

The Semiotics of Travel: A Comparative Study of Ibn Battuta and Ibn Fattouma

Hayam Almaamari^{1*}

¹Mohamed Bin Zayed University for Humanities, United Arab Emirates.

*Corresponding Author: halmaamari10@gmail.com

Citation: Almaamari, H. (2025). The Semiotics of Travel: A Comparative Study of Ibn Battuta and Ibn Fattouma. *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(3), 469–477. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i3.2440>

Published: November 27, 2025

ABSTRACT

This study explores travel discourse through the dual lenses of realism and symbolism by comparing Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* and Naguib Mahfouz's *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*. It examines how journeys are represented as narratives that integrate lived experience, moral reflection, and symbolic imagination within Arabic literature. The research addresses the overarching question: *How do these two journeys articulate human experience through realism and symbolism?* Specific questions include: 1. What realistic and symbolic elements characterize each narrative? 2. How are titles, characters, temporal-spatial settings, events, and language employed as semiotic systems? 3. In what ways do the two journeys converge and diverge in their narrative and symbolic functions? Using a comparative semiotic approach, the study analyzes the texts as interconnected systems of signs, highlighting the interplay of reality and imagination in constructing meaning. Findings reveal that Ibn Battuta's travels document lived reality through historical and geographical observation, while Mahfouz's narrative employs symbolic representation to explore ethical, existential, and spiritual dimensions. The analysis underscores the dual function of travel discourse: documenting experience and engaging with moral and imaginative insights. The study concludes that travel literature, whether historical or fictional, reflects humanity's pursuit of knowledge and transcendence, and recommends integrating travel narratives into educational contexts to foster intercultural awareness, ethical reflection, and empathy.

Keywords: Travel Discourse, Realism, Symbolism, Semiotics, Comparative Analysis, Ibn Battuta, Ibn Fattouma, Naguib Mahfouz.

INTRODUCTION

Travel has long been a fundamental human experience, encompassing physical movement, spiritual exploration, and intellectual inquiry. It manifests in journeys of life and death, dream and reality, self and Other. Travel narratives offer a unique lens to examine human thought, cultural identity, and moral reflection.

This study explores travel discourse between realism and symbolism through a comparative analysis of Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* and Mahfouz's *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*. Ibn Battuta's account provides a detailed record of historical journeys across the Arab, Islamic, and wider world, while Mahfouz's novel employs allegory and imagination to probe human consciousness and ethical dilemmas.

By examining key narrative elements—titles, characters, temporal and spatial frameworks, events, and language—this research investigates how each text represents reality, transcends it through symbolism, and reflects the universal human quest for knowledge, moral understanding, and self-transcendence.

Ibn Battuta and His Journey

Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Lawati al-Tanji, known as Ibn Battuta (703 AH / 1304 CE), stands among the greatest Muslim travelers in history, whose expeditions extended far beyond the Arab world to Asia, Africa, and Europe. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, 1448/852 AH, 4/100). Born into a family of scholarship and jurisprudence in Tangier, he initially prepared for a judicial career but soon yielded to his passion for exploration (Mustafa, 1992).

His first journey began at age twenty-two as a pilgrimage to Mecca, after which he continued to travel in pursuit of learning, spiritual enrichment, and discovery of diverse cultures.

Ibn Battuta was marked by deep faith, religious erudition, a love of Sufism, and remarkable endurance that enabled him to traverse continents under arduous conditions (Moanes, 1980, pp 11, 16-18; Al-Sayyad, 1985, pp 9-12).

Impressed by his accounts, Sultan Abu Inan Faris al-Marini commissioned his vizier and man of letters, Ibn Juzayy, to refine and compile Ibn Battuta's travel notes into a cohesive literary work. The result was the celebrated *Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar* (*A Masterpiece to the Observers on the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travels*) (Ibn Battuta, 1985, p 6). Despite scholarly debates about the accuracy of certain passages, the work remains an authentic and invaluable source blending observation, narration, and literary artistry (Ibn Khaldun, 1406/808 AH, p 322; Mustafa, 1992, pp 13- 29).

Naguib Mahfouz and His Journey

Naguib Mahfouz (1911–2006), laureate of the 1988 Nobel Prize in Literature, is regarded as the father of the modern Arabic novel. His works combine philosophical reflection with artistic realism, characterized by linguistic simplicity, narrative depth, and a profound understanding of the human condition (Fusul, 2006; Dad, 2006).

His novel *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1983) represents a symbolic reimagining of the traditional travel narrative, transforming the motif of travel into a philosophical quest for justice, happiness, and spiritual perfection. The protagonist, *Qindil Ibn Fattouma*, embarks on a multi-stage journey through allegorical lands—*Dar al-Islam*, *Dar al-Hayrah*, *Dar al-Mashriq*, *Dar al-Halbab*, *Dar al-Aman*, and *Dar al-Ghuroob*—in pursuit of the ultimate *Dar al-Jabal*, the land of perfection.

Each destination embodies a distinct worldview and social order, and through them Mahfouz crafts a metaphorical odyssey of human consciousness (Al-Aswad & Sarhan, 1989).

