

THE TRAVELS OF
IBN JUBAYR

A MEDIEVAL JOURNEY FROM
CORDOBA TO JERUSALEM



TRANSLATED BY
RONALD BROADHURST

INTRODUCTION BY ROBERT IRWIN

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A Medieval Journey from Cordoba to Jerusalem

Translated from the original Arabic by R. J. C. Broadhurst

With an Introduction by Robert Irwin

I.B. TAURIS

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To
SIR JOHN TRESIDER SHEPPARD, PROVOST,
and to the Fellows
of King's College, Cambridge,
in gratitude and esteem

Preface

THE undertaking of this work was prompted by Mr. Arthur Hibbert, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge, whose interests, ranging far beyond the confines of his field of mediæval studies, first led me to the study of Ibn Jubayr, and whose enthusiasm encouraged me to attempt this translation. But this is only one of my many debts to that College and to its Provost, Sir John Sheppard, without whose broad and enlightened sympathies I should never have shared of its privileges. I am honoured that he and the Fellows should condescend to accept the dedication of this book.

To Professor A. J. Arberry, the Sir Thomas Adams's Professor of Arabic at the University of Cambridge, I owe the deepest gratitude, not only for teaching me most of what I know of Oriental scholarship, but for guidance and help in this particular work. In the midst of his monumental labours he was always ready, indeed eager, to give me of his massive erudition. I must also record my indebtedness to Professor A. W. Lawrence of Cambridge University and Professor H. A. R. Gibb of Oxford University for valuable advice and encouragement, and my thanks to Mr. A. J. Scholfield, Mr. J. Pearson, and Mr. S. Naish of the Cambridge University Library, to Mr. S. C. Sutton of the India Office Library, and to Dr. J. Leveen of the British Museum, for the liberal library facilities and personal help they gave me. Mr. A. S. Nashar of Alexandria University allowed me to draw on his ever surprising familiarity with the literature and history of the Arabs, and Mr. Muhammad Salim of Nablus, Palestine, and Mr. Robert Serjeant of London University illumined many obscurities. Mr. Steven Runciman brought his learning to a reading of my notes on Crusader Syria and saved me from serious error. To my wife I owe the undisturbed ease and abstraction I needed for my task. And I would be failing in

gratitude if I did not attest my obligation to my publisher, Mr. Jonathan Cape, whose interest in things Arabian, extending from the works of Doughty and Lawrence to that of King Abdulla, has now embraced my humbler contribution.

As for the Arabs themselves, who have given me the keenest pleasures and interests of my life, I can only hope that I have helped to unveil some portion of their long and fabulous history.

R. J. C. BROADHURST.

BELVEDERE,
BALLYAUGHLIS,
CO. DOWN,
NORTHERN IRELAND.

December, 1951.

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Introduction

ONE day in the year A.D. 1182, the Moorish Governor of Granada, then the wealthiest and most splendid city of Spain, summoned his secretary to discharge some business. The incumbent of this post was Abu 'l-Husayn Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Jubayr, who, born in 1145 to a good family in Valencia,* had by his learning and character attained this office of trust. On arrival before his master, he had been offered a cup of wine, but the continent clerk, a sincere Muslim who emulated the temperance of his prophet, had pleaded that never before had his lips touched strong drink. The unregenerate prince, wishful of repairing this strange neglect, and with tones and gestures that allowed of no dispute, had thereupon cried: '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. Yet no sooner had he done so than the prince was seized with sudden pity, and in remorse had seven times filled the cup with golden dinars and poured them into the bosom of his servant's gown.

The good man, who long had cherished the wish to discharge the duty of the pilgrimage to Mecca, at once determined to expiate his godless act by devoting the money to this end. So, seeking and obtaining his master's leave, he took up the pilgrim staff and, on the 3rd of February, 1183, accompanied by Abu Ja'far Ahmad ibn Hassan, a physician of Granada,

* He was descended from 'Abd al-Salam ibn Jubayr who, coming from the tribe of Kinanah near Mecca, had entered Spain with the army sent in A.D. 740 by the Caliph of Damascus under the general Balj ibn Bishr al-Qushayri to quell the Berber insurrection in his Spanish provinces. At the time of our diarist, the Berber dynasty of the Almohades had established themselves as the independent rulers of Muslim Spain, and it was one of their princes, Abu Sa'id 'Uthman ibn 'Abd al-Mu'min, who was his master and the Governor of Granada.

departed on his way. And in this chronicle, which he recorded daily, or at least frequently and while his impressions were still fresh, we may read of the strange events and places, and the notable people and customs, that he observed upon the mediæval eastern scene before, on the 25th of April, 1185, he returned to his native Spain.

Embarking on a Genoese ship, he came to Egypt where, recounting his impressions of the ancient wonders that are but now unfolding their meaning, he pondered the splendid edifices and the salutary reforms prescribed by the munificence and the piety of Saladin, the rising champion of the East. He ascended the Nile, and describes the great temples of the Pharaohs now in ruin, at which 'the beholder might conceive that all time spent on their adornment would be too short'. From the Nile he journeyed in a camel caravan to the Red Sea, there to embark in a fragile craft for the Hejaz and, being delivered from the perils both of the waterless desert and a reef-set sea, arrive at the Holy Cities of Arabia. With precise and reverent detail he describes the Great Mosque of Mecca and its holy of holies, the Ka'bah, and then unfolds the unchanging pilgrim rites that, then and to-day, Muslims from all quarters of the earth must seek, if they have the means, at least once in a life-time to discharge.

