



A. Angelucci, F. Cortelezzi, A. Cupri eds.

Religious Tourism and Sustainability in the MENA Region

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**Antonio Angelucci, Flavia Cortelezzi
and Alessandro Cupri, eds.**

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FAITH IN TRAVEL

Antonio Angelucci, Flavia Cortelezzi, Alessandro Cupri

The phenomenon of religious tourism encompasses a wide range of dimensions, including spiritual, cultural, social, economic, and environmental aspects. The editorial approach adopted in this context is marked by an interdisciplinary integration of diverse academic perspectives, enabling a complex and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. This methodology transcends compartmentalized analyses, instead promoting a holistic framework that captures the multifaceted nature of religious tourism. Interdisciplinarity in this domain rests on the premise that religious tourism cannot be merely conceptualized as the physical movement between sites of worship. Rather, it constitutes a complex social phenomenon interwoven with a broad spectrum of political, economic, cultural, and social dynamics.

The convergence of religiosity and tourism assumes particular significance in that it necessitates targeted and coherent strategies for the management of sacred sites, tourist logistics, and visitor flows. A comprehensive approach involves considerations such as adherence to dietary prescriptions, the availability of spiritual services within accommodation structures, and the inclusion of dedicated prayer spaces. Furthermore, a critical assessment of tourism flows must address their implications for local territories, their potential impact on regional economies, and their alignment with religious, cultural, and ecological traditions.

In this context, a sustainable approach emerges as a crucial imperative. Sustainability must be understood not only in terms of environmental preservation but also in relation to the respectful engagement with local social and economic systems. This model of tourism advocates for the equitable distribution of benefits across host communities, rather than their concentration among a limited few. Accordingly, the organization and governance of religious tourism should aim to safeguard historical, cultural, and natural heritage while simulta-

neously enhancing the socioeconomic well-being of local populations.

The geographical and sociocultural landscape of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is characterized by a richly textured mosaic of millennia-old traditions, diverse cultural expressions, and complex geopolitical and economic configurations. This unique milieu provides an important analytical framework through which to examine the interplay between religious tourism and sustainability. Of particular relevance is the management of tourist flows to sites of profound spiritual significance—such as Mecca, Jerusalem, and Al-Quds—which annually draw millions of pilgrims and visitors from across the globe.

The MENA region stands as a pivotal epicenter of religious pilgrimage, with deep-rooted traditions embedded in the three major monotheistic faiths: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Its sacred cities—Mecca, central to Islam; Jerusalem, sacred to Christianity and Judaism; and Al-Quds, a spiritual nexus for multiple traditions—constitute not only religious landmarks, but also sites of exceptional historical and cultural value. However, the increasing influx of visitors to these locations presents significant managerial and logistical challenges. Addressing these requires a forward-looking, strategically oriented framework that places sustainability at its core.

A comprehensive analysis of religious tourism in the MENA region must necessarily take into account the region's diverse political and economic contexts, which directly influence national policies on tourism governance and pilgrimage facilitation. In this regard, an interdisciplinary approach becomes essential for capturing the full complexity of these dynamics—spanning spiritual, cultural, social, and political dimensions. The intersection of religiosity, tradition, culture, and modernity renders the management of religious tourism a particularly intricate and evolving challenge, in which environmental sustainability occupies a central position.

The notion of environmental sustainability acquires heightened relevance in this context, given the increasing pressure exerted by mass tourist movements on local ecosystems, natural resources, and cultural heritage. As such, the sustainable governance of religious tourism in the MENA region must be considered a critical priority, integrating environmental stewardship with respect for local traditions and long-term regional development goals.

The principal challenge lies in striking a delicate balance between the promotion of religious tourism and the preservation of the environment, in order to avert the potentially irreversible damage that may arise from unregulated tourist inflows to the region's natural and cultural heritage. The sustainable go-

vernance of religious tourism necessitates the development and implementation of targeted policy frameworks capable of reconciling tourism growth with the protection of environmental resources and local traditions. This requires rigorous planning and the establishment of regulatory mechanisms that safeguard natural assets, encourage responsible land use, and promote the active participation of local communities in tourism management processes.

Any comprehensive analysis of the MENA region must acknowledge the profound religious and cultural diversity that characterizes its societies. Religious tourism in this context engages a wide array of actors, traditions, and sociocultural practices, each of which demands due recognition. Accordingly, sustainability in religious tourism management must extend beyond environmental preservation to encompass the safeguarding of local traditions and the promotion of social equity and cultural respect. This calls for the adoption of inclusive policies that foster culturally sensitive and non-discriminatory tourism, recognizing and valuing religious and cultural pluralism.

Within this framework, sustainability must be conceptualized not solely in environmental terms but as a multidimensional construct that includes social and cultural dimensions. A holistic approach to religious tourism management thus requires attention to the socioeconomic needs of local populations, alongside efforts to conserve religious and cultural heritage. The integration and empowerment of local communities in the planning and decision-making processes is essential to ensure that religious tourism becomes a vector for sustainable regional development, rather than a threat to the authenticity of local traditions or to the well-being of host populations.

The intersection between religious tourism and sustainability represents a critical dimension of contemporary tourism policy and practice. In regions of pronounced religious significance, such as the MENA area, religious tourism must be understood as a complex phenomenon that transcends the mere act of pilgrimage. It must be embedded within a broader land-use and resource management system that accounts not only for environmental and cultural preservation, but also for the economic needs of communities, prevailing political conditions, and the imperative to protect religious and cultural identities. Sustainability, therefore, should be understood as a comprehensive objective—one that integrates environmental stewardship, cultural inclusivity, social equity, and the valorization of local traditions.

Environmental sustainability represents one of the most urgent and critical challenges in the context of contemporary religious tourism. The management of sacred spaces and pilgrimage destinations must prioritize the conservation

of these invaluable cultural and spiritual assets, which are increasingly threatened by the excessive influx of visitors, overdevelopment, and the unsustainable use of natural resources—particularly water and energy. Within this framework, the formulation and implementation of management strategies for accommodation facilities and tourist flows that are consistent with the principles of ecological sustainability assume fundamental importance.

Equally essential are the social and economic dimensions of religious tourism, which must be carefully integrated into sustainability frameworks. It is imperative that local populations derive meaningful and equitable benefits from tourism activity—not only through economic gains but also through their active participation in the management and operation of tourism infrastructure and services. The creation of employment opportunities, support for locally rooted economic initiatives, and the promotion of indigenous cultural practices represent key strategies for ensuring that the advantages of religious tourism are broadly and fairly distributed.

The future trajectory of religious tourism must, therefore, be guided by an approach that harmonizes the expansion of tourism-related opportunities with the imperative to safeguard environmental, cultural, and social resources. A sustainability-oriented model must serve as the foundational principle in the design and implementation of tourism policies, ensuring that religious tourism functions as a driver of inclusive and long-term development for host communities. Such a model must also preserve the sanctity and authenticity of places of worship and pilgrimage, preventing the degradation of their physical, cultural, and spiritual integrity.

In this regard, a sustainable vision of religious tourism demands a systemic and integrated approach—one that not only mitigates environmental impacts but also enhances the resilience of local communities, fosters respect for cultural heritage, and ensures responsible governance of natural and cultural assets. By embedding sustainability at the core of policy and practice, religious tourism can contribute meaningfully to regional development without compromising the values and identities upon which it is founded.

VISITING PLACES OF WORSHIP AND SACRED TOURISM IN THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

Mariachiara Angelucci

SUMMARY: 1. Pilgrimage and sacred tourism in pagan antiquity: a question not only of terminology – 2. Sacred tourism and the role of periegetes. – 3. Guides inside places of worship. – 4. Conclusions.

Religiosity and mobility are two founding elements of Hellenic civilisation, intertwined in a relationship of mutual influence since the beginning. During the first colonisation, when the Greeks sailed the Mediterranean in search of new lands, the sacred dimension permeated every aspect of the enterprise: colonial foundations were made after consulting an oracle that indicated the route to follow and the place to settle. The close link between travel and religious devotion can also be seen in other moments of the life of the *poleis*. To consult the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, considered the *omphalos* – the navel of the world – the Greeks undertook long and sometimes dangerous journeys. Similarly, from every corner of the Hellenic world, numerous travellers made their way to Olympia, Nemea, Delphi or the Isthmus of Corinth to attend the pan-Hellenic games, events that transcended the simple competitive dimension to take on a profound religious significance.

In the great festivals the celebration of the divinity was certainly the central focus, but commercial activities, cultural exchanges and diplomatic relations flourished around it. Visitors to a sanctuary, while participating in the prescribed rites, could at the same time admire architectural and artistic masterpieces of incomparable beauty – works whose fame has lasted for centuries. This interpenetration of the sacred and the profane was so profound that any attempt at a clear distinction between the two is made difficult.

The article therefore aims to analyse the complex interaction between religiosity, travel practices and erudition, showing how mobility towards sacred places constituted a multiform phenomenon, in which the different motivations – devotional, cultural, political – overlapped and integrated. We need to ask ourselves to what extent modern interpretative categories such as ‘pilgrim-

age' and 'tourism' can legitimately be applied to phenomena of the ancient world that responded to profoundly different logics, and how to avoid conceptual distortions in the use of these definitions. In the context of mobility, the periegetes were important figures who, through their works, described places that were particularly significant from a religious point of view. By analysing the writings of personalities such as Polemon of Ilion and Pausanias it is possible to highlight how they contributed not only to documenting the artistic and religious heritage of sacred places, but also to defining a way of approaching sanctuaries in which scholarly interest and religious sensitivity merged.