The Main Elements of the Two Narratives

Semiotics of the Title

The Semiotics of the Title in Ibn Battuta's Journey

The Arab traveler Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Abdullah al-Lawati al-Tanji, famously known as Ibn **Battuta**, embarked on his journey, which he entitled *Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar* (*A Masterpiece for the Observers on the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travels*). This title reflects a convention common among scholars, writers, and travelers of his era and preceding generations, who often extended their work titles with elaborate phrasing, employing rhetorical devices such as alliteration, parallelism, and carefully structured word endings. Examples include:

- *Al-Mu'jib fi Talkhis Aḥbar al-Maghrib* by Abd al-Wahid al-Marrakushi (d. 647 AH)
- *Mali' al-'Ayyab bima Jama'ut Tubul al-Ghaybah fi al-Wajhab al-Wajibah ila al-Haramayn* by Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Umar ibn Rashid al-Fihri al-Sabti (d. 721 AH)
- *Al-Dibaj al-Mudhabhab fi Ma'rifat A'yan Ulama al-Madhab* by Abu Ishaq Ibrahim ibn Ali Farhun al-Maliki (d. 799 AH)
- *Mustawda' al-'Allama wa Mustabda' al-'Allamah* by Abu al-Walid Ismail ibn Yusuf ibn Muhammad ibn al-Ahmar (d. 807 AH) and many others. Similarly, the renowned traveler Ibn Jubayr (d. 614 AH) titled his travel account *Tadhkirat al-Aḥbar an Ittiḥaqat al-Asfar*, a title reminiscent of Ibn Battuta's.

In Ibn Battuta's title, one can **identify** phonetic, structural, rhetorical, and semantic markers:

1. The title contains three compound phrases, each composed of two words forming an *idafa* (construct phrase):
 - *Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar* (Masterpiece for the Observers)
 - *Ghara'ib al-Amsar* (Wonders of Cities)
 - *'Aja'ib al-Asfar* (Marvels of Travels)

This binary structure produces musicality, phonetic harmony, and rhythmic balance, whether spoken or visually perceived.

2. Between each compound, prepositions and conjunctions function both cohesively and flexibly. For instance, the first construct (*Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar*) is linked to the second (*Ghara'ib al-Amsar*) by the preposition *fi* (in), while the second is linked to the third (*'Aja'ib al-Asfar*) by the conjunction *wa* (and). This arrangement allows a reordering of the second and third constructs without disrupting the original meaning, while adding a subtle aesthetic effect. One could thus render:

- (*Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar*) *fi* (*'Aja'ib al-Asfar*) *wa* (*Ghara'ib al-Amsar*)
- or (*Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar*) *fi* (*Ghara'ib al-Asfar*) *wa* (*'Aja'ib al-Amsar*)

without altering the semantic integrity.

3. Similarly, the elements of the second and third idafa phrases can be interchanged:

- (*Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar*) fī (*Ghara'ib al-Asfar*) wa (*'Aja'ib al-Amsar*)
- or (*Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar*) fī (*'Aja'ib al-Amṣar*) wa (*Ghara'ib al-Asfar*)

These variations maintain the original syntactic functions of the preposition and conjunction while producing a flexible yet coherent phrasing.

4. There is paronomasia (punning) between *Ghara'ib* (wonders) and *'Aja'ib* (marvels), and between *al-Amsar* (cities) and *al-Asfar* (travels), with a subtler resonance among the three nouns *al-Nuẓẓar*, *al-Amsar*, and *al-Asfar*. The repetition of sounds and similar endings contributes to phonetic cohesion and aesthetic appeal. While one could theoretically replace *Tuhfa* with alternatives like *Ragha'ib* or *Mararib* to match the rhythm of *'Aja'ib* and *Ghara'ib*, Ibn Battuta deliberately chose *Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar*, balancing meaning with elegance, leaving the reader some liberty to explore alternative interpretations. This choice also reflects that the primary focus of Ibn Battuta was the content of the journey itself, rather than ornamental refinement of the title, ensuring that the title emphasizes the marvels and wonders documented in his travels (Ibn Battuta, 1985; Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, 1448/852 AH).

5. Words like (*Tuhfa*), (*Ghara'ib*), and (*'Aja'ib*) capture the audience's attention, enticing readers to explore the journey's narrative, the exotic cities, and the extraordinary marvels along the way. This combination of sound, rhythm, and evocative vocabulary engages the human desire for storytelling, adventure, and wonder, guiding the reader into the immersive world of the journey.

While Ibn Battuta's full title is *Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar fī Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar*, most readers commonly refer to it simply as "Ibn Battuta's Journey", abbreviating the lengthy title. Among scholars, this shorthand is sufficient, as it denotes one of the most renowned works in **Arabic travel literature**, dating to 770 AH (Ibn Battuta, 1985, p 6; Mustafa, 1992, p 13-29).