The pilgrim then moved north to visit the tomb of the prophet Muhammad in Medina, which done, he turned eastward and, joining the long and motley caravan of pilgrims returning to Iraq and Turkestan, the sister of the caravan from Damascus described to us in the deathless pages of Doughty, he portrays its slow and ordered march across the deserts of Arabia to Baghdad, the City of the Caliphs, where lingered still the glories of Harun al-Rashid. He sees the reigning caliph, Nasir, 'the lustre of whose reign consists only in pages and negro eunuchs' and who, seeking to throw off the yoke of the fierce and illiberal Turk, once mercenaries and now masters, most foolishly invoked the aid of Jengis Khan; for the heathen hordes of Tartary, riding fleet horses and drawing strange bows,

were soon to extinguish his dynasty, massacre the citizens, and, breaking the splendid irrigatory canals our traveller admires, reduce a fruitful countryside to a horrid waste.

The armed company of some Turkish princesses gave him protection for his passage along the Euphrates and through such ancient cities as Mosul and Nineveh until, coming to northern Syria, he descended through Aleppo to Damascus. This jewel of the East he depicts as it was a hundred years before the invasion of the Mongols, and the Great or Umayyad Mosque that is still to-day one of its glories he describes as it was before the pillage of Timurlane.

Weary now for home, our pilgrim set forth for Acre in the Crusader kingdom of Jerusalem that he might there take ship to Spain. And here we come upon the strange anomaly of those days. At a time when the kingdom is at war with the Muslims and when our diarist has even witnessed, as he left Damascus, the triumphant return of the army of Saladin, laden with booty and leading many Christian prisoners, he yet can journey to this Christian stronghold in a caravan of Muslim merchants.

This Latin kingdom, founded some eighty years before by the warriors of the First Crusade, had endured only because it was united amidst the discord and dissension of the Saracens. To the north, the contending Arab princes and Seljuk dynasts, being orthodox Sunni Muslims, acknowledged as Commander of the Faithful the elected Caliph of Baghdad. But to the south, Egypt and its large provinces was ruled by the Fatimids, who as Shi'ites believed the caliphate to be a God-given office inherent in their family as descendants of 'Ali, the husband of the prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatimah, from whom they took their name.

It was the role and achievement of Saladin to unite Islam. As lieutenant of the Seljuk prince Nur al-Din ibn Zengi, who had combined the Muslim states of Syria, he had gone south and removed the heretic caliph of Egypt. On the death of Nur al-Din he had taken his suzerain's possessions; and from the Caliph of Baghdad he had condescended to ask, and the puppet

Caliph had been flattered to grant, a patent of rule for Egypt and Syria and their dependent provinces. The eastern Muslim world was now one; the Frankish kingdom was enveloped, and its death-knell had sounded.

If the opponents of the Cross were at last united, all within the Christian realm was anarchy and alarm. King Baldwin IV was a dying leper, and as with the Greek princes before Troy, there was treachery and strife among the chiefs. Into their midst the pilgrim was allowed to ride without let or hap; and from the critical viewpoint of a scholarly Muslim we may observe afresh the customs and manners of the champions of the Cross.

At Acre he embarked with fifty other Muslims on a Genoese ship sailing west with two thousand Christian pilgrims from Jerusalem, and after much tribulation and peril on the sea was shipwrecked upon the shores of Sicily. And here he must have perished but for the timely arrival of the island's ruler, King William II, fourth of a line of brilliant pirates, the famous house of Hauteville which, driven by the old Norse wanderlust from their father's petty seignury in Normandy, had won a kingdom under a blue sky.

From the Arabs they had taken Sicily, and the author records with pride the persisting art of the Arab craftsmen and husbandmen. High officers of the court, highly favoured ladies, and privileged eunuchs discovered to him their secret cleaving to the faith of Islam; and he studied the court, cities, and customs of this fabulous kingdom, where, without laying aside their dauntless valour and virile energy, the Normans, with their quick brilliance, love of magnificence, and receptive genius for acquiring what was polished and polite of the civilisations their long lances had subdued, took all, and more than all, the Eastern refinements that they found and brought to a full fruition a glorious blend of Arab-Norman art and culture. 'Amongst the orange groves of Palermo the descendant of the Vikings sat upon his throne, robed in the dalmatic of the apostolic legate and the imperial costume of Byzantium, his ministers

part Greek, part English, his army composed as to half of Moors, his fleet officered by Greeks, himself a Latin Christian, but, in that balmy climate of the south, ruling in half-Byzantine, half-oriental state, with a harem and eunuchs.* At Sicily our traveller took ship for home, whither he came without further mishap, and with a heart full of gratitude for the beneficence of Almighty God.

Throughout his journey indeed, he walked with God, and his constant supplications to his Maker when in distress and danger, and his just and ready praise and thanks for His mercies and blessings, keep us ever mindful that he is a man of piety in a community that is above all a religious community. For to its faith, Islam (Arabic, 'Submission' to the will of God), it owed its beginning and existence, its laws, social system, and code of values; and to Islam it owed its common language, Arabic, the language of the Koran. In this, the sacred scripture of Islam, communicated as Muslims believe by the Creator to His prophet Muhammad, the power, unity, and goodness of God are pronounced. Five duties are laid on all believers: (i) the profession of faith, 'There is no God but God'; (ii) the performance of divine worship five times a day; (iii) the fast between sunset and sunrise throughout the month of Ramadan; (iv) the payment of legal alms; and (v) the pilgrimage to Mecca, birthplace of Muhammad and the holy city of Islam. And all these duties we watch our pilgrim discharge.

To all his story, with its abundance of detail and interest, he brings a perspicacity and soundness of judgement, a precision and vividness of descriptive power (as in his picture of mediæval sea-travel and the terrors of shipwreck), that may, perhaps, be expected in a scholar and writer of his repute; but in his balanced comments on Crusader Syria and Norman Sicily, despite the perfunctory malisons that by convention he must pronounce upon the Christian enemy, I can discern a moderation most rare in that fanatic age. And his portraits of these Christian outposts, otherwise mostly known to us from strongly

* H. A. L. Fisher, *A History of Europe*, p. 190.

biased Western and clerical sources, are for this reason most revealing and instructive.

