, Sicily, Messina. He wrote significant descriptions of the kingdoms in those territories, and about how Muslims fared in crusader territories.²⁴

Even though his pilgrimage to Mecca remained his primary goal, Ibn Jubayr participated in and observed *ziyara* and, like other pilgrims, sought blessings by visiting the shrines of revered members of the Prophet's family—women as well as men—imams, and early companions. The presence of so many tombs in Egypt which belonged to members of the Prophet's family encouraged pilgrimages as part of his full itinerary. For Ibn Jubayr, his *hajj* represented a significant period of time when he put aside his courtly career to devote himself to God, and to rehearse the history of God's favour upon believers; consequently, visits to shrines became part of this longer itinerary.

Few territories offered as much opportunity to remember the saints of the Prophet's family in as condensed an area as al-Qarafa in Egypt. The so-called 'City of the Dead' contained mausoleums for al-Husayn, Sayyida Zaynab, Sayyida Nafisa, and imam al-Shafi'i, among many others.²⁵ Multiple stages of construction exist at al-Qarafa, beginning as early as the garrison city of al-Fustat, originally divided into sectors, with a living population and cemeteries in close proximity. First the governor Ahmad ibn Tulun built an aquaduct to allow greater expansion; the Fatimids in the tenth and eleventh centuries CE initiated a third great period of construction with secular and religious monuments as well as more aquaducts. Under the Ayyubids, construction continued, especially toward the north, bounded by the Citadel, and another stage of construction under the Mamluk regime, especially sponsored by al-Nasir Muhammad ibn Qalaywun (1309–1340) who turned a stadium into an expansion of cemetery space. Within this ongoing construction of mausoleums, living populations shared space with the dead, as well as with *khanqahs*, *madrasas*, mosques, palaces, and streets.²⁶

Ibn Jubayr's stay in Cairo took place in the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, AH 578 (March 28–April 25, 1183 CE).²⁷ During his time there, he visited the tomb of the head of Husayn ibn 'Ali and recorded what he saw among the other pilgrims who visited the shrine.

²³ See F. Gabriel, *La literatura árabe* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1971), 216. Cf. Carmen Carriazo Rubio, "La Visión del Antiguo Egipto en la *Rihla* de Ibn Yubayr," *Philologia Hispalensis* 14 (2000): 157–66, at 158.

²⁴ Yehoshua Frenkel, "Ibn Jubayr," *Literature of Travel and Exploration: an Encyclopedia*, ed. Jennifer Speake, vol. 2. (New York: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2003), 580–81.

²⁵ Galila El Kadi and Alain Bonnamy, *Architecture for the Dead: Cairo's Medieval Necropolis* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2007), 297–98.

²⁶ El Kadi and Bonnamy, *Architecture for the Dead*, 297–99; See also Christopher S. Taylor, *In the Vicinity of the Righteous: Ziyara and the Veneration of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

²⁷ Broadhurst, *Travels*, 31. In his translation, Broadhurst substitutes 'l for the article *al*; in the quotations here included, I have retained his transliteration, but in the main essay, I have not.

We shall begin by mentioning the monuments and blessed shrines, which for their beneficence are preserved by Great and Glorious God. Of such is the great tomb in Cairo in which is kept the head of Husayn, the son of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib, may God hold them in favour. It is in a silver casket and over it has been built a mausoleum so superb as to be beyond description and beyond the powers of the mind to comprehend. It is covered with various kinds of brocades, and surrounded by white candles that are like large columns; smaller ones are placed for the most part, in candlesticks of pure silver and of gilt. Silver lamps are hung from it and its whole upper part is encircled with golden spheres like apples, skillfully executed to resemble a garden and holding our eyes in spell by its beauty. There too are various kinds of marble tessellated with coloured mosaics of rare and exquisite workmanship such as one cannot imagine nor come near to describing. The entrance to this garden is by a mosque like to it in grace and elegance, with walls that are all marble in the style we have just described. To the right and left of the mausoleum are two chambers of exactly the same style and both leading into it. A brocade covering of exquisite workmanship is hung over all.

We observed men kissing the blessed tomb, surrounding it, throwing themselves upon it. Smoothing with their hands the *kiswah* (drape) that was over it, moving round it in a surging throng, calling out invocations, weeping and entreating Glorious God to bless the hallowed dust, and offering up humble supplications such as would melt the heart and split the hardest flint."²⁸

In the passage quoted above, Ibn Jubayr extolls the excellence of the space and the providence of God connected to it and then showed pilgrims showering it with their warm response of reverence and affection. The same pattern appeared when Ibn Jubayr recounted his visit to the tomb of the Prophet, which took place in the month of Dhu al-Qa'dah, AH 579 (February 15–March 15, CE 1184).