Another significant aspect that we intend to take into consideration concerns the guides who were active in the sanctuaries. Literary sources allow us to reconstruct the economic and social role of these figures who offered visitors interpretations of local traditions, explanations of the monuments and mythical narrations.

1. Pilgrimage and sacred tourism in pagan antiquity: a question not only of terminology

The appropriateness of using the term 'pilgrimage' in reference to the Greco-Roman world has given rise to an important methodological debate. The central problem is not purely semantic, but touches on the very heart of the interpretation of ancient devotional practices. It concerns, in fact, the legitimacy of the application to the pagan world of this interpretative category that carries with it a strong connotation linked to the religious experience of monotheistic traditions, particularly that of Christianity. The problem of the appropriate terminology to describe religious travel practices in antiquity is complex and articulated, with implications that go far beyond the choice of a single word. It is not simply a matter of finding a convenient label to describe certain behaviours, but of assessing the theoretical implications of using certain interpretative categories in regard to the ancient world, considering the substantial diversity of the cultures and religious rituals in question¹.

A fundamental point of the discussion concerns the specificity of the phenomenon in the Greco-Roman context. There were numerous forms of religious mobility, each with its own specific characteristics and meanings. Journeys to sacred sites were often integrated into a broader context of social and cultural

1 See the discussion on this topic in HUNT, 1984; DILLON 1997, XV-XVII; ELSNER-RUTHERFORD 2005, 1-12; SCULLION 2005; RUTHERFORD 2013, 12, 174-175; HORSTER 2020, 121; COLLAR-KRISTENSEE 2020, 7-8.

practices. These ventures could combine religious motivations with other political, commercial or cultural purposes, in a way that hardly fits our modern conception of pilgrimage.

It is opportune to examine the main types of travels in which the element of religious interest emerges in order to understand how mobility to sacred sites in the ancient world is configured. The quest for healing was one of the main reasons why the faithful travelled to sanctuaries in ancient Greece. The invocation of deities for assistance in illness was in fact a natural response to suffering, which found its greatest expression in the cult of Asclepius. During the Classical and Hellenistic periods, although sanctuaries dedicated to this healing deity were widespread in many cities, some centres stood out for their particular prestige. Epidaurus, Pergamon and Cos had indeed acquired pan-Hellenic status, attracting pilgrims from all over the Greek world². In the Mediterranean area, Egypt was also a destination for pilgrims, who from the late Hellenistic period onwards left graffiti on monuments, including the *Memnonion* at Abydos or the temple of Isis at Philai³.

Equally well known are the journeys of individuals or groups on behalf of city communities motivated by the need to consult oracles, which constituted a network of divinatory centres spread throughout the Mediterranean world. While some of these places, such as Delphi, Dodona and the oracle of Ammon in the Libyan oasis of Siwa, enjoyed pan-Hellenic fame, other oracular centres served a more local audience, as evidenced by the case of Trophonios at Lebadeia in Boeotia. The lead tablets found at Dodona offer valuable first-hand evidence of the mode of consultation, revealing how oracles were consulted by both official representatives of city-states and private citizens. The practice of oracular consultation remained vital even in Roman times, as demonstrated by the oracle of Apollo at Claros and that of Alexander of Abonotheicus in Paphlagonia – the latter of which became the subject of Lucian's biting satire in *Alexander the False Prophet*⁴.

Besides these two types of sacred journeys, the most significant and institutionalised manifestation of religious pilgrimage in classical Greece was undoubtedly *theōria*. This practice, whose name derives from terms referring to

2 DILLON 1997, 73-80; PETSALIS-DIOMIDIS 2005.

3 BERNAND 1988; RUTHERFORD 1998 and 2003. On pilgrimages to Egypt, already attested in Herodotus, see RUTHERFORD 2005.

4 On ancient divination see, among others, PARKE 1967a and 1967b; DILLON 1997, 93-96; BONNECHERE 2003a and 2003b; ELSNER-RUTHERFORD 2005, 14-15; ARNUSH 2005; EIDINOW 2019; FLOWER 2019; GIANGIULIO 2023.

the act of observing, took the form of sending official delegations. The sacred status of the envoys (*theōroi*) was emphasised by distinctive elements such as the use of a crown and special boats for the journey, *theōrides*, which underlined their role as representatives invested with a special inviolability. The *theōriai* were sent to religious festivals, where they played a dual role: they participated in local rituals and organised sacrifices on behalf of their *polis*. In the Hellenistic period this practice was further structured with the sending of heralds to announce formally festivals across the Greek world, helping to create a network of religious and diplomatic connections between communities. Of particular importance were the delegations to the great pan-Hellenic sanctuaries of Olympia, Delphi, Nemea and the Isthmus. In these places, athletic competitions were deeply intertwined with the religious dimension, so much so that *theōroi* played an important role of support and protection for the athletes⁵.

As the semantic ambivalence of the term *theōria* itself suggests, indicating both observation and official sacred delegation, for the Greeks the act of visiting and admiring sacred sites was intrinsically linked to the religious dimension. The man of the ancient world, in approaching sacred sites, was not merely a detached observer, but an active participant in an experience that inseparably merged the spiritual and cultural dimensions. One cannot therefore clearly separate the religious motivation from that of tourism of those who went to a shrine to see the monuments and rituals, driven by artistic and intellectual interests. This overlap between tourism and religiosity emerges clearly from various testimonies. A significant example comes from an Egyptian papyrus from the 2nd century BC, which describes the preparations for L. Memmius' visit to the Fayum Labyrinth⁶: although the declared purpose was the 'vision' (*epi theōrian*) of the site, the preparations included material for sacrifices, revealing how the tourist aspect was inseparable from the ritual. Literary tradition offers even more ancient evidence of this practice. Already Euripides, in *Andromache*, depicts the hero Neoptolemus intent on contemplating the sanctuary of Delphi⁷, while in the Hellenistic period Callimachus dedicates a poem to his friend visiting Olympia, dwelling on the famous statue of Zeus made by Pheidias.

Motivated by the desire to see and record the monuments they observed are also the *periegetes*, who from the Hellenistic period onwards with Polemon

5 DILLON 1997, 1-26; ELSNER-RUTHERFORD 2005, 12-14; KOWALZIG 2005; RUTHERFORD 2013.

6 *P. Tebt.* 1, 33. On the labyrinth see HDT. II 148; STRAB. XVII 1, 37; PLIN. *Nat. Hist.* XXXVI 19.

7 EUR. *Andr.* 1086-1088.

of Ilion have left behind writings in which erudite interest merges with the historical and religious. The *Periegete* first and foremost is Pausanias who, with his *Periegesis*, entirely preserved, presents an approach that combines antiquarian attention, religious sensibility and intellectual curiosity and reflects the new way of approaching sacred sites, widespread in the imperial age, in which devotional practice merges with philosophical reflection and cultural research⁸. In fact, the period of the Second Sophistic witnesses the development of a type of intellectual journey that responds to these characteristics. The protagonists are members of the city elites who visit traditional sanctuaries motivated by antiquarian-philosophical interests that transcend pure religious experience. Pausanias' work can perhaps also be read as a guide intended for precisely this type of cultured traveller. This practice has its roots already in the archaic age: one may think of Solon's journey, described by Herodotus⁹ as a philosophical *theōria* or of the initiatory journeys attributed to Pythagoras¹⁰, who, according to tradition, visited Delos and the Idaean Cave in Crete.

If the practice of journeys to sacred places thus dates back to ancient times, the question arises as to whether it is possible to speak of pilgrimage in the proper sense. The modern term carries with it a number of cultural and religious assumptions that may not correspond to the realities of the past. It generally implies a journey undertaken for specifically religious reasons, with a clear sacred destination and an explicit devotional intention. However, in the Greco-Roman world the boundaries between religious travel and other forms of mobility are often much more blurred, and journeys to sacred sites and sanctuaries present peculiar characteristics that distinguish them from monotheistic forms of pilgrimage. Scholars point out how the application of modern interpretative models can only be valid for specific manifestations of ancient religiosity, in particular mystery cults and sanctuaries dedicated to healing, without however being able to embrace the vastness and complexity of the Greco-Roman religious phenomenon in its entirety¹¹. The question becomes even more delicate when one considers the variegated typology of the frequenters of sacred places: while on the one hand the term 'pilgrim' could be adapted to describe those who went to the sanctuaries in search of physical benefits or spiritual consultations, on the other hand it is inadequate to characterise other important figures of the ancient religious panorama such as the

8 On Polemon and Pausanias see below.

9 HDT. I 23.

10 DIOG. LAERT. VIII 13.

11 See ELSNER-RUTHEFORD 2005, 2-5.

theōroi, who performed the role of sacred ambassadors of the city-states, or the numerous participants in the great pan-Hellenic festivals, whether they were spectators or athletes engaged in competitions.

Another significant aspect emerges from the analysis of ancient sources. The vocabulary used in Greco-Roman sources to describe journeys of a religious character does not have a univocal term equivalent to our pilgrimage. The ancient sources drawn especially on concrete expressions to refer to journeys to sacred places, utilising with a generic 'he who goes' for the individual who went to a sacred place. This absence of terminology is not accidental, but reflects a different understanding of the relationship between mobility and religiosity in the ancient world.

