

# Religious and Heritage-Based Tourism: From Ibn Battutah's Travels to Contemporary Global Practices

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## ABSTRACT

Religious and heritage-based tourism is an important area of tourism studies that connects pilgrimage, cultural heritage, and mobility. Grounded in ritual practice and the preservation of memory, this form of travel sustains devotion while reinforcing cultural identity and the significance of heritage. Drawing on heritage studies and tourism theory, this study examines how sacred journeys facilitate meaning-making, identity formation, and intercultural exchange. The travels of Ibn Battutah, a 14th-century Muslim jurist and explorer, provide a historical perspective to illustrate how religious purpose and cultural curiosity converged in travel narratives and encounters with diverse traditions, architecture, and languages. Today, these dynamics are still evident in the annual Hajj pilgrimage and the global appeal of UNESCO-recognised heritage sites. By situating both historical and contemporary practices within broader debates, this paper argues that religious and heritage-based tourism continues to promote cross-border connections, cultural resilience, and sustainable development.

**Keywords:** Religious tourism, heritage tourism, transmission of knowledge, Ibn Battutah, cultural resilience

## INTRODUCTION

Religion, rituals, and legacy have always been intertwined with tourism. Pilgrimage and other forms of religiously inspired travel are among the earliest types of tourism. Over the past 50 years, religiously motivated travel has grown significantly (Choe, 2025). Religious tourism has developed in various settings and locations, and scholars from a wide range of disciplines have increasingly studied it. There are two types of religious tourism: first, tourism that involves fulfilling a religious obligation, and second, tourism that involves documenting and sharing knowledge for wider dissemination. If this is done with the intention of obtaining God's blessings, it also achieves the second aim, namely, attracting tourists. The objective is to introduce travellers to a country with which they are unfamiliar and would not have the opportunity to learn about without religious tourism. Without religious tourism, tourists would also be unable to learn more about the country's citizens. This type of tourism undoubtedly contributes to expanding opportunities for scholarly research. Indeed, Islam promotes travel as a means for the faithful to conduct their daily lives and gain maturity and experience. Heritage tourism, often referred to as cultural heritage tourism, is a type of travel that emphasises a place's history and culture. When tourists visit a place because of its heritage, they typically seek a genuine experience of the local people, events, and history (EBSCO n.d.).

Ibn Battutah, a Muslim jurist and explorer from the 14th century, uses his travels as a historical lens to show how religious purpose and cultural curiosity combined in travel narratives and encounters with various languages, customs, and architectural styles. He began his travels in 1325 at the age of 20. His main reason for travelling was to undertake the Hajj, or pilgrimage to Mecca, to fulfil the fifth pillar of Islam. However, his journeys continued for about 29 years, during which he covered approximately 75,000 miles, visiting the equivalent of 44 modern countries, which were then mostly under the rule of Muslim leaders in the World of Islam, or "*Dār al-Islām*". He faced many dangers and had numerous adventures along the way (The Office of Resources for International and Area Studies (ORIAS), n.d.)

These forces remain evident in the modern world through the annual Hajj pilgrimage and the widespread appeal of UNESCO-designated historical monuments, both of which demonstrate the enduring Islamic belief that travel and exploration are essential to spiritual growth and cultural exchange. In Islamic tradition, exploring the world is regarded as a form of worship and a means of spreading faith. The pilgrimage tourism industry generates significant income, as pilgrims contribute to economic growth and support the development of tourism infrastructure. The Hajj pilgrimage is a globally significant event that Muslims are expected to undertake at least once in their lifetimes, provided they have the financial means and good health. Islamic teachings encourage followers to travel and appreciate the wonders of creation by reflecting on the signs of Allah. Consequently, travel is central to Islamic practice, particularly through the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina, which are considered holy sites (Mazni Saad et al., December 2024).

