

Knowledge, Culture, and Positionality: Analysis of Three Medieval Muslim Travel Accounts

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Abstract

This study provides an analysis of al-rihla account of three Medieval Muslim travelers: Nasir Khasraw (1004-1077), Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), and Ibn Battuta (1304-1378). The three travelers were selected from different eras, provinces, cultural backgrounds, and schools of Islamic thought and philosophy in Medieval Muslim society. This study intended to answer two questions: 1) what do the three travelers report about their al-rihla experiences? And 2) what factors influenced the three travelers' experiences of *al-rihla* as Muslim travelers in search for knowledge? The Holistic Content analysis method in Narrative Analysis was selected to analyze the data. The data analysis resulted in six themes: 1) hajj, the Pilgrimage to Mecca was conducted as, a religious obligation, repentance for sins, and a physical and spiritual path in seeking God's/Allah's forgiveness; 2) the theme of seeking knowledge in Islam is strongly associated with hajj; 3) place is a significant theme; 4) emphasis on Islamic principles applied into practice; 5) pride in religious identity as a Muslim; 6) the peaceful co-existence of Muslims, Christians, and Jews was recounted in the three travel accounts. The study concludes that al-rihla accounts of the three Medieval travelers were strongly influenced by three major factors: beliefs about knowledge/seeking knowledge in Islam, culture and cultural identity, and issues of power and positionality.

Key words: *Al-rihla*; Medieval Muslim Travelers (MMT); *Hajj*; Place and space; Positionality

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INTRODUCTION

The period between 750 and 1258 C.E. in Medieval Islamic history is characterized as the Golden Age of Muslim civilization during which four Islamic dynasties were established: the Umayyads (756-1031), who designated Damascus as their capital, the Abbasids (750-1258), who selected Baghdad as their capital, the separate Umayyad dynasty in Spain/Al-Andulus, who used Cordoba as their capital, and, finally, the Fatimid dynasty in Egypt and northwest Africa (909-1171) (Turner, 1995). The Caliphs in Baghdad and Damascus sponsored the translation of Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit manuscripts in philosophy, medicine, and other scientific works into Arabic (Turner, 1995). Within two centuries, Turner asserted that the "major works of Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Archimedes, Hippocrates, Galen, Ptolemy, and many other" (p. 29) and were made available to Muslim scholars. As a result, great libraries were established and learning centers flourished including religious centers of scholarly learning in Baghdad, Cairo, Nishapur, Hijaz (Medina), and Fez. A science academy was established at both Cordoba in al-Andalus and at Toledo, and in the Nizamiyya and Dar-al-Hikma universities in Baghdad. Advances in knowledge occurred in a myriad of fields, including philosophy, social sciences, physics, mathematics, medicine, alchemy, geometrical sciences, astronomy, religious science, optics, and metaphysics.

New educational theories and philosophies were developed at the instructional level by Medieval Muslim thinkers including theologians, philosophers, jurists, litterateurs, *hadith* scholars, and scientists (Gunther, 2006). And as a result of the advancement in educational theories, philosophies, and applications of the concepts of *talab al-'ilm* and *talib al-'ilm*, the Medieval Muslim civilization became a global center of knowledge not only for Muslim scholars but also for scholars from all over the world. Thus, travel in search for knowledge became a phenomenon and a "normative feature of Medieval

Muslim education” (Gellens, 1990, p. 55).

This study intends to analyze three selected Medieval Muslim travelers’ accounts to answer two questions: 1) what do the three travelers report about their al-rihla experiences? 2) what factors influenced the three travelers’ experiences of al-rihla as Muslim travelers in search for knowledge?

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Knowledge in Islam is of two kinds: *fard ain* and *fard kifaya*. Fard ain is an obligatory type of knowledge for male and female Muslims who are mature, healthy, and sane. These Muslims must learn about the practices of worship, ritual, and ways to follow their religion and apply it in their everyday life. Fard kifaya is a collective duty for all of the community, but if it is fulfilled by a part of that community, the rest are not obliged to fulfill it. It is, then, obligatory for at least one person in the Muslim community, so that he/she can serve the community as a doctor, teacher, nurse, or to fill other types of community needs.

The terms, “*Ilm*”, “*Talab al-ilm*”, and “*Talib al-ilm*”, in Islam may roughly be translated to knowledge, the search for knowledge, and the seeker of knowledge, respectively. Rosenthal stated that, “every term translated is a term distorted, no matter how much care has been spent on finding the most suitable English equivalent” (Rosenthal, 1970, p. 3). The translation of the Arabic word “*ilm*” is no exception. The translation of *ilm* into “knowledge” in English, in fact, “falls short of expressing all the factual and emotional content of “*ilm*” (Rosenthal, 1970, p. 1) in the Arabic language and Islamic culture. Netton (1996) added that *ilm*, though translated as “knowledge should be given the meaning of learning” (p. vii). However, *ilm* in Islam is a concept that holds a significant importance as it impacts “Muslims’ intellectual, religious, political, and daily life” (Rosenthal, 1970, p. 2). In fact, the concept of *ilm* has shaped Muslim civilization distinctively and uniquely.

Ilm, in Islam, begins with reading and writing, as the Qur’an makes clear, with the first word that was revealed to Prophet Mohammed (peace and blessing upon him): Read (Recite).

Read! In the Name of your Lord Who has created (all that exists). He has created man from a clot (piece of thick coagulated blood). Read! And your Lord is the Most Generous. Who has taught (the writing) by the pen. He has taught man that which he knew not (Qur’an, 30: 96).

Talab al-ilm, seeking knowledge, and *talib al’ilm*, the seeker of knowledge, have been mentioned in the Qur’an with pride and dignity, and elevated to a high status:

- “Allah will raise up, to (suitable) ranks and (degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted knowledge. And Allah is well-acquainted with all you do” (Qur’an, 58:11).