The name "Ibn Battuta" and his journey (*Tuhfat al-Nuẓẓar fī Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa 'Aja'ib al-Asfar*) inspired a number of modern writers and travel enthusiasts to borrow his name, emulate his journey, and follow his example, sometimes even adopting the abbreviated title (*Ibn Battuta's Journey*) for their own writings and travels, with slight modifications to suit their personal inclinations and the nature of their work¹.

Among these writers, some approached this homage with humor and playfulness, while others used it as a vehicle for creativity and literary innovation. From the first group, one can mention Mahmoud al-Sa'dani with his book *Rihlat Ibn 'Attuta*² and Naguib al-Mustakawi with *Ibn Battuta al-Riyadi*³. In the second group stands the renowned novelist Naguib Mahfouz, who drew on this tradition to write his novel *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma*, whose title we will examine in detail below.

Semiotics of the Title in The Journey of Ibn Fattouma

Naguib Mahfouz composed this novel after extensively examining numerous journeys of Arabs and Muslims, including those of Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta. When asked whether he wrote the novel while keeping Ibn Jubayr's journey in mind specifically, and Ibn Battuta's generally, he replied:

"Ibn Jubayr's journey, Ibn Battuta's journey, and other journeys I had read long ago were certainly present in my mind, but the journey of Ibn Fattouma has no relation to reality." (Abdel-Khalek, G. I. (1993, p 93) .

Mahfouz consciously fused the journeys he read into the crucible of his deep reflection, deliberately crafting a novel that diverges from the factual content of the journeys while mirroring their outward form. The most

¹ Ibn Battuta and his journey provided rich material for emulation in **dramatic works**, such as the Ramadan sketches *Fattouma* broadcast in the 1980s multiple times, featuring a main character named "Fattouma," written by **Abdel Rahman Shawqi**. These sketches depict famous figures of the world, relying on travel material in a humorous and entertaining style. The same character later starred in the series *The Magical Journey of Fattouma* (5 parts). See:

- [Wikipedia: Samir Ghanem](#) (accessed August 11, 2012)
- [Wikipedia: Iman al-Toukhi](#) (accessed August 11, 2012)
- Examples of these sketches on YouTube:
 - o [Sketch 1](#) (accessed August 11, 2012)
 - o [Sketch 2](#) (accessed August 11, 2012)
- Animation adaptation of the character: [YouTube link](#) (accessed August 11, 2012)

² **Mahmoud al-Sa'dani**, a satirical journalist who traveled to several countries, recorded his experiences in *Rihlat Ibn 'Attuta*. He humorously explains his choice of title:

"Ibn 'Attuta! But our uncle Ibn Battuta's name was his flaw, for 'Battuta' comes from 'bat' (duck), and ducks do not fly! Extremely lazy, extremely gluttonous, his journeys are nothing more than a turn in a lake, a walk in a pond, or a dip in a canal depending on circumstances. Thus, I named myself Ibn 'Attuta, echoing Ibn Battuta, considering that both of us have journeys and travels across time and space. I am thus Ibn 'Attuta, derived from 'Atta'—the human gives until exhaustion, and sometimes even faints." (Front cover, 1st ed.; Cairo: Al-Ahram Center, 1988/1408 AH).

³ Naguib al-Mustakawi, a sports trainer who traveled extensively on athletic missions, recorded his experiences in *Ibn Battuta al-Riyadi*, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dar Al-Shorouk, 1988/1408 AH.

immediate connection appears in the title: upon seeing or hearing it, the audience instinctively recalls Ibn Battuta's journey, although they may also draw upon other journeys as points of reference.⁴

The word "journey" thus constitutes the first key threshold of the title, carrying multiple meanings. Linguistically, it refers to movement, travel, or the expedition of animals and people, as well as to dwellings or places associated with such movement. (Ibn Manzur (n.d.), 11/273-279) Specifically, the term denotes:

Travel or relocation from one place to another, suggesting adventures, discoveries, and scattered events; journeys may be undertaken for leisure, experimentation, or exploration of the unknown.

The literary genre of *travel literature*, encompassing accounts of the traveler's observations, descriptions of customs, manners, ethics, and natural landscapes, often recorded systematically or episodically. (Wahbah, M., & Al-Muhandis, K. (n.d.), p 17)

The second component of the title, "*Ibn Fattouma*", represents the second threshold of meaning, evoking an authentic Arab cultural memory. It directly alludes to Ibn Battuta and the interrelated notions of journeys familiar to Arab audiences, thereby reinforcing the sense of continuity and intertextuality. The combination of "journey" with "*Ibn Fattouma*" amplifies narrative intrigue, guiding the reader toward the imagined voyage of the protagonist while invoking expectations of adventure, wonder, and discovery akin to a fantastic voyage, such as the adventures of Sinbad the Sailor.