The contemporary practice of visiting UNESCO World Heritage sites is rooted in a "preservation impulse" that reflects the medieval desire to document and transmit encounters with the sacred. Although the modern international community formalised this commitment through the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the conceptual origins of identifying "outstanding universal value" are evident centuries earlier in the *Rihla of Ibn Battutah*. By chronicling the architectural and spiritual significance of sites across Afro-Eurasia, Ibn Battutah created a proto-inventory of what we now recognise as global heritage. His narrative does not merely describe travel; it enables a form of religious and heritage tourism that reinforces a collective cultural identity across geographic boundaries (UNESCO, 2019; Anne, 2023).

To date, the 1972 Convention has been ratified by nearly 195 States Parties, making it a universally recognised instrument that unites the conservation of cultural properties with the protection of natural environments (UNESCO, 2023). This integrated framework acknowledges the intrinsic interdependence between humanity and the natural world – a theme central to Ibn Battutah's observations of the 14th-century world. By focusing on the continuity of these "sacred and culturally significant places," it becomes clear that UNESCO's modern mission formalises historical efforts to maintain equilibrium between cultural continuity and ecological integrity (UNESCO, 1972). In this light, the *Rihla* serves as human testimony to the very values that modern heritage law seeks to codify.

To bridge the gap between Ibn Battutah's 14th-century observations and the UNESCO framework, this study employs a comparative thematic analysis. Rather than treating the *Rihla* as a mere travelogue, we analyse it as a medieval "State of Conservation" report focused on three axes:

- 1) Selection Criteria: Mapping Ibn Battutah's subjective descriptors (such as "unrivalled" and "singular") against UNESCO Selection Criteria, particularly regarding living traditions and architectural ensembles.
- 2) Documentation of the Sacred: Examining the "preservation impulse" in the text, specifically how Ibn Battutah records the endowments (*waqf*) and social structures that ensured the survival of sites in Cairo and Shiraz.
- 3) Heritage Tourism Mapping: Evaluating how medieval pilgrimage routes prefigured the contemporary "heritage corridors" recognised by UNESCO.

Ibn Battutah's *Rihla* serves as a medieval survey that identifies "Outstanding Universal Value" (OUV) centuries before the 1972 Convention. By comparing his 14th-century descriptions with modern UNESCO criteria, we find a clear precursor to the contemporary mission of documenting and transmitting the sacred. In Delhi, for example, Ibn Battutah described the Qutub Minar complex as having "no parallel in the lands of Islam." His focus on the scale and craftsmanship of its red sandstone masonry directly anticipates UNESCO Criterion (iv) concerning architectural ensembles of historical significance. Beyond the physical structure, his account of the site as a vibrant centre of Indo-Islamic social life provides the historical continuity essential to its 1993 inscription.

Similarly, in Cairo, Ibn Battutah's documentation focused on the city's *waqf* (charitable foundations), including hospitals, *madrasas*, and *zawiyas*. This highlights a medieval understanding of sustainable heritage, as Ibn Battutah recognised that these sites were preserved by the socio-legal systems that funded them, rather than

solely by their masonry. His account of "Historic Cairo" (UNESCO, 1979) remains a primary source for the intangible heritage that underpins the site's modern significance.

The alignment between Ibn Battutah's observations and UNESCO designations shows that "outstanding universal value" is a historical reality, not just a modern construct. While the 1972 Convention provides a legal framework, the *Rihla* offers the lived testimony of a world where cultural achievements were already seen as a shared human legacy. Ultimately, UNESCO World Heritage sites are not merely relics; they are the physical anchors of a global narrative that Ibn Battutah was among the first to articulate, bridging the gap between the medieval traveller's wonder and the modern scholar's imperative to preserve a shared human story.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving people travelling to countries or locations outside their usual environment for personal or professional reasons. These individuals are known as visitors, and tourism concerns their activities, some of which involve spending money. They may be tourists or excursionists, residents or non-residents (UN Tourism, 2008). As one of the largest and most dynamic global industries, tourism plays a pivotal role in the world economy (Pederson, 2002). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council, the travel and tourism industry contributed \$10.9 trillion to global GDP in 2024. This includes the direct, indirect, and induced effects of the sector. Travel and tourism accounted for 10% of the world's GDP (World Travel and Tourism Council, n.d.).

