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## In Awe of the Holy City: Mecca in the Eyes of Five Medieval Travellers

Aditya Pratama Widodo<sup>1</sup> and Alwi Alatas<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This paper elaborates and analyses the situation of Mecca between the 11<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries based on travel accounts of five medieval travellers: Ibn Khushraw (1004–1072), Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217), Ibn Battuta (1304–1369), Ma Huan (1380–1460) and di Varthema (1470–1512). Moreover, by thoroughly consulting primary sources scored by above-mentioned travellers and other relevant secondary sources, this study aims to ascertain the importance of Mecca, in the given period, in the eye of Muslims and non-Muslim travellers. As the holiest city in Islam, which is also associated with Muslim religious pilgrimages, Mecca has a long and intriguing history throughout the ages. Furthermore, more often than not, during the medieval period, the pilgrimages to Mecca, which are usually conducted during the Islamic month of Dzulhijjah, were haunted by challenges and dangers posed by natural and social environments in and around Mecca, thus made the journey experiences of above-mentioned travellers all the more challenging, precious and memorable. However, at the end of the day, their hardships paid off and their praises proclaimed since they found themselves drenched in joy and in awe of the beauty and greatness of the Holy City. This research uses historical methodology, focusing on primary texts written by the five pilgrims mentioned above. This study provides a more comprehensive picture of the condition of the Holy City of Mecca in the era under study.

**Keywords:** Mecca, pilgrimage, pilgrim, journey, caravan, Masjid al-Haram, Ka'abah.

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## Introduction

As the holiest city in Islam, Mecca has a long and intriguing history throughout the ages. It is said that Mecca was once known as Baca (Bakka), and was associated with pilgrimages, springs, balsam trees, and the Greek even translated Baca as ‘the Valley of Weeping’ (Sardar, 2014, pp. 1–3), given that Mecca is located in the valley. In Islamic tradition, another name for Mecca is al-Balad, ‘the main city’. According to Islamic tradition, the importance of Mecca is closely related with the life of Prophet Ibrahim who brought his wife and son, Hājar and Ismā‘īl, to that valley, which subsequently developed into a settlement. Furthermore, it was in this city that Prophet Ibrahim built a cube structure called the Ka‘bah, which stands at the heart of the Holy City (al-Bukhāri, 1997; Hadits No. 3364 & 3365).

Subsequently, Prophet Abraham’s son, Prophet Ismā‘īl, made this city his home. The latter married a woman from the Jurhum tribe, a southern Arab tribe, who bore him twelve sons (Ibn Hishām, 1990). Thus, Prophet Ismā‘īl became the progenitor of early inhabitants of Mecca, and his offspring, Banu Ismā‘īl, inhabited in and around the city for many centuries before they finally left Mecca and gradually became astray and succumbed to paganism (Ibn al-Kalbi, 1952). Much later, the Banu Ismā‘īl returned to Mecca as the Quraysh tribe, who previously lived a sedentary and nomadic life (Sardar, 2014; Peters, 2017; Alatas *et al.*, 2020). Mecca became a strong permanent settlement once again sometime around 400 CE, thanks to the initiatives of a Quraysh leader, Quṣayy ibn Kilāb, who cleared the immediate vicinity of the Ka‘ba and settled his own people “in the newly cleared area, with a defined territory eventually assigned for the domicile of each tribe” (Peters, 2017, p. 18). Quṣayy initiated a new confederal structure centred in Mecca, which continued until the rise of Islam (al-Mubarakpuri, 1996).

The birth and subsequent life of Prophet Muhammad in Mecca, in the seventh century, has brought considerable changes to religious situation and landscape in Mecca, and later in neighbouring cities. However, before the time, as well as in early days, of Prophet Muhammad, polytheism and idol worship were flourished in Mecca. As a matter of fact, Qurasyh tribe, the descendants of Banu Ismā‘īl and which happened to be the tribe that the Prophet belongs to, was among the most prominent proponents of such tradition (al-Mubarakpuri,

1996; Peters, 2017). However, thanks to God's final revelation, which accompanied Prophet Muhammad's unrelenting *da'wah* effort, Mecca finally fell into the hands of Muslims in December 629. Subsequently, the 360 idols which were placed by the pagans around the Ka'bah were burned and destroyed (al-Mubarakpuri, 1996; Peters, 2017; Sardar, 2014). Thus, Mecca once again became the Holy City for the monotheists and, henceforth, became a magnet that attracted countless pilgrims from all over the world to drench in a spiritual journey, at least once in a lifetime. As a matter of fact, religious pilgrimage, *hajj*, is among the most important contributors to the greatness and wealth of Mecca.

More often than not, during the medieval period the pilgrimages to Mecca, which are usually conducted during the Islamic month of Dzulhijjah, were haunted by challenges and dangers posed by natural and social environments in and around Mecca. As far as natural environment is concerned, the journey across the Red Sea from Africa and journey through the deserts to inland Mecca, either from Medina or Jeddah, was often accompanied with obstacles. As for the social environment, unfriendly Christian states in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula and hostile local Jewish communities in certain period of times, the unscrupulous raids by the Bedouins, and even some corrupted local Muslim rulers in and around Mecca, sometimes jeopardised the pilgrims. However, it goes without saying that, for many people, such challenges and dangers actually made the journey to Mecca all the more challenging and precious, not to mention that the pilgrimage itself is also a very enlightening experience and notches unforgettable memories.

Since early medieval period, these experiences have been recorded in many pilgrimage accounts, some of which have been published as books. Not only do they elaborate the procession of pilgrimage, in many cases, those accounts also discuss the situation of Mecca and adjacent towns. Among the renowned medieval pilgrims who wrote their accounts pertaining to their visit and pilgrimage to Mecca are Ibn Khusraw (1004–1072), Ibn Jubayr (1145–1217), Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240), al-Tujaybi (the end of 13<sup>th</sup> century), Ibn Battuta (1304–1369), al-Abdari (d. 1336), Ibn al-Sabah (late 14<sup>th</sup> century), Ma Huan (1380–1460), and Ludovico di Varthema (1470–1512) (van Leeuwen, 2023).