We may further judge his merit and integrity by the comments of the historian Lisan al-Din ibn al-Khatib (A.D. 1313-74), who, in his *Kitab al-Ihatah fi akhbar Ghranata* ['Story of Granada'] describes him as a man 'clear in doctrine, and an illustrious poet distinguished above all others, sound in reason, generous-spirited, and of noble character and exemplary conduct. He was a man of remarkable goodness, and his piety confirms the truth of his works. . . . His correspondence with contemporary scholars reveals his merits and excellence, his superiority in poetry, his originality in rhymed prose, and his ease and elegance in free prose. His reputation was immense, his good deeds many, and his fame widespread; and the incomparable story of his journey is everywhere related. God's mercy upon him.'

The high literary reputation that Ibn Jubayr achieved among the Arabs was partly due to his poetical works, two of the best of those preserved being one composed on his first approach to Medina, and another addressed to Saladin concerning the vexatious imposts levied on pilgrims to Mecca on landing in Egypt, but in the main it was based on this chronicle which he published soon after his return to Spain.

The style of this chronicle, as indicated by Lisan al-Din, is, for the most, of an easy and elegant free prose to which the Arabic tongue so happily lends itself. For the benefit of scholars, historians, and students of Arabic it has been my purpose to give as literal a translation as possible, abiding faithfully by the words, arrangement, and even imagery of the author. But it is beyond the resources of our tongue to reproduce the enchanting rhythm of the frequent pieces of rhymed prose, the play upon words, assonances, and paronomasia of the Arabic, and here the translator must fail his author and, to his keen regret, his readers.

The text I have used is that edited by W. Wright in 1852 and revised by M. J. de Goeje in 1907, from a manuscript preserved in the University of Leyden. The emendations of these

scholars, and their fillings of lacunae in the text by relevant extracts and quotations from other Arab authors, I have accepted almost in toto but have not indicated in my notes, since they are not wanted by the general reader and to scholars are accessible in Wright's edition, where also will be found, in the Preface, details concerning the MS. and the method by which it was edited. By a happy chance, a reprint of this edition, for some time unobtainable, has just been published by the Gibb Memorial Trust, and it is my hope that not only will the advanced student of Arabic find the study of my rendering a profitable and rewarding exercise, but that the beginner will be spurred by it to still greater efforts to read the author in his native tongue.

The excellent, so far as I can judge, Italian translation by Schiaparelli has saved me much drudgery of research for geographical, chronological, and other equivalents, and his notes, which I everywhere acknowledge, I have found most useful. And if, when checking with it those forward passages that had caused me much turning of lexicons, I sometimes found him nodding, I also often found therein a pleasant confirmation and, I gratefully confess, at times a guiding beam. This tribute I cannot extend to the Frenchman M. Amari's work (*Journal asiatique*, 1845-6), where, dealing only with the Sicilian journey, he yet is all too often errant. The few sentences translated by Burton for relevant passages in his *Pilgrimage to al-Madinah and Meccah* I found to be uniformly inexact.

The notes, I fear, are copious and sometimes long, and this is due to the need for providing both such annotations of a technical character that scholars will require and those directed to the polite layman; for it is my hope that this work, apart from academic value, will be some contribution towards the quickening and development of the already growing interest and sympathy of my countrymen in the resurgent Arab and Islamic world.

In transliteration I have followed the orthodox system, save that printers' difficulties have dictated the dropping of

diacritical points and macrons, and that with some well-known names I have adopted a latitudinarian practice. My short explanatory or corrective comments in the body of the text are placed between rectangular brackets. Parenthesis signs are used to denote those words which, although not specifically mentioned by the author, are nevertheless needed to complete the meaning, or to secure the balance or euphony that otherwise would be wanting in an English sentence. Where there are lacunae in the text, and the missing words have not been supplied from other Arab writers, a row of asterisks implies the omission. Dashes are employed to isolate the many pious ejaculations which might tire some readers, but whose exclusion would not only destroy my aim of faithfully rendering each word the traveller has recorded, but would also, to my thinking, rob the book of some of its special ethos. A glossary explains the Arabic or technical words that, in the translation, are usually indicated in italics.

Nothing now remains but to make an end and come to my account with all my imperfections on my head. For I cannot but be sensible that, despite my pains and labour, since industry must supply the want of parts, my work is full of infelicities and shortcomings. To try to render with exactness the spirit, style, and import of this Moor, and yet retain the freshness of original composition, has stretched me to the full. And if I cannot dissemble my satisfaction at ending my task, neither can I conceal my sadness in parting from a gentle companion with whom, from the rustic seclusion of an Irish study, I have travelled again under Eastern skies and listened once more to the voices of Arabs in prayer and disputation.

And so I stand aside and, begging you piece out our imperfections with your thoughts, commend him to your hearing.

Introduction to this Edition

by **Robert Irwin**

Ibn Jubayr, the passionate pilgrim

To the world when it was half a thousand years younger, the outlines of all things seemed more clearly marked than to us. The contrast between suffering and joy, between adversity and happiness, appeared more striking. All experience had yet to the minds of men the directness and absoluteness of the pleasure and pain of child life.

