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Writing the Sacred from Within in Richard Burton's *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*

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Abstract

The West has shown the utmost curiosity for the Middle East's culture, tradition, society, and the Hajj pilgrimage. This region was considered the least explored on the world map until the nineteenth century. Over the decades, a handful of adventurers and explorers have undertaken various perilous journeys to find answers and satisfy the inquisitiveness of a larger, knowledge-thirsty populace. Travel writing, Hajj pilgrimage travel writing, can still not be considered an established area of study. This paper aims to highlight the pilgrimage travelogues of the nineteenth century by drawing scholarly attention to the genre of Hajj pilgrimage travel writing, its significance, and the need for more academic attention. The paper critically analyses Sir Richard Burton's travelogue *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* (1855), which recounts his journey to the cities of Mecca and Medina and the Hajj pilgrimage from the nineteenth century. He undertook the Hajj pilgrimage in disguise as a Muslim pilgrim, a journey fraught with numerous challenges and dangers. The paper primarily critically analyses the motivations of this so-called pilgrim from the West, his reflections on the Oriental society, culture, religious sites, and life in the Middle East, along with the challenges he faced during this perilous journey. It also critically examines how he attempted to reconcile his Englishness with an adopted Muslim guise or identity and its impact on the narration and description in the travelogue.

Keywords: *Hajj Pilgrimage, Mecca and Medina, Middle East's Culture, Pilgrimage in Disguise, Travel Writing.*

Introduction

Sir Francis Richard Burton (1821–1890) was a celebrated Victorian explorer, author, ethnologist, spy, soldier, geographer, poet, ambassador, Orientalist, translator, cartographer, polyglot, and traveller. He was renowned for his perilous expeditions and explorations across continents such as Asia, America, and Africa. A distinguished scholar, he possessed extensive knowledge of various cultures and languages and an impressive number of books he authored. Throughout his lifetime, Richard Burton undertook numerous expeditions as a renowned explorer of the Victorian era. His insatiable curiosity and courage to uncover both tangible and intangible aspects, such as places, culture, religion, and tradition, prevented him from settling in one location. He devoted his life to travelling, exploring, and documenting until his last breath. Among his most celebrated undertakings were his life-threatening journeys to the sacred and forbidden pilgrimage sites of Mecca and

Medina, where he accessed these sites as a Muslim pilgrim, and his exploration of Lake Tanganyika in Africa, making him the first European to do so. He also embarked on numerous expeditions with his friend John H. Speke, primarily across the African continent, discovering the great lakes of Africa and tracing the source of the Nile. Additionally, he is lauded for his firsthand and nuanced documentation of these adventures.

Burton was a polyglot. He utilised his linguistic expertise to enhance his writing and further his journeys. He diligently documented his expeditions and published them to satisfy the knowledge thirst of the wider populace. As a multilingual expert, he made the information he covered accessible in the public domain in the least explored or unexplored areas across the continents, including notably brilliant translations of famous books in various languages. He also experimented with poetry. His most celebrated prose works include his meticulously documented travels to the holy cities in Arabia under the guise of a Muslim pilgrim entitled A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah (1855); the translation of The Arabian Nights (1885 to 1888 in English); the publication of Kama Sutra (1883) in English; The Perfumed Garden (1886), and so forth. His writing has been instrumental in establishing his name and fame among the broader reading audience. Upon his return from his expedition in Mecca, Burton set off for a new voyage to East Africa, accompanied by Lieutenant Speke and others. His book, First Footsteps in East Africa (1856), thoroughly documented his harrowing and life-threatening experiences with the native Somalis of East Africa. He was honoured with a knighthood in 1886.

Richard Burton was among the few European travellers who could successfully and securely visit the most sacred cities of Islam – Mecca and Medina – in 1855. After his return, he penned an account of his journey entitled *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah*. He performed the Hajj pilgrimage in 1855, disguised as a Muslim pilgrim. His travelogue became an immediate sensation in nineteenth-century Europe and was subsequently republished in various abridged versions and editions. The original account, written in three large volumes, was rather lengthy.

The narrative is divided into XXXIII (33) chapters, spanning 479 pages. Each chapter is marked by a title, offering a glimpse into the elaborate content of that chapter. Another intriguing aspect is that each chapter has distinct subtitles that change as the narration shifts from one event to another. Thus, by simply reading the titles and subtitles, readers can outline the various accounts depicted by Richard Burton. For instance, the first chapter is entitled "To Alexandria", and it is further accompanied by subtitles such as "How and Why Undertaken", "Getting into Train", "The Kaif", and so on.