Without a doubt, those accounts, or travelogue, provide some valuable information concerning Mecca and the pilgrimages in the middle ages. However, this article only focuses on the description of Mecca left by five travellers who came from five different cities in three different continents, namely Ibn Khusraw of Merv (Persia, Asia), Ibn Jubayr of Valencia (al-Andalus, Europe), Ibn Battuta of Tangier (Maghreb, Africa), Ma Huan of Kuaiji (China, Asia), and di Varthema of Bologna (Italy, Europe). By employing historical methodology that scrutinises the travel accounts of the above-mentioned pilgrims and by means of descriptive approach, rather than analytical, this study aims to find out a detailed representation of Mecca between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, this study also aims to ascertain the value of Mecca, in the given period, in the eyes of Muslims and non-Muslim travellers.

### **The Travellers and the Background of Their Journey**

The first traveller is Abū Mu‘īn Ḥamīd al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusraw, a renowned writer and scholar of the Ismaili school of Persian ethnic background. He was born in 1004 in Qabodiyon but later lived in Merv. Initially, he was a civil servant in charge of finances and running the country, serving Sultan Toghrul Beg, ruler of the Seljuk dynasty, who captured Merv in 1037. Based on his confession, in October–November 1045 (Rabiul Akhir 437), when Jupiter was at its highest point in the fragile zone, he prayed two cycles of prayer and then prayed to Allah to grant him prosperity. Subsequently, his prayers were answered, hence he immediately went to Djouzdjanan (Jowzjan), a district in Balkh Province, and spent a month there enjoying wine. However, in this city, one day he had a dream. In his dream he met someone who questioned him: “How long will you drink this wine which deprives man of reason? It would be better if you looked back on yourself.” The wise man in his dream then proceeds with some advice:

Loss of reason and self-possession... does not calm the mind; the sage cannot therefore recommend anyone to let himself be guided by madness. On the contrary, we must seek what increases the spirit and the intelligence (Ibn Khusraw, 1881, pp. 3-4).



Then, a man in his dream pointed towards the Qibla. After waking up, Ibn Khusraw realised that he had to abandon the life he had lived for forty years, hence he improved his conduct and changed his way of life. Therefore, on Thursday, 20 December 1045 (6 Djumadil Akhir 437), he purified himself and went to the mosque, asking Allah's help to give him the strength to fulfil His commands and gave up things that were forbidden by the religion (Islam). Subsequently, he left for Merv in order to express his desire to his superior to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, thereby resigning from the government position he had held so far. He also left notes and his possessions, except for important needs for his journey. His journey to Mecca began from Balkh on 4 March 1046 (23 Shaaban 437). Long story short, after going through many major cities in Persia, Iraq, Egypt, and Medina, Ibn Khusraw finally reached Mecca at the end of May 1047 (Dzulqaidah 438). He would later come again to Mecca for the second time on 16 May 1048 (end of Dzulqaidah 439), and for the third time on 19 September 1050 (the last day of Rabiul Akhir 442). His journey from Balkh to Mecca is outlined in his monumental work, *Safarnama* (Ibn Khusraw, 1881).

The second traveller is Abū al-Husayn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Jubayr, a geographer, poet and a scholar from al-Andalus who was of Arab descent. He was born in 1145 in Valencia. He was a descendant of 'Abd al-Salām ibn Jubayr of the Kinānah tribe, who joined an army sent by the Caliph in Damascus to al-Andalus in 740 to quell a Berber rebellion there. Later, Ibn Jubayr served as secretary to the governor of Granada which was under the rule of the Almohad caliphate.

According to the introductory note in his recently-reprinted travelogue, while serving as an official in Granada, it is said that Ibn Jubayr was forced by his superior to drink seven cups of wine. Even though he did not drink the wine, he felt so guilty, that he decided to atone for his "sin" by resigning from his position and then embarking on a pilgrimage to Mecca. However, the truth of this dramatic story cannot be ascertained because of the weak chain of the story, besides Ibn Jubayr does not mention this episode in his book (Ibn Jubayr, 2020). After his pilgrimage and journey to some other places, Ibn Jubayr returned to his country, despite seemingly only for a brief period. He eventually left al-Andalus and became a Sufi sheikh and teacher of Hadith in Alexandria.

Ibn Jubayr left Granada on 3 February 1183, accompanied by Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad ibn Ḥassan, a physician from Granada. Subsequently, on 24 February 1183, he boarded a Genoese ship bound for Cairo. On 4 August 1183 (13 Rabi‘ul Akhir 579) he arrived in Mecca for the first time. His first pilgrimage experience was set forth in his *rihlah*, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr: A Medieval Journey from Cordoba to Jerusalem*, which was originally published in Arabic and was later published in English for the first time in 1852 (Ibn Jubayr, 2020, p. 20).

The third traveller is Abū ‘Abdullah Muḥammad ibn ‘Abdullah al-Lawatī at-Tanjī ibn Battuta, a Berber scholar of Maghreb origin. Ibn Battuta was born into an Islamic jurist (*faqih*) family on 24 February 1304 in Tangier. His family came from the Lawata tribe. It seems that Ibn Battuta also had a qualification in literary and scholastic education (Gibb, 1958). Given his background, it is understandable that Ibn Battuta decided to depart for the Holy Land at the age of 22, in 1325. The purpose of his pilgrimage was not solely to fulfil religious demands, but also to seek opportunities to broaden his horizons, and to obtain more insightful knowledge from various sources, so that he would become a good and qualified scholar.

Ibn Battuta started his itinerary from Tangier and - after going through several important cities such as Tunis, Tripoli, Alexandria, Cairo, Damascus - he arrived in Mecca for the first time in mid-October 1326. He described his travel experience in detail in the voluminous *Masterpiece to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling*, or better known simply as *Rihlah Ibn Battuta* (Ibn Battuta, 1958; Dunn, 1986). Perhaps, Ibn Battuta is the most famous Muslim traveller, not to mention that he also travelled more than any other medieval explorers, totalling around 117,000 km.

The fourth traveller is an emissary cum chronicler named Ma Huan, an important yet ill-known Chinese traveller, overshadowed by his far more famous superior, Admiral Zheng He. Ma Huan was born in 1380 into Ma family in Kuaiji, a district of Shaoxing, near Hangzhou bay. Although he humbly described himself as “the mountain woodcutter of Kuaiji,” and despite the simplicity of his opening poem in his book, it is quite obvious that he was fairly well-educated, and that he was acquainted with Chinese classics and Buddhist books. Furthermore, he had previously received Arabic and Persian literacy lessons from

a scholar in his hometown, so that, while accompanying Zheng He, he also acted as a translator and interpreter (Mills, 1970). This is certainly understandable considering that in Hangzhou, a city Marco Polo described as a “noble and magnificent” and by Ibn Battuta as “the biggest city I have seen on the face of the earth,” there used to be a village of Arab and Persian merchants (Polo, 1907, p. 314; Ibn Battuta, 1958, pp. 900–901; Bretschneider, 1871, p. 11; Hirth and Rockhill, 1911, pp. 102–204).