While one cannot superimpose the concept of pilgrimage, as understood in the Christian religion, with mobility in the ancient world for religious reasons because this would mean disregarding some fundamental differences, on the other hand one cannot deny that there are strong elements of continuity and that some of the practices of Christian pilgrims come from the pagan world. It is also very difficult to establish the exact boundaries between journeys undertaken for faith and those in which elements such as curiosity for the place of worship and interest in the monuments visited are significantly present, to such an extent that sacred tourism may fall within the concept of pilgrimage depending on a more or less restrictive interpretation of the term. Believing that one can speak of pilgrims only in the case of individuals animated by an exclusively religious purpose may become excessively limiting even for Christianity¹².

One possible methodological solution is to use the term 'pilgrimage' more flexibly, recognising its limitations and implications. Such an approach would allow the concept to be used while remaining aware of the substantial differences between ancient and modern practices. This is also valid for the ques-

12 ELSNER and RUTHERFORD 2005, 4 regarding the reticence with which scholars usually treat Pausanias and the periegetes as pilgrims, state: «One objection (clearly dependent on the importation of Christian notions of belief into the definition of pilgrimage) is that a pilgrim is one who must *believe in full* before embarking on a sacred journey, which would certainly distance not only Pausanias but also the rest of antiquity's religious authors (and not a negligible number of post-antique writers too) from characterization as pilgrims. [...] Another line of attack has been to argue that 'pilgrimage implies a journey by a devotee in pursuance of a primarily religious objective', which is so purist a formulation of pilgrimage as to disqualify not only Pausanias but most other pilgrims in cultural contexts where the validity of the term has never been contested (such as Christianity or Islam)».

tion of 'tourism' in the ancient world. Although contemporary sociology tends to place the birth of tourism in the era of the industrial revolution, linking it to the emergence of bourgeois society and its social practices, an analysis of the Hellenistic-Roman world also reveals the existence of forms of mobility for reasons of pleasure. Indeed, the ancient Mediterranean was a complex and highly interconnected system. In the large urban centres, such as Rome and Alexandria, a cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic culture had developed, supported by efficient communication and transport networks that facilitated not only trade, but also mobility for pleasure and culture. Particularly significant was the seasonal mobility of Roman elites, which included stays in coastal villas, trips to thermal bath localities and visits to places of cultural and historical interest. These practices responded to needs not dissimilar to those of modern tourism: the search for recreation, the desire to get away at least temporarily from urban life, the interest in different cultural experiences and the desire to distinguish oneself socially through travel. This mobility was supported by a significant developed infrastructure, including accommodation facilities, dedicated services and forms of travel literature.

It should also not be forgotten that in the ancient world it is particularly complex to isolate a purely tourist dimension of travel. The experience of mobility was in fact a multiform phenomenon, in which different motivations – economic, cultural, political and religious – constantly intertwined and overlapped¹³. A merchant travelling to a city on business could at the same time visit shrines and monuments; a pilgrim on his way to an important religious centre did not fail to take an interest in the cultural and artistic aspects of the place; a diplomat on an official mission often combined his duties with activities that today would form part of the term 'tourism'. This fluidity and interpenetration of purposes and interests is a distinctive feature of mobility in the ancient world, making artificial any attempt to categorise rigidly travel motivations according to modern criteria.

2. Sacred tourism and the role of *periegetes*

In the context of mobility to sacred places in the ancient world a special role is played by *periegetes*. The term derives from the verb *periēgeomai*, which from the Hellenistic age onwards means «to carry around» and indicates in

13 On the close relationship between pilgrimage and tourism and the difficulty of attributing travel in the ancient world to a single category, see HUNT 1984; MORINS 1992, 1-28; COHEN 1992; ELSNER-RUBIÉS 1999, 1-56; WILLIAMSON 2005, 220-223.

particular the authors of works in which territories, cities or parts of them are described with specific attention to the monuments encountered along the way¹⁴. The first author of whom we preserve a substantial number of fragments is Polemon of Ilion¹⁵. His writings, like much of the scholarly production of this era, have come down to us by indirect tradition, through the citation of later authors who have preserved certain titles and numerous passages. His attention turned to Greece, Magna Graecia and Asia Minor from which he came. Strabo in the imperial age explicitly calls him *periēgētēs*, a qualification that is also taken up by the *Suida*, in the lemma dedicated to him¹⁶. From the Byzantine lexicon we know that he came from a village near Ilion, in the region of the Troad, and that he was the son of a certain Evegete, in all probability what could be considered a 'speaking name' consisting of *eu* «well» and *ēgēomai* «to act as a guide», formed as a result of the fame of Polemon as a periegete¹⁷. His origin is confirmed by an epigraphic testimony of 177/176 BC, in which he is defined with the ethnic name *Ilieus*¹⁸. The epigraph documents the conferral of the proxenia of Delphi, which he most probably obtained for having celebrated the city and its famous sanctuary in his work *On the Treasures of Delphi*. This award is of fundamental importance as it represents a fixed point for his dating and also testifies to the notoriety he had achieved in the first half of the 2nd century BC. This fame achieved through his writings is also confirmed by literary sources that attribute to him various citizenships received as a form of honour. *Suida* designates him as an Athenian citizen, a definition also found in Plutarch and Athenaeus¹⁹. The latter, quoting Heraclides of Mopsuestia, also reports that Polemon was also referred to as a native of Samos, Sicyon and oth-

14 On the terms periegetes and *periegesis* in the ancient world, see PRELLER 1838 = 1964², 157-159; DE ANGELIS 1998, 1-2; HUTTON 2005a, 241-272; ZIZZA 2006; NAFISSI 2007; CAPEL BADINO 2018, 37; FALASCHI 2021, 19-21; ANGELUCCI 2022, 31-35.

15 See PRELLER 1838 = 1964²; MÜLLER 1883; DEICHGRÄBER 1952; ČISTJAKOVA 1983; DONOHUE 2001; REGALI 2008; ENGELS 2014; CAPEL BADINO 2018; ANGELUCCI 2022 with bibliography.

16 T 8 STRAB. IX 1, 16 and T 1 SUID. π 1888. Polemon's *testimonia* and *fragmenta* are cited following the numbering of Angelucci's edition 2022 (for concordances with earlier editions see *ibid.*, 215 and 265).

17 Similarly, Daedalus' father was known as Eupalamos (*eu-palame* «good-hand») and Lycurgus, the famous Spartan legislator, as Eunomos (*eu-nomos* «good-orderer»). See DEICHGRÄBER 1952, 1290.

18 T 2 Syll³ 585, n. 14.

19 T 3 ATHEN. VI 234d; T4 PLUT. *Quaest. Conv.* V 675b.

er cities²⁰. In the Hellenistic period, when the *poleis* had lost their political and military autonomy, there was a strong need to reaffirm their cultural identity. In this context the works of Polemon took on a value that went far beyond the mere description of monuments and votive gifts. Sacred sites represented not only religious centres but veritable repositories of Greek collective memory, where artistic and historical evidence of centuries of civilisation was concentrated. The periegete's focus on sanctuaries, which were both sacred spaces and guardians of Hellenic identity, responded to a precise need of Greek cities to preserve and enhance their historical and cultural heritage as a means of self-representation. Temples, with their treasures, votive offerings and ritual traditions, were in fact the privileged places where this identity could still be fully expressed and celebrated. This explains the considerable prestige Polemon enjoyed among the communities he visited and described: his activity as a periegete helped to keep the historical memory of the *poleis* alive and to legitimise their role in an era of profound political transformation.

The focus on places of worship, which did not exhaust all the periegete's interests but was undoubtedly an essential element of them, is found not only in his work on Delphi but also in those dedicated to other cities. Strabo reports that «Polemon, the periegete, wrote four books *On the Votive Offerings of the Acropolis*»²¹. The title, known here in a more extended form than the shorter *On the Acropolis of Athens*, reported by other sources²², suggests that the work contained an extremely detailed list of the monuments and votive gifts visible to visitors, if one considers its breadth in relation to the territory under consideration. Similarly, a writing dedicated to votive gifts in Sparta is known to us and a few fragments have come down to us testifying to his visit to Ilion²³. His meticulous attention to documenting temple votive offerings is particularly evident in the list of *anathēmata* observed in the sacred precincts of Olympia. Here he describes in great detail the contents of the temple of Hera and the treasures of the Metapontinians and Byzantines, specifying precisely the type

20 This apparent contradiction in the sources can be explained by considering the widespread practice in the Hellenistic age of conferring citizenship and proxenia on foreigners who had distinguished themselves for their merits towards a *polis*. Such recognitions, although having lost the concrete privileges that characterised them in the classical age, retained considerable formal prestige. See OSBORNE 1983, 94-99; CAPEL BADINO 2018, 9-12; ANGELUCCI 2022, 16-17.

21 T 8 STRAB. IX 1, 16.

22 F 1 ATHEN. XI 472b. The title is cited even more briefly as *On the Acropolis* (FF 1-5).

23 FF 20-22.

and material of each vase on display²⁴.

Although Polemon manifests a predominantly antiquarian approach, documenting and cataloguing cult objects in a manner almost reminiscent of modern travel guides, his frequent trips to sanctuaries in Greece and Asia Minor show characteristics that place him alongside visitors motivated by religious-cultural interests. His works betray elements typical of what we would today call a form of sacred tourism, namely attention to the artistic aspects of localities and the anecdotes connected with them, combined with a curiosity for the religious dimension.