Method

This paper used qualitative method to highlight and analyse the pilgrimage travelogues of the nineteenth century by drawing scholarly attention to the genre of Hajj pilgrimage travel writing, its significance, and the need for more scholarly attention. The paper critically analyses Sir Richard Burton's travelogue *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* (1855), which recounts his journey to the cities of Mecca and Medina and the Hajj pilgrimage from the nineteenth century. Thirty three chapters in the book are the data that have analysed critically combining literary analysis with historical contextualization in order to examine how pilgrimage narratives reflected and shaped religious and cultural during this period. Key passages are selected to illustrate Burton's descriptive language, his depictions of sacred spaces, and his encounters with both fellow pilgrims and local

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inhabitants. Moreover, this paper also integrates close reading with contextual and theoretical frameworks in order to unveil western perspectives on hajj. In addition, the paper primarily analyses the motivations of this so-called pilgrim from the West, his reflections on the Oriental society, culture, religious sites, and life in the Middle East, along with the challenges he faced during this perilous journey. Furthermore, the paper critically examines how he attempted to reconcile his Englishness with an adopted Muslim guise or identity and its impact on the narration and description in the travelogue.

Results and Discussions

The Journey to Medina and Mecca

Richard Burton commenced his travels from London to Mecca and Medina in 1853. He had been skilfully adopting various disguises as a Muslim pilgrim end route to disguise himself as a European explorer until he left the Middle East. He first arrived in Egypt, where he stayed for almost three months before continuing his journey. He joined the pilgrims and boarded the ship from Suez to Yambu, a gateway to Medina. He reached Medina first, the city of the Prophet Mohammed, and remained there for a month. During his stay, he explored the city, its famous shrines, mosques, markets, and the daily lives of the locals. He provided a vivid narrative of the town in his travelogue. His descriptions are detailed and provide historical background information. After a month, he joined a caravan from Damascus to Mecca, arriving there in early September. After fulfilling the rituals of the Hajj as a pilgrim, a Haji, he shifted to focused exploration of the city. After completing his thorough observations of Mecca, its people, traditions, culture, and so on, he made his way to the seaport of Jeddah to return to London.

Burton, inspired by his keen love of exploration and travel, proposed his plan to undertake the most dangerous yet exciting journey to Arabia before the Royal Geographical Society. The Royal Geographical Society gladly financed Burton for such an essential and perilous endeavour. After receiving approval for this journey from the Royal Geographical Society, he persuaded the East India Company's board of directors to grant him leave for three years. Burton's motives, as the Royal Geographical Society understood, were to impart greater scientific knowledge and, more importantly, to provide details about various trade routes leading to Arabia to the East India Company. However, Burton's wish remains unspecified among all these political and economic intentions. His pilgrimage journey was not mentioned in his proposal. In the first chapter of his account, entitled "To Alexandria", he narrates the problems he faced in convincing the authorities and how he secured permission for this journey. He writes,

> What remained for me to prove, by trial, that what might be perilous to other travelers is safe to me. (18)

The Royal Geographical Society sought information about the lives and culture of Muslims in Muslim countries. They were particularly focused on expanding their business in these territories. The Middle East remained a subject of curiosity for Europeans, as accurate information about this region was seldom conveyed. Before Burton, very few Europeans had ventured into such a perilous area; nonetheless, they could not communicate factual details about the people and places. Consequently, superstitions and misconceptions about Muslims, their customs, lives, traditions, and all the nuances of their existence were prevalent in Europe. Europeans' image of the Middle East was often stereotypical and

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distorted. To Europeans, the Middle East conjured notions of polygamy, polygyny, zenana, and an exotic and mysterious array of customs. The prohibition on non-Muslims entering the heart of Islam, Mecca and Medina, further fueled the mystique surrounding this land. Burton intended to seize this unique opportunity that could bring him fame and recognition in one fell swoop. He successfully embarked on this perilous journey into this daunting territory.

On the one hand, Burton's journey fulfilled the Royal Geographical Society's aim; he could satisfy his long-standing personal curiosity about exploring this mysterious land. This endeavour brought his name and fame together. Burton's journey once again aroused hope in the Royal Geographical Society to convey details about,

> Moslem's inner life in a really Mohammedan country; and longing, if truth be told, to set foot on that mysterious spot which no tourist had yet described, measured, sketched and daguerreotyped. (Burton 18)

Burton, as an intelligent, aware, and conscious writer, justifies his choice of title for this travelogue. He crafted his entire account with his readers in mind. He made additional efforts to ensure his narrative is reader-oriented. Therefore, he begins the initial chapter of his account,

> I have entitled this account of my summer's tour through El Hejaz, a personal narrative, and I have labored to make its nature correspond with its name, simply because "it is the personal that interests mankind." (Burton 20)