- “Say [unto them, O, Mohammad] are those who know equal to those who know not? But only men of understanding will pay heed” (Qur’an, 39:9).
- And say: “My Lord increase me in knowledge” (Qur’an, 20:114).

And in hadith:

- The *ulama* (scholars) are the heritage of the prophets
- Seeking knowledge is obligatory on every Muslim and Muslima (be it male and female)
- Seek knowledge even in China
- Seek knowledge from cradle to grave

In hadiths on al-rihla for the search for knowledge:

- One who treads a path in search of knowledge has his path to Paradise made easy by God
- He who follows a road seeking knowledge, God will make the path to heaven easy for him. And the angels will place their wings so as to aid the seeker of knowledge. And all in heaven and on earth, even the snake in the water, will seek forgiveness from such a person. The merit of the learned man over the worshipper is like the merit of the moon over the rest of the stars. The *ulama* are the heritage of the prophets. The latter did not bequeath *dinars* and *dirhams*. Rather they left behind knowledge. He who takes it should do with an abundance of good fortune (Ibn Majah, 1972, p. 1, *hadith* No. 223)

The above mentioned verses and hadiths emphasize the importance that Islam places on knowledge, its virtues, and travel in search of it. The search for knowledge as a theme and practice has, “dominated Islam and given Muslim Civilization its distinctive shape and complexion” (Netton, 1996, p. xii). In fact, knowledge in Islam comes before deeds in importance, as in the hadith, “A learned one is as much above an (ordinary) worshiper as I am above the least of you”.

In Medieval Muslim society, new educational theories and philosophies were developed on the hands of Muslim philosophers, theologians, scientists, and other scholars. At the instructional level, for instance, *Ibn Sahnun* (816 A.C.-870 A.C.), a jurist and chief judge wrote the first handbook about teaching for teachers entitled *Rule of Conduct for Teachers (Adab al-mu’allimin)*, and recommended a curriculum that includes the basics of language and grammar, arithmetic, poetry, and historical reports (Gunther, 2006, p. 370). *Al-Jahiz* (776 A.C.-868 A.C.), a celebrated man of letters and a theologian emphasized reasoning and thinking instead of rote memorization as methods for acquiring knowledge.

The leading sages, masters of the art of deductive reasoning and [independent] thinking, were averse to excellence in memorization, because of [one’s] dependence on it and [its rendering] the mind negligent of rational judgment, so [much so] that they said: “Memorization inhibits the intellect.” [They were averse to it] because the one engaged in memorization is only an

imitator, whereas deductive reasoning is that which brings the one engaged in it to calculated certainty and great confidence. (Gunther, 2006, p. 372)

Another scholar, Al-Farabi (also known as Avennasir in medicine) (870 A.C.-950 A.C.) and referred to as the “second teacher” after Aristotle contributed to Instruction Theory by his proposal that,

Every instruction is composed of two things: (a) making what is being studied comprehensible and causing its idea to be established in the soul [of the student], and (b) causing others to assent to what is comprehended and established in the soul. There are two ways of making a thing comprehensible: first, by causing its essence to be perceived by the intellect, and second, by causing it to be imagined through the similitude that imitates it. Assent, too, is brought about by one of two methods, either by ... [conclusive] demonstration or by ... persuasion. (Gunther, 2006, p. 375)

And the last but not least is Al-Ghazali (1058 A.C.-1111 A.C.), Islamic theologian and mystic who accepted Greek logic as a “neutral instrument of learning and for recommending it for theologians”. He incorporated “basically Aristotelian ethical values into an Islamic mode” (Gunther, 2006, p. 381).

Setting the Stage

I selected three Medieval Muslim travelers, Nasir Khasraw (1004-1077), Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), and Ibn Battuta (1304-1378) to analyze their travel accounts with focus on the theme of search for knowledge in Islam. The three travelers were purposefully selected from three different eras in Medieval Muslim society, cultural background, and schools of Islamic thought. The three travelers embarked on their *al-rihla* mainly to conduct hajj; however, though the goal was similar the experiences varied.

My selection of the three travelers was based on several reasons: 1) their travel accounts are reliable sources that have been under scholarly examination and scrutiny for centuries, 2) though the goal of all three Medieval Muslim travelers was religious, that of conducting hajj, the experiences were significantly different, 3) their *al-rihla* for hajj was combined with a quest for knowledge, 4) they were pioneer Muslim travelers, 5) their travel accounts were recorded during and after their travels, 6) their accounts are significant historical, geographical, and cultural records of the Medieval Muslim society that has/is still contributing to global historical, geographic, scientific, and cultural knowledge, 7) they were pious Muslim scholars; thus, their travel accounts combine religious and secular sorts of knowledge, and, finally, 8) though the three travel accounts reflect religious aspects of *al-rihla*, Ibn Jubayr's account in specific is a lively record of Muslim-Christian and/or Muslim-non-Muslim tolerance and peaceful co-existence despite the fact that it was during a time of war: the Crusades.

Below is a brief introduction of the three MMTs' biography, works, and philosophy:

1.1 Nasir Khasraw (1004-1088)

Abu Mo'in Hamid ad-Din Nasir ibn Khusraw al-Qubadiani or Nāsir Khusraw Qubādiyānī (1004-1088) was born in Khurasan (Iran nowadays) and died in Yamagan. His travel of conducting hajj lasted seven years and is known as *Safarnama*. Khasraw was a famous poet, moralist and theologian and well educated in Greek philosophy, Islamic studies and theology, science, and literature. He also occupied several high positions at the court of the Saljuq. In his early life, Khusraw was a bureaucrat and wine connoisseur, but, at the age of forty, a visionary dream “transformed him into a devoted man of faith” (Thackston, 1986, p. vii). The next year, he embarked on a journey to Mecca to conduct hajj and seek God's forgiveness for his sins.