In 1413, when he was barely twenty-five years old, he was assigned to participate in Zheng He’s expedition for the first time. In addition, Ma Huan was also assigned to accompany Zheng He in the latter’s seventh and last expedition, departing in 1431. On this occasion, Ma Huan voyaged in a detached fleet under the commandship of eunuch Hung Pao which departed from China. This eunuch Hung Pao dispatched Ma Huan as emissary to Mecca, hence the latter landed in Mecca in the October 1432, after several stops at Bengal and Calicut. It is also said that, while in Mecca, Ma Huan fulfilled his obligations as a follower of “religion of the Heavenly Square (Mecca),” that is to say, Muslim (Mills, 1970, p. 35). The story of his adventures, as well as descriptions of places he visited, was set out in detail in *Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan (The Overall Survey of the Ocean’s Shores)*, which was published for the first time in Chinese in 1451.

The fifth traveller was actually a non-Muslim, let alone visiting Mecca for a religious pilgrimage. Instead, he only stopped briefly at Mecca on his way to the Malay-Indonesian archipelago. However, interestingly, he is the first non-Muslim to successfully visit Mecca, not to mention that his experience and description are also noteworthy. This person was Ludovico di Varthema, a nobleman who was born in Bologna in around 1470. Although very little is known about the further background of di Varthema, he did mention that he was the “most skilled maker of large mortars in the world,” which might imply his occupation as a gunsmith. Furthermore, he also proclaimed that “I have found myself in some battles in my time...,” which might indicate that he used to be a soldier as well (di Varthema, 1863, pp. 50 & 280).

The motive behind his travels is his curiosity about various foreign countries in the East - countries rarely frequented by the Venetians and Bolognese - and his desire to be adventurous, to feel, and to see first-hand

the situation there, and, in the end, to gain recognition from the public (di Varthema, 1863). Thus, his journey started from Venice, at the end of 1502, first to Cairo, and between April and June 1503 he had reached Mecca and stayed there for several weeks. His travel experiences are set forth in his book, *The Travels of Ludovico di Varthema in Egypt, Syria, Arabia Desert and Arabia Felix, in Persia, India, and Ethiopia, A.D. 1503 to 1508*, which was first published in Rome in 1510, and later published in English for the first time in 1577.

## **In Awe of the Holy City**

### ***The journey thither from adjacent towns***

In the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Khusraw made his first pilgrimage from Balkh to Mecca. After numerous stops at many towns in Persia, Syria and Palestine, he left Jerusalem for Mecca on 14 May 1047 (15 Dzulqaidah 438). After 13 days of journey, he finally arrived in Mecca, probably at the end of the same month. However, food was very scarce in Mecca at that time; there were no caravans from other countries there, which might indicate that there was famine in Mecca. Moreover, when he visited Arafat some time later, he also found out that everyone was in fear of Arabs attack, hence he abruptly ended his first pilgrimage and return to Jerusalem.

Roughly a year later, before arriving in Mecca for the second time, Ibn Khusraw made a stop in Egypt on 4 January 1048 (15 Radjab 439). There, it was announced that the sultan of Egypt would arrange a caravan, complete with the soldiers, horses, camels, and provisions, to secure the safety of for the pilgrims on their way to and in Mecca. However, later, still in the same year, another letter bearing the sultan's seal was publicly read and urged the public not to make the pilgrimage due to the famine that struck the Hejaz (Ibn Khusraw, 1881). Nevertheless, Ibn Khusraw, still bent on performing pilgrimage, departed from Qulzoum (Gulf of Suez) sailing to Medina, and continued on foot from Medina to Mecca, a distance of 100 fersengs.<sup>3</sup> After walking for

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<sup>3</sup> *Ferseng*, or *parasang*, is a historical Iranian unit of walking distance. One *ferseng* is equal to 4.8 or 5.6 km. Thus, the distance between Medina and Mecca, according to Ibn Khusraw's description, is equal to 480 or 560 km.

eight days across rocky ground, he arrived in Mecca around 16 May 1048 (end of Dhulqaidah 439) and encamped at the Gate of Safa. It turned out that famine overtook this city and even the guards of the Ka'aba (*mujawirin*) were forced to leave and no pilgrims came. As a matter of fact, many people fled from the Hejaz. Even so, thanks to his determination, Ibn Khusraw made time to perform the ritual on Mount Arafat, before finally returning to Egypt (Ibn Khusraw, 1881).

For his third pilgrimage, Ibn Khusraw departed from Egypt and arrived at Aydhab, one of the most important Egyptian Medieval ports, on 11 August 1050 (20 Rabiul Awwal 442). He was forced to stay there for three months since no ships leave for Jeddah at that time. When the monsoon winds started to blow, he boarded a ship that departed for Jeddah, heading north (Ibn Khusraw, 1881). On arrival at Jeddah, which is 12 *fersengs*<sup>4</sup> away from Mecca, Ibn Khusraw received passes (safe-conduct) from the governor of Jeddah, who was the servant of the emir of Mecca, who stated that he was a scholar and did not need to be taxed. Subsequently, he left Jeddah after Friday prayers and arrived in Mecca on Sunday, 16 September 1050 (the last day of Rabiul Akhir 442<sup>5</sup>). While Ibn Khusraw did not specifically mention the name of the *mīqāt* point, he recounts that he wore his *ihram* garment at “towers and chapels” at the distance of half *fersengs*<sup>6</sup> from Mecca (Ibn Khusraw, 1881).

Similar to Ibn Khusraw's third pilgrimage made more than a century earlier, Ibn Jubayr, who left Granada on 3 February 1183, departed from Aydhab for Jeddah aboard the *jilabah* in an eight-days voyage across the Red Sea that left him feeling “died and lived again” due to unrelenting tempest (Ibn Jubayr, 2020). *Jilabah*, also known as *jalba* or *galbah* (pl. *jilab/gilab* or *jalbāt/galbāt*), is an ancient watercraft of Sudano-Egyptian or Arabic origins that was normally used to transport cargo and pilgrims in the Red Sea and southern Arabian waters. According to Ibn Jubayr, the *jilabah* he was aboard was made from planks that were sewn together, without single nail, “with cord made from qinbar, which

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<sup>4</sup> Equal to 57.6 or 67.2 km.