Burton's narration is both detailed and informative. He endeavoured to provide accounts of every facet encountered during his journey from Egypt to Egypt. He noted specifics such as days and dates, recorded conversations with Egyptian natives, and shared his experiences with fellow pilgrims throughout the expedition. He describes Arabian customs, attire, behaviours, food habits, superstitions, history, landscape, diseases, and a lengthy list of observations. Burton made detailed entries on minute details as well, illustrating precisely the dates he consumed, for example. He provided comprehensive information about the wide variety of dates found there, the names used by the natives, their therapeutic uses, and various methods of preparing those dates. Similarly, the reader will also encounter a detailed entry on diseases. Thus, these particulars underscore his thorough knowledge and deep interest in learning everything new he encounters. The travelogue includes languages other than English, which can make it challenging for readers to follow the narrative. However, his extensive footnotes are helpful for curious readers, enabling them to comprehend the text without seeking external resources or materials. As a seasoned explorer, he employed disguising skills to avoid suspicion and documentation as a concealed pilgrim. He faced challenges while taking regular observational notes. However, despite sensing all perils, he documented his sharp observations and drew charts of significant mosques and shrines on an inner layer of his pilgrim's attire. Interestingly, he sometimes kept a small diary in the wooden case where Muslims carry the Quran. Such strategies helped maintain his disguise and documentation while protecting him from suspicion.

Burton stayed for nearly a month in Medina City. He was the first European to put Medina on the map for Europeans. The information provided by Burton about Medina – Prophet's city, is known as his noteworthy contribution to the literature on Hajj written by European pilgrims. Burton's narrative discusses Medina exclusively. His account records

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details of Muslim sects, architecture, the House of the Prophet (PBUH) and his Caliphs, commerce, history, libraries, marketplaces, leading mosques, social life, traditions, myths, inhabitants, and more. This information helped to dispel counterfeit and fictitious beliefs from past centuries. Many groundless notions were widespread about Medina. Indeed, numerous earlier travellers have incorrectly depicted the Prophet's (PBUH) tomb, mosques, and religious sites before Burton. As a well-read traveller, Burton noted irrational ideas and false depictions in his account to convey accurate information to his European readers. He demonstrated his sound knowledge of the Quran and Islam. He differentiated between visitations, better known as "Ziyarat", and the Hajj pilgrimage according to the Quran. He accurately mentions that "the former is only a meritorious action whereas the latter is obligatory" (Burton 195).

> "Tawaf" or circumambulation of the House of Allah at Meccah, must never be performed at the Prophet's Tomb. It should not be visited in the *ihram* or pilgrim dress; men should not kiss it . . . as at Kabah; or rub the face with dust collected near the sepulcher; . . . to treat it with contempt, is held to be the act of an infidel. (196)

The readers, non-Muslims who have never visited these sacred sites before, were provided with erroneous information until now. They had no reason to doubt the data given to them. Aware of the life-threatening nature of this journey, Burton was prepared to confront those false assumptions with appropriate evidence. His account of Medina is meticulously written, featuring testimonials from Islam and Hadith (religious sayings). He did not exaggerate or present incorrect documentation. He acknowledges the risks associated with entering as a non-Muslim. He references earlier European explorers who endeavoured to penetrate this territory. Their claims about this perilous journey were accurate. He alludes to Ali Bey's attempts to enter the city. Unfortunately, he could not gain access. Nevertheless, Burton writes in footnotes, "In A.D. 1807 they prevented Ali Bey from entering El Medinah and it appears that he had reason to congratulate himself upon escaping without severe punishment" (Burton 196).

Chapter XXV, entitled "The first visit to the House of Allah," narrates Burton's overwhelming reaction and sense of remarkable achievement as he realises his long-cherished dream of visiting Mecca during the Hajj season as a Muslim pilgrim. He was awestruck upon entering the House of Allah. He expresses his pleasant state of mind:

> There at least it lay, the bourn of my long and weary pilgrimage, realising the plans and hope of many and many a year . . . the view was strange, unique, and how few have looked upon the celebrated shrines! I may truly say that, of all the worshippers who clung weeping to the curtain, or who pressed their beating hearts to the stones, none felt for the moment a deeper emotion than did the Haji from the far north . . . But to confess a humbling truth, theirs was the high feeling of religious enthusiasm, mine was the ecstasy of gratified pride. (Burton 390)

His respect for Islam was evident in his narration, as mentioned earlier. He was modest enough to acknowledge that there was a significant difference between his feelings and those of Muslim Hajis. After offering namaz in front of the Ka'aba, he observes, "I have seen the religious ceremonies of many lands, but never-nowhere-aught so solemn, so impressive as this" (391). He noted everything in Mecca, including the informal chats of the locals, their food habits, cultural practices, and taste of water, as well as the geology of the desolate area, transportation, architecture, economy, and much more.