Every era has contributed to our current understanding of travel and tourism. For example, many roads and highways were built alongside historic and commercial routes. Road signs and roadside inns became common along key routes, and the concept of distinct forms of tourism emerged early. By the 15th century, pilgrimage, educational travel, and cultural tourism were well established. The post-industrial era of the 20th century marked the beginning of travel for leisure or enjoyment, and current trends in human mobility are characterised by increasing levels of autonomous travel, more off-the-beaten-path destinations, and a wider range of experiences. (Timothy, n.d.).

Amid these modern developments, it is important to recognise that travel motivated by faith predates leisure tourism by centuries. Religious travel is not a new phenomenon. Religion has always been a major factor in travel decisions and is typically regarded as the most ancient, non-profit travel activity (Jackowski and Smith 1992). Each year, millions of people visit important pilgrimage sites worldwide, both ancient and contemporary. According to Jackowski (2000), the majority of pilgrims – approximately 240 million annually – are Muslims, Christians, and Hindus. Travel driven by religious or spiritual reasons has increased significantly in recent years, both proportionally and absolutely, and now constitutes a significant share of international travel (Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

This continued growth highlights the increasing importance of religious tourism within the global tourism sector, as research indicates that overall tourism activity will remain a critical factor in the management and development of UNESCO World Heritage sites. Although official statistics have not been collected, a site's inclusion on the World Heritage List often leads to an increase in visitor numbers. Tourism presents a significant challenge at World Heritage sites, even at current visitation levels. According to a 1993 assessment by the UNESCO United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), it is a major concern for most natural site managers (Pederson, 2002).

In response to these pressures, cultural institutions such as national heritage museums play an important role in managing visitor engagement and promoting heritage appreciation. To appeal to domestic tourists and meet the educational or curiosity-driven interests of international visitors, these museums often emphasise the patriotic dimensions of the past. National museums are particularly prevalent in smaller nations and emerging regions.

There may be more than one national museum in larger countries. Among the most significant topics associated with national museums are colonisation, science, the military, and Indigenous heritage. Some museums are renowned worldwide and attract both domestic and international tourists. The Smithsonian, the Vatican

Museums, and the British Museum are among the world's most prestigious institutions, attracting millions of visitors each year who seek cultural enrichment and intellectual engagement through travel (Timothy, n.d.).

While such secular forms of tourism reflect a modern quest for knowledge and aesthetic experience, religious traditions provide a more transcendent motivation for mobility. Islam, in particular, has long encouraged travel as a means of spiritual growth, cultural exchange, and intellectual exploration. Muslims from diverse regions, including Andalusia, China, India, Persia, Turkey, and Indonesia, have travelled extensively in pursuit of knowledge and livelihood, motivated by their Islamic faith. This tradition of travel has shaped individual travellers and profoundly influenced Muslim societies. Many of these travellers were skilled writers and observers who documented their experiences and produced significant works in literature, history, and geography. Some, such as Ibn Jubayr, went beyond the traditional pilgrimage to Mecca, extending their journeys to distant lands where they observed and recorded diverse cultures and societies (Al-Amin, 2002).

Continuing this tradition of inquisitive and observant travel, Ibn Battutah – often regarded as the greatest traveller in world history (Ibn Battuta, 2002)—departed from Tangier in June 1325 CE to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Makkah. In this sacred city, his aspiration for exploration emerged, which he pursued throughout his life. Ibn Battutah travelled extensively across the vast Islamic world, beginning in North Africa and reaching as far as China before returning to his homeland. His journey, spanning approximately 120,000 km between 1325 and 1354 (Ibn Battuta, 2002) across Africa, Europe, and Asia, is considered one of the greatest expeditions in world history, establishing him as one of the most distinguished travellers of all time. After nearly three decades of travel, Ibn Battutah returned to Fez, Morocco, in 1354 CE, where his extraordinary journeys were recorded and preserved for posterity (Syed Nurul Akla & Adi Setia, 2004). In his account, he mentioned more than 1,500 individuals by name (Ibn Battuta, 2002), offering an unparalleled glimpse into the interconnected societies of his era.