Khusraw was an intellectual philosopher. His writing may be divided into three different genres; his travel account, *Safarnama*, or memoirs in prose; his poetry collection, *Diwan*; and his work The Book of Light which discusses his philosophical doctrine of Ismailism (Glasse, 2008), and a number of philosophical works that discuss the doctrine of Ismailism (a division of Shia't Islam) that he embraced later. Although some sections of *Safarnama* had previously been translated into English, in 1986 it was translated in its entirety into English by Thackston. In his philosophical books, Nasir Khusraw addressed a broad range of inquiries about creation, existence, the spirit, and the soul. According to Hunsberger (2000), Khusraw, in his philosophical works, delved into philosophical debates and arguments in an attempt to answer questions such as, “how did the world come to be? What is meant by space, time and matter? What is the relationship between matter and spirit? What is soul and what is intellect? And what are the central ethical issues a believer should be concerned with?” (p. 118).

The Ismaili philosophy dates back to the Fatimid period (10th-12th century) in Cairo; it is a division of Islamic Shi'at doctrine that has a core belief that God will give man a revelation along with a guide to interpret it. This guide, according to Ismaili doctrine, must be, “a living person, the Imam of his time, divinely inspired, infallible, capable of providing worldly and spiritual guidance to his followers” (Hunsberger, 2005, p. 2). Ismailis also believe in the exoteric (*zahir*) and esoteric (*batin*) doctrines that refer to the, “outward and inward dimensions of Islam in daily life” (Hunsberger, 2005, p. 458). However, Ismailism is based on the concept of *tawhid*, or oneness/Unity with God, and thus it seeks to extend the meaning of religion and revelation to identify the visible and the apparent [*zahir*] and also to penetrate to the roots, to retrieve and disclose that which is interior or hidden [*batin*]. Ultimately, this discovery engages both the intellect [*aqal*] and the spirit [*ruh*], functioning in an integral manner to illuminate and disclose truths [*haqai'q*] (Hunsberger, 2005). For Khusraw, it is only through

tawhid, which he defines as the knowledge of God, that the, “human soul can attain eternal bliss” (Hunsberger, 2000, p. 118).

1.2 Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217)

Abū al-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr al-Kinānī, known as Ibn Jubayr (1145-1217), was from al-Andalus and was secretary to the Almohad governor of Granada (in present-day Spain). He embarked on a journey to conduct hajj in 1183 and returned to Granada in 1185: he performed hajj three times throughout his life, but recorded only one of them in the form of a book, known as *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. He studied the Quran and hadith, religious science, law, mathematics, linguistics and literature; he was a Muslim scholar, courtier, and a poet. Ibn Jubayr conducted hajj as a journey of expiation, after being threatened by the governor of Granada and forced to drink seven cups of wine. Through hajj, he sought forgiveness from God for drinking the wine. He conducted hajj three times throughout his life: in 1183-1185, 1189-1191, and in 1217 (Netton, 1996, p. 95).

Ibn Jubayr is famous for his book of travel, *Rihla*, based upon his first journey to conduct hajj, in which he kept a detailed journal of his travel experiences. This book was translated and edited by William Wright and published under the title, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*, in 1856; it was later revised by M. J. De Goeje in 1907. Unfortunately, Ibn Jubayr only documented his first journey to conduct hajj. In his book, *Rihla*, Ibn Jubayr documented his visits to monuments, educational institutions, sacred places, and the people from various cultures he met. He, “recorded knowledge about what he saw and where he traveled with the eagerness of a magpie” (Netton, 1996, p. x). Many articles in the Encyclopedia Britannica and the Encyclopedia of Islam, “show how largely the western orientalist have relied on Ibn Jubayr’s description of the sacred cities” (p. 26) in medieval Islam. Ibn Jubayr’s account is considered as an, “extremely valuable resource” for medieval art and architecture (p. 98) for its, “precision and details ... to measurements, dimensions and distances, large and small” (p. 99).

Ibn Jubayr visited many places and cities in the Muslim World, such as Alexandria, Sicily, Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Mecca and Medina. After conducting his last hajj, he returned to Alexandria, where he died in 1217.

Ibn Jubayr was a Sunni Muslim who adhered to the Maliki School of law. Schools of law in Islam are based on the, “different interpretations and exegesis of the Qur’an and the *Sunna* of the Prophet” (Mansour, 1995, p. 2). For Sunnis, there are four schools of law, or *mathahib*; Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki, and Shafii. Each of these schools of law consists of a legal system named after its founder, who was a Muslim scholar. These four schools of law, according to Waliullah (1954), differ from each other only in their, “opinions on certain questions of details in

legal propositions” (Waliullah, 1954, p. 136). These four legal systems have developed out of the *usul al-fiqh* – foundation of sacred law in Islam (Glasse, 2008, p. 465), and are derived from its four roots: the Qur’an, the *Sunna* of the Prophet, *ijma’* (consensus), and *qiyas* (reasoning by analogy) (Mansour, 1995).

The founder of the Maliki School of law was Abu Abd Allah Malik Ibn Anas (d. 179/795), known as Imam Malik, who studied with Ja’far as-Sadiq, the great scholar and descendant of the Prophet (pbuh). Imam Malik received traditions from Sahl Ibn Sa’d, one of the last surviving companions of the Prophet (pbuh), and studied jurisprudence with Rabi’ah ibn Abd al-Rahman, an eminent jurist. At the age of seventeen, Imam Malik started teaching jurisprudence and continued to do so until he died in his early eighties. Maliki’s book, the *Muwatta* (The Path Made Smooth), was the first book of law (Glasse, 2008, p. 320) that, “catapulted him to the pinnacle of fame and drew to him seekers of knowledge from all over the Islamic world” (Mansour, 1995, p. 18). Waliullah (1954) recounted Imam Malik’s vision of the relationship between knowledge and seekers of knowledge in this incident.