On the temple of Dodona in Epirus, known for its oracular centre, we possess an interesting fragment in which the periegete describes the votive offerings of the Corcirians and the peculiar acoustic effect it produced²⁵. The *anathēma* consisted of two side-by-side columns supporting a bronze vase and a statue of a boy with a whip: the wind, moving the metal straps of the whip, made them beat against the vase, creating a continuous vibration. This offering reproduced the sound phenomenon that characterised the temple in its earliest phase, when in place of walls it was surrounded by a series of aligned tripods, as reported by the Attic annalist Demon. If one of these bronze vessels was struck, the vibration propagated through all the others, generating a persistent sound that stopped only when someone touched one of the tripods again. The testimony of the periegete is cited as an authoritative source by Stephanus of Byzantium to explain the proverb ‘vase of Dodona’ used for overly talkative people. Demon, in fact, spoke of many tripods while the proverb of a single vessel. To explain the aporia, Stephanus of Byzantium relies on the authority of the periegete, describing him as a profound connoisseur of the sanctuary and quotes the words of Aristides who had transcribed the text²⁶.

24 F 21 ATHEN. XI 479f-480a «[...] Polemon, at any rate – or whoever the author of the work entitled *An Account of Hellas* is – writes the following about the treasury of the Metapontians at Olympia: a treasury belonging to the Metapontians, within which are: one hundred and thirty-two silver *phialai*; two silver wine-pitchers; a silver *apothustanion*; and three gilt *phialai*. A treasury belonging to the Byzantines, within which are: a Triton made of cypress-wood, holding a silver *kratation*; a silver Siren; two silver *karchēsia*; a silver *kulix*; a gold wine-pitcher; and two drinking-horns. Inside the old temple of Hera are: 30 silver *phialai*; two silver *kratania*; a silver cook-pot; a gold *apothustanion*; a gold mixing-bowl, dedicated by the people of Cyrene; and a silver *batiakion*» (transl. by D.S. Olson).

25 F 29 STEPH. Byz. δ 146.

26 See ANGELUCCI 2022, 175-182 with bibliography. The identity of this Aristides remains uncertain, but it is likely to be the author of a collection of proverbs in

As far as Asia Minor is concerned, *Suida* has handed down to us the title *Periegesis of Ilion*, a work about whose composition we can get an idea thanks to three fragments that, in terms of content and characteristics, can be attributed to this text. However, Polemon's interest in the Troad, his native region, was not limited to Ilion: his investigation extended to other important localities in the area, as two significant fragments demonstrate. The first (F 30) is dedicated to the temple of Apollo Smintheus near Chrysa, an important religious centre in the region; the second (F 32) focuses on Myrmissos, a city located near Lampsacus. This special focus on his homeland reflects not only a personal interest, but also a desire to document meticulously the historical-religious heritage of an area of great significance in the ancient world. This is what emerges in particular from F 30, which preserves the aetiological explanation of the epithet Smintheus under which Apollo was worshipped in a sanctuary in the Troad, which Polemon undoubtedly had the opportunity to visit because it was close to his home town. The periegete reports a mythical story set in Chrysa where the god, after punishing the priest Chrinis by sending mice – *sminthoi* in the local dialect – to devastate his fields, reconciled himself with him by exterminating the rodents with his arrows. In memory of this event a temple was erected to Apollo worshipped as Smintheus²⁷.

Attention to cult aspects means not only going to the shrines and describing statues, monuments, ritual objects and the mythical events connected to them, but also accounting for the festivals that were celebrated there. Polemon recalls the *lampadēdromia*, a particular torch race that took place in Athens in the Panathenaia, in the Hephaestia and in the Prometheia²⁸. This race has its roots in an ancient sacred tradition, initially taking the form of a religious ritual before evolving into athletic games. It is a particular type of competition that was widespread in the Greek world, not limited to Athens alone, and found its place in celebrations dedicated to both heroes and deities. Its origins, still shrouded in mystery, are linked to two distinct cult interpretations: it may

three books known from Athenaeus (XIV 641a), rather than the more famous Aristides of Miletus or Aelius Aristides.

27 See ANGELUCCI 2022, 183-187. Another explanation of the epithet Smintheus is given by Strabo (XIII 1, 48). Teucer, following an oracular response, was supposed to found a city where 'children of the earth' attacked him. In Hamassitos, when mice gnawed the cords of his men's weapons, he recognised the divine sign and settled there. His daughter Bateia married Dardanus, giving rise to the Trojan dynasty.

28 F 6 HARP. λ 3.

have originated as a celebration in honour of Prometheus for the gift of fire to mankind or it may have been connected to the rite of the transfer of the sacred flame between altars, to be accomplished in the shortest possible time²⁹. Particularly emblematic is the story of Euchidas who, after the battle of Plataea, sacrificed himself in this ritual practice: he ran all the way to Delphi and returned to Athens in a single day to bring the sacred fire to the altars, finding death from the immense effort³⁰. Like other religious celebrations that marked the calendar of the *polis*, the *lampadēdromia* attracted a considerable influx of people, turning into a moment of intense collective participation that united the sacred dimension with the social.

We also know of a specific writing by Polemon *On the feasts of Heracles at Thebes* and that he had dealt with the prize awarded to the winner of the Lykaia celebrated in Arcadia in honour of Zeus³¹. At Delphi he had personally participated in the Theoxenia, observing the curious detail that he who offered Leto the largest leek (*gēthullis*) could participate in the ritual meal³².

In the context of the festivals, there can be no missing reference to the periegete's focus on the famous Mysteries of Eleusis. We possess the title *On the Sacred Road*, fragments of which have not come down to us. Similarly to what Pausanias did later³³ it is very likely that he documented temples, votive offerings and tombs visible along the road travelled each year by the procession to the sanctuary of Demeter at Eleusis. A reference to the mysteries of Samothrace must also have been contained in the work dedicated to this island, the title and a single fragment of which has come down to us, though this surviving excerpt contains no allusion to them³⁴. Within the variegated panorama of Greek sanctuaries, a fundamental distinction emerged in the modalities of access and participation in the sacred. Most places of worship were characterised by a substantial openness: rituals and festive celebrations took place in public spaces and were accessible to almost all the faithful. However, there was a particular category of sanctuaries that offered a profoundly different religious experience, based on secret initiatory rituals that promised both

29 On the *lampadēdromia* and the deities in whose honour it was celebrated as well as its origins, see CAPEL BADINO 2017 and 2018, 126-139; ANGELUCCI 2022, 102-107 with bibliography.

30 PLUT. *Arist.* 20.

31 F 25 SCHOL. PIND. *Ol.* VII 153d.

32 F 35 ATHEN. IX 372a-b.

33 PAUS. I 36, 3 - 37, 7. On this well-known periegete, see below.

34 F 35 contains a reference to the Theoxenia festival of Delphi, which were most probably addressed within an *excursus* of his work *On Samothrace*.

earthly and otherworldly forms of salvation. In this context the sanctuaries of Eleusis and Samothrace represented two emblematic cases, albeit with distinct characteristics³⁵. Besides the mystery rites reserved for initiates, they also hosted important public festivals that attracted both individual pilgrims and official city delegates (*theōroi*).

If Polemon is the main exponent of the periegetic literature of the Hellenistic age, the most famous Greek author known by the appellation of Periegete is Pausanias. His *Periegesis of Greece* is a valuable record of the culture, cults, art and traditions of mainland Greece, the result of a systematic exploration that lasted some thirty years. During this period, between 150 and 180 AD, the author devoted himself to documenting meticulously everything that captured his interest in the territories he visited. His work, which transcends the boundaries of a simple travel guide, is enriched with numerous anecdotes and local stories that accompany the descriptions of monuments with a special predilection for shrines and holy places. Using Elsner's words, it can be said that he «is interested almost obsessively (though not exclusively) in religious things»³⁶.

The wealth of detail and topographical references meant that from the 17th century onwards his work gained increasing importance among scholars and travellers. At first used primarily as a guide to understanding the topography of ancient Greece, its influence gradually extended beyond mere geographical reference. Jacob Spon and George Wheler followed Pausanias when they undertook a voyage in 1675-1676 starting from the Gulf of Corinth and visiting Boeotia with Delphi and then Attica³⁷. The 18th century marked a turning point in the reception of Pausanias' text. Scholars increasingly recognised its value not only for topographical information, but as a crucial source for understanding Greek art, religion and culture. During this period, a more systematic

35 See DILLON 1997, 60-73.

36 ELSNER 1992, 8. See CASSON 1974, 296 «It is when he gets to the sanctuaries and temples that he lets himself go» and HABICHT 1985a, 23 «In general, Pausanias preferred the old to the new, the sacred to the profane». The latter notes that this aspect is shared by modern critics (23, n. 91). Already in the late 19th century Frazer 1898, XXXIII stated «The monuments described [...] are for the most part religious, not profane». PRETZLER 2007, 19-20 points out: «It is crucial to understand how important the divine and supernatural are to Pausanias' project, but, at the same time, I find it impossible to separate this issue from his general approach to the landscape and history of Greece. For Pausanias the religious sphere is part of the physical world and therefore his enquiries about gods, rites and sacred places are an integral part of the *Periegesis*».