As Dunn observes, the fourteenth-century world was far more dynamic than often assumed; caravan routes and maritime networks were busy with travellers moving across the eastern hemisphere. Among these travellers, Muslims journeyed from Spain and West Africa to Central Asia and southern China. Muslims were the foremost explorers of the world. Why, then, were Muslims seemingly everywhere? Muslim civilisation flourished in the central region of the Eastern Hemisphere, spanning almost all areas.

Muslim traders travelled extensively across regions, managing much of the hemisphere's commercial exchange (Dunn, 2005). This spirit of mobility was not limited to economic pursuits; it also appeared in the religious devotion of countless Muslims who undertook the sacred journey to Mecca and Medina, known as the Hajj, often spending years away from home to fulfil this obligation. Some travelled as diplomats, imperial envoys, roaming Sufis, warriors, or scholars seeking books and renowned instructors. Ibn Battutah's travelogue, the *Rihla* – the journey – vividly illustrates the breadth and cosmopolitan nature of Islam as a civilisation, particularly during the period from 1000 to 1500 C.E. According to Dunn (2005), Ibn Battutah journeyed over 73,000 miles, moving almost exclusively through Muslim communities. In each city and region, he encountered individuals with whom he shared faith, language, and cultural values, regardless of their ethnicity or background. Ibn Battutah saw himself not as a citizen of a specific nation – a modern concept – but as a member of the *Dar al-Islam*, the abode of Islam: a vast spiritual and cultural network connecting cities and societies underpinned by shared belief and moral order. This interconnectedness reflects the dynamic unity of the Muslim world, where travel became a means of sustaining both devotion and knowledge.

The same unifying ethos that shaped Ibn Battutah's encounters continues to resonate in contemporary pilgrimage experiences. Recent studies on the Hajj show that this sacred journey remains a central institution of Islamic identity, fostering the same sense of solidarity and transformation that united medieval Muslim society. Alzeer and Abuzinadah (2024) highlight the emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions of pilgrimage, illustrating how Hajj serves not only as an act of worship but also as a psychologically restorative and socially integrative experience. Their work underscores that pilgrimage cultivates humility, gratitude, and a strengthened sense of belonging within the ummah, reaffirming the enduring spiritual continuity that links the faithful across time and space.

This transformative potential is vividly illustrated in Ibn Battutah's reflections throughout the *Rihla*, which present travel as both a spiritual discipline and an intellectual pursuit. His consistent emphasis on gratitude,

humility, and wonder indicates an early awareness of the psychological mechanisms by which pilgrimage recalibrates one's sense of self within a divine and communal framework. The emotional equilibrium he describes after encountering diverse people and sacred spaces parallels the findings of Alzeer and Abuzinadah (2024), who identified pilgrimage as a multidimensional process fostering emotional regulation, mental resilience, and heightened spiritual awareness. Both the medieval traveller's observations and modern psychological analyses affirm that pilgrimage functions as a holistic experience, shaping cognition, emotion, and faith together. Through this synthesis, the Hajj emerges not only as a ritual obligation but also as a continuum of spiritual evolution, linking the introspective journeys of historical figures like Ibn Battutah with the lived realities of today's global Muslim community.