[Mahfouz's choice reflects his awareness that, although the audience recognizes from the outset that this is a work of fiction within the novelistic genre, the reference to travel literature evokes an irresistible human curiosity and nostalgic engagement with journeys, irrespective of their temporal, spatial, or formal characteristics.⁵

The protagonist's name further strengthens this effect. Mahfouz introduces the character's lineage: his father, Abu Muhammad al-'Annabi, was a wealthy and established merchant; his mother, Fatouma al-Azhari, was a young and beautiful woman married to his father despite the objections of her brothers. The protagonist explains:

"My father named me Qandeel [thus], but my brothers called me 'Ibn Fattouma'—to disown me and question my lineage" (*Mahfouz*, 1983, p 6)

This naming underscores Mahfouz's narrative craft, signaling from the outset the centrality of the character and his journey, and demonstrating the author's mastery over the interplay between title, character, and narrative expectations.

CHARACTERS

Characters in Ibn Battuta's Travelogue

Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* (*The Travels of Ibn Battuta: A Marvel of Distant Lands and Strange Journeys*) belongs to the travel literature genre. Within this genre, the traveler primarily expresses his impressions of what he observes and records his reflections at will. Consequently, the traveler's persona becomes the central or main character—using modern narrative terminology—while other figures function as secondary characters, appearing only through the traveler's narration to complete the narrative scene. It can be argued that such travel literature could not exist without the traveler figure, who performs actions around which events revolve, and whose movements define the temporal and spatial dimensions according to the various regions and periods he traverses (Al-Alawi, n.d.; Ibn Battuta, n.d. pp. 17–18).

In simple terms, this type of literature is viewed through the traveler's own eyes and perspective, focusing on the matters he chooses to highlight while disregarding others at his discretion. Accordingly, the travelogue reveals more about the traveler than about the observed subject itself. As the traveler endeavors to depict the lands he visits and seeks to delight and engage his readers with wonders and curiosities, he inevitably conveys insights about his own self, both explicitly and implicitly. He cannot detach himself from his cultural background, nor distance himself from the civilization to which he belongs. In other words, the traveler carries his own world with him; his presence strengthens or diminishes depending on his sense of estrangement and encounters with what is foreign to his tastes, language, and religion. Thus, discussing the "strange and marvelous" necessitates the presence of the "familiar"—that is, the norms and habits inherent to the self, culturally and personally (Al-Hajj, 2008).

Ibn Battuta appears in his travelogue as both recorder and narrator, documenting his observations and recounting stories interwoven throughout his journey. He describes what captures his attention without explicitly revealing his personal traits or limits, leaving the reader to form a general impression based on his accounts, disclosures, and statements.

He opens his narrative by dictating his travel account to Ibn Juzayy, who documents it as follows:

⁴ Ibn Manzur, A. F. J. M. (1311/711 AH). *Lisān al-'Arab* (Vol. 11, pp. 273–279). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Saad.

⁵ Some scholars tend to "speculate" that Ibn Jubayr's journey was the primary source from which Naguib Mahfouz drew inspiration for his novel, although they did not provide conclusive evidence for this speculation. At the same time, they did not rule out the possibility that he may have also drawn from Ibn Battuta's journey or other journeys. (Abdel-Khalek, G. I. (1993).

"Sheikh Abu Abdullah said: My departure from Tangier, my birthplace, took place on Thursday, the second day of the month of Rajab, year seven hundred and twenty-five [sic], undertaking the Hajj pilgrimage to the Sacred House and a visit to the Prophet's grave, alone without a companion I felt attached to. I rode on a camel, with strong determination and longing for those noble sites residing in my heart. I resolved to part from loved ones, male and female alike, and to leave my homeland as birds leave their nests. My parents were still alive, so I bore the hardship of separation, as did they, at the age of twenty-two"(Ibn Battuta, n.d., pp. 17–18).

The life and journeys of Ibn Battuta have been chronicled in numerous biographical works and transmitted through successive generations. The first part of this study has briefly highlighted aspects of his biography (Arab Center for Geographical Literature, 2012; Ibn Battuta Mall, 2012). The traveler continues to occupy a prominent place in Arab culture, and institutions exist today to celebrate Arab explorers, writers, and travelers, preserve their works, and disseminate them to a global audience (Arab Center for Geographical Literature, 2012). It should be noted that this study does not have the scope to elaborate on every character; therefore, only the main features are addressed⁶.

Characters in The Journey of Ibn Fatouma

While travel literature traditionally centers on the traveler as the primary and active character whose journey unfolds spontaneously without premeditated narrative techniques, the author of *The Journey of Ibn Fatouma* deliberately crafted a novel in which he expresses his opinions, emulating the style of travel literature. He dresses one of his characters in the persona of a traveler, performing the actions traditionally associated with travelers of previous eras, such as journeying, exploration, and narrating their experiences.

Thus, the main character in this novel is entirely fictional, as are the secondary or peripheral characters, all of whom move according to the author's prior planning. The narrator, for instance, conveys what Ibn Fatouma has documented while simultaneously expressing the novelist's voice. The author goes so far as to simulate Ibn Battuta's journey by stating from the outset that the novel is "transcribed from a manuscript" of Ibn Fatouma's travels. This creates the impression that Ibn Fatouma had written the travelogue, which a narrator later discovered and transmitted to us—mirroring the role of Ibn Juzayy in recording Ibn Battuta's journey—whereas the traveler in Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* remains a real historical figure whose movements and experiences inspire authors to create diverse artistic works.