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that the last day of Rabiul Akhir 442 was actually on 19 September 1050. However, Ibn Khusraw mentioned that he arrived at Mecca on Sunday, which was probably 16 September 1050.

<sup>6</sup> Equal to 2,4 or 2,8 km.

is the fibre of the coconut and which the makers thrash until it takes the form of thread, which then they twist into a cord with which they sew the ships” (Ibn Jubayr, 2020, pp. 200; Agius, 2008; Hourani, 1951). While in Jeddah, Ibn Jubayr and the group of pilgrims were wrongly treated, and even treated worse than the treatment received by the *dhimmis* (i.e. Christians and Jews under tribute), by the local residents and authorities on the orders of the Emir of Mecca, Muktir ibn ‘Īsā. The pilgrims, including Ibn Jubayr, were arrested and only released if they paid bail as a form of custom tax. Fortunately, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī sent 2,000 dinars and 2,002 *irdabh*<sup>7</sup> of wheat to the Emir of Mecca in order to cover pilgrims’ customs dues (Ibn Jubayr, 2020).

In his travelogue, Ibn Jubayr recorded his grievance pertaining to this unjust treatment, and, in fact, as he recounts, al-Andalus jurists were of the opinion that pilgrimage (*hajj*) was not obligatory for Muslims since they were often faced with danger and treated badly by the people of the Hejaz. So irritated was he, to the extent that he stated that Hejaz is an Islamic land which sins must be washed away with bloodshed, because of the actions of Hejaz people - which included confiscation of property and banning the property of pilgrims and killing them, while employing deception and false pretexts - were in fact loosening up the Islamic brotherhood. On this occasion he also greatly praised the Almohad government who, according to him, managed to triumph Islam in al-Andalus and North Africa. He also praised the ability and achievements of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī in ensuring the smoothness of pilgrimage (Ibn Jubayr, 2020).

After a short stay in Jeddah and after being bailed out by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, Ibn Jubayr left this town, which he described as a “village on the coast,” on 2 August 1183 and stopped at al-Qurayn to rest from morning to evening. In this place there was a spring with sweet water, so that the pilgrims filled the provisions to continue their journey to Mecca, or, when the pilgrimage is finished, to Jeddah. At this al-Qurayn, which he thought to be the *mīqāt* point, the pilgrims began to put on their *ihram* garment and then made their way to Mecca at night. When marching at night, under the full moonlight, the pilgrims recite *talbiyah* formula together, and sometimes add prayers. So arrived Ibn

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<sup>7</sup> 2,002 *irdabh* is equal to 146 metric tonnes.

Jubayr and his entourage at the Umrah Gate in Mecca on 4 August 1183 (13 Rabiul Akhir 579) (Ibn Jubayr, 2020).

Meanwhile, Ibn Battuta, at the age of twenty-two, intended to perform the pilgrimage and visited the Prophet's Tomb in Medina. He departed from Tangier on Thursday, 13 June 1325 (1 Rajab 725). As mentioned in his account, at first he set out on the journey alone, though later accompanied by an entourage, determined "to leave all my lovers, women and men, and leave my house like a bird leaves its nest" (Ibn Battuta, 1958, p. 8). Ibn Battuta approached Mecca via Medina, in contrast to the previous two travellers who departed from Aydhab to Jeddah, then to Mecca. However, it is important to note that, initially, it seemed that Ibn Battuta also intended to cross the Red Sea from Aydhab, but he was unable to take this route any further due to enmity between Mamluk sultanate and Aydhab ruler, al-Hadrabi, which caused the latter to sink the ships that belonged to the former. Thus, he had to return to Cairo (Ibn Battuta, 1958).

From Cairo, Ibn Battuta continued his journey to Damascus and then from there to Mecca. On the way from Damascus to Mecca, he stopped at Taiba (Medina), probably in early October 1326. Upon arrival there, the caravan of pilgrims stopped at al-Salām Gate in the Prophet's Mosque, after which they prayed in the garden (*al-rawḍah al-saghīrah*) which is located between the Prophet's Tomb and his pulpit. Ibn Battuta and his entourage encamped in Medina for four days, and spent every night at the Prophet's Mosque to read the Qur'an while sitting in a circle (*halaqah*). At this occasion, some of them also made *dzikr* (remembrance), contemplated at the Prophet's Tomb, offered prayers in that blessed site, and gave alms to the needy (Ibn Battuta, 1958). It is clear that, from a lengthy description in his book, Ibn Battuta spent his time observing various sacred buildings in Medina, interacting with several scholars and pious people who resided in this city. After completing their activities in Medina, the pilgrims headed towards Mecca, but first stopped for a moment at the Dhul Hulayfa Mosque, the *mīqāt* point. There, the entourage bathed and cleaned themselves, put on their *ihram* garments, and performed 2 *rak'ah* of sunnah prayers. After that, the *talbiyah* formula accompanied the pilgrims' journey along the valleys and hills, and then camped at al-Rawha, al-Safra, Badr, until they finally arrived in Mecca one morning in mid-October 1326 (Ibn Battuta, 1958).

Unlike the previous three travellers, the fourth, Ma Huan, took the sea route almost entirely. On 19 June 1430, Emperor Xuande issued an edict ordering Zheng He and several other admirals to sail west, in which the chroniclers of the voyage were required to record the strange things which they heard. The participants of this expedition included soldiers, ship crews, interpreters, businessmen, doctors, craftsmen, and various other professions with a total of 27,500 people (Mills, 1970). Ma Huan was assigned as Zheng He's staff and official interpreter, despite the fact that he was not voyaged with his fleet, but with Hung Pao's.

The Hung Pao's fleet consisted of hundreds of ships which departed from Longwan (Dragon bay) in Nanjing, on 19 January 1431, heading straight to Bengal then to Calicut. From Calicut, Ma Huan was sent to Mecca with seven Chinese emissaries. From Calicut, the ship was sailed southwest and had to voyage for three months before finally anchoring at the port called Chih-ta (Jeddah). From Chih-ta, Ma Huan and his entourage headed east for a day until they finally arrived at the city of Mo-ch'ieh (Mecca), probably in the second half of 1432 (Ma Huan, 1970).