– Jan Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*

In the last decades of the twelfth century, that ‘dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea’, the Mediterranean and its hinterland was one vast war zone. In the east Saladin, the Kurdish Sultan of Egypt and Damascus had taken Aleppo from its Zengid princeling, ‘Imad al-Din, in 1183 and, although Saladin had mostly warred against his Muslim rivals and neighbours in the first part of his career, from the 1180s onwards he increasingly turned his hostile attention to the Crusader states and launched raids against the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the County of Tripoli. Though Saladin hardly needed a provocation to sustain and extend those attacks, he was nevertheless provoked in the autumn of 1182 by Reynald of Chatillon’s daring Red Sea raid, which attacked commercial and pilgrim shipping and which seemed to threaten the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina, though the piratical fleet was soon sunk and its crews executed or enslaved. In 1183 Saladin’s invasion of Galilee resulted in a standoff with the army of the Kingdom of Jerusalem at Sefhoria, before he took his troops south to besiege Reynald’s fortress of Kerak of Moab. His siege

and a second attempt in 1184 both failed. Though Saladin was always careful to acknowledge the suzerainty of al-Nasir, the 'Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad, Muslims in the east now preferred to look to Saladin as leader of jihad against the Frankish presence in Syria. About a year later Saladin and his nephew, Taqi al-Din, seem to have plotted to attack the Almohad Caliphate in North Africa, though nothing came of this.

And there was turbulence also in Constantinople. The child Alexius II had acceded to the imperial throne in 1180, but in 1182 his cousin, the bold and dashing Andronicus Comnenus, deposed him. Andronicus was known to be hostile to the former emperor Manuel I's policy of favouring both the Crusader states and the Italian merchant republics and, even before Andronicus had arrived in Constantinople, a massacre of the Italians and other Westerners in the city had taken place. Thereupon the Norman king, William II, began preparations for a revenge attack on the Byzantine Empire. The landing of the Sicilian army in Epirus in August 1185 would precipitate the downfall of Andronicus, who was tortured and torn to pieces by his former subjects.

In the west, Abu Ya'qub Yusuf (r. 1163–84), the Almohad caliph and ruler of Morocco and southern Spain, led an army of jihad out from Seville and advanced against the Portuguese in Santarem and came close to capturing it in early assaults before withdrawing. A few days later he was dead, and it was left to his son and successor, Ya'qub al-Mansur (r. 1184–99), to continue the war against the Portuguese. The Almohads also had to defend the eastern edge of their territory in North Africa from hostile Arab and Berber tribes.

But total war had yet to be invented and, despite the political and military turbulence of the 1180s, in 1183 the Spanish Muslim pilgrim, Ibn Jubayr, travelled to Alexandria on a Genoese ship. Then, after completing his pilgrimage to Mecca and visiting Baghdad and Damascus, he crossed into the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem and travelled on to Acre, where he again chose a Genoese ship for his homeward journey. Despite the fighting between Saladin's armies and those of the Crusader Kingdom, there was not much of a frontier between Muslim and Christian territory. When

Ibn Jubayr entered the Crusader Kingdom, Saladin was engaged in besieging Kerak.

and yet Muslim and Christian travellers will come and go between them without interference ... still the caravans passed successively from Egypt to Damascus, going through the lands of the Franks without impediment from them. In the same way the Muslims continuously journeyed from Damascus to Acre (through Frankish territory), and likewise not one of the Christian merchants was stopped or hindered (in Muslim territories) ... 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 ... The state of these countries is more astonishing than our story can convey.¹

Ibn Jubayr was born in 1145 in Valencia in what was then Muslim Spain. He set out on the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, in 1183. It was related shortly before, while he was a senior administrator in the service of the Almohad governor of Granada, that the governor pressed a goblet of wine upon him and, when Ibn Jubayr tried to refuse, he was forced by the governor to drink *seven* goblets of wine. On seeing Ibn Jubayr's religiously inspired anguish, the governor repented, however, and presented him with seven goblets of gold. But Ibn Jubayr then resigned from his service and resolved to go on a penitential pilgrimage. It is a good story and, like so many good stories, it may not actually be true. Ibn Jubayr himself makes no reference to such a shameful episode or to any resolve of his to undertake a penitential pilgrimage. The chain of transmission for the story is weak. Al-Maqqari, a seventeenth-century North African biographer and chronicler, took it from Ibn al-Khatib, a fourteenth-century Andalusian vizier and polygraph, who in turn took it from a certain Ibn Raqiq. Moreover, there are relatively few accounts of Muslims making penitential *hajjs*. It is also puzzling that Ibn Jubayr

1 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 300–1.

should have left Spain in such haste that once he arrived in Mecca he had to wait there for eight months before the pilgrimage rituals commenced in the month of Dhu'l-Hijja. (It is a mystery how he spent his days during this long wait.)

The *hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam, together with faith, prayer, alms-giving and fasting. Every adult Muslim is obliged to perform the *hajj* at least once in the course of his or her life, so long as it is possible to do so. Poverty or danger have been the most common reasons for not performing the *hajj*. In this period the long journey from Andalusia and the Maghreb had become hazardous and, moreover, many pilgrims from the west brought back reports of being badly treated by the Egyptian, Syrian or Meccan authorities. As a consequence, some jurists in the western Islamic lands had decreed that in the current state of things the *hajj* was not compulsory for Andalusians or North Africans.

Some individuals chose to go on the *hajj* for reasons that were not purely religious: a lot of trade was conducted in Mecca during the pilgrimage season. Also, undertaking the *hajj* sometimes served as a pious pretext for a minister or senior official to resign his office and so escape from service to a ruler who had become either onerous or dangerous (and it is possible that this was so in Ibn Jubayr's case). More commonly, Muslim scholars – particularly North African and Andalusian scholars – travelled to the eastern Islamic lands in quest of knowledge (*talab al-'ilm*). In particular they sought *hadiths*: sayings and deeds of the Prophet and his Companions, which might serve as a guide to points of religious law and a guide to pious living. Since there was a prejudice against the written transmission of knowledge, scholars sought to accumulate *hadiths* through oral transmission. *Hadiths* came with long *isnads* (chains of authorities on which the *hadiths* were based): 'I was told by so-and-so, who had it from such a name, that he heard from ...' and so on. Collectors of *hadiths* might travel great distances to sit at the feet of a reliable transmitter and, since it was desirable to have as few transmitters as possible in the chain running down from the Prophet, the older the transmitter the better. Ibn Battuta's account of his globe-trotting travels in the fourteenth century devoted many pages to the *hadith* scholars he had

studied with in Damascus and the consequent diplomas (*ijazas*) that entitled him to transmit what he had learnt.