On Monday the 13th of the month we entered the birthplace of the Prophet—may God bless and preserve him. It is now a superbly built mosque, and had been the house of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, the father of the Prophet—may God bless and preserve him—of which we have already spoken. The actual spot of his nativity has the likeness of a small basin in the floor, three spans wide, with in its centre a green marble tablet, two-thirds of a span wide, and encircled by silver so that with this attached silver its width is one span.

We smoothed our cheeks on this holy spot which was the place of delivery for the most illustrious child in the world, and which was touched by the purest and most noble of offspring—may God bless and preserve him, and advantage us with the blessings of visiting the place of his birth."²⁹

²⁸ Broadhurst, *Travels*, 36–37.

²⁹ Broadhurst, *Travels*, 166–67.

Another key component in the travel writing of Ibn Jubayr, a characteristic even more clearly present in the writing of al-Biruni, is the connection between time, the created cosmos, and worship.³⁰ Each section of his *rihla* begins with a short description of the appearance of the new moon which signals the beginning of the month, and often includes also a rationale or purpose of that month. The appearance of the new moon needed to be witnessed, and for liturgical activities to commence, its appearance needed to be authenticated by a person of stature. Ibn Jubayr had travelled first and foremost to participate in the *hajj*, for him the culminating experience of his travels, so when a discrepancy arose in the sighting of the new moon and the commencement of his pilgrimage, he recorded what he observed.

For the Month of Dhu 'l-Qa'dah, AH 579

The new moon of this month rose on the night of Wednesday, corresponding with the 14th of February, and the testimony of its observation was proved before the Qadi. The greater part of the people in the sacred Mosque saw nothing of it, although they stayed there watching until the end of the sunset prayers. There were those among them who imagined that they observed it and who pointed towards it, but when their claim was examined, the vision disappeared and their information was proved false. God best knows the truth of the matter. This blessed month is the second of the sacred months and the second of the months of the pilgrimage.³¹

Nevertheless, Ibn Jubayr did not believe that God—or His praise—was ultimately dependent on the calendar and astronomy, for that would place the creator below the creation. In the passage below, he addressed the serious discrepancy over the appearance of the new moon in the very month when the central rituals of the *hajj* should take place.

The Month of Dhu 'l-Hijjah, AH 579

The new moon of this month rose on the night of Thursday, corresponding with the 15th of March. In the watching for it the people were involved in a strange circumstance, and a remarkable fabrication; and a false utterance almost provoked the stones, not to mention else, to rebut and deny it.

[Ibn Jubayr then described at length some confusion about the sighting of the new moon; because it was believed that special blessings attended the pilgrims should the *hajj* begin on a Friday, many insisted they had seen it, and the confusion required intervention.]

On the night of this Friday the new moon appeared during a break in the clouds, clothed in the radiance of the thirtieth night. The crowds then raised

30 Al-Biruni, *Vestiges of the Past*, 321–25.

31 Broadhurst, *Travels*, 166.

tremendous shouts and proclaimed that the 'standing (on Mount Arafat) would take place on Friday, crying, "Praise be to God who did not render vain our efforts or bring to naught our proposals," as if it were a truth with them that if the standing did not fall upon a Friday it would not be acceptable to God, nor could God's mercy be hoped for or expected. But God is above that.³²

Probably the best-known Muslim travel writer among Western readers is Abu Abdallah Muhammad ibn Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim al-Lawati al-Tanji, also known as Shams al-Din ibn Battuta. Born in Tangier, Morocco, and educated as a *qadi*, he began his journeys in 1325 CE and travelled thereafter for nearly thirty years across three continents. His role as *qadi* gave him a significant place in the various courts he visited. He most particularly wished to visit the court of a Delhi sultan who had a reputation for welcoming scholars and jurists from outside his regime. It was this Muhammad ibn Tughluq who commissioned ibn Battuta as an ambassador to the court of China in 1342. His eastern journeys included the Malabar coast, Maldives Islands, Ceylon, Bengal, Assam, China, Sumatra, and Malaya. After he returned to Tangier in 1348, he travelled to Granada in 1350, and again acted as a diplomat, this time for the sultan of Morocco to Timbuktu in 1352. He returned again to Morocco in 1353, and dictated his *rihla* to ibn Juzayy as *Tuhfat al-Nuzzār fī Gharā'ib al-Amsār wa 'Ajā'ib al-Asfār* [*A Feast for the Eyes Exotic Places and Marvelous Travels*]. He continued as a *qadi* in Morocco until his death, exact time unknown.³³ His account was not widely known, even within the Muslim world, until the early 1800s when extracts were published in German and English based on manuscripts discovered in the Middle East containing abridged versions of Ibn Juzayy's Arabic text. Eventually five manuscripts were uncovered and were brought back to the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. In 1853, French scholars Charles Defremery and Beniamino Sanguinetti edited the Arabic text and translated it into French.³⁴ Additionally, there do exist a couple of extra-*rihla* notices of Ibn Battuta's work. In his foreword, the translator of the modern critical edition of Ibn Battuta's account, H. A. R. Gibb, tells us about several pre-modern writers who mentioned the travel account of Ibn Battuta. The first of these derives from *al-Durar al-Kamina, The Concealed Pearls*, a dictionary of eminent persons compiled in the fifteenth century CE by Ibn Hajar of Ascalon. The fifteenth-century dictionary draws on reports given by two fourteenth-century men who lived contemporary with Ibn Battuta. The first was Ibn al-Khatib, vizier of Granada (fl. 1374), and the second, a scholar named Ibn Marzuq from the Tlemcen region of Algeria who became a *qadi* in Cairo, who also died ca. 1370s.³⁵