Regarding the depiction of Ibn Fatouma, Naguib Mahfouz employs the skilled novelist's technique to portray the character precisely as he intends, serving the overarching purpose of the novel. The character is malleable, performing the role written for him: embodying the novelist's ideas, simulating a real traveler, and dedicating his life to the pursuit of the unknown⁷.

At the beginning of the novel, Ibn Fatouma addresses his inner self:

"What are you searching for, traveler? What emotions surge through your heart? How do you govern your instincts and whims? Why do you laugh like the knights, and why do you shed tears like children? You witness the joys of festive celebrations and see the executioner's sword strike the necks..."

He then continues using the first-person pronoun:

"And no matter how far the place stretches, it will continue to exude familiarity, offering unforgettable memories and leaving its mark on the heart in the name of the homeland. I shall forever cherish the scents of perfumers, the minarets and domes, and the radiant face that lights the alleyway... My father, Muhammad Al-Anabi, was a prosperous grain merchant. He fathered seven distinguished merchants and lived past eighty in good health. At eighty, he saw my beautiful mother, Fatouma Al-Azhari, then seventeen years old..."

He proceeds to discuss his mother and teacher, preparing the ground for their roles, and opens the space for other characters to interact, converse, and enrich the unfolding events (Ibn Fatouma, n.d., p.xx).

TIME, PLACE, AND EVENTS

⁶ The Arab traveler Ibn Battuta continues to hold a significant place in Arab culture in its various forms. From time to time, institutions and centers dedicated to Arab scholars, creators, and travelers highlight their works and disseminate them globally. Among these is the "Arab Center for Geographical Literature – Artihad Al-Afaq" in Abu Dhabi and London, which established the "Ibn Battuta Prize for Geographical Literature" as part of the pioneering Arab cultural project "Artihad Al-Afaq," aiming to revive travel literature and Arab-Islamic geographical literature. The center also seeks to establish a museum bearing Ibn Battuta's name. The fame of Ibn Battuta in the Arab and Western worlds led to naming one of Dubai's major shopping centers after him, the Ibn Battuta Mall, featuring replicas of the traveler and travel instruments such as ships, astrolabes, and compasses, along with representations of countries he visited and their iconic symbols (Arab Center for Geographical Literature, 2012; Ibn Battuta Mall, 2012). This reflects pride in this Arab figure, appreciation of his wisdom, and the effort to keep his legacy alive in collective memory, especially in Arab and Islamic cultures.

⁷ The character of Ibn Fatouma is entirely fictional, crafted by Naguib Mahfouz to serve the narrative's purpose. Secondary characters are similarly fictional and move according to the author's premeditated design. Mahfouz intentionally mirrors the travelogue style of Ibn Battuta, creating a fictional manuscript that a narrator "discovers," thereby blending the travel literature tradition with novelistic invention.

Time, Place, and Events in Ibn Battuta's Journey

Given the earlier assertion regarding the realism of Ibn Battuta's character—that he was a historical traveler who truly undertook a journey driven by personal motives—it follows that the times and places mentioned in his *Rihla* are likewise authentic, and that most of the events he recorded are factual. Only on rare occasions might he have embellished his account with marvelous or semi-fantastic tales, either for the sake of narrative excitement or as a result of misperception.⁸ Nevertheless, the way he describes places and events ultimately reflects his own worldview, emotional sensibility, and personal reactions to the scenes he witnessed—whether they delighted, disturbed, or astonished him.

Ibn Battuta's journey lasted nearly thirty years. He began it on a Thursday in the month of Rajab, 725 A.H. (1325 C.E.), and concluded it around the middle of Dhu al-Qa'dah, 754 A.H. (1354 C.E.), finally dictating his travelogue on the 3rd of Dhu al-Hijjah, 756 A.H. (1355 C.E.) (Ibn Battuta, n.d., pp. 18, 455). During this extensive journey, he traveled an estimated seventy-five thousand miles (75,000 mi)—a remarkable feat for any traveler of his time (Mounes, n.d.).

Throughout his travels, he visited numerous regions of the Arab, Islamic, and even European worlds, including Algeria, Tunisia, Alexandria, Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Mecca, Medina, Sana'a, Baghdad, Bahrain, Oman, Constantinople, Khwarazm, India, Sind, China, the Maldives, and Ceylon, among others. For nearly three decades, Ibn Battuta exemplified the observant and critical traveler—meticulous in verifying the information he gathered and scrupulous in describing what he saw. He thus earned the title “the trustworthy traveler”, and his *Rihla* became one of the most celebrated travel narratives of the medieval Islamic world, as well as a foundational source for scholars of geography, history, and sociology.

At the conclusion of the *Rihla*, Ibn Juzayy, the scholar who compiled and edited Ibn Battuta's dictation, offers this fitting tribute:

“It is evident to any person of sound mind that this Shaykh is the traveler of his age; indeed, to call him the traveler of this entire nation would not be far from the truth” (Ibn Battuta, n.d., p. 456).