More broadly, such traditions of sacred travel reflect humanity's enduring effort to preserve and transmit meaning across generations, resonating with the universal impulse to safeguard what is spiritually and culturally significant. The world's cultural and natural heritage likewise constitutes a treasure trove of invaluable assets that belong not only to individual nations but also to humanity as a whole. The loss or deterioration of these precious assets impoverishes global heritage, affecting people worldwide. Certain aspects of this heritage possess "outstanding universal value", warranting special protection against the growing threats they face. In 1972, UNESCO's Member States adopted the World Heritage Convention to ensure the identification, protection, conservation, and presentation of the world's heritage. The Convention established a World Heritage Committee and a World Heritage Fund, both operational since 1976. Since the Convention's adoption, the international community has embraced sustainable development, recognising that protecting and conserving natural and cultural heritage significantly contributes to this goal. The Convention's primary objective is to identify, protect, conserve, and transmit the cultural and natural heritage of outstanding universal value to future generations (UNESCO, 2008).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, historical–interpretive methodology, combining textual analysis of Ibn Battutah's *Rihla* with contemporary scholarship on religious and heritage tourism. Ibn Battutah's travel accounts provide primary historical data, supplemented by secondary sources such as Dunn (2005) and Syed Nurul Akla and Adi Setia (2003). Thematic analysis identifies recurring motifs of *pilgrimage*, *intercultural exchange*, and *knowledge transmission*. An interdisciplinary framework – drawing on heritage studies, cultural geography, and religious anthropology – enables comparison of Ibn Battutah's journeys with modern pilgrimage practices, including the Hajj and visits to UNESCO heritage sites (UNESCO, 1972, 2019). This approach situates the historical narrative of travel within broader sociocultural and spiritual contexts, demonstrating how religious tourism continues to reflect Islam's enduring call for exploration and reflection.

## Discussion and Research Findings

The imperative for human mobility, conceptualised as both a spiritual and intellectual pursuit, is a foundational tenet of Islamic epistemology. This mandate is textually rooted in the Qur'anic injunction, *Sīrū fī al-Ard*, "Travel through the earth..." (Surah al-Hajj 22:46), which appears in multiple contexts, urging believers to observe, reflect, and derive lessons (*i'tibār*) from the remnants of past civilisations (Al-Qurtubi, 2006). This framework presents travel not as mere tourism but as a hermeneutic act – a method of reading divine signs (*āyāt*) in both the natural world and human history (Al-Sabith, n.d.).

This Qur'anic impetus is strongly reinforced by Prophetic traditions (Hadith), which present the pursuit of knowledge (*ṭālib al-‘ilm*) as an act of profound devotion. The tradition, "Whosoever travels a path seeking knowledge, Allah will make easy for him a path to Paradise" (Sahih Muslim), sanctifies the scholar's journey, giving the *rihla* soteriological significance. Classical scholars built on this foundation, codifying the ethics and virtues of travel. In his *Diwān al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī*, Imām al-Shāfi‘ī highlights five principal benefits of travel: alleviation of adversity, pursuit of livelihood, acquisition of knowledge, cultivation of refined etiquette, and attainment of noble companionship. These elements encapsulate the holistic nature of travel in Islam, encompassing both worldly and spiritual dimensions. This philosophy of travel was not merely theoretical for Imām al-Shāfi‘ī; it was evident in his own scholarly journey. He made it his ultimate aim to study as many

branches of knowledge as possible, travelling extensively across regions in search of jurists and scholars whom he could take as his teachers (Muawiyah ibn Mufti Abdussamad Ahmed, n.d.).

Ibn Battutah's three-decade expedition across Africa, Europe, and Asia exemplifies how Islamic travel combined devotion and discovery. Departing from Tangier in 1325 CE to perform the Hajj, he extended his journey to over 75,000 miles (120,000 kilometres), visiting the equivalent of 44 modern countries, which were then mostly governed by Muslim leaders of the *Dār al-Islām* (The Office of Resources for International and Area Studies (ORIAS), n.d.). His experiences illustrate a premodern form of globalisation in which the shared faith of Muslims enabled cross-cultural exchange and intellectual mobility (Dunn, 2005).