Like Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta wished to make pilgrimage to Mecca and visit the burial place of the Prophet at Medina, "swayed by an overmastering impulse within me and a

32 Broadhurst, *Travels*, 172–73.

33 Mohammad Asfour, "Ibn Battuta," in Speake, *Literature of Travel and Exploration* 2:577–78.

34 Dunn, *Ibn Battuta*, 4–5.

35 Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, A.D. 1325–1354*, trans. with revisions and notes from the Arabic text edited by C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti (London: Hakluyt Society, 1994), ix–x. It would be a *rihla* of a different kind to track and source the manuscript copies, editions, and extra-*rihla* notices of the travel writers, but no doubt a rewarding one.

desire long-cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries.”³⁶ His secretary Ibn Juzayy included a preface stating that Ibn Battuta was asked to record his travels by their ruler Sultan of Morocco, especially to record what he saw in the cities, memorable events, rules of countries, “distinguished men,” and pious saints. His scribe confirmed the final composition contained a plethora of marvellous and curious accounts.³⁷ Ibn Battuta’s own resolve to complete the *hajj* appeared early in the account when he came down with a fever. A companion advised him to delay his travels, to which advice he responded, “If God decrees my death, then my death shall be on the road, with my face set towards the land of the Hijaz.”³⁸

Like Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta visited mausoleums in al-Qarafa during his time in Egypt. He described what he saw as follows:

At Old Cairo too is the cemetery called al-Qarafah, a place of vast repute for blessed power, for it is a part of the mount of al-Muqattam, of which God has promised that it shall be one of the gardens of Paradise. These people build in the Qarafah beautiful domed chapels and surround them by walls, so that they look like houses, and they construct chambers in them and hire the services of Qur’an readers, who recited night and day in beautiful voices. There are some of them who build a religious house or a madrasah by the side of the mausoleum. They go out every Thursday evening to spend the night there with their children and womenfolk and make a circuit of the famous sanctuaries. They go out also to spend the night there on the night of the mid-Sha’ban, and the market people take out all kinds of eatables. Among the celebrated sanctuaries in the city of Cairo is the imposing holy shrine where rests the head of al-Husayn ibn ‘Ali (On both be peace). Beside it is a vast convent, of wonderful workmanship, on the doors of which there are silver rings, and plates also on them of the same metal. This shrine is paid its full meed of respect and veneration.³⁹

Ibn Battuta was devoted to learning about Sufism, intellectually and experientially, and therefore participated in the pious custom of visiting renowned holy men in their dwellings to learn from them as a visiting disciple. For example, he related his enthusiasm for the *tariqa* of Abu’l-Hasan al-Shadhili as below:

Another of the religious at Alexandria was the Shaikh Yaqut al-Habashi (the Ethiopian), a man of outstanding gifts, who had been the pupil of Abu ‘l-Abbas of Murcia, who in his turn was the pupil of the famous saint Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili, noted for his great miracles and his high degrees of mystical attainment.

Ibn Battuta continued his story with an account of a miracle related by Yaqut. According to Yaqut, Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili went on pilgrimage every year, travelling through

³⁶ Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, abridged from H. A. R. Gibb’s translation by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (London: Picador, 1958; repr. 2003), 3.

³⁷ Mackintosh-Smith, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 1.

³⁸ Mackintosh-Smith, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 4.

³⁹ Mackintosh-Smith, *Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 16–17.

upper Egypt, staying in Mecca, fasting, and performing other pious exercises, as well as visiting Muhammad's tomb.