The Maliki School of law predominated in the Arab West and Southern Egypt in the Medieval Muslim world; currently, it is dominant in all of Muslim Africa except in Upper Egypt. Mansour (1995) argued that geographical factors heavily affected the teachings embraced by the Islamic schools of law. As Imam Malik was born and lived his entire life in Medina, he emphasized the prophet’s hadith and *Sunna*, while his counterpart, Abu Hanifa, the founder of the Hanifi school of law, who was born in Iraq and lived in Qufa, emphasized personal reasoning. The Malikis, according to Mansour, “rejected human reason and believed that every law must be derived from the Qur’an or the Prophet’s *Sunna* as recorded in hadith” (p. 3). The Maliki School relied heavily on the religious practice of the people of Medina and the sayings of the Companions (the early Muslims who accompanied the Prophet). The Malikis, thus, are known as the People of Tradition, while the Hanifis (the followers of Imam Abu Hanifa) are known as the People of Opinion (Bello, 1968, p. 4).

1.3 Ibn Battuta (1304-1377)

Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Abdullah Al Lawati Al Tanji Ibn Battuta, known as Ibn Battuta (1304-1377), was from Tangier, Morocco and was one of the most famous travelers in world history. His journey lasted nearly 30 years, during which he conducted hajj six times. He was a Muslim scholar of the Sunni Maliki school of Muslim law and a judge, and was 21 years old when he embarked on his al-rihla, which covered almost the entire Islamic world at that time, including Northern and Western Africa, Southern and Eastern Europe, Asia, China, and other parts of the world. The book of his travels is known as *Al-Rihla*.

Upon returning to his homeland, the Caliph appointed

Ibn Juzayy, a literary scholar, to edit Ibn Battuta's dictation of his travel account. The book of travel, took almost three years to be completed and was entitled, *Tuhfat an-nuuzzar fi ghara'ib al-amsar wa-aja'ib al-asfar*, Rihla. This work, "part autobiography and part of the cultural history of the second quarter of the fourteenth century" (Dunn, 1986, p. xiv). The Rihla book had been translated into major European languages first by two German scholars in the early nineteenth century, by the French scholars, C. Dfremery and B. R. Sanguinetti in 1853, then by the British orientalist Samuel Lee in 1929, and by H. A. R. Gibb in 1958. This work has been also studied as a literary genre (Wha, 1991). The Rihla manuscript is, "considered to be a generally accurate account of the countries ... of the ancient world" (Glasse, 2008, p. 220).

The credibility and accuracy of Ibn Battuta's book of travel have long been under dispute, as he dictated his travel account from memory, without making notes or keeping a journal, unlike Ibn Jubayr or Khusraw. However, this debate is beyond the context of this research study, as the focus of the study is limited to several descriptive travel accounts and the cultural interactions and communication between the traveler and people. The significance of Ibn Battuta's travel account does not lie in his discovery of new lands or visits to places that no man had gone to before, but, "for knitting together with his scores of journeys ... the whole Islamic world from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Muslim fringes of China, from the ice of the Central Asian steppes to the heat of African Sudan" (Harvey, 2007, p. 10).

As a student of law, religious science, Qur'anic exegesis, and theology, Ibn Battuta studied Islamic law according to the Maliki School. The Maliki School of law prevailed throughout North African in the 13th-14th century Islamic era. Ibn Battuta developed an interest in Sufism, the mystical dimension of Islam, which was growing more popular at this time, and he was highly influenced by Sufi's ideas and philosophy. Wha (1991) argued that by the time Ibn Battuta left Tangier he was greatly influenced by Sufism, though not a "true sufi adept...he attended mystical gatherings, seeking the blessing and wisdom of spiritual luminaries, and retreating on occasions into brief periods of ascetic contemplation" (pp. 25-26).

Sufism in its broader sense refers to the mysticism or esoterism of Islam. Linguistically, the word Sufi is thought to be derived from the Arabic word *suf* (wood) in reference to "woolen clothing characterized early ascetics" (Glasse, 2008, p. 498) and detachment from worldly life. It has also been argued that the term is either derived from the Arabic word, "*safwe* meaning elected or *suffa* meaning purity, or the Greek word *Sophia*, meaning wisdom and – knowledge of ultimate things" (Aslan, 2005, p. 199). In its narrowest sense, it refers to a, "number of schools of Islamic mystical philosophy and theology, to the phenomenon of religious order and guild (*tariqat*) that

have exerted considerable influence over the development of Islamic politics and society" (Elias, 1998, p. 595). Aslan (2005) argued that Sufism as a religious movement is like an empty caldron into which have been poured the principles of Christian monasticism and Hindu asceticism, along with a sprinkling of Buddhist and Tantric thought, a touch of Islamic Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, and finally, a few elements of Shi'ism, Manichaeism, and Central Asian Shamanism (p. 199).

Sufism is defined as an inward path of union, "which complements the shari'ah or outward law namely exoterism, the formal clothing of religion ... it is the perception of the supra formal essence which is seen by the eye of the heart" (Glasse, 2008, p. 500). Sufis believe that by removing limitations from the understanding of Islam and its testimony of faith the, "dividing line between world (manifestation) and Reality (God) can be pushed back until nothing but God remains" (Glasse, 2008, p. 500). For Sufis esoteric knowledge, according to Glasse (2008), is likened to a kernel (*lubb*), which is the essence, the intrinsic truth that, "resides at the center of the circle of knowledge at the same time contains the circle itself. The radius from circumference to center the Sufis spiritual path (*tariqah*)" (p. 500).