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He opines that Arabs are attractive and good-natured individuals. He remarks, "They are of a more affectionate nature than the Persians, and their manners are far more demonstrative than those of the Indians" (181). He compares Arabs with different groups of people, such as Persians and Indians, based on his personal experience with them, as mentioned earlier. Thus, he concludes that Arabs are kind and friendly. Burton comprehensively narrates the Bedouin tribes of Arabia. He writes, "the best character of Bedouin is a truly noble compound of determination, gentleness and generosity" (Burton 323). He provides detailed accounts of those tribal people, encompassing their living habits, attire, dietary practices, traditions, customs, rituals, lifestyle, and so forth. He precisely comments upon Bedouin women:

> The women of Hejazi Bedouins are by no means comely . . . they are far inferior to the high – bosomed beauties of Nejd. The Hejazi women's eyes are fierce, her features harsh, and her face haggard; . . . she soon fades and her appearance is truly witch-like. (322)

He also mentioned the war dance of the Bedouins in Chapter XIV. This is their traditional dance, among many others. These dancers use pistols, daggers, and other weapons. It caught Richard Burton's attention. He narrates the dance, the dancers, and comments on their dancing style:

> The style of the siltation called Rufayhah, rivaled the song. The dancers raised both arms high above their heads, brandishing dagger, pistol, or some other small weapon. They followed each other by hops, on one or both feet, sometimes indulging in the most demented leaps; whilst the bystanders clapped with their palms a more enlivening measure. (449)

In addition, he commented on and contrasted the diverse traditions and beliefs of the El Hejaz people, which are similar to those of the African and Somali peoples. Because Richard Burton ventured into the interior regions of Africa, he was able to identify parallels between two different tribes from distant lands. Burton continues to narrate his detailed observations of the Bedouins. He notes that gender discrimination prevails within the tribe. Males and females dance in separate groups in Bedouin culture, as it is believed that dancing together would bring shame to their respective families. Hence, "the sexes never mingle: the girls may dance together, but it would be disgraceful to perform in the company of men" (Burton 450). He also highlights the unethical practice of giving dowries in marriage. He harshly records that "women, being a marketable commodity in barbarism as in civilization, youths in El Hejaz are not married till the father can afford to pay for the bride" (340). Additionally, detailed entries describe the women's apparel, hairstyles, and ornaments. For instance, "the women wear . . . dark blue cotton Tobes, but larger and looser . . . their ornaments are bracelets, collar, ear, and nose-rings of gold, silver, or silver-gilt" (342-343).

Burton set out for Mecca on September 1 with the caravan, arriving a day before the commencement of the Hajj rituals. In chapter XXI, "from El Medinah to El – Suwayrkiyah", he narrates the grand appearance of the caravan, whose manifestation was evident. "To judge by the eye", he notes, "there were at least 7000 souls on foot, on horseback, in litter, or bestriding the splendid camels of Syria" (309). Burton travelled on the Shagdaf camel and observed the social and class hierarchy among the pilgrims in the caravan, which was a striking and apparent sight. The hierarchical discrimination in the caravan seemingly drew his attention:

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> There were eight gradations of pilgrims. The lowest hobbled with heavy staves. Then come the riders of asses, camels, and mules. Respectable men, especially Arabs, mounted dromedaries, and the soldiers, had horses: a led animal was saddled for every grandee, ready whenever he might wish to leave his litter. Women, children, and invalids of the poorer classes sat upon a "haml musattah,". . . many occupied Shibriyahs, a few, Shugdufs, and only the wealthy and the noble rode in Takhtrawan (litters), carried by camels or mules. (309)

The discriminatory behaviour of pilgrims arriving from all over the world in Mecca and Medina should not be tolerated. Hajj is a sacred ritual during which Muslims globally, regardless of gender, class, or race, come together to perform pilgrimage rituals at one place and time in Mecca each year. Similar accounts of discrimination among pilgrims or Hajis in various situations and occasions have been presented by Sikandar Begum in her acclaimed travelogue *A Pilgrimage to Mecca* (1863). Sikandar Begum, an Indian Nawab and British ally, travelled to Mecca in the same century as Richard Burton. Both Sikandar Begum and Richard Burton observed that pilgrims were afforded means of conveyance based on their economic status and societal hierarchy (Usmani, 2021).

Moreover, his journey was fraught with adversity and challenges right from the outset. He faced both natural and physical obstacles along the way, including bandit attacks, a severely injured foot, extreme heat, and sunstroke, any of which could have led to his demise during the trek.