As for the last traveller, Ludovico di Varthema, he was not a Muslim who went to Mecca for religious pilgrimage. Thus, at the end of 1502, by spreading the sails after praying for protection, di Varthema reinforced his intention to sail to Alexandria. Upon arriving there, because he longed for novelty, di Varthema immediately continued his journey to Cairo, and then to Damascus. He described Damascus as very beautiful, extremely populous and rich, and inhabited by many Moors (i.e. Muslims), Mamluks, who were renegade Christians, and also Greek Christians. It was also in Damascus that di Varthema stayed for several months in order to learn the Moorish language (i.e. Arabic) (di Varthema, 1863).

Subsequently, on April 8, 1503, di Varthema left Damascus for Mecca, which the distance is forty days and forty nights from the former city. On this trip, he befriended the captain of a Mamluk caravan who provided him with Mamluk clothing and a horse. In doing so, he was able to disguise himself as a Mamluk (i.e. Muslim). He said to the captain that he was a Roman who became Moor in Cairo, therefore he was allowed to become a member of the Mamluk guard which consisted of sixty men, whose job was to protect this caravan of 35,000 camels



and 40,000 men (di Varthema, 1863). Their journey to Mecca was not so smooth, as they were attacked several times by groups of Bedouin Arab, including being stopped at a place they called Sodom and Gomorrah, which was a mountain range called Akabet el-Shami according to the editor of the book, because they could not afford to pay for water (di Varthema, 1863). The caravan continued its journey and, around mid-May 1503, they arrived at Medinathalnabi (Medina).

The caravan stopped at Medinathalnabi for three days and di Varthema took the time to visit the Prophet's Mosque and the Prophet's Tomb. In his account, di Varthema describes the two buildings in sufficient detail, while inserting somewhat resentful comments on the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. After Medina, di Varthema and the caravan continued their journey to Mecca, which took several days, and arrived on 18 May 1503. Interestingly, later, while on the way from Mecca to Jeddah, di Varthema's cover was almost blown, hence he lied that, supported by the Mamluk attire he wore, he was a Roman who became a Mamluk in Cairo (di Varthema, 1863). His dishonesty was fruitful, and he managed to travel further to Malay-Indonesian Archipelago before eventually returned safely to Italy.

### *Geographical and socio-economic situation of Mecca*

In general, Mecca was well and brightly-painted by the five travellers, even though di Varthema, as a non-Muslim, seemingly had mixed-feelings towards the city and sometimes did not shy away from shedding negative comments about the Holy City, Islam and Prophet Muhammad. Arriving in the later part of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Jubayr, in the spirit of pilgrims, described Mecca as a noble sacred place, "It is the Haram [sacred precinct] of God, and His place of security... the source of inspiration and revelation... was the resort of the prophets of God and his noble apostles." Ibn Jubayr was also of the opinion that the greatness and wealth of the Holy City, since ancient times, were the fruit of the prayers of Prophet Ibrahim (Ibn Jubayr, 2020, pp. 130–132).<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, roughly a century and half later, Ibn Battuta called

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<sup>8</sup> Here are Prophet Ibrahim's prayers for Mecca: "My Lord, make this city of Mecca secure and provide fruits to its people—those among them who believe in Allah and the Last Day" (al-Baqarah, verses 126); "My Lord!

Mecca the “city of surety,” and illustrated it as large and compactly-build town with oblong shape, located in the hollow of valley, and he also ascribed the glory and wealth of Mecca with the blessed prayer or Prophet Ibrahim (Ibn Battuta, 1958, pp. 187 and 190–191). Ma Huan did not score any eulogy about Mecca, while di Varthema described the “very noble city of Mecca” as the “most beautiful city” (di Varthema, 1863, p. 35).

Ibn Khusraw, who arrived in Mecca in mid-September 1050, related that Mecca stood in a valley that stretched between majestic mountains. According to him, the length and width of Mecca did not exceed two arrows shot. At the southern tip of Mecca there is Jabal Abu Qubeis, on the slopes of which are two hills called Safa and Marwah. He observed that the climate of Mecca was extremely hot (Ibn Khusraw, 1881). However, during his visit to Mecca (in September 1183) Ibn Jubayr experienced a rather unusual weather in Mecca. The heat that was usually brought by *samum* (the notorious hot wind) was alleviated, hence he and other pilgrims would spend the night on the roofs of houses covered with blankets to protect themselves from the cold of the night (Ibn Jubayr, 2020). Ma Huan added that Mecca was always hot, all year round, like summer and without rain, lightning, frost, or snow, despite its heavy dew at night (Ma Huan, 1970). Meanwhile, di Varthema was of the opinion that, since there were neither grasses nor trees around it, Mecca has been cursed by God (di Varthema, 1863, p. 37).

In the mid-11th century, as set forth by Ibn Khusraw, the well of water in Mecca tasted brackish and bitter, hence almost impossible to drink from. In order to provide better quality water, ten thousand dinars must be spent to dig lots of basins and reservoirs which were used to collect rainwater that flowed down from the canyon. In addition, in Mecca there was an underground aqueduct, or conduit (*qanats*), built by the emir of Aden. The water that flew through this aqueduct came from a basin outside the city, which first flew to Arafat for agricultural

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Make this city of Mecca secure, and keep me and my children away from the worship of idols.... Our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley, near Your Sacred House, our Lord, so that they may establish prayer. So make the hearts of believing people incline towards them and provide them with fruits, so perhaps they will be thankful” (al-Balad verses 35 and 37).

irrigation purposes, so that only a small amount of water reached Mecca. However, Ibn Khusraw later narrated that it was the son of Chad Dil, the emir of Aden, who ordered the construction of those basins. The purpose of this costly project was to provide water for the pilgrims (Ibn Khusraw, 1881; Peters, 2017). According to Ibn Battuta, there was another underground aquaduct which channelled water that came from a gushing spring in a place named Khulais, which was located outside Mecca. Moreover, apparently a gushing spring at Marr al-Zuhran (now called Wadi Fatima) also provided Meccan inhabitants with water (Ibn Battuta, 1958). In addition, Ibn Khusraw also mentioned the importance of *bir ez zahid* (the well of the religious) in his time, which was located just outside of Mecca, in providing palatable water which, in turn, was distributed and sold in Mecca. Due to heavy dew in the Holy City, another method to collect water in Mecca was, according to Ma Huan, “by put out an empty bowl to receive it until day-break, the dew-water will be 3 *fen* [deep] in the bowl” (Ma Huan, 1970, p. 176).<sup>9</sup> As if confirming Ibn Khusraw’s four-and-a-half-centuries earlier account, di Varthema recounted that at the foot of Mount Arafat there were two very beautiful reservoirs to collect rainwater, and other water which was transported from many faraway places, in order to fulfil the needs of the inhabitants of Mecca (di Varthema, 1863).