Throughout Islamic history, Sufism has been grouped into different *turiq* (*tariqa*, sing), or paths, which are a, "congregation formed around a master, meeting for spiritual sessions in a specific place called *majlis* ... with the great Master, the true Master, is none other than the Prophet himself" (Glasse, 2008, p. 499). A Master is a spiritual master who is selected from the *Umma* (community) to – pursue the path of self-purification and inner enlightenment (Aslan, 2005, p. 199). Aslan noted that these masters learned from earlier legendary masters and attained – a level of spiritual maturity, then taking the lead in transmitting their master's words to their pupils. Furthermore, Aslan (2005) argued that, "Sufism's goal is to thrust humanity toward God whereas Islam and other religions – can only claim to point humanity to God" (p. 201). Sufis believe that this occurs only through "spiritual poverty" which means, "emptying the soul of the ego's false reality so that one makes way for what God wills for the soul" (Glasse, 2008, p. 501). Early Sufis, as Aslan (2005) argued, were highly mobile individuals who traveled throughout Muslim lands "seeking intimate knowledge of God" (p. 199). Some of them, such as Ibn Arabi; Jalal ad-Din ar-Rumi; and al-Ghazali; left behind writings, oral teachings, and Sufi poems describing the Sufi doctrine in great depth. One of these poems is the *Language of the Birds* by Farid ad-Din Attar, in which the birds (souls) set out on a journey to find their king (God) (Glasse, 2008, p. 500).

The belief in and study of Sufism is, currently, widespread in Turkey, Iran, India, North African and Sahara, amongst other places.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Holistic Content method in Narrative Analysis was used in analyzing the travel accounts. Riessman (2008) stated that in Holistic Content analysis the focus is on “what” is said and not on “how” and “to whom” or “for what purposes” it is said. The method presented by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Silber (1998) helped me identify the overarching themes that could be used for further analysis. During my reading of the three narratives I searched for any repetitions, omissions, contradictions, or unfinished descriptions in the form of foci looking for emerging patterns and themes. The Holistic Content analysis method provided me with the information needed to excavate major themes that occurred in the three accounts with special focus on the cultural aspects of al-rihla of the three travelers.

2.1 Data Collection

The data were collected from the MMT *al-rihla* accounts recorded in their travel books: *Safarnama* by Nasir Khasraw, *The Book of Travel* by Ibn Jubayr, and *Rihla* by Ibn Battuta. I, the researcher, read the three travel accounts in Arabic and then in English. I then searched and selected the most reliable English translations of the three accounts with reference to the focus of this research study and questions intended to answer.

2.2 Data Presentation and Emerging Themes

The following section includes the data presentation, analysis, and the emerging themes. Six themes emerged out of this research study:

1) Hajj, the Pilgrimage to Mecca, was conducted as: A Religious Obligation, Repentance for Sins, and a Physical and Spiritual Path in Seeking God's/Allah's Forgiveness.

Although the goal of al-rihla for the three travelers was to conduct hajj, the motives were different. For Khusraw, the purpose of his pilgrimage was to repent from his sins after a transformational dream,

One night I saw a man in my dream asking me for how long would I continue drinking wine, the drink that takes away men's minds. The man called on me to change. But I replied that wise men can do nothing other than this; get drunken so they forget about their miseries. The man replied that we can not lessen our miseries by losing our emotions, rationale, and wisdom as a result to drinking wine. Such a man can never guide people to righteous life, instead he must search for other ways to increase his intellect and gain more wisdom. I asked how? The man replied: he will find it who searches for it. Then he pointed out to Kibla, Ka'ba in Mecca. I woke up and could still see the image in front of my eyes. I said to myself: I woke up from last night dream; it is time to wake up from a forty years of loss (p. 1).

Ibn Jubayr's hajj, on the other hand, was a journey of expiation and seeking forgiveness from God for a sin he was forced to commit. Ibn Jubayr was under pressure and forced to drink wine by the governor of Granada from whom he worked as his secretary,

The unregulated prince.... and with tones and gestures that allowed of no dispute, had thereupon cried, [upon Ibn Jubayr],

“seven cups, by Allah, shalt thou drink”; and the trembling scholar, his apprehensions of the wrath to come obscured by present terrors, had been fain to swallow the forbidden draughts (Broadhurst, 1952, p. 15).

For Ibn Battuta it was his sole intention to conduct hajj as one of the five pillars in Islam,

with the object of making the Pilgrimage to the Holy House [at Mecca] and of visiting the tomb of the Prophet, God's richest blessing and peace be on him [at Medina], I set out alone, having neither fellow-traveler ... nor caravan whose party I might join, but swayed by an overmastering impulse within me and a desire long-cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries. (p. 8)

2) Seeking Knowledge, Talab Al'ilim, Is Strongly Associated with Hajj.

The theme of seeking knowledge, both in its scholarly and secular forms, is evident throughout the three MMT al-rihla accounts. For example, Ibn Battuta mentioned receiving his license to teach Islamic law in Damascus,

In the Umayyad mosque ... I heard the whole of the Sahih of the imam Abu' Abdullah Muhammad b. Isam'il al-Bukhari ... explained by the aged shaikh, the goal of travel from all quarters, the conjoiner of the younger with the elder generation ... it was completed in fourteen sittings ... Amongst the scholars of Damascus who gave me a general license were the above-mentioned shaikh ... al-Hajjaron my request for it and other scholars ... All of these gave me a general license [to teach] in the year [seven hundred and] twenty-six at Damascus. (p. 157)

Ibn Battuta attended classes and studied at Islamic centers and received many certificates and advanced licenses in his profession as *qadi*/ judge. In his visit to al-Yaman, he described his meeting with some of its eminent Muslim scholars and a Sufi jurist,

The scholars and doctors of the law in this country are upright, pious, trustworthy, generous, and of fine character. I met in the city of Zabi the learned and pious shaikh Abu Muhammad al-San'ani, the jurist and accomplished sufi Abu l-Abbas al-Abyani, and the jurist and traditionist Abu Ali al-Zabidi. I placed myself under their protection; they received me honorably, and showed me hospitality ... I also met the jurist and learned qadi Abu Zaid Abd al-Rahman al-Suffi, one of the eminent men of al-Yaman. (p. 367)

Khusraw, on the other hand, made it clear, starting with the introductory paragraph of his travel account, that the search for knowledge is a search for wisdom, “instead he must search for other ways to increase his intellect and gain more wisdom. I asked how? The man replied: he will find it who searches for it” (p. 1). In addition to gaining wisdom, Khusraw spent three years in Cairo, in which he attended regular religious classes and scholarly learning circles of the Ismaili school.