Critical Analysis

Pilgrimage is a form of travel that has been practised since time immemorial (Valsiner 2012). It has always been regarded as the most common reason for travelling throughout antiquity around the world. "Pilgrim" and "pilgrimage" have carried diverse meanings for ages. The English term 'pilgrim' originated from the Latin word *peregrinus*, which means 'a foreigner, a stranger, someone on a journey, or a temporary resident.' This term depicts the traveller on a short journey to a particular place or someone staying in a foreign land for a short or long period. *Peregrination* refers to the state of being or living abroad, which alludes to the pilgrim (Usmani, 2020).

For centuries, people have embarked on pilgrimages and shared their experiences. Pilgrimage is transformative. It is believed that a pilgrim's life undergoes transformation after the pilgrimage. The earlier accounts of the Hajj pilgrimage, penned over the years, have documented the constant and rapid changes in pilgrimage practices and the experiences at sacred sites. Over the decades, with progress and development, Arabia has drawn an increasing number of visitors. Burton was also eager to experiment and experience the transformative nature of the pilgrimage. Consequently, he arranged his travel itinerary to ensure he reached Mecca and Medina during the Hajj period.

> From the fourth century and for well over a millennium, the pilgrimage was the dominant mode of travel through the Middle East and the most available paradigm for travel writing . . . this mode . . . retained its place in the British discourse on the Orient (Hulme and Youngs 108).

In his essay "The Middle East / Arabia: 'The cradle of Islam'", Melman establishes the significance of religious travel, such as pilgrimage, which has flourished worldwide for centuries. The pilgrimage has successfully facilitated the mobility of larger groups of people across continents. However, the re-establishment of dedicated pilgrimage observance in the early nineteenth century was directly linked to the growing interest of the British in the

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Middle East. The development of transportation methods further eased the challenging travel conditions of the nineteenth century, enabling more travellers to undertake the pilgrimage and travel worldwide.

Travel writing was also closely connected with British colonisation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It enabled travellers to explore far-off continents and fulfil their aim of gathering firsthand information about many unseen parts of the world, promoting territorial expansion in Eastern countries. The unfamiliarity with the lands, inhabitants, traditions, culture, and society posed challenges to expansion. Thus, travel became a valuable tool for learning about Middle Eastern countries and distant regions. Many explorers were encouraged and sponsored to venture globally, particularly in the Middle East. As Roy Bridges aptly states,

> (during this period) travel writing became increasingly identified with the interests and preoccupations of those in European societies who wished to bring the non-European world into a position where it could be influenced, exploited or, in some cases, directly controlled (Hulme and Youngs 53).

On the other hand, European travellers and several non–European travellers who traversed novel routes have penned their journeys through non-European civilisations. They navigated to learn more about the larger world around them. However, travelling and exploring through the lens of European colonial understanding implies that journeying is associated with innovation. At the same time, textual portrayal specifically references mapping, documenting, administering, and controlling new lands, which are exceptional (Khair et al. 21). Thus, non-European travellers were not given as much preference compared to Europeans.

Western travellers to the East have systematically publicised the exotic, mysterious, romantic, and forbidden Arabian Peninsula over time, influenced by Western notions. European pilgrims journeying to Mecca penned a handful of pilgrimage accounts before the nineteenth century. These travellers, or pilgrims, include Ludovico di Varthema from Rome in 1503, Joseph Pitts from Exeter, England in 1704, Ali Bey al-Abbasi from Spain in 1807, John Lewis Burckhardt from Switzerland in 1814, and Richard Burton from Great Britain in 1853. Burton's account is regarded as the most accurate and reliable narrative written by a non-Muslim. These travellers have crafted their version of the Middle East through their writings. The Middle East has been depicted as practising social customs that are foreign to the West, such as veiling, polygyny, polygamy, and harem. The accounts authored by these English travellers and explorers are, in the words of Sarah Searight, "as revealing of the writers . . . as of the countryside through which they travelled" (Searight 130).

Burton had worked painstakingly for this endeavour while closely observing the lives of Muslims. He began to study and learn about typical Muslim behaviour, the manner of offering namaz and dua, and so forth. During his tenure with the British Army, he spent nearly seven years in India in a Muslim province. It was during this time that he observed and learnt about Muslim customs, traditions, behaviours, and rituals, and nearly every minute detail that needed to be executed like a Muslim man. His profession allowed him to gain a first-hand understanding of various cultures, behaviours, and the lives of different provinces and religions, including Islam. His experiences proved invaluable when he planned this perilous journey to the most sacred sites of Muslims during the Hajj period. It was exceedingly risky to navigate these cities amid the crowds during Hajj, as he could face

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severe consequences if caught. However, his determination prevailed, enabling him to perform the pilgrimage alongside other Muslims. He articulates his fears in his account that even minor mistakes, such as offering a prayer or reciting a prayer, could land him in jail or face the death penalty. His resolve turned this seemingly impossible task into a reality. Moreover, this adventurous journey established him as a renowned traveller of the Victorian era. His account is regarded as the most authentic and reliable, alongside a well-documented narrative written by a nineteenth-century non-Muslim.