Despite that fact, di Varthema maintained that the inhabitants of Mecca suffered from serious dearth of water so that, in order to fulfil their daily needs of water, they needed to spend more than 4 *quattrini* (di Varthema, 1863, p. 37). The presence of the well of Zamzam, which lies at the heart of Mecca as eternal source of water, must not be overlooked and underestimated. This well, according to Ibn Khusraw, “lies to the east outside the Ka’abah.... The water is drinkable, although it tastes brackish” (Ibn Khusraw, 1881, p. 205). Nevertheless, by the time of his pilgrimage, Ibn Jubayr seemingly found that Zamzam water had become more palatable and tasted like “milk coming from the udder of the camels.” So miraculous and beneficial was the water that, he added, if one poured it on his/her body, all fatigues would be relieved and that he/she would be enlivened in an instant (Ibn Jubayr, 2020, pp. 140–141). Correspondingly, Ibn Battuta stated that the water in this well also miraculously increased in volume on the eve of each Friday (Ibn

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<sup>9</sup> 3 *fen* is equal to 0,3 inch.

Battuta, 1958). Ma Huan called this well A-pi-San-san, which contained pure and sweet water. It was usually stored, in their ship, by people who travelled to faraway places so that, if they met typhoon at the sea, the water could be scattered so “the wind and water are lulled” (Ma Huan, 1970, p. 177). Meanwhile, di Varthema related that the belief and tradition among the pilgrims in his time was to draw three buckets full of water from this well - a structure he described as “very beautiful” – and to bathe with it from head to feet. People believed that, by reciting *basmallah* and *istighfar* and bathing simultaneously, their sins would be washed away by the water (di Varthema, 1863, pp. 40–41).

According to Ibn Khusraw, who stayed in Mecca from 19 November 1050 (1 Rajab 442) to 29 April 1051 (15 Zulhijjah 442), at the time of his visit, Mecca was inhabited by not more than 2,000 men, while the rest were 500 *mujāwirīn* or foreigners (Ibn Khusraw, 1881). In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, di Varthema recounted that Mecca was very well-inhabited by around 6,000 families who lived in extremely good houses, and some of the houses worth 3,000 or 4,000 *ducats* each (di Varthema, 1863). Ibn Battuta maintained that the residents of Mecca “are given to well-doing, of consummate generosity and good disposition.” Therefore, it is not surprising if the customs among them was to act kindly towards strangers, the poor, and those who devoted their lives to religious life. It was customary for the residents of Mecca to invite them “with courtesy, kindness and delicacy, and then giving them to eat,” or bought grain, meat and vegetables for orphans, or even invited them to eat. As far as fashion and physical attributes are concerned, Ibn Battuta found that

The Meccans are elegant and clean in their dress, and as they mostly wear white their garments always appear spotless and snowy. They use perfume freely, paint their eyes with *kuhl*, and are constantly picking their teeth with slips of green arak-wood (made from *Salvadora persica*). The Meccan women are of rare and surpassing beauty, pious and chaste. They too make much use of perfumes .... (Ibn Battuta, 1958, p. 215–216)

Ma Huan described the physical features of inhabitants of Mecca as follows:

The people of this country are stalwart and fine-looking, and their limbs and faces are of a very dark purple colour. The menfolk bind up their heads; they wear long garments; [and] on their feet they put leather shoes. The women all wear a covering over their heads, and you cannot see their faces ....  
(Ma Huan, 1970, p. 174)

Ma Huan proceeded by expressing his astonishment on the orderly of the inhabitants of Mecca:

The law of the country prohibits wine-drinking. The customs of the people are pacific and admirable. There are no poverty-stricken families. They all observe the precepts of their religion, and law-breakers are few. It is in truth a most happy country. As to the marriage-and funeral-rites: they all conduct themselves in accordance with the regulations of their religion. (Ma Huan, 1970, p. 174)

It is also important to note that imams became the pillar of community in Mecca, and Ibn Jubayr mentioned four imams of Sunnite, and one Zaydi imam, living in Mecca at that time. While not giving the number of the population of Mecca, Ibn Jubayr related that, in the second half of 12<sup>th</sup> century, the houses in Mecca, especially those that surrounded the Masjid al-Haram, had high roofs with belvederes. The inhabitants used to pass the night and cool the waters on that roof; they looked upon the Ka'bah and prayed (Ibn Jubayr, 2020). Ibn Jubayr's description about the houses in Mecca was later confirmed by Ibn Battuta, who also provided some details about the location of the houses which belonged to notable and pious figures during and after Prophet Muhammad's era. In addition, Ibn Battuta also compiled a long list of virtuous and pious figures who resided in Mecca, including their deeds, habits, customs, "miracles," thoughts and stories surrounding their lives (Ibn Battuta, 1958).

Masjid al-Haram was surrounded by bazaars. In the time of Ibn Khusraw, many houses were built at the foot of Marwah, and there was also a bazaar "containing twenty shops placed opposite each other; they are all occupied by barbers who shave the heads of pilgrims"; the length of the bazaar was 50 paces (Ibn Khusraw, 1881, pp. 184–187; Ibn Jubayr, 2020, p. 122). In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Jubayr recorded that, in the months of Rajab, Sha'ban and Ramadhan, the ground between Safa

and Marwah was flooded by foods, a sight that he never encountered anywhere else, including in Egypt (Ibn Jubayr, 2020). According to Ibn Khusraw, there were two baths in Mecca, the bases of which were made of green stones (Ibn Khusraw, 1881). More than a century later, Ibn Jubayr mentioned that the two baths were named after two important scholars, Jamāl al-Dīn and al-Mayanishī (Ibn Jubayr, 2020). Ibn Khusraw mentioned that the caliph in Baghdad built shelters in this city, which were intended for pilgrims from Khorasan, Iraq, Transoxiana, and other places; but now some of the buildings had collapsed or been converted into private buildings (Ibn Khusraw, 1881).