After his first pilgrimage Ibn Jubayr seems not to have returned to administration in Spain. He undertook two further pilgrimages, which he did not trouble to chronicle, after which he ended up as a teacher of Sufism and *hadiths* in Alexandria. (In the course of his *hajj* Ibn Jubayr noted that many Muslims from north-west Africa had settled in Alexandria.) It would be plausible, then, to suppose that, besides the primary aim of fulfilling one of the five canonical Muslim duties, Ibn Jubayr on his first pilgrimage might have nourished the subsidiary ambition of sitting at the feet of aged and learned transmitters of *hadiths* in the east, which is where the top scholars in religious studies were known to be. Yet this seems not to have been the case and (or at least), if he spent time in Mecca, Medina, Baghdad and Damascus in the somewhat dry study of centuries-old traditions about the Prophet, he kept quiet about it.

His passion was for something else. Indeed, his passion was for holy passion. There is a premonitory hint of it in his account of one of the sermons he attended in Medina, after leaving Mecca. This was delivered by a learned scholar of religious law, Sadr al-Din of Isfahan. As they listened to him, ‘men’s spirits were carried away in contrition and emotion’. At the end of the sermon,

people threw off their turbans and stretched forth their arms to the tomb of the Prophet – may God bless and preserve him – praying for this man, weeping and imploring. I never saw a night of more tears and contrition than this.²

Ibn Jubayr reported that Sadr al-Din was the greatest man that he encountered in his eastern travels.

Months later, in Baghdad, his narrative, so often dryly descriptive and enumerative, catches fire once more. A large part of the city was fly-blown and in ruins and most of its citizens were horrible, but it was in Baghdad that Ibn Jubayr met some truly remarkable teachers

2 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 208–9.

and preachers. One such, Shaykh Radi al-Din al-Qazwini, gave a lecture on the Qur'an, *hadiths* and the religious sciences:

His disquisition was learned and homiletic, grave, quiet and persuasive, revealing God's blessing and his calmness of soul; and the souls of the humble did not grudge the flowing of tears, especially at the end of the convocation when his exhortations dissolved them in contrition and weeping, and caused the repentant to rush into his arms. How many were the forelocks he cut!³ [For a man to allow his forelock to be cut off was a sign of repentance.]

This was soon followed by the sermon of Jamal al-Din Abu'l-Fada'il ibn 'Ali al-Jawzi, at the end of which the

penitent raised loud their voices and fell upon him like moths on a lamp. Each one offered him his forelock, and this he cut, and, touching each man's head, he prayed for him. Some fainted and he raised them to him in his arms. We witnessed an awesome spectacle which filled the soul with repentance and contrition, reminding it of the dreads of the Day of Resurrection.⁴

There was a similar response to another of his sermons:

Eyes poured forth their tears, and souls revealed their secret longings. Men threw themselves upon him, confessing their sins and showing their penitence. Hearts and minds were enravished, and there was great commotion. The senses lost their understanding and discernment, and there was no way to restraint.⁵

Ibn Jubayr went to yet a third performance of this man:

We witnessed one notable example of his powers: through his exhortations the souls of those present rose as clouds, and from their tears there poured a heavy shower of rain. Then at the end of his meeting, he delivered some erotic

3 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 228–9.

4 Ibn Jubayr, p. 231.

5 Ibn Jubayr, p. 232.

verses, ardently mystical and emotional. At last weakness overcame him and he sprang from the pulpit, sad and distressed, but leaving all repenting and sadly crying, 'Alas, what a pity!' The weepers moved round him like a millstone, wailing and all still unrestored from their intoxication.⁶

Ibn Jubayr was enchanted by the rhetoric of the scholars of Baghdad. He had encountered nothing like it in the Hejaz or in the western Islamic lands.

In medieval Islamic culture eloquence was esteemed as 'licit magic' (*sibr halal*), something capable of producing magical effects. (Ibn Jubayr actually uses the phrase 'licit magic' when evoking the eloquence of a preacher from Khorasan.⁷) One of the legally permissible effects of this rhetorical magic was to cause the listener to briefly lose his senses. *Tarab* means 'lively emotion', 'excitement' or 'agitation of heart or mind by joy or grief resulting in loss of self-control'; *istataraba* means 'he sought lively emotion'. The tenth-century man of letters and musicologist Abu al-Faraj al-Isfahani compiled the *Kitab al-Aghani* (Book of Songs), a compendious text which not only gave the lyrics of songs performed at the court of Harun al-Rashid but also gave the context of their composition, performance and reception. Often that reception resulted in the tearing of robes, slapping of cheeks, weeping and fainting – all of them manifestations of *tarab*.

It seems possible that it was during his pilgrimage that Ibn Jubayr was converted to Sufism. The *khanqas* (Sufi monasteries) that he encountered in Damascus made a great impression on him. The Sufis

follow a noble path, and their social conduct is admirable. The style of their ritual in worship is remarkable, and excellent is their custom of assembling to listen to impassioned music. In these ecstasied and abstracted states the world forsakes them, such is their rapture and transport. In a word, all their affairs are wonderful, and they hope for a future life of bliss and felicity.⁸

6 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 233–4.