Burton was born to be an explorer. He possessed physical features that naturally facilitated his inclusion in the Eastern community; his fair skin and dark hair contributed to his Eastern appearance. Despite being born into an Irish family, his looks held no advantage as an Irish or English man. His most remarkable trait was his fluency in various dialects and vernaculars, which came naturally to him as his family continually moved due to his father's job. He was a remarkable natural orator, speaking several languages like a native. During his family's frequent relocations, he had the opportunity to closely observe Islam. He undertook many journeys to the East, which allowed him to learn about Islamic traditions, customs, and behaviours, almost as if he were a Muslim. This keen observation was vital during his expedition to Mecca and Medina, where he could seamlessly adopt the behaviour and actions of a Muslim pilgrim. As an avid reader of world literature, he explored a wide array of texts. His knowledge of diverse cultures, traditions, languages, and locations greatly benefited his expeditions. He consistently sought to enrich his understanding as a lifelong learner. This information is acknowledged in the Editor's Preface to the English edition of his book.

> It was during the residence of many years in India that Mr. Burton had fitted himself for his late undertaking, by acquiring, through his peculiar attitude for such studies, a thorough acquaintance with various dialects of Arabia and Persia; and indeed his Eastern cast of features seemed to point him out as the very person of all others best suited for an expedition like that. (Burton vi)

Burton made a conscious choice to don Oriental attire. Alternatively, he could have entered Mecca as a newly converted Muslim, thereby eliminating the risks associated with maintaining the disguise of a Muslim pilgrim. However, his decision not to present himself as a newly converted Muslim may have stemmed from a deeper thought process. His complex array of professional goals and the knowledge he acquired while living in the Orient likely led him to pursue this challenging deceit. For instance, a newly converted Muslim would not have been accepted by fellow pilgrims as a truly devout and pious pilgrim. His prior experience in Sindh with Muslims had taught him that the persona of an Oriental pilgrim would be a safer and more fitting disguise to access the hidden aspects of the lives of Arab natives.

He chose a new name, Abdullah, as an Afghan doctor, which seems a calculated step. In the footnotes of his account, he informs his readers of the importance of choosing a name. As a curious explorer and traveller, he must adopt various guises according to the time, place, and situational requirements. He should be well-versed in that particular sect or religion to adapt to any masquerade and should equally show respect for the selected faith. The most important point he conveys to his readers is that a traveller should possess an unbiased perception and the skill of nuanced observations. Conversely, his readers should approach the account with a neutral opinion regarding the traveller and his journeys. Burton

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elaborates on this idea in the footnotes when he states that Abdullah is a name that suggests this kind of person whom "all sects and religions might be equally proud to adopt" (Burton 26). He endeavours to convince his European readers not to perceive his presence as an accurate conversion.

Burton's vivid and evocative narration enables readers to experience the Arabian Peninsula vicariously. His intricately detailed descriptions of the cities of Mecca and Medina, the awe-inspiring grandeur of the Ka'aba Sharif in Mecca, and most significantly, his awareness of his predecessors and their travelogues, allow him to become the author of the most authentic travelogue on these sacred cities in the nineteenth century. Chapter XXV, entitled "The First Visit to the House of Allah", recounts Burton's overwhelming reaction and sense of outstanding achievement, realising his long-cherished dream of visiting Mecca during the Hajj season as a Muslim pilgrim. He was awestruck upon entering the House of Allah. He expresses his pleasant state of mind:

> There at least it lay, the bourn of my long and weary pilgrimage, realizing the plans and hope of many and many a year . . . the view was strange, unique, and how few have looked upon the celebrated shrines! I may truly say that, of all the worshippers who clung weeping to the curtain, or who pressed their beating hearts to the stones, none felt for the moment a deeper emotion than did the Haji from the far north . . . But to confess humbling truth, theirs was the high feeling of religious enthusiasm, mine was the ecstasy of gratified pride. (Burton 390)