37 See the studies by ASVESTA and GUILMET 2007, 155-168; 105-112; PRETZLER 2007, 135; STEWART 2018; ZIZZA 2019, 562; FALASCHI 2021, 28.

approach to the study of his work emerged with a focus on the archaeological verification of his descriptions. By the 19th century Pausanias had become a reference for both academic research and fieldwork. His detailed descriptions proved invaluable during the first archaeological excavations in Greece, in particular of Mycenae, Athens, Corinth and Olympia. While he was portrayed as a pedantic antiquarian, not without errors, to the extent that he attracted severe criticism from Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in 1873, the growing interest in Greek antiquities in this period led to translations and critical editions of his work, making it accessible to a wider academic audience³⁸. In 1898, with his six-volume work on Pausanias, James George Frazer marked a decisive moment in the history of Pausanian studies and established him as an ancient *Baedeker*. Although considering it a travel guide is reductive and improper, the appellation contains some truth as Habicht states: «[...] Pausanias is first a guide and also as systematic as a volume of *Baedeker*. He discusses one area after the other and, within a region, one city, sanctuary, or site after another. He has to be selective and describes whatever seems worthwhile to him»³⁹.

As most modern scholars have observed, his focus is mainly on sacred sites⁴⁰. By the 2nd century AD, Greece had been reduced to a province of the Roman Empire. The unavoidable tension between the myth of the glorious Greek past and Roman domination found a resolution in Pausanias through the appeal to a religious identity deeper than socio-political contingencies, rooted in the sacred sites and monuments of Greece⁴¹. Pausanias' attitude towards religion distinguished him substantially from travellers motivated by purely antiquarian interests. His was not the simple curiosity of an outside observer in search of interesting information: rather, he posed as a potential initiate, a participant in the mysteries of at least some of the sanctuaries he visited. While it is undoubtedly true that his work contains many references and descriptions of temples and places of worship, which respond to an artistic and cultural curiosity that is also present in modern pilgrimages, there are some passages in his work that testify to a more specifically religious interest⁴².

38 See FALASCHI 2021, 29 with n. 37.

39 HABICHT 1985b, 220. See the discussion on this topic by HUTTON 2005a, 242-247 in the paragraph "Ancient *blue guide*?".

40 See above.

41 ELSNER 1992, 5; ALCOCK 1996, 247-250; BOWIE 1996; ALCOCK 2002, 36-98; PRETZLER 2007, 100.

42 ELSNER 1992, 8; 1995, 130; RUTHERFORD 2001; HUTTON 2005a, 8, 307; HUTTON 2005b, 291-299.

In Book I he discusses the Eleusinian mysteries of which he himself lets it be known that he was initiated⁴³ and which he believes markedly reveal divine intervention⁴⁴. Already in his description of the *Eleusinion* in Athens he emphasises the importance of the cult there, stating that a vision prevents him from revealing its details⁴⁵. The element of religious silence returns even more clearly when the description shifts to Eleusis. He declares that he cannot reveal the rituals that are reserved for followers only: «My dream forbade the description of the things within the wall of the sanctuary, and the uninitiated are of course not permitted to learn that which they are prevented from seeing»⁴⁶. This narrative choice is particularly significant: having constructed Eleusis as a world apart, instead of describing its interior or guiding the reader beyond the sanctuary walls, Pausanias dramatises the otherness of the sacred place through silence. The dream, the details of which he never reveals, becomes a narrative means, implicitly supernatural, to justify this silence and preserve the mystery of the sanctuary⁴⁷. The religious importance of the place is also revealed by the topographical detail concerning the borders with Attica: the rivers sacred to Kore and Demeter, in which only priests may fish, were an ancient demarcation mark between the territory of Eleusis and that of Attica⁴⁸.

In other cases it is Pausanias who is excluded from the ritual because he is uninitiated. During his journey to Argolis, Pausanias stops at the sanctuary of Demeter located on Mount Pron, near Hermion. Here, his description proceeds

43 PAUS. I 14, 3; 37, 4; 38.

44 PAUS. V 10,1.

45 PAUS. I 14, 3.

46 PAUS. I 38, 7 (transl. by W.H.S. Jones). See ELSNER 1992, 8-9; HABICHT 1995a, 156; MUSTI-BESCHI 1997⁵, 413; PRETZLER 2007, 20.

47 This is not the only case in which Pausanias declares that he cannot recount what he saw. Concerning the rites of the Great Goddesses celebrated in the Carnasian grove in Messenia and described as second in importance only to those of Eleusis, the periegete declares that he had to keep them secret on the explicit indication of a dreamlike revelation (IV 33, 5). Silence and the prohibition of access to certain parts of the sanctuary are signs of sacredness and carried punishments for transgressors. In the enclosure of Zeus Lycaeus (VIII 38, 6) men were not allowed to enter and those who disobeyed this prohibition died within a year. A similar prohibition was in force in Mantinea at the temple of Poseidon Hippios: for ignoring it Aepytus was blinded and died shortly afterwards (VIII 5, 5; 10, 3). Death did not spare even the merely curious or those who attempted to imitate the mysteries. Emblematic is the case of Orpheus, whose verbal profanation of the mysteries cost him his life, showing how even the mere oral revelation of sacred secrets was considered an unforgivable transgression (IX 30, 5. See also IX 25, 9).

48 PAUS. I 38, 1.

methodically through the visible elements of the cult: the annual feast with procession and sacrificial rites, the statues and minor images of the sanctuary. However, when he gets to the very heart of the cult, the author reveals an unsurmountable limit: the main object of veneration remains inaccessible not only to him, but to any man, foreign or local. This knowledge is reserved exclusively for the elderly priestesses⁴⁹. Similarly with regard to the sanctuary of Eileithyia, located along the road from Hermion to Mases, while the external aspects of the cult are fully visible – from the daily sacrifices to the incense offerings and the numerous votive gifts – the very image of the deity remains hidden from the eyes of all, with the possible exception of the priestess⁵⁰. In both cases, the external elements of the cult – rituals, offerings, sacred apparatus – invite description and deserve to be documented, but the very core of the cult – the divinity and its representation – remains shrouded in mystery, denied direct knowledge. This tension between visible and invisible, between what can be described and what is beyond description, reveals a fundamental aspect of Greek religiosity, where the culmination of sacred experience often coincides with what can neither be seen nor narrated.

Another point in the *Periegesis* where it becomes clear how antiquarian interest is accompanied by a focus on the religious sphere is found in Book VIII. During his journey to Arcadia Pausanias recalls a visit to the sacred cavern of Demeter Melaina on Mount Elaius near Phigalia⁵¹. His description dwells on multiple aspects of interest, ranging from local mythical traditions to the characteristics of the cult. According to local narrative the goddess retreated to this cave after suffering violence from Poseidon, wearing a black robe as a sign of mourning. Her grief was also amplified by the loss of her daughter Persephone – a story element that clearly reveals the influence of the Eleusinian mysteries on the Phigalian tradition. The goddess's retreat into the cave caused a severe famine, depriving the land of its fruit. The resolution of the crisis came only thanks to the intervention of Pan, one of the most outstanding Arcadian divinities, who persuaded Zeus to send the Moirai to appease Demeter's wrath. The narrative structure clearly reflects the natural cycles of vegetation, with the alternation between sterility and fertility of the earth. Scholars have also highlighted significant connections between these themes and the religious traditions of the Near East, suggesting a complex interweaving of cultural influences that spanned the ancient Mediterranean.

49 PAUS. II 35, 5-8.

50 PAUS. II 35, 11.

51 PAUS. VIII 42, 1-13.

The visit to this cavern reveals the perspective not only of a periegete driven by historical and cultural interest, but also that of the pilgrim who goes to a particular place for the deity honoured there and to take part in the rituals, which he describes in rich detail. He states: «It was mainly to see this Demeter that I came to Phigalia. I offered no burnt sacrifice to the goddess, that being a custom of the natives. But the rule for sacrifice by private persons, and at the annual sacrifice by the community of Phigalia, is to offer grapes and other cultivated fruits, with honeycombs and raw wool still full of its grease. These they place on the altar built before the cave, afterwards pouring oil over them»⁵². These were non-bloody sacrifices, called *nephalia*, which involved libations of oil and were presided over by a priestess assisted by the youngest of the sacrificers. The first statue of the goddess was made of wood and depicted her wrapped in a long chiton and with a horse's head, from which snakes and other beasts emerged, creating an image of disturbing power. In her hands she held a dolphin and a dove. This peculiar combination of iconographic elements was not accidental, but reflected Demeter's vast sphere of influence. The simultaneous presence of chthonic creatures such as serpents, together with symbols of water (the dolphin) and air (the dove), suggests the goddess' dominion over nature in its totality. The horse's head, coupled with the presence of fierce creatures, further emphasises the deity's connection to the primordial forces of nature, while the human form of the body recalls her role as dispenser of civilisation through the gifts of agriculture⁵³.

Pausanias reports that the statue had been destroyed in a fire and that it was later carved in stone by Onatas, after famine had struck the area and the Pythia's response attributed the cause to neglect of rituals and the absence of a new simulacrum. The interesting fact is the information provided by Pausanias that Onatas work no longer existed in his time and many did not even remember it⁵⁴. There was nothing to see that was significant from an artistic point of view to motivate the Periegete's visit, who therefore moved only for a religious reason⁵⁵.