Time, Place, and Events in The Journey of Ibn Fattouma

Just as the time, place, and events in *The Journey of Ibn Battuta* were realistic—reflecting the authenticity of a true historical traveler and his lived experiences—the corresponding elements in *The Journey of Ibn Fattouma* belong entirely to the realm of the author's imagination. Here, Naguib Mahfouz intertwines the world of lived reality with the world of aspiration and dream, creating a narrative that imitates the structure and tone of traditional travel literature while embedding it within an allegorical framework.

The temporal dimension of the novel is essentially psychological and symbolic, an inner or spiritual time that mirrors the evolution of the human soul from primitive paganism to the modern age, passing through successive phases of transformation and civilization (Al-Na'mi, 2007). Likewise, the spatial dimension of the narrative is undefined in geographical terms, though it evokes the Arab-Islamic world and its cultural milieu. These symbolic lands suggest both proximity to and distance from lived reality, blending the real and the imagined in a way that mirrors the tension between the known and the desired.

The protagonist, *Ibn Fattouma*, serves as a metaphorical traveler who wanders through successive lands—beginning with *Dar al-Islam* (the Land of Faith), followed by *Dar al-Mashriq* (the Eastern Land), *Dar al-Hayrah* (the Land of Perplexity), *Dar al-Halbab* (the Land of Contest), *Dar al-Aman* (the Land of Security), and *Dar al-Ghuroob* (the Land of Sunset), leading ultimately to *Dar al-Jabal* (the Land of the Mountain), the symbolic realm of perfection.

Like Ibn Battuta in his historical travels—who expressed admiration when encountering mosques and saints, criticism when observing acts contrary to Islamic law, and astonishment when faced with superstition or sorcery—*Ibn Fattouma* similarly oscillates between fascination and reflection. His journey becomes an intellectual and spiritual quest to learn from other civilizations, to dialogue with difference, and to understand the self through the mirror of the Other. He strives to reconcile his moral principles with what he witnesses, to select from every “land” the wisdom that best suits his nature, and to return home enriched by the lessons of others' experiences.

However, his pursuit of perfection—an ideal he knows in his heart cannot be achieved in this mortal world—ultimately prevents him from reaching his final destination. Thus, at the end of the narrative, he entrusts his *travel diary* to the leader of the caravan, instructing him to deliver it to his mother or to the custodian of the *House of Wisdom*:

“Within it,” he writes, “are scenes that deserve to be known—indeed, glimpses of *Dar al-Jabal* itself, dispelling the darkness surrounding it and awakening the imagination to envision what remains beyond understanding... With these words, the manuscript of Qindil Muhammad al-‘Anabi, known as Ibn Fattouma, came to an end. No record

⁸ An example of such marvelous tales is the story of the *Rukh* (a mythical giant bird), which many historians doubt to be true. Ibn Battuta recounts that before dawn, while aboard a ship with his companions, they saw what appeared to be a massive mountain in the distance—though they knew no mountain existed there. As the sun rose, the “mountain” began to move, revealing itself as the legendary *Rukh*! Some scholars suggest that Ibn Battuta may have been deceived by fog or optical illusion. See *Rihlat Ibn Battuta*, p. 425.

of this traveler appears in any book of history thereafter. Did he continue his journey, or perish along the way? Did he enter *Dar al-Jabal*? What fate befell him there? Did he remain until his death, or return to his homeland as he had intended? Will another manuscript of his final journey ever be discovered? God alone, the Knower of the unseen and the seen, knows the answer.” (Mahfouz, 1983, pp. 157–158)

LANGUAGE

Language in Ibn Battuta’s Journey

Ibn Battuta’s *Rihla* conveys the numerous observations he made during his travels in a direct, clear, and accessible language, suitable for the era in which it was composed, and generally understandable to later readers. The language is not rigid or technical as in scientific treatises; rather, it blends knowledge and literary elegance, employing a refined narrative style that delivers accurate information interspersed with scattered anecdotes and enhanced by occasional rhetorical and aesthetic devices.

Ibn Battuta uses the first-person plural pronoun—“we”—when referring to himself and the group accompanying him (e.g., we traveled, we returned, we arrived), and the first-person singular pronoun—“I”—when speaking of his personal actions (e.g., I arrived, I thanked, I stayed).

It is important to note that Ibn Battuta did not write the *Rihla* directly for his audience during his travels. He journeyed for nearly three decades before finally settling in his homeland. At that point, the Sultan instructed him to dictate his travel account to Ibn Juzayy, a scholar and poet. Ibn Juzayy’s introduction to the *Rihla* demonstrates his editorial role and the structural approach he adopted. He gathered Ibn Battuta’s dictations, organized them coherently, refined the language, clarified meanings, preserved the narrative style, and explained complex foreign names (Ibn Battuta, n.d.; Ahmad, 2007, pp. 214–215, 221–223).

Through this collaboration, the *Rihla* achieved its final form: dictated by Ibn Battuta and refined by Ibn Juzayy. The text maintains clarity, engagement, and literary richness, preserving the traveler’s observations, personal impressions, and narrative style while benefiting from Ibn Juzayy’s meticulous editing. This process exemplifies scholarly integrity similar to modern critical editing (*taḥqīq*), involving verification, refinement, annotation, and commentary while remaining faithful to the original account (Ibn Battuta, n.d.; Ahmad, 2007, pp. 214–215, 221–223).