As for Ibn Jubayr, though there are no specific references in his al-rihla account to indicate any scholarly religious endeavors or his joining formal learning circles or classes, he attended lectures and discussions held in mosques on various occasions. One of these was in Baghdad, where he attended a lecture held by

the prominent imam, Radial-Din al-Qazwini, who was a sheik, the head of the Shafi'i, a theologian at the Nizamiyah College, and distinguished for his pre-eminent role in fundamental studies. Ibn Jubayr reflected,

I went to the lecture he gave following, the afternoon prayer of Friday the 5th of the month of Safar. He ascended the pulpit and the readers, who were on chairs in front of him, began to recite ... the imam then delivered a quiet and grave discourse that dealt with the various branches of learning, including a commentary on the Book of Great and Glorious God ... with an explanation of the meaning. Like a shower of rain, questions were sprinkled upon him from all sides, and these he did not fall short to answer, and was prompt to do so, delaying not. A number of notes were passed to him and, gathering them together in his hand, he began to answer each one, throwing away each note as he dealt with it, until he had come to the end (p. 228).

3) Seeking Knowledge from Places as Well as People was Part of the Journey.

This theme manifested itself clearly in the three MMT accounts through the special interest and focus placed on the cultural-geographical components of their al-rihla records,

I arrived to Qazvin which has many orchards with neither walls nor hedges, so that there is nothing to prevent access to the gardens.... Its walls were well fortified and furnished with crenellations, and the bazaars were well kept, only water was scarce and limited to subterranean channels. Of all the trades practiced in the city, shoemaking had the largest number of craftsmen (Khusraw, 1986, p. 3).

Ibn Jubayr's description of Alexandria in Egypt provides another example of this theme,

One of the greatest wonders that we saw in this city was the lighthouse which Great and Glorious God had erected by the hands of those who were forced to such labor ... and as a guide to voyagers, for without it they could not find the true course to Alexandria. It can be seen for more than seventy miles and is of great antiquity. It is most strongly built in all direction and competes with the skies in height. Description of it falls short the eyes fail to comprehend it, and words are inadequate, so vast is the spectacle (pp. 32-33).

Another example is Ibn Battuta's description of one of the colleges and the students' accommodations in Wasit in Iraq,

It has a large and magnificent college with about three hundred cells, where strangers who have come to learn the Qur'an are lodged; this college was built by the shaikh Taqu al-Din b. Abd al-Muhsin al-Washit who is one of its principal citizens and jurists. To each student in it he gives a set of clothing every year and supplies money for his expenses every day, and he himself sits in the college with his brothers and his associates to teach the Qur'an. I met him and he showed me hospitality and supplied me with provisions of dates and money (p. 272).

4) Place, as a Theme, Is Strongly Emphasized through Thick and Detailed Description.

In his visit to Damascus, Ibn Battuta described the beauty of the city, imbuing it with a historical-religious significance that adds more in-depth meaning to his geographical description,

she is the Paradise of the Orient, and dawning-place of her resplendent light, the seal of the Islamic lands which we have explored, and the bride of the cities which we have unveiled ... she is ennobled by the fact that God Most High gave a refuge to the Messiah (upon Him be peace) and his Mother in it, – upon a hill furnished with security and a flowing spring... Her soil is sated with abundance of water until it yearns for thirstiness, so that even the rocks and the rugged places almost cry to thee (p. 118).

He describes the sacred mosque in Mecca,

The sacred mosque lies in the midst of the city and occupies an extensive area; its length from east to west is more than four hundred cubits ... and its breadth is approximately the same. The most venerable Ka'ba stands in the center of it ... The height of its walls is about twenty cubits, and the roof is supported by tall pillars, arranged in a triple row, of most sustention and beautiful construction. Its three aisles are arranged on a marvelous plan, which makes them appear like a single aisle. The number of marble pillars which it contains is 490, exclusive of the plaster pillars which are in the Dar al-Nadwa annexed to the sanctuary ... along the wall of this colonnade is a series of small platforms beneath vaulted arcades; these are occupied by teacher so the Qur'an, copyists and tailors ... (p. 193).

In his description of the Sacred Mosque and the Ancient House in Mecca, Ibn Jubayr wrote,

It has four corners and is almost square ... the principle corner is twenty-nine cubits ... and is the one containing the Black Stone ... the venerable door is raised above the ground eleven and a half spans. It is of silver gilt and of exquisite workmanship and beautiful design, holding the eyes for its excellence and in emotion for the awe God has clothed His House in ... the door has two silver staples on which is hung the lock. It faced to the east and is eight spans wide and thirteen high. The thickness of the wall in which it turns is five spans, the inside of the blessed house is overlaid with variegated marbles and the walls are all variegated marbles (p. 78).

Khusraw described the city of Mecca and the Sacred Mosque,

The city of Mecca is situated how in the midst of mountains such that from whatever direction you approach, the city cannot be seen until you are there. The tallest mountain near Mecca is Abu Qobays, which is round like a dome, so that if you shoot an arrow from the foot of the mountain it reaches its top ... on top of the mountain is a stone stele said to have been erected by Abraham. The city lies on a plain between the mountains and measures only arrow-shots square ... the Haram Mosque is in the middle of the plain and the city lanes and bazaars are built all around it ... the only trees in the city are at the western gate to the Haram Mosque (p. 68).

5) Emphasis on Islamic principles Applied in Practice.

In his journey, Khusraw sought out the learned and criticized teaching and education. He wrote about a conversation he had with a young man called the Master, Ali Nasa'i, who was teaching a group of pupils surrounding him. Khusraw criticized Ali Nasa'i for his lack of knowledge about the material he was teaching,

During the teaching conversation, Ali kept saying "I read this with Avicenna" and "I heard this from Avicenna"...but later he said to me, "I do not know anything about mathematics and would like to learn something of the arithmetic art". And I

thought how the fellow could possibly teach anything if he did not even know the subject (p. 3).