One year he instructed his servant to bring a pickaxe, a basket, aromatics for embalming and "all that is necessary for burying the dead." The servant asked "Why so, O my master?" and the Shaikh answered, "In Humaithira, you shall see." [...] When they reached Humaithira, the Shaikh Abu al-Hasan made a complete ablution, and said a prayer of two prostrations. At the final prostration in his prayers God (Great and Mighty is He) took him and he was buried there.⁴⁰

Ibn Battuta tells his reader that he visited the tomb of al-Shadhili, and remarked especially how the tombstone inscribed the lineage of the saint tracing back to al-Hasan, the son of 'Ali ibn 'Abu Talib. Here, as with Ibn Jubayr's observations of *ziyara* to the mausoleum containing the head of al-Husayn, one sees the reverence for the family of the prophet, the sanctity of 'Ali and his descendants, but no mention of sectarianism associated with the latter.

Ibn Battuta's spiritual affinity for Sufism and Sufi saints did not just encompass visits to tombs or histories of the dead. He also visited the living and recorded the rituals of the Shadhili *tariqa*. In his *rihla*, Ibn Battuta recorded at great length a prayer recited by the disciples of al-Shadhili. What is quoted below significantly truncates the text of the prayer, which contains many quotations from the Qur'an. It evidently struck Ibn Battuta as important that the text of the prayer had been passed down through the generations to his own day.

In his [al-Shadhili's] annual journey through Upper Egypt he would cross the sea of Juddah (Red Sea) and recite this litany every day. His disciples still recite it every day. "O God, O Exalted, O Mighty, O Forbearing, O all-knowing, Thou art my Lord and Thy knowledge is my Sufficiency. How excellent a lord is my Lord, how excellent a sufficiency my sufficiency. Thou aidest whom Thou wilt, for Thou art the Powerful, the compassionate. We pray Thee to guard us from sin in our movements and stillnesses, our words and designs, and in the stirring of doubts, of unworthy suggestions and of vain imaginings that veil from our hearts the perception of things unseen."⁴¹

Ibn Battuta shared with other Muslim travellers the characteristics of a literary class. He was a *qadi*, a member of that class of scholars, *'alim*, learned in the Qur'an, hadith, and law, and therefore a desirable person who would be welcomed in courts of Muslim rulers for administration. In Ibn Battuta's case, he was a scholar of the Maliki *madhhab*. In social class, he was a gentleman, a middle-class, literate, cosmopolitan person to whom travel was a pleasant opportunity to explore the world, and gain knowledge, as well as receive welcome and hospitality and honours, what Dunn calls a "literate frontiersman."⁴²

⁴⁰ Mackintosh-Smith, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 9. Al-Shadhili died in 1258 CE.

⁴¹ Mackintosh-Smith, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, 10–11.

⁴² Ross E. Dunn, "International Migrations of Literate Muslims in the Later Middle Period: The Case of Ibn Battuta," in *Golden Roads: Migration, Pilgrimage and Travel in Medieval and Modern*

Like Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta showed special reverence for the tomb of the head of al-Husayn, although he mentions the services there only in generalities. His account gives us a better picture of the social importance of the great cemetery where living and dead mixed side by side. Neither Ibn Jubayr nor Ibn Battuta explicitly associated their visit to the shrine of the head of al-Husayn with Shi'i sectarianism. In fact, Ibn Jubayr only used the occasion to praise Salah al-Din's generous contributions for new construction and pious endowments (*awqaf*) to the entire *al-Qarafa* district. Rather, both travel writers demonstrate "tourist *adab*," that is, proper respect, behaviour, and enthusiasm for the opportunity to visit the shrine, observe the rituals, and receive blessings for their participation.⁴³

Between the two writers of *rihla* here surveyed, the attention the travellers paid to ritual worship accords well with their purposes of travel. For Ibn Jubayr, the pilgrimage fulfilled his purpose to do penance for his unintentional sin, and we are fortunate that he chose to record so much detail about worship. For Ibn Battuta, he tells the reader he wished most of all to participate in the *hajj*; nevertheless, he travelled also for knowledge, experience, and professional opportunity. His reverence for Sufi saints—living and deceased—shows a longing to enter into a deeper spirituality, one he yearned for, but for which he was not fully suited. Their contributions about religious ritual are uneven, but immensely valuable, as they can be compared to records unearthed by archaeologists, pilgrimage guides, prayer books, and other sources to provide a more comprehensive historical understanding of pre-modern Muslim worship.