Pausanias' approach to describing Greek cities reveals how ancient tourism was deeply intertwined with the sacred dimension. His descriptive methodology systematically privileges religious buildings, making them the cornerstones of the organisation of his itineraries. The case of Tegea is particularly emblem-

52 PAUS. VIII 42, 11 (transl. by W.H.S. Jones).

53 PAUS. VIII 42, 4. See SFAMENI GASPARRO (1986), 326; HABICHT 1995a, 139 n. 86; MOGGI-OSANNA 2003, 487-490.

54 PAUS. VIII 42, 5-7; 12.

55 See JOST 1973, 249; HEER 1979, 160-167; ELSNER 1992, 8; RUTHERFORD 2001, 43.

atic: instead of beginning his description from the agora, as would have been logical for a Greek city, Pausanias chooses to start from the temple of Athena Alea⁵⁶. This choice is not accidental: although the temple was undoubtedly remarkable from an artistic and architectural point of view, the decision to place it as a starting point reflects above all its spiritual and cultural centrality in the life of the city. The temple acted as the true identity center of the Tegean community, transcending its mere monumental value.

This sacral perspective in the organisation of itineraries finds its greatest expression in the description of Olympia, where Pausanias structures his narrative not by following a topographical route, but by tracing the order of sacred rituals. This methodological choice is explicitly emphasised twice in the text, as if to underline the importance of this perspective: first when he announces that he will follow the order in which the Eleians normally sacrifice, and then when he reiterates to the reader that the enumeration of altars does not reflect their physical arrangement, but rather the order of sacrificial practices⁵⁷. This narrative choice reveals how the experience of the place was inseparable from its religious dimension.

This approach suggests that, in antiquity, visiting places was not conceived as a mere exploration of physical spaces, but as an experience that deeply integrated religious and cultural dimensions. Ancient 'tourism', if we can call it that, was intrinsically linked to the sphere of the sacred: monuments were not just objects to be admired aesthetically, but points of access to a deeper understanding of the identity of communities. This peculiar organisation of itineraries also reflects a hierarchy of values in which the sacred occupied a prominent position in the perception and experience of urban space. Pausanias' choice to structure his descriptions around places of worship was thus not just a literary convention, but reflected a specific way of conceiving and living the city space, in which the religious dimension acted as an organising principle and method for comprehending places.

3. Guides inside places of worship

Works such as Polemon's *On the Treasures of Delphi* were most likely kept within the temple archives and made available to guides who explained the

56 PAUS. VIII 45, 4-7. See PRETZLER 2007, 95.

57 PAUS. V 14, 4; 14, 10. See GURLITT 1890, 346; WENIGER 1909, 299; MADDOLI-SALADINO 1998², 261; ELSNER 1992, 13.

sanctuary and its traditions to visitors⁵⁸. Polemon's writing showed a high level of knowledge and was held in high esteem by the priests and attendants of the sacred centre, as evidenced by the accolades obtained by him, to which the literary sources testified. An interesting passage by Plutarch documents both the importance of periegetic writings and the existence of such guides. In the work *On the E at Delphi* the author, discussing the meaning of the E engraved in the pronaos of Apollo's temple, reports the opinion of Lamprias, which is judged to be invented: «Apparently Lamprias had unwittingly stirred up the persons connected with the temple against his remarks. For what he had said no one of the Delphians knew anything about; but they were used to bring forward the commonly accepted opinion which the guides give (*periēgētikēn doxan*) [...]»⁵⁹. The passage highlights the deep respect for the knowledge handed down by the periegetes, who were recognised as authoritative experts and reliable guardians of local traditions and histories. Their authoritativeness was such that their erudition was referred to within the sanctuary, as evidenced by the fact that the attendants appealed to their expertise to refute the interpretation proposed by Lamprias.

We are dealing here with a written cultural heritage, but it cannot be excluded that in addition to texts such as that of Polemon, oral knowledge could also be meant. The term 'periegete' in fact also referred to figures charged with guiding foreigners who travelled to sanctuaries. This coexistence of written and oral sources was also reflected in the organisation of the temple staff, characterised by a differentiation of roles. This designation specifically identified the official guides of the sanctuary, professional figures in charge of accompanying visitors. Alongside them operated other temple personnel who, while not having the specific title of periegete, could occasionally provide information as part of their ordinary duties. This stratification of personnel suggests an articulated system of knowledge transmission: while the periegetes performed a codified role of cultural mediation, presumably based on both written texts and oral tradition, the other temple workers contributed more informally to the dissemination of knowledge about the sanctuary.

If the written works of the periegetes were considered of undoubted value, that of the temple guides was not always judged at the same level⁶⁰. Again with regard to the periegetes of Delphi, Plutarch shows in *On the Oracles of the*

58 See FALASCHI 2021, 49, 71.

59 PLUT. *De E apud Delphos* 386b (transl. by F.C. Babbitt).

60 See PRELLER 1838 (= 1964²), 158, 162-169; FRAZER 1898, LXXVI-LXXVII; JACOBY 1949, 399; CASSON 1974, 264-267; MARASCO 1978, 85-88.

Pythia a different view than that expressed in the previous work under consideration, in this case clearly referring not to written texts but to persons. Here Plutarch offers a vivid and critical portrait of these individuals through a scene that takes place along the Sacred Way⁶¹. These professional guides, who carry out paid work as the author implies, are charged with guiding the stranger Diogenianus with a group of intellectuals and are presented from the outset in an ironic key. The narrative highlights the contrast between the methodical professional zeal of the guides and the needs of the educated visitors. Indeed, the periegete inflexibly pursue their pre-established programme, ignoring the repeated requests of those present to shorten their explanations and leave out parts of the numerous inscriptions. Their strict adherence to protocol thus becomes a source of tedium for the listeners.

The critical assessment of the Delphic periegetes offered by Plutarch, who was himself a temple priest, must be contextualised by considering the author's particular perspective. His ironic and apparently negative judgement in fact reflects the vision of an intellectual of extraordinary depth, whose vast erudition ranged from history to philosophy, from literature to philology and religious studies. From this point of view the attitude of biting irony towards the periegetes fits into a broader pattern of critical relations that Plutarch maintained with many cultural exponents of his time. It is not surprising, then, that even the guides of Delphi, with their codified and professional knowledge, became the object of this unindulgent gaze. Therefore, while recognising the critical elements in the text, it is necessary to downplay the negative scope of Plutarch's judgement, interpreting it as an expression of a more general disposition of the author towards many of his contemporary intellectuals, rather than as a specific condemnation of the category of periegetes, some of whom must have possessed a high level of preparation⁶².

Pausanias also offers evidence of the existence at Delphi of explanations of the temple's contents in the description of the paintings of Polygnotus in the ex-voto of the Cnidians. One part of the painting depicts Odysseus' descent into Hades to question Tiresias about his return to Ithaca. Among the characters represented is Eurynomus who is «said by the Delphian guides (*exēgētai*) to be one of the demons in Hades, who eats off all the flesh of the corpses, leaving only their bones»⁶³. To this opinion Pausanias objects that Homer makes no mention of any demon named Eurynomus, casting doubt on the opinion of the

61 PLUT. *De Pyht. Or.* 395a. See JONES 2001, 37-38; FALASCHI 2021, 43-47.

62 JONES 2001, 36-37; HUTTON 2005, 246-247; FALASCHI 2021, 43-49, 70-71.

63 PAUS. X 28, 7 (transl. by W.H.S. Jones). See BULTRIGHINI-TORELLI 2017, 444-445.

exegetes, who can be placed here alongside Plutarch's periegetes⁶⁴.

However, it is interesting to note how the Periegete contrasts the interpretation of the exegetes not with historical-erudite sources, but through references to the epic tradition, thus displaying his own culture. In the case of Pausanias, as in that of Plutarch, the negative opinion shown in various circumstances towards the exegetes not only of Delphi but also of other places such as the Athenian demes, Troezen, Argos and Sicyon, must be assessed in the light of the Periegete's considerable erudition, which leads him on several occasions to compete with local experts⁶⁵. If with regard to Delphi one cannot be entirely certain about the oral or written nature of the source, in the case of the Athenian demes and Troezen one can reasonably think, on the basis of some particular linguistic expressions, of persons encountered during the journey and thus of individuals with guiding duties⁶⁶.

Paid guides in sanctuaries are also attested by Lucian. In *A True Story* we find a particularly interesting use of the term *periēgētēs*, which is used to describe figures who accompany the writer on his journey to Hades, explaining to him in detail the stories and condemnations of the damned⁶⁷. The transposition of the periegete into the world of the dead represents a sharp operation of social satire. Lucian, in fact, recreates in the afterlife a cultural practice well known to his contemporaries, that of guided tours, transferring it into a surreal and grotesque context. The guides from Hades, with their detailed explanations of the biographies and punishments of the damned, parody the behaviour of their terrestrial colleagues, known for their meticulous descriptions of monuments and sacred places. The comic effectiveness of this portrayal lies precisely in its recognisability: the fact that Lucian chooses to place the periegete even in Hades, keeping their typical professional behaviour intact, suggests how familiar this figure was to the audience of the time. The satire works precisely because

64 The term exegete does not have a univocal meaning in Pausanias but reveals considerable semantic flexibility. Indeed, the author uses this word to refer to a variety of figures and sources: written documents, experts in local traditions, religious office holders and professional guides. See FALASCHI 2021, 75-102.

65 See the discussion and passages analysed by FALASCHI 2021, 84-89. See also JONES 2001, 35-36.

66 The use of the verb *punthanomai* when Pausanias recounts that he did not learn anything from the Athenian demi-gods of Phlya, Myrrhinous and Athmonon nor from those of Troezen (I 31, 5; II 31, 4) suggests that these were people he actually spoke to. See MUSTI-BESCHI 1982, XLII, 173, 186; MUSTI-TORELLI 1986, 165; FALASCHI 2021, 84-86.