Through encounters with rulers, scholars, and merchants, Ibn Battutah reveals the cosmopolitan unity of Islamic civilisation. His *Rihla* documents cities, mosques, and customs, serving as both a travelogue and an ethnographic record that shaped later understandings of Islam's global reach. This broad depiction of interconnected Muslim societies finds tangible expression in his experiences in key centres of learning such as Damascus and Mecca. In these cities, Ibn Battutah exemplified the integration of faith and knowledge through mobility, participating in scholarly circles at the Umayyad Mosque and engaging with prominent Maliki jurists and Hadith scholars. His intellectual pursuits continued in Mecca, where he extended his stay to study, pray, and reflect, transforming the pilgrimage into a prolonged spiritual and scholarly retreat. These experiences illustrate how medieval Muslim travel united worship, learning, and cultural exchange, effectively turning mobility into a mode of education.

Just as contemporary pilgrims face various challenges during Hajj, Ibn Battuta encountered similar hardships, including bandit attacks, dehydration, and war along the Red Sea, during his 18-month pilgrimage (SK Films Inc., 2009). Among the most valuable ethnographic sections of the *Rihla* is Ibn Battuta's account of the Mali Empire (1352–1353). He travelled along the Niger River, visiting towns such as Timbuktu and Mali (Niani), and recorded the political, religious, and social life under Mansa Suleyman (Levtzion, 1973).

His descriptions of governance, the administration of justice, and trade in gold and salt reveal a sophisticated Islamic polity integrated into the broader *Dār al-Islām*. However, his observations also reflect the cultural pluralism of West African Islam. He expressed admiration for the people's piety and hospitality, but noted his disapproval of local customs, particularly the public roles and unveiled appearance of women (Gibb, 1929). These remarks, though culturally conditioned, underscore Ibn Battutah's ethnographic integrity and provide modern historians with one of the earliest and most authentic firsthand accounts of sub-Saharan Africa's Islamic societies.

Beyond these observations, the *Rihla* also provides valuable, though fragmentary, insights into the gendered dimensions of mobility in the medieval Islamic world. Ibn Battutah's accounts of women in regions such as the Maldives and the Mali Empire indicate varying degrees of social visibility, economic participation, and cultural autonomy. Although his perspectives are shaped by his own normative framework, they nonetheless show that female presence and agency were part of the broader landscape of travel, social interaction, and community life. These accounts invite a more inclusive reading of religious and heritage-based mobility, highlighting that the experience of travel and cultural exchange in Islamic civilisation was not exclusively male, but embedded in more complex and diverse social realities.

Ibn Battutah's *Rihla* offers valuable insights into the presence and roles of women in the regions he visited, revealing diverse patterns of female agency and social participation. In the Maldives, he encountered a society where women, including rulers such as Sultana Khadijah, exercised political authority and did not adhere to strict dress codes, often appearing unveiled despite his efforts to encourage greater conformity. In West Africa, he observed matrilineal practices and noted women's visible participation in public and social life, which contrasted with his own cultural expectations. Among Turkic societies, he remarked on women's mobility, economic involvement, and relative autonomy, including their participation in trade and travel. Although his accounts are filtered through a normative Islamic juristic perspective, they nevertheless document a range of gendered experiences, suggesting that women were active participants in the social, political, and cultural landscapes of the medieval Islamic world (Albayrak, 2005).

His detailed observations of the Mali Empire remain an enduring primary source for studying African Islamic civilisation and cross-cultural exchange. Moreover, his meticulous descriptions of the peoples, places, and

customs of the region are among the most valuable early written records of African history, serving as the only extant eyewitness account of the great medieval Empire of Mali (Joudi, 2005).

