

المصلى (الحرم) في الجامع الأموي - دمشق

View of the Prayer Hall of Umayyad Mosque - Damascus

Religious Tourism in Islamic Heritage

Ibn Jubayr – Writer, Historian, and Tourist

Today, secular tourism has become a major international asset and concern. Every country has a tourism ministry and a tourism high council. Every country counts each year the numbers of tourists, how much they spend and how many days and nights they stay in a particular place.

Today, tourism is the concern of every traveller who awaits the season in which he prefers to travel in search of rest, health and entertainment. Tourism is also the concern of the particular country that promotes it since it attempts to provide those things that attract tourists to its environs and which makes the tourist journey back there.

Those who are interested in secular tourism today aim at acquiring knowledge whereas the travellers of the past were often wanderers who faced many difficulties and returned to their own countries as instructors and writers.

The position of religious tourism in the past was different to that of today. However, governments then did not sponsor tourism - tourists themselves had to undertake financial responsibilities in addition to the difficulties and risks they took upon themselves.

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What do we mean by religious tourism?

Religious tourism is not one type of tourism, as is the case with secular tourism. It is of two types: tourism through which a religious duty is performed, and tourism by which knowledge is recorded and quoted for wider dissemination. Should the aim of this be to obtain the Blessings of God, it would achieve another objective - and that is to attract tourists. The aim is to introduce to tourists that country with which they are unfamiliar and which are, moreover, impossible to know about without the existence of religious tourism in the first place. Visitors would also be unable to know more about the people of a country should religious tourism not exist there.

This type of tourism would undoubtedly help to extend the prospects for intellectual investigation.

This, indeed, is Islam, which encouraged tourism for the faithful in the practise of life's affairs and to obtain experience and maturity. For instance, Muslims from Andalusia to China, India, Persia and Turkey to Indonesia have traversed the earth by the orders of God, both in search of work and to acquire knowledge. ➤

Thus, if religious tourism has such a great impact on the tourist, it will have a deeper impact on Muslim societies. Such tourists, who possess literary talents and instructive tendencies, have held their pens and papers to record the echoes of their observations and have described what they have seen. Books of literature, history and geography, which have never been written before by any historian and geographer, have emerged after them. However, some of them were not satisfied with reaching the Holy Land of Mecca only, but rather attempted to travel to other countries to see, record and publish [their experiences]. In this respect, Ibn Jubayr and what he has produced may be singled out in relation to religious tourism.

The first tourist excursion of Ibn Jubayr was on Thursday 8th Shawwal in 578 AH (3 February 1183 CE), a journey from Granada in Andalusia to the island of Tarif across the sea, and thence to the city of Sabtah. His ship sailed from Sabtah on 29 Shawwal (24 February) until it reached Alexandria on 29 Dhu'l qi'dah (26 March), which means that the journey took thirty days to complete.

We learn from the historical records of Ibn Jubayr how travellers were treated in those days. For instance, the Sultan's Trustees, as Ibn Jubayr called them, ordered all Muslim passengers on a ship to write down their names, descriptions and goods before disembarking. This recorded incident is only one of a huge number recorded by him. Ibn Jubayr then travelled to Ethab across the Red Sea to the city of Jeddah, and from there to Mecca. After performing the pilgrimage, he joined travellers to Iraq where he stayed thirteen days and visited Iraqi cities on his way to Baghdad. He left Baghdad from Mosul on 15 Safar 580 AH (1184 CE) to reach Aleppo and then Damascus in Syria. Here, we do not describe what he wrote on Iraq and Syria since most of what he wrote in regard to these two countries remain invaluable historical, geographical and social documents. Nevertheless, all these documents are of less when compared with what he recorded on his way from Damascus to the city of Akka, and then to Sur.

Muslim historians, who recorded the Crusades, only wrote about Islamic cities and what the European Crusaders did to these cities, including descriptions of massacres, destruction and expulsions wherein neither countryside nor village dweller was spared.

Such events were largely ignored by other historians, but Ibn Jubayr recorded these incidents as records of religious tourism by an original historian. He was also a skilful geographer whose works speak of nations, mountains and valleys.