67 Luc. *Ver. Hist.* II 31.

readers could easily recognise in these hellish companions the characteristic traits of the guides they encountered in sanctuaries and cities. Lucian's choice to include the periegetes in his fantastic narrative of the afterlife thus constitutes valuable indirect evidence of their prevalence in the 2nd century AD.

Another example of their popularity is found in *The Lover of Lies*, or *The Doubter*, in which Lucian constructs a dialogue between Tychiades and Philocles on the human propensity for disinterested lying. The discussion develops through various examples, eventually touching on the topic of local traditions and how cities tend to manipulate them to enhance their own prestige. Philocles' response, in justifying these 'noble lies', refers to the guides who accompany foreign visitors and who base their livelihood on the oral narration of local myths: «If these fabulous tales should be taken away from Greece, there would be nothing to prevent the guides (*periēgētas*) there from starving to death, as the foreigners would not care to hear the truth, even gratis!»⁶⁸. The passage suggests that this activity was not merely tolerated, but constituted a real recognised profession, on which the livelihood of a specific group of people depended.

The observation that foreigners would not be willing to listen to the truth even for free not only confirms the paid nature of this service, but also reveals the expectations of the public of the time: visitors sought in guides not so much historical accuracy as an engaging narrative that would make the city visited more venerable. The institutional context in which Lucian places these figures is particularly significant. The fact that their activity is presented as functional to the cities' self-representation suggests the existence of an organised system of education. They were therefore not simply improvised guides, but professionals who had to possess specific preparation. This testimony by Lucian thus allows us to reconstruct an articulated picture of the profession of guide in antiquity: an economically relevant, socially recognised and probably regulated activity that was part of a broader strategy of promoting the identity and prestige of Greek cities.

Interesting evidence on the economic nature of the activity of guides in sanctuaries emerges from a passage in the *Affairs of the Heart* of Pseudo-Lucian⁶⁹. Although the text does not explicitly mention professional guides, it describes a significant scene set in the sanctuary of Dionysus at Rhodes: some individuals spontaneously present themselves as improvised interpreters, offering

68 LUC. *Philops.* 4 (transl. by A.M. Harmon). Vd. JONES 2001, 38; OGDEN 2007, 46; FALASCHI 2021, 58-59.

69 Ps.-LUC. *Am.* 8. See MARASCO 1978, 87-88; ELSNER 2001, 38; FALASCHI 60.

their explanations of the paintings on display in exchange for a modest fee. The fact that these improvised guides demanded payment for their services suggests that remuneration was an established and socially accepted feature of the guiding profession and that the public was accustomed to the idea of having to pay those who provided explanations at sacred sites. This practice indirectly confirms the existence of an established market for such services, where the willingness of visitors to pay for explanations had created opportunities for both professionals and occasional imitators. This economic system reflects the complex relationship between culture, religion and commerce in the ancient world: the need for cultural intermediaries to facilitate the understanding of artistic and religious heritage had generated a veritable economy of sacred knowledge, where its transmission was intertwined with commercial and professional aspects.

In Strabo we find a further example, referring to the exegetes in charge of explaining the rites in Heliopolis in Egypt⁷⁰. The author observes how the priests devoted to philosophy and astronomy, who once gave prestige to the city, had disappeared, while in his time one could only find cult workers who also performed the task of exegetes, aimed at explaining the ceremonial of the cult to foreigners. The geographer is describing a process of cultural impoverishment, confirmed by the example of the self-styled expert Chaeremon, mocked as a charlatan despite boasting higher knowledge. The 'tourist' function of these exegetes should be seen in the broader context of the interest Greeks and Romans had in Egyptian religion and culture. Their presence in Heliopolis responded to a precise cognitive need: foreign visitors wished to understand Egyptian religious rites and practices, which were considered ancient and mysterious. In this sense, the *exēgetai*, while playing an apparently more modest role than their philosopher and astronomer predecessors, nevertheless represented important figures, interpreting Egyptian rites for a Greco-Roman public increasingly interested in these religious practices.

4. Conclusions

The peculiarity of sacred mobility in the ancient world lies in the diversity of motivations that drove individuals and groups to travel. From the search for healing in the sanctuaries of Asclepius to the consultation of oracles, from official city delegations to intellectual visits of sacred sites, a picture emerges

70 STRAB. XVII 1, 29 C806. See BIFFI 1999, 135; ELSNER 2001, 36; HUTTON 2005, 247 n. 16; RADT 2005, 459; ROLLER 2018, 961-962; FALASCHI 2021, 16-17; LAUDENBACH 2022.

in which religious experience is constantly intertwined with other essential aspects, such as those of politics, culture and sociality. One can therefore affirm, also in light of the debate on the applicability of the term 'pilgrimage' to ancient practices, that «what is absent from Greece and Rome is not sacred mobility in the broader sense, but a particular terminology and ideological consciousness that is characteristic of medieval Christendom (and, to an extent, of Islam). The pilgrim ideology is a specialised outgrowth from less self-conscious but no less widespread religiously motivated movements»⁷¹.

Periegetic literature, with emblematic figures such as Polemon of Ilion and Pausanias, testifies to the inseparable connection between cultural interest and religious sensibility. Their works were not mere *ante litteram* guidebooks, but elaborate narratives in which erudition, devotion and cultural identity merged into a single discourse. Particularly significant is the case of Pausanias, whose *Periegesis* reveals an approach to sacred sites that goes beyond mere antiquarian interest to embrace sometimes a deeper religious interest, evident in his respect for mystery secrets and his active participation in local rituals.

The system of professional guides in sanctuaries, documented by authors such as Pausanias, Plutarch and Lucian, further enriches this picture. These figures, often the object of irony on the part of intellectuals, represented an important link between the codified knowledge of the sanctuaries and the visitors. Their remunerated activity constituted a significant element of the economy linked to sacred sites, revealing how the transmission of religious knowledge could also become an object of commercial exchange.

In the light of these considerations, it is evident how, in the ancient world, mobility towards sacred places constituted a multidimensional phenomenon, in which elements that today we would define as 'religious', 'cultural' or 'touristic' coexisted in a unitary experience. The sanctuaries, with their heritage of traditions, monuments and rites, represented privileged spaces of encounter between different spheres of human existence: places where the experience of the divine was naturally accompanied by admiration for works of art, where the search for answers from gods was intertwined with the rediscovery and affirmation of Hellenic cultural identity. This perspective invites us to overcome approaches that tend to segment ancient religious experience, artificially separating the devotional dimension from the cultural or social.

71 HORDEN-PURCELL 2000, 446.

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LEGAL ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM. LEGAL PROTECTION, RECENT DEVELOPMENTS, AND THE ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Stella Coglievina

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. What is Religious Tourism? – 2. Legislation about Religious (and Cultural) Tourism. – 3. Religious Tourism and Religious Routes. – 3.1. The development of Religious and Cultural Routes and the Law. 3.2. – Religious Routes and Sustainable Tourism. – 4. Religious communities and religious tourism. In particular: the point of view of the Catholic Church.

1. Introduction. What is Religious Tourism?

Religious tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon and it is difficult to frame and define it. Since the dawn of civilizations, people moved to visit sites of special sacred significance; thus, pilgrimages constitute “the typical form of travel for religious reasons”¹. However, along the centuries, other forms of religious tourism have been developing. Pilgrimages are the “forerunners of the religious dimension of a phenomenon entirely characterized by its modernity such as ‘tourism’”² and certainly, they are not the sole example of religious tourism. Today, many people travel both for religious purposes, and for visiting religious sites and cultural heritage. Religious tourism is not just for religious people: it includes different experiences such as travelling for spiritual reasons, discovering new ideals or spiritual ways of life, or tours among religious sites for cultural or general interest.

From a legal point of view, the doctrine has defined religious tourism with at least two different meanings³. The first one intends religious tourism in a

1 LO GIACCO M.L. (2020), “Il turismo religioso: un esempio di turismo sostenibile”, *Quaderni di diritto e politica ecclesiastica*, n. 2/2020, 516.

2 CHIZZONITI A.G. (1999), *Il turismo religioso tra normativa statale e normativa regionale*, in CHIZZONITI A.G. (a cura di), *Codice del turismo religioso*, Giuffrè, Milano, 2.

3 CHIZZONITI A.G. (1999), *Il turismo religioso tra normativa statale e normativa*

strict sense (or objective), indicating forms of tourism that take place with religious and spiritual purposes. This meaning can also be found in some international documents, in particular those of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). This organization defines tourism as an activity of the traveller that involves moving from the usual place for a period of at least one night and less than a year, for personal purposes other than work-related ones, among which religious purposes⁴. A second meaning intends religious tourism in a broader sense (or subjective), which includes not only tourism with religious motivations but also activities in the tourism sector which have religious subjects as actors or operators (for example religious bodies managing accommodation facilities). In this sense, religious tourism can fall within (or comes close to) the category of social tourism⁵.

Recently, religious tourism has been increasingly considered and studied, due to its recent development and its new forms and experiences. Some of the many aspects of this phenomenon will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

Firstly – as we will see in paragraph 2 –, in contemporary forms of religious tourism the borderline between tourism and religious experience is becoming increasingly blurred and confused⁶. The figure of the tourist, in contemporary society, has many facets and the motivations for his travel often overlap. Consequently, even the definitions of the related tourist phenomenon, from a legal point of view, are not (and could not be) clear, but consider hybrid expressions such as «cultural religious tourism» or «religious cultural tourism», as a result of the contemporary perception of this phenomenon⁷.

regionale, cit., 2-5; LO GIACCO M.L. (2020), “Il turismo religioso: un esempio di turismo sostenibile”, cit., 516.