In many ways, Ibn Jubayr presents the clearest example of the writer of a *rihla* as a "liturgical person."⁴⁴ Netton's analysis of Ibn Jubayr's *rihla* identified a structure he called "a trinity of time, place and purpose as expressed in (a) the author's precise, almost neurotic, use of the Islamic calendar, (b) the travel or *rihla* impulse and associated 'sense of place' which imbues the entire narrative, and (c) the primary orientation towards, or focus on Mecca."⁴⁵ Furthermore, he rightly noted how Ibn Jubayr's constant use of the Islamic calendar as his principle of organization, and his exuberant admiration for much of what he sees, makes his narrative more plodding than Ibn Battuta's.⁴⁶ If, however, one looks at Ibn Jubayr's work through the lens of the writer as a liturgical person, some of the more redundant or effusive aspects of his writing—while no less irritating at times—signify a different purpose, and seem to do so successfully.

In most instances, Ibn Jubayr's record of a liturgical event includes a description of the ritual space, its workmanship when relevant, or God's creation of the space when it is not the result of the art of humans, furnishings, and so forth. The record then presents

Islam, ed. Ian Richard Netton (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1993); also Netton, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta*, 11.

⁴³ Ian Richard Netton, *Seek Knowledge: Thought and Travel in the House of Islam* (London: Routledge Curzon, 1996), 145–54.

⁴⁴ For this expression, see Richard W. Pfaff, "St Hugh as a Liturgical Person," in *De Cella in Saeculum*, ed. M. G. Sargent (Woodbridge: Brewer, 1989), 17–27.

⁴⁵ Ian Richard Netton, "Basic Structures and Signs of Alienation in the *Rihla* of Ibn Jubayr," in *Seek Knowledge*, 127–44, at 128–29.

⁴⁶ Netton, "Basic Structures," 130–31.

the actions and prayers of persons. These two form a regular bond of description and response analogous to antiphonal singing. The excerpt from his visit to al-Qarafa given above illustrates the point.

His positive and sympathetic representation of the pilgrims at al-Husayn's shrine confirms the universal reverence accorded to Husayn and his own acceptance of the *ziyara* or pilgrimages to the tombs of imams who profoundly shaped belief and practice. Naturally, neither Ibn Jubayr nor Ibn Battuta explicitly associated their visit to the shrine of the head of al-Husayn, grandson of the Prophet and revered as such by the Sunni, with Shi'i sectarianism. What disapproval for *ziyara* was registered by their contemporaries came from scholars and it focused more on the aspects of *ziyara* that, like other popular religious practices, tread dangerously into the area of *bid'ah*, or innovation.

Innovation in religious practice carries with it the potential danger of heresy. Treatises by such scholars as Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Hajj, for example, expressed concern about a number of aspects of popular celebrations. The extra-Qur'anic celebrations, such as the *mawlid* of the Prophet, provided occasions for inappropriate behaviour in the people's revelry. They also challenged the authority of the consensus that defined Islam for those scholars. In their role as guardians of the faith, the scholars needed to assess to what extent did veneration of holy men and women of Islam go beyond the scope of *sunna* as understood and analyzed by the scholars.⁴⁷

Popular religious piety in the medieval Muslim regimes included veneration for holy individuals—whether respected scholars, Sufi *shaykhs*, or local mystics. The tendency to revere a respected master or scholar, moreover, grew with a more widespread presence of Sufi institutions, giving large numbers of people at least superficial familiarity with Sufi practices and goals. Many might not enter into the full spiritual discipline to attain mystical experience of God, but they could hear, see, watch, and revere from the sidelines. Moreover, pilgrims could visit local *shaykhs* attached to *zawiyas*, which were not full *khanqahs* but smaller institutions in a village or town where the *shayhk* would be a source of preaching and guidance.

In those circumstances, the chances were greater for participation in another characteristic of popular piety, that is, syncretism with other local, sometimes ancient, practices. Pious, but uneducated Muslims, could not always distinguish Muslim festivals from Christian or Jewish festivals, or superstitious tokenism such as the "evil-eye" or the use of amulets to drive off bad luck.⁴⁸ The resistance to such popular religion, then, came primarily from the *ulama*, but at least in the Middle Ages, was not a serious concern in the minds of the literary travelling class or the secular leadership. On the contrary, for these travel writers, pious visits to graves of Shi'ite imams, as well as visits to living and deceased *shaykhs* of Sufi organizations, rather reflected their sense of shared heritage of Prophet, his family, and early companions.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Jonathan P. Berkey, *The Formation of Islam: Religion and Society in the Near East 600–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 248–50.

⁴⁸ Berkey, *Formation of Islam*, 250–51.

⁴⁹ Ahmed, *What is Islam?*, 93.