Language in The Journey of Ibn Fattouma

In his novel, Naguib Mahfouz sought to convey his ideas and perspectives regarding the events and transformations around him. He appears to explore the Other across different times and places, moving between civilizations, engaging with their sages, sensing the sources of suffering, and comparing them with the people of the Arab and Islamic world. In doing so, he undertakes a journey of the human soul from pagan times to the present, passing through various systems of governance and authority in different civilizations (Mahfouz, 2005, pp. 5–6).

The novel adopts the structure of a travel narrative, embodying the persona of the traveler. Mahfouz frequently uses the first-person pronoun, while occasionally referring to the protagonist in the third person, exploring the relationship between self and Other and tracing the path toward redemption. The text acknowledges that the human soul has long suffered—and continues to suffer—from oppression, coercion, and tyranny, and that true salvation lies in justice, freedom, happiness, and security. The ultimate goal is perfection, and the journey continues as long as God wills it (Mahfouz, 2005, pp. 8, 11, 17).

The narrative conveys these themes implicitly rather than explicitly. The reader is invited to infer them while accompanying the traveler, experiencing

both affliction and the search for remedy. Mahfouz’s language is philosophical, symbolic, and suffused with Sufi imagery, cloaked in ambiguity that mirrors the human soul’s oscillation between reality and dream, self and Other, permanence and change. At times, it tends toward abstraction, evoking the linguistic style of early navigators, delving into the roots of history and time, yet remaining comprehensible and engaging to the reader. It is a language of effortless mastery, combining narrative, description, and dialogue in harmony, suited to the setting, time, and reality of the story, as well as to its form and content (Mahfouz, 2005, pp. 76–77).

The novel’s language reveals the author through his diction, style, and Egyptian-Arab identity. Passages from the text illustrate this:

“Life and death, dream and wakefulness, are stations for the bewildered soul, traversed stage by stage, receiving signs and glances from things, groping in a sea of darkness, clinging stubbornly to hope that renews itself smilingly in obscurity... I shall love, as long as I live, the scents of perfumers, the minarets and domes, the bright face illuminating the alley... the songs of the possessed, the tunes of the rebab, the dancing steeds, ivy trees, the wailing of doves and the cooing of pigeons” (Mahfouz, 2005, p. 5).

“Islam today is confined to mosques and does not extend outward!” (Mahfouz, 2005, p. 8).

“I was pained by injustice, poverty, and ignorance!” (Mahfouz, 2005, p. 11).

“I reflected on how we decorate our desires with words of luminous piety, and how we conceal our modesty with sparks of divine revelation” (Mahfouz, 2005, p. 17).

“The only remaining hope for a prisoner like me is to kill hope itself, to adapt to the grave that has swallowed me, and to marry despair’s overarching dominion” (Mahfouz, 2005, p. 76).

“I descended into the depths, stage after stage, losing track of time and the causes of life, history vanished, and I no longer knew the hour, the day, the month, or the year; landmarks disappeared, and my age became an enigma, made vast without measure or mirror except for my companions...” (Mahfouz, 2005, p. 77).

“The door of patience through the bitterness of affliction to reach the sweetness of secret communion” (Mahfouz, 2005, p. 146).

CONCLUSION

The comparative study of Ibn Battuta’s historical journey and Ibn Fattouma’s fictional voyage provides significant insights into the interplay between human experience, cultural encounter, and narrative representation. The analysis demonstrates that travel narratives—whether grounded in historical reality or imaginative fiction—serve as a means for self-discovery, understanding the Other, and reflecting on societal and personal dynamics. Both journeys, despite differences in characters, times, places, events, and linguistic style, reveal the persistent human quest for knowledge, transcendence, and moral insight.

The study also highlights how Ibn Battuta’s *Rihla* offers a faithful record of real travels, critical observations, and cultural documentation, while Ibn Fattouma’s narrative allows the author to explore psychological, ethical, and philosophical dimensions through fictionalization, adopting the structure of a travelogue to reflect on human suffering, social injustice, and the pursuit of perfection (Mahfouz, 2005, pp. 5–6; Ibn Battuta, n.d.). This comparison underscores the value of travel literature as both a historical and literary lens, bridging personal experience and cultural reflection.

- From the findings of this research, the following conclusions and recommendations emerge:
- Travel narratives remain a powerful tool for intercultural understanding, enabling readers to experience diverse societies, values, and worldviews.
- Authors can utilize fictionalized travel to examine ethical, psychological, and philosophical issues while drawing inspiration from historical precedents.
- Future research could further explore how travel literature, historical or fictional, contributes to empathy, cultural awareness, and ethical reflection, especially in the context of globalization and intercultural exchange.
- Educators and scholars may consider integrating both historical and fictional travel texts into curricula to illustrate the dynamic interplay between reality, imagination, and human aspiration.
- In conclusion, the journeys of Ibn Battuta and Ibn Fattouma exemplify the dual dimensions of the travel experience: literal exploration of space and culture, and metaphorical exploration of the self and the Other. These narratives testify to the enduring human desire to explore, learn, and achieve moral, intellectual, and spiritual growth, making them relevant not only as literary or historical artifacts but also as instruments for ongoing reflection and human development.