Ibn Jubayr's implicit message to his fellow citizens in Maghrib is clear evidence of his belief in and application of Islamic orthodoxy in practice in the search for knowledge. He wrote,

Whoever of the young men of the Maghrib seeks prosperity let him move to these lands and leave his country in the pursuit of knowledge and he will find many forms of help. The first of these is the release of the mind from the consideration of livelihood, and this is the greatest and most important. For when zeal is present the student will find the way clear to exert his utmost endeavor, and there will be no excuse for lagging behind, save in the case of those addicted to idleness and procrastination, and to them this exhortation is not addressed, we speak only the zealous who in their own land find that the search of the means of living comes between them and their aim of seeking knowledge ... I have given counsel to those I found listening and called to those I heard answering (pp. 298-299).

On another occasion, Ibn Jubayr commented on an incident he witnessed in the port of Alexandria, where some of the customs officials examined passengers' luggage in a derogatory way that contradicted Islamic teachings and practice,

One of the most infamous things we saw was a group of insolent exactors, carrying in their hands long, pointed prods with handles, going aboard the ships to examine what was in them. There was no bundle or sack into which they did not drive those accursed staves in case there should be in the baggage, which held nothing but provisions, some unseen goods or money. This is the most shamefully affecting of the odious happenings. God has forbidden spying [Koran XLIX, 12: – Do not spy, nor let some of you backbite others] ... May God punish these oppressors at the hand of the just Sultan and if He wills, favour his success (p. 56).

6) Pride in Cultural and Religious Identity as a Muslim.

MMT were proud of their cultural and religious identities as Muslims traveling in Muslim lands during the golden age of Islamic civilization. The MMT accounts are rich with descriptions, reflections, and comments that refer to the many achievements and accomplishments that they witnessed throughout their *al-rihla* in Islamic lands. They proudly reflected on different aspects of their Islamic culture and Muslim practices throughout their journeys. For example, Ibn Jubayr reflected on Sultan Saladin and his glorious reign and achievements, especially in helping pilgrims to travel to Mecca,

The pilgrim in their lands does not cease to pay dues and provide foods until God helps him to return to his native land. Indeed, but for what God has done to mend the affairs of Muslims in these parts by means of Saladin, they would suffer the most grievous oppression, with no remission of its rigors. For Saladin lifted from the pilgrim the customs duty, and in its stead provided money and victuals with orders that they should be sent to Mukthir, Emir of Mecca (pp. 71-72).

Ibn Battuta recorded his visit to Khwarizm and his attendance at one of the regular practices of its Emir, a

Muslim ruler, in the audience-hall of the Islamic-court,

It is one of the regular practices of this Emir that the qadi comes daily to his audience-hall and sits in a place assigned to him, accompanied by the jurists and his clerks. Opposite him sits one of the great Emirs, accompanied by eight of the great Emirs and shaikhs of the Turks ... the people bring their disputes to them for decision; those that come within the jurisdiction of the religious law are decided by the qadi, and all others are decided by those Emirs. Their decisions are well-regulated and just, for they are free from suspicion of partiality and do not accept bribes (p. 545).

Khusraw wrote about his visit to the city of Tabas and the hospitality of its Emir, "he [the prince] kept us in Tabas for seventeen days and showed us much hospitality. When we left he bestowed presents and apologized for any shortcomings. (May God rejoice in him!)" (p. 100).

7) The Peaceful Co-Existence of Muslims, Christians, and Jews Was Recounted.

The three MMT reflected on the co-existence of Muslims with the people of the Book, Christians and Jews, on different occasions in their *al-rihla*. For example, Ibn Jubayr reflected on Muslim-Christian peaceful co-existence in Damascus,

The Christians impose a tax on the Muslims in their land which gives them full security; and likewise the Christian merchants pay a tax upon their goods in Muslim lands. Agreement exists between them, and there is equal treatment in all cases. The soldiers engage themselves in their war, while the people are at peace and the world goes to him who conquers. (p. 301)

Ibn Battuta noted that on one of his sea voyages he disembarked on the Island of Crimea, where he entered a Church and met with a monk. He wrote,

I saw a church so we made towards it. In it I found a monk, and on one of the walls of the church I saw the figure of an Arab man wearing a turban, and girt with a sword, and carrying a spear in his hand, and in front of him a lamp which was alight. I said to the monk: what is this figure? And when he replied "this is the figure of the prophet Ali" I was filled with astonishment. We spent the night in that church. (p. 469)

Khusraw asserted that Muslims co-existed peacefully with Christians and Jews, especially on his visit to Jerusalem. In his description of the historical city he wrote,

They [Muslims] perform the requisite rituals and offer a sacrifice on the customary holiday. Some years more than twenty thousand people come during the first days of Dhu l-hejja bringing their children to celebrate their circumcision. From the Byzantine realm and other place come Christians and Jews to visit the churches and synagogues located there (p. 21).

3. DISCUSSION

During the classical period of Islamic history *al-rihla*, *talab al'ilm* signified travel in search of religious knowledge and spiritual matters that led to one of the, "esteemed places of Islamic teaching, such as Hijaz/ Medina, Cairo, or Fez" (El Moudden, 1990, p. 69). However, a scholar in Andalusia argued that, "those who

traveled were concerned with secularly and religious disciplines alike and far from being restricted to the search and study of Tradition ... the [*al-rihla*] was a many-sided intellectual endeavor (as cited in Euben, 2006, p. 36). A religious *al-rihla*, such as the hajj, involves not only the physical movement between places but also encounters with other cultural and "political and social identities" (Euben, 2006, p. 36). Thus, *al-rihla* becomes a multi-sided journey towards different ends. During the fourteenth century, the travels of Moroccan Muslim scholars of *Maghrib* became phenomenon that characterized the Medieval Muslims' *al-rihla* in search of knowledge. *Al-rihla* thus, "became a cliché of medieval Islamic intellectual life" (Netton, 1996, p. vii). Netton added that, "there is no branch of Muslim intellectual life, religious and political, and the daily life of average Muslim that remained untouched by the all pervasive attitude towards knowledge as something of supreme value for Muslim beings" (as cited in Netton, 1996, p. vii). Thus, it became a trend to for Muslims to travel to the Islamic centers of knowledge in Cairo, Hijaz (Saudi Arabia), and Fez to gather with other Muslim scholars.