Apparently, by the time of Ibn Khusraw's visit to the holy city, the remnants of the Hejaz famine that occurred in 1047 still lingers, therefore food was expensive and many people migrated. However, Ibn Khusraw witnessed a joyful sight in the month of Behmen Mâh 428 (around end of January 1050) of the Persian calendar: cucumbers (*badrengs*) and new aubergines were seen in Mecca. Later, on 15 Farvardin 430 (March–April 1051) “ripe grapes brought from the countryside which were sold at the market; on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of Ordibehesht 430 (April–May 1051) melons were abundant. Throughout the winter, there are fruits in large quantities and they never ran out” (Ibn Khusraw, 1881, pp. 150 and 190). In similar vein, Ibn Jubayr was amazed to witness that Mecca was overflowing with good foodstuff, including fruits ranging from figs, dates, grapes, pomegranates, quince, peaches, lemons, walnuts, almonds, raisins, palm-fruit, water-melons, to cucumbers, and all the vegetables like eggplant, pumpkin, carrot, cauliflower and other aromatic and sweet-smelling plants. He also highlighted the distinguished quality of water-melons that “its odour is the most fragrant of smells and the best .... and when you taste it, it seems to you like sugar-candy or purest honey” (Ibn Jubayr, 2020, p. 137–138). In similar vein, Ibn Battuta maintained that the quality of foodstuffs in Mecca were unrivalled in the world, while the flavour and sweetness of melons brought there were also peerless (Ibn Battuta, 1958).

As an Andalusian who felt that situation back home is better than anywhere else, Ibn Jubayr seemed to be overjoyed to find that vegetables flowed into Mecca uninterruptedly all year round, and all the fruit and vegetables there tasted extraordinary compared to the other places. These fruits and vegetables were imported from nearby places, such as al-Taif, Udum which was also located in Taif valley, Batn Marr, Wadi

Nakhlah, ‘Ayn Sulayman, as well as Yemen. Ibn Jubayr also highlighted the importance of people from Maghreb, with proper skills in tillage and husbandry, as the reason for the fertility of above-mentioned lands (Ibn Jubayr, 2020; Ibn Battuta, 1958). Ibn Battuta related that, in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, fruits and vegetables were also brought from Marr al-Zuhran, which was a blessed fertile valley, where many date palms grew and were well irrigated due to its proximity to a flowing water source (Ibn Battuta, 1958). The abundance of fruits and vegetables in Mecca was also confirmed by Ma Huan during his pilgrimage in 1432, and he added that the people of Mecca, or around it, cultivated unhusked rice, wheat, black millet, but rice and grain were scarce. Moreover, he mentioned about the cultivation of “a kind of tree with twisted flowers, like the large mulberry-tree of the Central Country; it is 1 or 2 *chang* in height; the flowers blossom twice a year; [and] it lives to a great age without withering” (Ma Huan, 1970, p. 176).<sup>10</sup>

As far as meat is concerned, Ibn Jubayr said that the meat in Mecca was wonderful, and that many people, who had gone across the horizon and traversed many regions on earth, admitted that the meat in Mecca was the best they had ever eaten. The fatter the meat is, he added, “the more appetizing and acceptable it is, and you will find it so tasty and tender that it will melt in the mouth before you bite it, and for its lightness be speedily digested by the stomach” (Ibn Jubayr, 2020, pp. 138–139). Ibn Jubayr ascribed this high quality of meat with the goodness of the pastures. Meanwhile, Ibn Battuta found out that meat in Mecca was fatty and “exceedingly delicious in taste” (Ibn Jubayr, 1958, pp. 191). With regards to animals, Ma Huan mentioned many kinds of animals in Mecca, such as camels, horses, donkeys, mules, oxen, goats, cats, dogs, fowls, geese, ducks, and pigeons (Ma Huan, 1970, p. 176).

In addition to fruits, vegetables and meats, honey could also be found in Mecca, which was called *al-mas’udi*, which was of better quality than *al-mahdi* honey. Furthermore, Ibn Jubayr mentioned the imported sugar cane, sugar and confectionaries, in all kinds of unusual forms, “with honey and thickened sugar in many shapes, including imitations of all the fruits, fresh and dry.” As for dairy products, in Mecca there were various types of high-quality milk as well as butter made out of milk that is as sweet as honey” (Ibn Jubayr, 2020, p. 138). As far as general

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<sup>10</sup> 1 *chang* is equal to 10 feet 2 inches.

foodstuffs are concerned, di Varthema related that, in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, they were imported from Cairo, Zidda (Jeddah), Arabia Felix (southern coast of Arabian Peninsula) and Ethiopia (di Varthema, 1863).

In terms of trade, Mecca, although not an entrepot like Jeddah, could also be considered flourished. Although trade there was only conducted during the pilgrimage season, the people who flooded Mecca from the east and west brought with them a great deal of merchandises, ranging from pearls, precious stones, many kinds of perfumes and odoriferous including musk, camphor, amber, and aloes, cotton, silk, to drugs. Furthermore, in this city one can also find products produced by neighbouring countries, such as Syria, Iraq, Khorasan (Persia), India Major and Minor, Ethiopia, and Yemen. Di Varthema admitted that, during the 20 days he remained there, he “never saw so many people collected in one spot.... Of these people some had come for the purposes of trade, and some on pilgrimage for their pardon” (di Varthema, 1863, pp. 37–38; Peters, 2017, pp. 24–33).

Despite the other four travellers not mentioning Mecca’s products, during his visit, Ma Huan somehow listed some merchandises produced by the Holy City, which included rose-water, *an-pa-erh* (*ambergrist*) incense, *ch’i-lin* (giraffe), lions, the “camel-fowl” (ostrich), the antelope, the “fly-o’er-the-grass” (lynx), all kinds of precious stones, pearls, corals, amber, etc. (Ma Huan, 1970, p. 176). However, Ma Huan was alone in mentioning the names of these animals and was not supported by the narratives of the other travellers.