By travelling from Damascus to Akka, and then to Sur at the beginning



إحدى مآذن الروضة الكاظمية في بغداد

One of the minarets at the Al-Rawdha al-Kadhimiya in Baghdad

of his journey, Ibn Jubayr crossed the mountain of Amil (Jebel Amil) from east to south, from the first Amili city of Hawnin in the east to the first Amili city of Sur in the west. During this journey, he has given us an adequate and comprehensive picture of all the places he visited. Many were eager to know about the situation of the al-Amiliyin during the European occupation as well as the condition of their mountain in that difficult period. Such information leads us to discover and learn of the more ambiguous facts of the time. What was hard to discern from the history books could be learnt from the records of Ibn Jubayr and his religious tourism.

Ibn Jubayr was in Jebel Amil in 580 AH the time that the Europeans occupied the mountain. We are unaware of what happened to the Amili villages and troops at that time: were they built or destroyed? Did their people stay there or desert them? Ibn Jubayr answered these questions by describing his crossing the Jebel Amil thus: "... joined villages and organised estates ..", in which he refers to the people living in the villages and estates as, "... all Muslims".

This has further led us to ask how the people of Beirut, Sidon and Sur reluctantly departed their villages while the people of the mountain of Amil stayed safely?

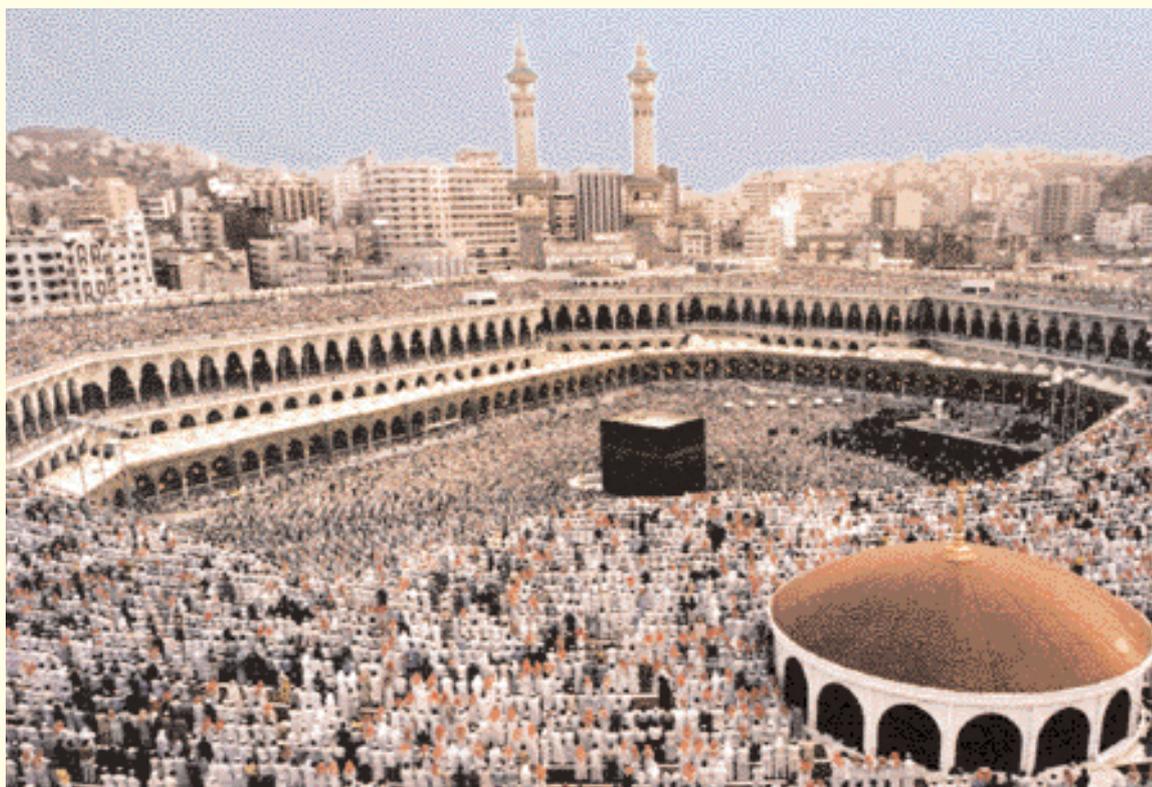
Ibn Jubayr answers our question when he talks about those

Muslims: "They paid half of the revenue and poll tax equivalent to one dinar and five small pieces of gold to the Europeans as well as [a] low tax on fruits only ..". This text, and the one previous to it, were the best texts to be written on the condition of villagers throughout the European occupation.