Al-rihla in Medieval Muslim society can be divided into three types: 1) *al-rihla* within Morocco as a regional journey, 2) *al-rihla hijaziyya* or travel to Hijaz for pilgrimage and religious study, and 3) *al-rihla sifariyya* which includes visits to embassies and missions to Muslim and non-Muslim lands (El Moudden, 1990, p. 70). The *hijaziyya al-rihla*, in particular, may be considered as a type of hajj. Not only was the *hijaziyya al-rihla* a religious journey but it was also a cultural and social experience, as pilgrims stopped for extended periods in cities and places, such as Cairo, to attend classes at al-Azhar University, for instance, on their way to Hijaz. El Moudden (1990) argued that, "both *al-rihla hijaziyya* and *sifariyya* had two elements in common: 1) to share experiences of *al-rihla* with – various components of *Umma*, and 2) understand differences through comparisons with others" (p. 70). However, some Muslim travelers devoted their *al-rihla*s to the search for religious knowledge, such as Al-Ayyashi (AH 39 ... 1037/AD 1628) who traveled three times to Hijaz in 1649, 1653, 1661, to "actively learn and participate in the theological debates" (El Moudden, 1990, p. 77).

In the nineteenth century, a critical shift in the concept of *al-rihla* occurred, changing from an adventure for travelers to a more in-depth perception of a, "pedagogical process, to seek other places and nations knowledge which is useful at home" (Euben, 2006, p. 97). Travel in this sense, according to Euben (2006), becomes a bridge to learning about a different kind of, "perception of place and space and distance engendered by an increasing awareness of regions and peoples separated by vast oceans and thousands of miles" (p. 97). Euben (2006) ascribed this shift mainly to Tahtawi and Tocqueville, and their subsequent journeys to France and the U.S. For al-Tahtawi, it was the French society, knowledge,

and organization that influenced his *al-rihla*, while for Tocqueville it was the American democracy that shaped his perception of *al-rihla*.

In the 1980s, Najib Mahfuz's *al-rihla* account of Ibn Fattuma was a lively example of the *al-rihla* genre in the twentieth century. Mahfuz's novel is fictional and presents a journey to another culture in the form of comparisons and contrasts between different cultures/civilizations in a historical, rather than geographical, sense (El-Enany, 1993). The novel's theme is universal and it raises questions, "about whether and when human society will be able to achieve the craved-for ideal, and it criticizes the – modern Dar al-Islam which is shown to be in need of – radical reform" (Netton, 1996, p. 166). There is no reference to time or place in Mahfuz's imaginary novel, which was written to parody Ibn Battuta's *al-rihla*, as the goal for the protagonist is to conduct hajj (Netton, 1991). It is a harsh criticism of Dar al-Islam in modern Islamic history.

CONCLUSION

Islam, as a religion and social practice, encourages Muslims' mobility through different forms of travel. One of these is *hijra* (migration), or travel from non-Muslim lands (*dar al-kufr*/non-Muslim territories) to Muslim lands (*dar al-Islam*/Muslim territories). Another form of travel is hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, being one of the five pillars of Islam for Muslims who are able to afford it. A third form is *ziyarat*, or visits to shrines, and the fourth form is *al-rihla*, or travel in search of knowledge. Some Muslims' journeys may combine two or more forms of travel; such as the three Medieval Muslim travelers in this research study. In *Muslim Travelers*, Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori argued that Muslim travel is a complex phenomenon that expands the boundaries of religious doctrines and ritual practices to become a – pervasive intricacy (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1990, p. xii). In their work, Eickelman and Piscatori examined a variety of research studies that analyzed the four different forms of Muslim travel, hajj, *hijra*, *al-rihla*, and *ziyarat* throughout Islamic history in order to answer questions concerning the essence, motivation, and effect of those travels. These researchers believed that these studies show that Muslim travels are heavily influenced by the "religious imagination" as represented in different forms of spiritual and temporal movement rather than solely physical movement.

However, *al-rihla* as a concept has evolved throughout the history of Islam, and, thus, has had different meanings in the past and present, "the exploration of cross-cultural travels of the past from the perspective of the present is a comparison across history" (Euben, 2006, p. 174). Through travel the unfamiliar becomes common, and "difference can be as fascinating as familiar is comfortable" (Krenicki, 2004, p. 147). Nevertheless, travel also increases one's appreciation of their own home and country (Gellens, 1990). In the classical Islamic

period, *al-rihla* of Muslim travelers was a religious, social, cultural, and political experience that gave us a written record of the Islamic as well as some of the non-Islamic World.

In the modern Islamic period, the concept of *al-rihla* expanded to include not only physical movements, whether for religious and/or secular motives, but also inner-self journeys of exploration. Euben (2006) argued that, “travel allows for three kinds of movements: physical, cultural, and a metaphoric inner journey as an internal movement” (p. 108). *Al-rihla* became a, “practice of the pursuit of knowledge about others and oneself by way of literal and imaginative contrasts with seemingly alien lands, peoples, and institutions” (Euben, 2006, p. 15). Thus, travel in this sense, and according to Euben (2006), creates “a conceptual bridge across traditions separated by culture or time” (p. 15) that facilitates cultural exchange. Such change may advance not only cultural practices in an increasingly multicultural world but also the creation of an international culture and cultural identities that are not only shaped by our cultures, as Bhabha (1994) argues, but also by the cultures of the people we encounter.

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