As the true magnet that attracts many travellers to visit Mecca, Masjid al-Haram stands at the heart of the Holy City and occupies an extensive area, with the Ka’bah in the centre of it. According to Ibn Battuta, “The aspect of the mosque is [so] exquisite, its outward sight [so] beautiful [that] no tongue could presume to describe its attractions, and no voice of description do justice to the charm of its perfection” (Ibn Battuta, 1958, p. 191). Even di Varthema portrayed Masjid al-Haram as a “very beautiful temple, similar to Colosseum of Rome,” with sweet-smelling temple (i.e. the Ka’bah) full with spicery and delicious odours (di Varthema, 1863, pp. 38–39). While all travellers agreed that this holiest mosque in Islamic world was surrounded by rectangle, or rather oblong, walls, it is important to note that there are discrepancies concerning the detailed description of Masjid al-Haram. As far as the



number of gates surrounding the mosque is concerned, Ibn Khusraw mentioned the existence of 18 of them, while Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta agreed that there are 19 gates in Masjid al-Haram. Ma Huan specified that there were 466 openings on that wall, while di Varthema stated that there were around 90 or 100 doors on that wall (Ibn Khusraw, 1881; Ibn Jubayr, 2020; Ibn Battuta, 1958; Ma Huan, 1970; di Varthema, 1863). As for the minarets, Ibn Khusraw and Ibn Jubayr agreed that there were seven of them. Ibn Battuta counted that there were five minarets, and Ma Huan reckoned that the number were four, while di Varthema did not mention any minaret (Ibn Khusraw, 1881; Ibn Jubayr, 2020; Ibn Battuta, 1958; Ma Huan, 1970).

As for the interior of Masjid al-Haram, Ibn Khusraw described that it was surrounded by “three galleries covered with a wooden roof supported by marble columns,” and that those marbles were imported from Syria and, at the order of caliph in Baghdad, transported therefrom via sea route (Ibn Khusraw, 1881, pp. 194–195). Not did he mention the existence of 471 marble columns, Ibn Jubayr also illustrated that the circumambulation (*tawāf*) area in the Masjid al-Haram was covered with very beautiful marble-like-polished granite. In addition, his description about the existence of circumambulation area specifically for women, which was located at the edge of paved stones, might imply the enactment of sex segregation in the circumambulation ritual in the later part of 12<sup>th</sup> century (Ibn Jubayr, 2020). Ibn Battuta confirmed the existence of 490 tall marble pillars, hence, the number is slightly different from that of Ibn Jubayr’s. In similar vein, Ma Huan mentioned that the roof of Heavenly Hall Mosque (i.e. the Masjid al-Haram) was supported by 467 pillars made of white jade stone (Ma Huan, 1970). According to di Varthema, from the gate of Masjid al-Haram, one must descend ten or twelve steps of marble before they finally reached the “temple” (i.e. the Ka‘bah) at the heart of the holy mosque. Upon descending, he found out that there were many arches, under which “4,000 or 5,000 persons, men and women, which persons sell all kinds of odoriferous things; the greater part are powders for preserving human bodies, because pagans come there from all parts of the world” (di Varthema, 1863, pp. 38–39). The presence of those merchandises explains the “sweet-smelling” of the Ka‘bah, as mentioned earlier.

Aside from the descriptions of the exterior and interior of Masjid al-Haram, all five travellers offer rather long and detailed descriptions

about other essential parts of the holy mosque. Ibn Khusraw, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Battuta and di Varthema made some very informative depictions concerning the exterior and interior of the Ka‘bah, including its waterspout (*mizab*), its curtain (*kiswah*), the opening of its door as well as customs and traditions related to it, and the sacred black stone (*hajar al-aswad*); imprint on stone of Prophet Ibrahim’s feet (*maqam Ibrāhīm*); the well of Zamzam and the buildings nearby; and even the customs and traditions surrounding the Eid al-Adha as well as the commencement of ritual of slaughter (Ibn Khusraw, 1881; Ibn Jubayr, 2020; Ibn Battuta, 1958; di Varthema, 1863). However, since the broadness of the information about those buildings will require a whole, thorough and separated study, this article does not discuss that information.

## Conclusion

The journey of Ibn Khusraw to Mecca has been quite eventful, and his travelogue can be considered as a complete account and cover some essential parts of Mecca and the situation surrounding his pilgrimage. More importantly, his account also covers many places further inland of Arabia Desert, as well as describes geographical situations and many local communities, and their stories, in and around Mecca. It is safe to say that his account on Mecca is comfortably concise and easy to read, not to mention that he often includes the exact date of most of the events he experienced. As a man who devoted his journey to Mecca as a spiritual journey, it is not surprising if Ibn Jubayr provides lengthy description regarding situation of Mecca, in nearly a hundred pages. He also makes architectural description of Masjid al-Haram and the Ka‘bah with particular detail. He covers the essential parts of Mecca, including the sacred places in and around it, the procession and situation surrounding the pilgrimage, and he includes numerous stories about some individuals. Like Ibn Khusraw, he provides some geographical information of Mecca, as well as commerce in the region. Interestingly, Ibn Jubayr revealed some unfavourable situations surrounding his pilgrimage to Mecca, especially the corruption of the ruler of Jeddah and Mecca, and the wickedness of some local communities.

As pilgrim and eminent scholar of Islam, Ibn Battuta’s account does not only cover the physical description of Mecca in his time, but also numerous sites of sacred places, including the houses of earliest follower

of Islam (*tābi‘īn*), as a guidance for his reader. Furthermore, he listed many pious individuals during his visit, along with their virtues, good deeds, and habits, so that the reader can reap some lessons from the story of their lives. However, sadly, many sacred places with historical importance which were recorded by Ibn Battuta have been demolished in the 20<sup>th</sup> century since the current government of Saudi Arabia, which happens to be a staunch proponent of Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb’s teachings, decided to expand the Masjid al-Haram and make way to further development of the Holy City in order to provide more extensive services for the future pilgrims (Taylor, 2012). Rather different from three previous accounts, Ma Huan’s travelogue highlights more of the economic situation in Mecca and also the social conditions of its inhabitants. This is understandable since *Ying-Yai Sheng-Lan* was meant to be an official record which, in turn, was to be reported to the Emperor of China, especially considering that the writer was indeed ordered to “record the strange things” (Mills, 1970, p. 15). As for di Varthema, it is safe to say that he was indeed very devoted to adventure, and we can see that from his willingness to disguise as a Mamluk and learn Arabic and the fact that he, and his caravan, was willing to put their lives on the line when faced with some raids on their way to Mecca. Quite similar with Ibn Khusraw, Ibn Jubayr, and Ibn Battuta, he includes descriptions of interesting places around Mecca, as well as the essential parts of Mecca in sufficient detail and with enthusiasm. Sometimes he painted Mecca brightly, which might imply the sincerity of his writing. However, given the fact that he was a Christian, it is not surprising that sometimes he inserts discordant comments about the sanctity of Prophet Muhammad and Islamic holy sites.

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