The enduring spirit of inquiry and devotion that inspired his journeys continues to find expression today. The spiritual impulses that motivated Ibn Battutah's travels persist in modern pilgrimages and heritage journeys, as the annual Hajj continues to inspire transformation, humility, and social cohesion among millions of pilgrims (Alzeer & Abuzinadah, 2024). His legacy resonates in UNESCO's mission to preserve sacred landscapes, as both the *Rihla* and contemporary heritage frameworks seek to safeguard memories and promote intercultural dialogue (UNESCO, 2019). The experiences of medieval travellers thus illuminate the continuity between past and present forms of sacred mobility. Within this broader continuum, Ibn Battutah's *Rihla* stands as a pioneering work in Islamic historiography, blending autobiography, geography, and ethnography. His methodology, combining firsthand observation with theological reflection, distinguishes him as both a traveller-scholar and a proto-ethnographer.

The *Rihlah* continues to inform contemporary discussions on religious tourism, cross-cultural understanding, and the human search for meaning through physical movement. The continuity of pilgrimage practices is notable, with Ibn Battuta's experiences corresponding to the psychosocial benefits identified in contemporary Hajj research (Alzeer & Abuzinadah, 2024). Parallels also exist between Ibn Battuta's accounts of flourishing trade and sacred cities and modern heritage-based economies, where religious destinations sustain both cultural and economic vitality. In conclusion, Ibn Battuta's *Rihlah* is a rich and complex text that offers insights into the cultural, economic, and spiritual practices of the medieval Islamic world. By examining his experiences and observations, we gain a deeper understanding of the significance of faith-based tourism and its lasting impact on local economies and cultural identities.

While the *Rihla* offers an unparalleled window into the medieval world, its value as a historical source requires careful navigation of its compositional complexities. As Dunn (2005) notes, the text is not a raw diary but a collaboratively reconstructed narrative, edited by the Andalusian scholar Ibn Juzayy years after Ibn Battutah's return. This collaborative process introduces layers of literary artifice, with Ibn Juzayy occasionally incorporating passages from earlier travellers, such as Ibn Jubayr, to enhance descriptions of certain holy sites.

Furthermore, scholarly debate continues regarding the geographical accuracy of certain itineraries, most notably Ibn Battutah's claimed travels to Bulghar and parts of China (Dunn, 2005). Critics highlight potential exaggerations or chronological inconsistencies as evidence that some sections may rely on hearsay rather than firsthand experience. However, for heritage analysis, these debates do not diminish the work's value. Even where the *Rihla* may lack literal cartographic precision, it remains an outstanding record of the "preservation impulse" and the mentalities of the 14th-century Mediterranean and Indian Ocean worlds. It captures the perception of universal value and the social frameworks, such as the *waqf* system, that sustained these sites, making it an indispensable, if stylistically complex, document of global heritage.

Accordingly, the *Rihla* should be approached not as a strictly empirical historical record, but as a layered narrative shaped by observation, memory, and the literary conventions of medieval Islamic scholarship. This interpretive approach allows the text to be understood both as a source of historical insight and as a reflection of the intellectual and cultural frameworks within which Ibn Battutah operated.

According to Harvey (2007), the presence of exaggerations or fabrications in Ibn Battutah's *Rihla* should not be regarded as modern "falsification" but rather as adherence to medieval literary tradition. Harvey argues that travellers such as Ibn Battutah and Marco Polo were meeting the specific expectations of their 14th-century readership, who anticipated accounts of "marvels" and wonders from distant lands. Consequently, modern readers often struggle to reconcile the text's factual accuracy with these supernatural elements, which were a standard feature of the era's travel genre rather than a personal attempt to deceive (Buckton-Tucker, R., 2018).

Beyond its architectural and institutional focus, the *Rihla* provides a fragmented yet essential record of female mobility. Ibn Battutah's accounts of the high-status Mongol Khatuns in the Golden Horde and the economic agency of women in the Maldives reveal a landscape where 'universal value' was not exclusively male. As Tolmacheva (1993) argues, these observations offer a rare glimpse into the social heritage of the 14th century,

documenting intangible cultural norms that modern heritage frameworks, such as UNESCO's 'Living Heritage' initiatives, now seek to protect.

## CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Ibn Battutah's *Rihla* remains one of the most significant contributions to Islamic historiography, reflecting the intricate interplay between faith, knowledge, and mobility that defined medieval Muslim civilisation. His detailed observations capture the spiritual vitality and cosmopolitan unity of the Islamic world, while demonstrating how travel served as a form of education, cultural exchange, and intellectual enrichment. By situating his experiences within broader patterns of sacred and scholarly mobility, this study reaffirms the enduring relevance of his legacy to contemporary understandings of global heritage and intercultural dialogue.

Ibn Battutah's life and writings further embody the enduring synthesis of faith, intellect, and exploration that characterises Islamic civilisation. His journeys demonstrate that travel can be a conduit for spiritual enrichment, intercultural connection, and the dissemination of knowledge. These principles also underpin contemporary religious and heritage tourism, where sacred travel fosters unity, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. By linking Ibn Battutah's fourteenth-century *Rihla* to twenty-first-century pilgrimage and heritage practices, this study affirms that the Muslim ethic of travel, seeking both divine and worldly understanding, remains a vital force shaping global tourism, scholarship, and human solidarity.

The *Rihla* thus endures as both a historical record and a moral compass, illuminating the timeless human quest for meaning through movement. Building on the present study's analysis of Ibn Battutah's ethnographic method, the spiritual epistemology of travel in Islam, and the conceptual continuity between medieval mobility and contemporary heritage frameworks, several targeted and analytically grounded directions for future research emerge:

1. **Comparative Medieval Hermeneutics:** Future research should conduct comparative analyses between the *Rihla* and the narratives of contemporaries such as Ibn Jubayr and Marco Polo. Employing a hermeneutic framework would identify divergent notions of sanctity and the historical contexts that shaped medieval worldviews on "universal value." Such a study would examine how different cultural perspectives, including Latin Christian and North African Maliki viewpoints, constructed the conceptual boundaries of heritage.
2. **Digital Heritage and Geospatial Pedagogy:** Investigators should evaluate digital heritage projects that employs GIS mapping technologies to visualise Battutah's routes. Future studies should assess the pedagogical potential of these platforms in educational settings to foster historical awareness through the spatial reconstruction of medieval travel corridors.
3. **Gender, inclusivity, and the "hidden" pilgrim:** Following the discussion of Mongol Khatuns, it is necessary to examine the experiences of underrepresented groups in both historical and modern Muslim travel. Future research should employ a feminist historiographical approach to bridge the gap between Ibn Battutah's 14th-century observations and contemporary religious tourism.
4. **Psychosocial Dynamics of the Sacred Journey:** Future studies should employ longitudinal sociological methods to examine the effects of pilgrimage on identity and well-being. This would offer a nuanced understanding of how sacred journeys influence personal transformation and community cohesion in a globalised context.
5. **Heritage-Based Tourism Impact:** Research should analyse the socio-economic influence of UNESCO designations on regions associated with Battutah, such as Timbuktu or Historic Cairo. Using impact assessment modelling, scholars can evaluate the role of UNESCO in promoting sustainable heritage management and local economic resilience.

Taken together, these directions reaffirm the enduring significance of Ibn Battutah's *Rihla* as both a historical narrative and a conceptual lens for understanding the evolving dynamics of religious and heritage-based tourism. By situating medieval travel within contemporary frameworks of heritage preservation, this study demonstrates that the impulse to seek meaning through movement, to document the sacred, and to sustain cultural memory is not confined to any single era but constitutes a continuous human endeavour. The *Rihla*, therefore, transcends its historical context, offering a living intellectual legacy that informs how mobility, identity, and heritage are

negotiated in an increasingly interconnected world. In this sense, religious and heritage-based tourism emerges as a timeless expression of humanity's search for connection, understanding, and transcendence.

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