7 Ibn Jubayr, p. 186.

8 Ibn Jubayr, p. 297.

He had been similarly impressed by an ascetic Sufi whom he encountered in the vicinity of Harran.⁹

Ibn Jubayr was an aesthete and he also had a passion – though a more muted one – for architecture. This comes over most strongly in his description of the Great Mosque of Damascus. Having first announced that there would be no point in describing it, he then goes on to describe it in great detail: its dimensions, pillars, naves, dome, cupolas, courtyard, minarets, basins, mosaics, gateway, portals, clepsydra, *mibrabs* (prayer niches) and *maqsuras* (enclosures reserved for the politically prominent), and attached shops. His descriptions of other mosques are similarly meticulous, though less rhapsodic. He possessed a surprisingly large vocabulary of architectural terms. But his appreciation of architecture was not restricted to Muslim religious buildings. He marvelled at the pharaonic temple of Ikhmim in Upper Egypt and described its architecture and decoration before concluding that ‘this temple has a sublime grandeur, and its sight is one of the wonders of the world, beyond description or defining ... God embraces all knowledge of it and knows its meaning.’¹⁰ He found another architectural marvel in Palermo. This was the Church of the Antiochian (also known as La Martorana), which he judged to be ‘beyond dispute the most wonderful edifice in the world’.¹¹ On the other hand, this aesthete judged that Harran was a town ‘with no beauty about it’.¹²

Apart from architecture, he also had an eye for the women, particularly Christian women. He looked on a Christian wedding that was taking place in the Crusader port of Tyre and was particularly taken with the bride and her beautiful dress: ‘We were thus given the chance of seeing this alluring sight, from the seducement of which God preserve us.’¹³ Again in Palermo, where even the Christian

9 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 254–5.

10 Ibn Jubayr, p. 55.

11 Ibn Jubayr, p. 349.

12 Ibn Jubayr, p. 254.

13 Ibn Jubayr, p. 321.

women followed the practice of veiling but also wore robes of gold-embroidered silks: 'We invoke God's protection for this description which enters the gates of absurdity and leads to the vanities of indulgence, and seek protection also from the bewitchment that leads to dotage.'¹⁴

Ibn Jubayr also had an eye for the beauties of landscape, which he described very well. The Qur'an instructs believers to admire the world that Allah has created for them. To marvel at God's creation was, then, a pious act. Whole cosmographies devoted to marvels were compiled by the Muslims. If an artefact was perceived of as being beautiful the common response was not '*jamil!*' (beautiful) but '*ajib!*' (amazing). Sinbad, in the course of his seven legendary voyages, encountered many marvels, some of which were monsters; but it was not only the monsters that were marvellous in Sinbad's eyes but also the trees and plants, and the amazing natural wealth of the islands and littorals of the Indian Ocean. Similarly, the non-fictional *rihla*, or travel genre, commonly encompassed accounts of the marvels of the natural world, the monuments of antiquity, and the supernatural. The temple at Ikhmim was a marvel. So were the statues of crocodiles at Gizeh, which kept the Nile free of real crocodiles for three miles in either direction. The Great Mosque of Damascus was miraculously free of spiders and sparrows. Bitumen, encountered in Iraq, was something to marvel over: 'God indeed creates what he wishes.'

To return to Ibn Jubayr's accounts of architecture, he is somewhat obsessive in his registering the dimensions of everything and counting all various features of the buildings through which he paced. For example,

The length of the Mosque of the Prophet [in Medina] – may God bless and preserve him – is three hundred cubits, and the breadth two hundred. The number of its columns is three hundred and its minarets three. Its area is twenty-four Maghribi *maraja'*, which is fifty square cubits.¹⁵

14 Ibn Jubayr, p. 350.

15 Ibn Jubayr, p. 100.

Similar details follow about the mosque of Jerusalem. He was equally assiduous in logging the days and months of his travelling, as well as the distances he covered by land and sea. So, then, who was Ibn Jubayr writing for? Was his book aimed at those of his compatriots who would undertake the *hajj* on some future date? Or for those who would never go on the *hajj*? Though this is an obvious question to ask, it is impossible to be certain of the answer. However, the meticulous quality of his descriptions, and his determination to make the reader see what he had seen, rather suggests that he was writing for those who would never actually travel to Mecca; and, as already noted, Andalusian and Maghribi *fuqaha* (jurists) were urging a boycott of the *hajj*.

Whatever his intentions may have been, today Ibn Jubayr is customarily read at cross purposes to those intentions, and his narrative is mined for historical facts. Admittedly his narrative is a remarkably rich and interesting source of such facts. Particularly apparent is his repeatedly expressed admiration for Saladin, the great Sultan and war leader against the infidels in Syria. Not only does Ibn Jubayr admire Saladin for his conduct of the jihad, but he also praises him for his abolition of the tax on pilgrims. Yet Saladin and the Almohad rulers, Yusuf and al-Mansur, were enemies, and in 1186 Saladin sent troops to assist Arab tribes who were fighting Almohad forces in the region of Gafsa (in what is today Tunisia). As a loyal subject of the Almohads, Ibn Jubayr looked forward to the day when they should conquer Egypt and he was encouraged in this by certain prophecies. Thus Saladin's construction of bridges in the Nile Delta could be seen as a sign of this:

To the Egyptians, the construction of these bridges is a warning of a coming event, for they see in it an augury that the Almohads will conquer it and the eastern regions. But God is the Knower of His hidden affairs.¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibn Jubayr, p. 45.

An apocalyptic prophecy also circulated that Berbers with yellow flags would attack and plunder Egypt, and in some versions of the prophecy they would go on to Syria as well.¹⁷ Ibn Jubayr believed that most Egyptians hoped that the Almohads would conquer Egypt. As evidence of this he cited their superstitious story of two statues on towers located between the Mosque of Ibn Tulun and Old Cairo. When the statue facing east fell, it foreshadowed the conquest of Egypt by Saladin and his Turkish army. If the statue facing west should fall, that would betoken the conquest of Egypt from the west and that army would be an Almohad one.