Despite not being a pilgrim, he was modest enough to acknowledge that there was a significant difference between his feelings and those of the Muslim Hajis. After offering namaz in front of the Ka'aba, he observes, "I have seen the religious ceremonies of many lands, but never-nowhere-aught so solemn, so impressive as this" (391). He took note of everything in Mecca, including the informal conversations of the locals, their eating habits, preferences in water, the geology of the desolate area, transportation, architecture, economy, and much more. In Chapter XV, "A Visit to the Prophet's Tomb", Burton mentions the three most famous and significant sites of Muslim religious observance. They are, as he notes, "Masjid El Haram of Meccah, Masjid El Nabawi and Masjid El Aksa of Jerusalem" (195). He then describes his visit to The Masjid El Nabawi, the Prophet's Mosque. It feels as if he is providing a precise map of the mosque. In his words,

> The Masjid el Nabi is a parallelogram about 420 feet in length by 340 broad, the direction of the long walls being nearly and south . . . it is a hypaethral building with a spacious central area, called El-Sahn, El-Hosh, El-Haswah, or El-Ramlah, surrounded by peristyle with numerous rows of pillar . . . their arcades or porticoes are flat-ceilinged, domed above the small half-orange cupola of Spain, and divided into four parts by narrow passages, three or four steps below the level of the pavement. (197)

As a voracious reader, Burton was aware of the incorrect, irrational, and exotic descriptions of the Prophet's tomb found in the accounts of his predecessors. He therefore depicted it accurately, incorporating elements from the flawed documentation of those who came before him. He refers to his predecessors, ranging from classical travellers, such as Ibn Jubayr, to the more recent Burckhardt. He narrates,

> I saw a curtain, or rather hangings, with three inscriptions in large golden letters, informing readers, that behind them lie Allah's Prophet and the two first caliphs. The exact place of Muhammad's tomb is moreover distinguished by a large pearl rosary, and a particular

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> ornament, the celebrated Kaukab el Durri, or constellation of pearls, suspended to the curtain breast high. (Burton 211)

He accurately described known shrines and renowned locations across both cities, incorporating excerpts from earlier Hajj accounts for precise comparisons. Consequently, his narrative is celebrated as the most authentic account of the Hajj pilgrimage by any European traveller and pilgrim throughout the centuries. The reader may wonder why he references not only Burckhardt, his immediate predecessor, but also one of the classical Muslim travellers—Ibn Jubayr. He contrasts his narration with their depictions, seeking to establish and emphasise the extra efforts he invested in his journey and its documentation. He notes:

> Ibn Jubayr, who travelled A.H. 580, relates that the Prophet's coffin is a box of ebony (abnus) covered with sandal-wood, and plated with silver; it is placed, he says, behind a curtain, and surrounded by an iron grating. El Samanhudi, quoted by Burckhardt, declares that the curtain covers a square building of black stones, in the interior of which are the tombs of Muhammed and his two immediate successors. (212)

It was ensured in the Editor's Preface to the English edition that European readers would welcome his account, as it narrates Muslim holy pilgrimage sites. Non-Muslims are forbidden from entering these sacred premises, except by impersonating a Muslim. Many courageous adventurers endeavoured to enter cities and, upon being caught, were either jailed or expelled. Among them, a few fortunate European travellers managed to successfully cross the threshold and endeavoured to document their experiences during their journey and pilgrimage. Philip Hitti, therefore, correctly noted in his History of the Arabs (2002),

> No more than fifteen Christian-born Europeans have thus far succeeded in seeing the two holy cities and escaping with their lives. (Hitti 2002)

Philip Hitti commented on Burton's travelogue after reviewing certain accounts written on a similar theme. He appreciated Burton's work and noted that "the most interesting was undoubtedly Sir Richard Burton's nuanced narrative" (119). This demonstrates that, despite the peculiar relationship between the East and the West, this enigmatic land has fascinated many curious and courageous travellers and continues to attract many more. Prior to the publication of Burton's account, John Lewis Burckhardt's writings were considered the most authentic documentation of the East. Unfortunately, Burckhardt could not visit and write about Mecca, as his illness prevented him from travelling to Medina. Therefore, his account provides comprehensive information about Mecca, including descriptions of the rites performed during the pilgrimage. Thus, Burton's portrayal of Medina remains the only firsthand, reliable, and most authentic depiction of the holy city. Given the significant contribution Burton made in presenting Medina to Western readers, Europeans could visit the city thanks to him. Michael Wolfe thus rightly states that "Burton was a natural ethnographer – curious, brave, indefatigable" (Wolfe 191).