REFERENCES

- Ibn Battuta, M. b. ‘Abd Allah b. M. b. I. al-Lawati (d. 779 AH/1377 CE). (1997). *Rihla Ibn Battuta* (1st ed.). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Al-Nafa’is.
- Ibn Battuta, M. b. ‘Abd Allah b. M. b. I. al-Lawati (d. 779 AH/1377 CE). (1985). *Rihla Ibn Battuta, also known as Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Ghara’ib al-Amsar wa ‘Aja’ib al-Asfar* (A. M. al-Kattani, Ed.; 4th ed.). Beirut, Lebanon: Al-Risala Foundation.
- Mahfouz, N. (1983). *The journey of Ibn Fattouma* (1st ed.). Cairo, Egypt: Maktabat Misr.
- Al-Aswad, F. (Ed.). (1989). *Al-Rajul wa al-Qimma: Research and studies* (Vol. 1; S. Sarhan, Intro.; S. Al-Shami, A. Hammad, & Y. Al-Dib, contributors). Cairo, Egypt: General Egyptian Book Organization.
- Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, A. b. ‘A. (n.d.). *Al-Durar al-Kamina fi A’yan al-Mi’ab al-Thamina* (Vol. 4). Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha.
- Ibn Khaldun, A. R. b. M. (n.d.). *Al-Ibar wa Diwan al-Mubtada’ wal-Khabar fi Ayam al-‘Arab wal-‘Ajm wal-Barbar* (3rd ed.). Cairo, Egypt: Dar Nahdat Misr.
- Al-Saadani, M. (1988). *Travels of Ibn ‘Attuta* (1st ed.). Cairo, Egypt: Al-Ahram Center, Al-Ahram Foundation.

- Al-Sayyad, M. M. (1985). *Ribla Ibn Battuta (Abridged version)*. Sousse, Tunisia: Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Abdelkhalek, G. I. (n.d.). *Jibat Khamsa: Applied studies in Naguib Mahfouz's literature* (1st ed.). Beirut, Lebanon: Arab Institute for Studies and Publishing.
- Mo'nis, H. (1980). *Ibn Battuta and his travels: Verification, study, and analysis*. Cairo, Egypt: Dar al-Ma'arif.
- Al-Mustakawi, N. (1988). *Ibn Battuta al-Riyadi* (2nd ed.). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Shorouk.
- Mustafa, A. A. (1992). *Life in the eighth century AH as portrayed in the travels of Ibn Battuta* (1st ed.). Cairo, Egypt: Al-Sa'ada Press.
- Ibn Manzur, A. F. M. (n.d.). *Lisan al-'Arab* (Vol. 11). Beirut, Lebanon: Dar Sader.
- Wahbah, M., & Al-Mohandis, K. (1984). *Dictionary of Arabic terms in language and literature* (2nd ed.). Beirut, Lebanon: Maktabat Lubnan.
- Dad, F. (2006, November). Special issue on Naguib Mahfouz. *Dad: Literary Quarterly*, 5(2). Cairo, Egypt: Union of Egyptian Writers.
- Fousoul, (2006, Summer–Autumn). Special issue on Naguib Mahfouz. *Fousoul: Literary Criticism Journal*, 69. Cairo, Egypt.
- Wikipedia contributors. (2012, August 11). *Samir Ghanem*. Wikipedia. http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%B3%D9%85%D9%8A%D8%B1_%D8%BA%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%85
- Wikipedia contributors. (2012, August 11). *Iman al-Toukhi*. Wikipedia. http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A5%D9%8A%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B7%D9%88%D8%AE%D9%8A
- Ibn Battuta Mall. (2012, August 11). About the mall. <http://www.ibnbattutamall.com/aboutthmall.html>
- Al-Hadj. (2008, April 28). *Arab pilgrimage literature: Contemporary Moroccan examples*. <http://al-hadj.com/ar/index.php?part=library/15/019&id=13>
- Al-Nemi, H. (2007, March 29). *Inspiration from classical texts in Ibn Fattouma*. Forum post 1. <http://www.alnemi.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=13>
- Al-Nemi, H. (2007, March 29). *Inspiration from classical texts in Ibn Fattouma*. Forum post 2. <http://www.alnemi.com/forum/index.php?showtopic=14>
- Al-Rihla. (2012, August 13). *Ibn Battuta studies and initiatives*. <http://alrihlah.com>
- YouTube. (2012, August 11). *Video related to Naguib Mahfouz*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xhKpaqqLdw&feature=related
- YouTube. (2012, August 11). *Video related to Naguib Mahfouz*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fq-YniTwqfM&feature=related>
- YouTube. (2012, August 11). *Video related to Naguib Mahfouz*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQ2B_gyvU9w&feature=related