There remains nothing but the happy prospect of an Almohade conquest of these lands, and attentively they watch for it one auspicious morning, being certain of it, and expecting it as they expect the (last) hour, the fulfilment of the promise of which no one feels doubt.¹⁸

Though Ibn Jubayr made no attempt in what he wrote in the *Rihla* (journey) to resolve his partisanship for the Almohads with his praise for Saladin, perhaps his final decision to settle in Saladin's Egypt reflected a slowly growing disillusionment with the Almohads.

Ibn Jubayr has been much quoted as a source on the status of Muslims in the Kingdom of Jerusalem and particularly on his observation that they paid less in taxes than their co-religionists in that part of Syria that was under Muslim rule. His admiration for Saladin and certain preachers and Sufis notwithstanding, Ibn Jubayr had a rather sour view of the Muslims in the east:

Let it be absolutely certain and beyond doubt established that there is no Islam save in the Maghrib lands . . . There is no justice, right or religion in His sight except with the Almohades – may God render them powerful.¹⁹

17 David Cook, *Studies in the Muslim Apocalyptic* (Princeton, 2002), p. 82.

18 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 73–4.

19 Ibn Jubayr, p. 73.

Judged by the standards of strict Almohad puritanism, these people were either heretics or at best negligent in their religion:

The lands of God that most deserve to be purified by the sword, and cleansed of their sins and impurities by blood shed in holy war are these Hejaz lands, for what they are about in loosening the ties of Islam, and dispossessing pilgrims of their property and shedding their blood. Those of the Andalusian jurists who believe the pilgrims should be absolved from this religious obligation believe rightly . . . May God soon correct and purify this place by relieving the Muslims of these destructive schismatics with the swords of the Almohades, the defenders of the Faith, God's confederates, possessing righteousness and truth.²⁰

Syria was no better, for there the heretics outnumbered the orthodox.²¹ Moreover, those Muslims who lived under the rule of the Franks of the Crusader states were living in sin: "There can be no excuse in the eyes of God for a Muslim to stay in any infidel country, save when passing through it, while the way lies clear in Muslim lands."²²

In the light of this last verdict, Ibn Jubayr's observations about Muslims living under Norman rule in Sicily are of particular interest. At first he was favourably impressed. King William II spent money rescuing Ibn Jubayr and other Muslims from their ship, which was foundering off the Sicilian coast. Moreover, William had taken the trouble to learn Arabic. Muslim eunuchs enjoyed a high status at William's court. (Incidentally, in his translation Broadhurst several times translated *fatan* and *fityan* as 'page' and 'pages', which may be the meanings in a modern dictionary, but in the context of the times and in Ibn Jubayr's narrative they mean 'white eunuch' and 'white eunuchs'.) Sicilian Muslims prospered and were well treated by the Christians.

20 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 72–3.

21 Ibn Jubayr, p. 291.

22 Ibn Jubayr, pp. 321–2.

But these were *first* impressions. Right from the outset of his travels he seems to have been writing an ongoing diary that then became his finished *Rihla* in which he did not go back to correct early misperceptions. In the case of his Sicilian sojourn, the longer he stayed there the bleaker became his assessment of the condition of the Muslims under Christian rule. By the time he arrived in Trapani he felt moved to write the following:

During our stay in this town, we learned painful things about the grievous state of the Muslims in this island concerning their relations with the worshippers of the Cross – may God destroy them – their humiliation and abasement, their state of vassalage under the Christians, and the duress of the king, bringing the calamities and misfortunes of apostasy on those of their women and children for whom God had ordained such suffering.²³

There were forced conversions and confiscations. We also learn that William's agents in Sicily were interrogating all new arrivals on the island for intelligence about Constantinople. (Such interrogations were standard practice in medieval ports.) At the same time, these officers were trying to prevent ships sailing from Sicily in case the Greeks got wind of William's invasion plans. But the master of the ship that Ibn Jubayr boarded used bribery to get them away.

Ibn Jubayr's narrative is also an important source on shipping in the Mediterranean, for he was knowledgeable about ships and took a keen interest in those he sailed in. In this period, ships followed certain fixed routes, tramping and island hopping were common and, as Fernand Braudel remarked in his famous study of the Mediterranean, 'great stretches of the sea were as empty as the Sahara'. Moreover there were very few sailings at all in winter. Ships sailing to the east from Spain or North Africa tended to sail from island to island – Sardinia, Sicily, Crete, Cyprus – using them as navigation aids, seeking their shelter from winds blowing from the north and from pirates, as well as sometimes taking on water and provisions from the islands. Those islands were all under Christian control. Sailing in the opposite

23 Ibn Jubayr, p. 357.

direction was more difficult, since there were only two times of the year when there was likely to be a favourable east wind: from mid-April to late May and then again for two weeks in October. Ibn Jubayr chose to travel out and to return on Genoese ships. Genoa enjoyed good relations with Saladin's sultanate, the Kingdom of Jerusalem, and the Almohad regime, and its ships offered more security from corsairs. The Genoese specialized in maritime trade with North Africa. Though Acre was one of the chief ports of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, its harbour was too small for large ships and therefore lighters were needed to convey passengers and baggage out to them. At Acre the captain of the Genoese ship that Ibn Jubayr had chosen to travel back on was so desperate to catch a sudden favourable wind that Ibn Jubayr almost missed his passage. Once he had reached Sicily he had to wait three and a half months before a favourable wind allowed him to complete his journey. By the way, he declared that Acre resembled Constantinople in size, but he had never seen Constantinople; so how did he know?