Burton himself acknowledges his predecessors who undertook the Hajj throughout his narration. Interestingly, he admits to understanding his contemporaries, who could not document their journeys, despite having made the pilgrimage. In chapter I, "To the Alexandria," with the subtitle "how and why undertaken," he states that he was acquainted with the contemporary M. Bertolucei, a Swedish diplomat in Cairo. M. Bertolucei managed

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to reach Mecca after persuading a few local Bedouin men. He was unable to document his pilgrimage due to his fear of being discovered. Another traveller, Dr. Wallin from Finland, succeeded in entering these sacred sites in 1845. Even within the sacred territory, Dr. Wallin found himself unable to record his observations alongside his companions (Burton 20). However, Burton's direct approach raises ethical concerns. His deceptive methods and apparent disregard for local customs can be seen as disrespectful and culturally insensitive. Although his intentions may have been to demystify the sacred Hajj pilgrimage and the cities of Mecca and Medina, his methods risk undermining the journey's sanctity for those who hold it dear. The aspect of the written account aimed at sharing information with a broader Western readership might also leave readers with mixed feelings about his intentions and methods in achieving his targeted aim. Despite being eloquent and rich, his writing style can also be overly verbose, and he occasionally appears self-indulgent. Extensive footnotes throughout the book may overwhelm readers, making the narrative more challenging to follow. It may also divert the reader's attention from the main text to supplementary information. While some may appreciate the detailed depth, others might find it distracting and unnecessarily dense. Consequently, the narrative does seem monotonous at specific points. Additionally, Burton's Eurocentric perspective occasionally conveys a condescending tone when discussing local Arabian customs, people, and practices. His Eurocentric viewpoint may appear subjective and biased to contemporary readers, who favour a more nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to travel writing.

After returning to England, he gained fame and was appreciated for such a remarkable undertaking. This book is undoubtedly the finest work among his numerous accounts of travelling to various lands. His account is regarded as a narrative offering details of a great adventure from the nineteenth century. It has also been revered as a classic commentary by a non-Muslim traveller describing the Muslim lifestyle, manners, and the Hajj pilgrimage. The Hajj is not merely a ritual or practice that people have followed and performed for centuries. Instead, the pilgrimage plays a vital role in uniting millions of Muslims around the globe, at one time and in one place. Thus, it symbolises the common faith and the beliefs of its adherents in the oneness of God and the unity of Muslims worldwide. Reza Aslan, in a Forward to One Thousand Roads to Mecca, very well said that,

> For nearly fifteen hundred years Muslims have travelled by foot, by camel, by boat, by train, and by plane . . . to experience the transformative nature of Hajj. (Wolfe viii)

Conclusion

Travel writing aims to provide information about unfamiliar places. By observing Arabia as a European traveller, Richard Burton could offer deeper insights into that society, its inhabitants, customs, manners, food habits, attire, rituals, markets, corruption in the administration, and much more. His account presents a unique perspective on Arab society and the individuals he encountered. He wrote to convey factual information about the East to European readers. His narrative recounts details that differ from those typically found in Muslim accounts. His writing adopts a more interrogative and informative tone. The primary purpose of documenting his journey was to impart detailed information to Western readers that had only been partially shared before his work. Burton's account reflects the interests and concerns of European society and its readers through his observations in Arabia. Tabish Khair opines, "Medieval and later pilgrimage accounts are not available in translation" (Khair

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et al. 16). The earliest pilgrimage accounts written in various regions around the globe, in local dialects, remain largely unseen in scholarly discourse. The absence of well-translated texts has contributed to this ignorance among scholars worldwide. Indeed, it is high time to unveil such archival records. Khair quotes Professor Adeeb Khalib, an eminent scholar of Central Asian history, on his views regarding the largely unexplored Hajj pilgrimage accounts, safely preserved in regional archives. Professor Khalib states, "Hajjnamas (accounts of the Hajj pilgrimage) lying around in manuscript repositories in Uzbekistan, but they have not been explored" (Khair et al. 387). This paper fulfils the aim to highlight the pilgrimage travelogues of the nineteenth century by drawing scholarly attention to the genre of pilgrimage travel writing.

In conclusion, Sir Richard Burton's *A Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah* offers a unique examination of the Islamic holy cities of Mecca and Medina, while illuminating a world largely unfamiliar to the inquisitive Western audience of the nineteenth century. Unsurprisingly, this travelogue is widely regarded as one of the most authentic accounts by a non-Muslim during the nineteenth century, before the modern methods of travel and transportation associated with the Hajj pilgrimage. The publication of this work brought long-overdue recognition and acclaim to this seasoned and intrepid explorer across the West. Nevertheless, particular ethical concerns regarding the travelogue, such as Burton's writing style, cultural bias, and subjective viewpoint, may render it a controversial yet influential depiction of the Hajj pilgrimage before the dawn of modern transportation, authored by a Westerner who undertook the challenging journey disguised as a Muslim pilgrim and meticulously documented his experiences.

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