The situation can be concluded from the texts of the journey as follows: The European troops with their horses and men entered the cities killing and looting some of them, as it happened, in Tripoli and Beirut, banishing their people and imposing high taxes as in Sidon and Sur. The cities that refused to surrender and which continued to resist were taken over by the victorious Europeans who set about killing and looting. The cities that negotiated a conditional surrender were subjected to imposed conditions, such as exodus.

After exodus and killing, the Europeans displaced the Arabs. The cities, with their peoples, were transformed to emulate European cities and few people stayed around in many of them. Those who did had no impact whatsoever on the life of those cities.

Among the Europeans who entered these cities were rulers and others who were fighting soldiers. It was, therefore, natural that a business class appeared to secure the needs of cities and manage and ➤



الحرم المكي الشريف
The Great Mosque in Makkah

control their economies.

However, whereas Europeans could be rulers, soldiers, commercial and industrial men, it was questionable whether they were able to be farmers. This seemed impossible since those farmers who had accompanied the crusade campaign had fled away because they had undergone oppression and slavery in their countries. So, when they were asked to take over farming the land, they refused for fear of coming back to face the same destiny. Thus, the crusader leaders appealed to adopt the solution mentioned by Ibn Jubayr - they asked the native people to stay on in their lands with the same conditions as mentioned elsewhere by Ibn Jubayr. This situation, which was imminent, preserved the existence of villagers as well as their beliefs and freedoms. The Europeans' compulsion of not infuriating the farmers and making them cling to their land was the only factor that made Ibn Jubayr note that the villages and buildings were all inhabited by Muslims. This was not only the case of the mountain of Amil, but the entire countryside that was occupied by the Europeans. Ibn Jubayr states: "All the shore of al-Sham was in the hands of Europeans, whereas all villages and countryside was [made up of] of Muslims".

There is another type of religious tourism, which is to meet with scientists and talk to them. The study of *Ahadiths* (the sayings and traditions of the Holy Prophet) and teaching it were principle tasks for of Muslims. When we look at *The History of Baghdad* by al-Khatib al-Baghdadi, and *The History of Damascus* by Ibn Asakir, we find that their main contents are about *Hadith and Muhaddithin*.

During the first Islamic centuries, the main focus was on hearing Hadith orally from a person, who in turn heard Hadith orally as related to ascription, without which Hadith is not narrative. This has led to a unique type of Islamic tourism which was referred to as the journey for seeking knowledge.

Ali bin Hibattullah, known as Ibn Asakir (499-571 AH / 1105-1176 CE), the Damascene historian and narrator, travelled from Damascus looking for Hadith. He had two journeys that can be described as religious tourism: one to Baghdad in 521 AH and another to Khurasan in 529 AH

through Azerbaijan, passing by Khoy, Tabriz, Marand, Zanjan, Abher and Khurasan where he heard from *shaykhs* and others.

Ibn Asakir is regarded as an example of religious tourism. When we want to describe such journeys as religious because their objective was religious, the journeys of Ibn Asakir should surpass this description. Ibn Asakir said in one of his poems, while talking about his own religious tourism:

*I travelled seeking for guidance,
two journeys across lands and places.*

*I travelled to more than one city,
from Esfahan to the borders of al-Ta'if.*

*Most of the eastern cities I saw,
Sham and Iraq all I know.*

*I collected every valuable in my journeys,
I met friends and enemies.*

*I heard Ahmed's tradition,
After spending the old and new at every station.*

*With loyalty and honesty I narrated,
with decency the ignorant I rejected.
I chose a time without heretics,
Followed by both the past and the present.*

He highlights exclusively religious tourism in his verses. Such tourism gets the tourist used to travelling to countries afar and undergoing hardships in order to collect valuable narrated traditions of the Holy Prophet along the way. We have mentioned here only a brief profile on religious tourism. However, one can learn more about this type of tourism should one like to obtain more information. ■