Occasionally Ibn Jubayr chose to compose in a high style, and on those occasions he wrote in rhymed prose, sacrificing accuracy to hyperbole, as in the opening of his description of Damascus. He had made a special study of the *Maqamat* of al-Hariri (1054–1122) and modelled his high style on that of al-Hariri. Al-Hariri's *Maqamat*, one of the masterpieces of medieval Arabic literature, consists of fifty rhymed prose narratives in which the rascal who is doing the narrating reveals himself to be the master of all the tricks of eloquence and allusion. More prosaically, Ibn Jubayr often resorts to the trope of claiming that such and such a thing is beyond his powers to describe. When he ends an account of something with 'God knows best' it means that he does not believe a word of it (as was the case with the wonder-working crocodile statues, or the alleged house of Eve in Jeddah). He uses invocations of God to mark chapter breaks.

Finally, the translator, Ronald Joseph Callender Broadhurst (1906–1976), was a surprisingly interesting man. He was not an academic Arabist but he had acquired excellent Arabic in Palestine. After entering the Colonial Service in 1925, he became a brigadier in Jordan's Arab Legion and became the right-hand man of its

commander, John Bagot Glubb (another accomplished Arabist and later a historian of the Middle East). Sadly, in the long run he and Glubb fell out as Broadhurst judged that Glubb favoured the Bedouin and neglected the interests of the urban Arabs. Broadhurst, on the other hand, had many friends among Jordan's Arab elite and was first the friend and then the aide-de-camp of the ruler, the Emir Abdullah. He left the Middle East in 1948 and retired to Northern Ireland where, in 'the rustic seclusion of an Irish study', he produced his translation of Ibn Jubayr, and where he also produced *A History of the Ayyūbid Sultans of Egypt, Translated from the Arabic of al-Maqrizî* (posthumously published, New York, 1980). From time to time, as he worked on these translations, he seems to have sought the advice of A. J. Arberry, the Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic at Cambridge, a scholar who was particularly noted for his translations, as well as that of Hamilton Gibb, professor at the School of Oriental and African Studies and an expert on the career of Saladin. Apart from turning himself into an amateur though capable Orientalist, Broadhurst also became prominent in Unionist politics, and in 1973 he became a member of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

THE TRAVELS OF IBN JUBAYR





*In the name of God, The Merciful, the Compassionate;
bless and preserve our Lord Muhammad, His Kindred,
and his Companions*

*An Account of the Events that Befell upon
Certain Journeys*

The writing of this chronicle was begun on Friday
the 30th of the month of Shawwal, 578 (A.H.)¹
[25th of February, 1183] at sea, opposite Jabal Shulayr
[Sierra Nevada]

may God with His favour grant us safety

[8th of Shawwal to the end of the month of Dhu
l-Qa'dah 578 = 4th of February to the 27th of March,
1183.]

AHMAD IBN HASSAN and Muhammad ibn Jubayr left
Granada – may God preserve it – on their pilgrimage to
the blessed Hejaz – may God give easement and help and reveal
His beneficent works – at the first hour of Thursday² the 8th
of Shawwal 578 (A.H.), which fell, according to the foreigners
[i.e. non-Arabs] on the 3rd of February (1183).

We passed through Jayyan [Jaen] that we might despatch
some business, and left it at the first hour of Monday the 19th
of the month of Shawwal, being the 14th of February. Our
first stage from there was to the fortress of al-Qabdhaq³ [Alcau-
dete]. Thence we moved to the fortress of Qabrah [Cabra],
to the city of Istijah [Ecija], to the fortress of Ushunah [Osuna],
to Shallabar [Jeliver], to the fortress of Arkush [Arcos], to the
burgh known as the Burgh of Qashmah⁴ [Casma] which is
a burgh belonging to Madinat Ibn al-Salim [Medina Sidonia],
and then to the island of Tarif [Tarifa] which we reached on
Monday the 26th of the month (of Shawwal). At midday on
Tuesday the (twenty) second (of February) God granted us

an easy crossing of the sea to Qasr Masmudah [Alcazar]. Praise be to God.

On the morning of Wednesday the 28th of the month, we removed to Sabtah [Ceuta] where we found a Rumi^s Genoese ship about to sail to al-Iskandariyah [Alexandria] by the power of Great and Glorious God, and with His help we embarked; and at midday on Thursday the 29th of the month, or the 24th of February, we set sail with the power and help of God Most High. There is no God but He.

Our course lay along the Andalusian coast, but this we left on Thursday the 6th of Dhu 'l-Qa'dah [3rd of March] when we were opposite Daniyah [Denia]. The morning of Friday the 7th of the month we were off the island of Yabisah [Iviza], on Saturday the island of Majorca, and on Sunday we were off Minorca. From Ceuta to Minorca is eight *majari*; a *majra* being one hundred miles.⁹ We left the coast of this island, and early on the night of Tuesday the 11th of the month, being the 8th of March, the coast of the island of Sardinia all at once appeared before us about a mile or less away. Between the islands of Sardinia and Minorca lie about four hundred miles. It had been a crossing remarkable for its speed.

That night there fell upon us from shoreward a mighty storm with a wind which God Most High released at the time we met the land, but from which He preserved and delivered us. Praise be to Him for that. On the morning of Tuesday a tempest rose and the sea raged, so that we remained hovering off the coast of Sardinia until Wednesday. As we lay in this parlous plight, with all directions locked by the storm and being unable to distinguish the east from the west, God revealed to us a Rumi ship approaching. When it was beside us, we asked whither it was going and were told that it was bound for the island of Sicily and had come from Cartagena in the province of Murcia. Without our knowledge, we had been sailing before this ship on its course; and thereupon we took to following in its wake. God is the Disposer of all things, there is no God but He.