- 4 UNWTO is the United Nations Agency concerning tourism policies worldwide. It promotes the values of responsible, sustainable and accessible tourism. A glossary of terms related to tourism is available at <https://www.unwto.org/glossary-tourism-terms>.
- 5 CHIZZONITI A.G. (1999), *Il turismo religioso tra normativa statale e normativa regionale*, 2-5; CHIZZONITI A.G. (2023), *Interventi legislativi statuali, normativa regionale e interventi locali* (chapter 2.2), in DANIA V., GAZZERRO L. (a cura di), *Fondazioni e beni ecclesiastici di interesse culturale. Sfide, esperienze, strumenti*, Bologna 2023, 102 ff.
- 6 CHIZZONITI A.G. (2024), “Il turismo religioso nell’ordinamento giuridico italiano: legislazione unilaterale e nuove forme di collaborazione tra Stato e confessioni religiose”, *Anuario de derecho eclesiástico del estado*, 587 ff.
- 7 CHIZZONITI A.G. (2024), “Il turismo religioso nell’ordinamento giuridico italiano: legislazione unilaterale e nuove forme di collaborazione tra Stato e confessioni religiose”, 589.

Secondly, the most recent legislation – especially in the European context – considers religious tourism as a driving force for the development of forms of cultural tourism and sustainable tourism. Some experiences are particularly relevant for this last profile: religious and cultural routes (see paragraph 3).

2. Legislation about Religious (and Cultural) Tourism

In order to analyse how the law takes into account the variegated phenomenon of religious tourism, we will take Italian legislation as an example.

First of all, it should be noted that there is no definition of religious tourism in any act, and there are few explicit references to this aspect in the legislation in force. We can say the same about other countries, such as Spain, whose legislation does not mention religious tourism specifically; some authors spoke about religious tourism as an “extra-legal concept”⁸. This occurs despite the presence of legal references to religious cultural heritage and a well-established tourism legislation (e.g. a “Tourism Code” in Italy; different acts about tourism both in the State and in the Regions legislation in Spain and in Italy).

The attention of the Italian legislator for the experiences that today we can define as “religious tourism” began at the end of the 1950s. In a first phase, religious tourism was taken into consideration regulating the presence of religious “operators” within tourism industry, in particular non-profit associations and entities with religious purposes, who obtained the possibility of organizing tourist activities for their members with favourable conditions. In some provisions, reference was also made to religious structures (for example, religious guesthouses) that could offer accommodation to visitors with some fiscal advantages⁹.

8 SANCHÍS VIDAL A. and GOSÁLBEZ PEQUEÑO H.J. (2015), “El turismo cultural por influencia religiosa en Andalucía”, *International journal of scientific management and tourism*, Vol.1 (2), 27-51.

9 Act n. 326 of 21 March 1958, when regulating «complementary tourist-social accommodation facilities» in art. 1, 5th paragraph, refers to *guesthouses* defined as «permanent accommodation facilities summarily equipped to accommodate, in specific periods, employees of public or private administrations or companies and members of associations and organizations with the exclusive purpose of social assistance». This provision was then also applied to structures belonging to ecclesiastical bodies intended to accommodate the faithful who referred to them. Subsequently, the framework law on tourism of 17 March 1983, no. 217, in art. 10 established that: «non-profit associations operating at a national level for recreational, cultural, religious or social purposes are authorised, exclusively for their members, to carry out tourist and hospitality activities», *Vid. CHIZZONITI A.G. (1999), Il turismo religioso tra normativa statale e normativa regionale, cit., 7-8.*

In a second phase, Italian legislation addressed the issue of religious tourism in relation to some “major events”, especially those of the Catholic Church, such as the Jubilee of the year 2000, by providing funds and promotional interventions. Alongside the major events, in the same period, some acts – especially regional ones – promoted the identification and protection of religious itineraries¹⁰. Both the Jubilee and the religious itineraries represent a resource and a possible driving force for the development of the tourism and hotel industry in Italy¹¹. It is in this phase that the term “religious tourism” is gaining ground, also at a legal level, and is mainly referred to the new categories of experiences mentioned above.

In the most recent legislation, the profile of the protection and promotion of religious tourism as a strategic sector for the country is even more evident, also in connection with the enhancement of cultural heritage and the environment. First, the Regions, operating on the territory, have focused their attention on religious tourism as an opportunity for economic and cultural promotion, and not only as the protection of tourist activities managed by religious organizations for their internal purposes. More recently, the Code of Tourism (legislative decree n. 79/2011), at article 22.2, letter d, identifies religious tourism among the “national circuits, routes, products and homogeneous thematic itineraries”. These national circuits are homogeneous tourist contexts or thematic itineraries throughout the national territory. Together with religious tourism, other “national circuits” are mentioned, including, precisely, cultural tourism. These tourist circuits can be the object of promotional interventions at a national or regional level, depending from the competencies of the different institutions.

This is undoubtedly a new focus on religious tourism, which is considered a way for cultural and economic promotion of the territories. Alongside this broadening of horizons, the Italian legislation maintains in force some favourable provisions for associations (including religious ones) when managing tourist activities for their members, outside the ordinary rules of the tourist industry.

10 It is also worth mentioning the numerous interventions by the Regions that consider religious tourism within promotional regulations, with allocation of funds in favour of some accommodation facilities or some initiatives, among which, once again, major events (Jubilee, or Years dedicated to particular saints) or the creation and recovery of cultural and religious itineraries, which will be discussed later. CHIZZONITI A.G. (2023), *Interventi legislativi statuali, normativa regionale e interventi locali*, cit., 105-150.

11 *Vid.* CHIZZONITI A.G. (1999), “Gli itinerari turistico-religiosi giubilari tra turismo e cultura”, *Aedon, Rivista di arti e diritto on line*, 1.

For example, the Third Sector Code (legislative decree no. 117/2017) has established that third sector entities - among which there may also be religious entities - can carry out, among the activities of general interest protected by the code, also the «organization and management of tourism activities of social, cultural or religious interest» (art. 5.1, letter k)¹². The joint consideration of religious and cultural tourism is also explicitly highlighted in some regional regulations, highlighting once again the contiguity and, often, the intertwining of cultural and spiritual characteristics of certain tourist experiences¹³. Cultural and spiritual aspects are interlaced also in the context of cultural heritage, which, in Italy as in other places, often also has religious characteristics. Thus, religious tourism has become, in Italy as elsewhere, as a mean to increase also cultural tourism and to promote cultural heritage, which often has religious features. The two forms of tourism find a common point of intersection in the protection and valorisation of “religious cultural heritage”: a definition that includes, together with cultural assets of religious interest or belonging to religious bodies, also intangible cultural heritage and environmental heritage. This latter point is particularly evident in the development of religious itineraries.

3. Religious Tourism and Religious Routes

3.1. The development of Religious and Cultural Routes and the Law

Among the most well-known and rapidly developing forms of religious tourism in recent times, we can mention religious itineraries. They are not the same phenomenon of a cult practice such as pilgrimage: in fact, even if they often follow the paths used in ancient times by pilgrims, they are routes with historical and cultural characteristics, often travelled by a non-religious public, but interested in slow and sustainable tourism, or spiritual and personal discovery¹⁴.

12 MAZZONI G. (2023), “Turismo religioso e Terzo Settore. Opportunità e scenari applicativi per gli enti religiosi civilmente riconosciuti”, *Il diritto ecclesiastico*, n. 4, 799-818.

13 The Act of Tuscany Region, n. 30 of 23 June 2003, speaks about the promotion of «religious cultural tourism» («turismo religioso culturale») (article 2). About that example, and other cases: CHIZZONITI A.G. (2024), “Il turismo religioso nell’ordinamento giuridico italiano: legislazione unilaterale e nuove forme di collaborazione tra Stato e confessioni religiose”, *Anuario de derecho eclesiástico del estado*, 599.

14 Among the articles underlining the growing number of experiences related to Religious Paths, see for example: BRUNO R. (2024), “Passi di fede (e salute): pellegrini verso Roma per avere il Testimonium”, *Corriere della Sera*, 20 december 2024,

Religious routes have recently developed also through international initiatives: in particular, the system of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. Through this system, some transnational routes, such as the Camino de Santiago, have been recognized at the international level and received indisputable notoriety.

As regards the law, in some Countries the legislation on tourism considers religious (or cultural) routes, offering protection and tools for their protection and valorisation. Taking as an example, once again, Italy, the national legislation, this deals with religious routes for at least two categories of reasons: the first, the promotion – as already mentioned – of religious and cultural tourism, so as to implement the protection and valorisation of cultural and environmental heritage; the second, the impulse for forms of sustainable tourism, through gentle mobility and slow tourism.

More in detail, the Italian legislator firstly promoted a cataloguing of cultural routes, through the directive on the “2016 Year of the Italian Routes” issued by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism. The directive stated: «cultural itineraries of particular European and/or national importance, which can be travelled on foot or with other forms of sustainable soft mobility, and which represent a way of enjoying the widespread natural and cultural heritage, as well as an opportunity to enhance the natural, cultural attractions and territories involved, are considered “Walks”. In line with the vision of the Council of Europe, the walks cross one or more regions, can be part of European routes, are organized around themes of historical, cultural, artistic, religious or social interest»¹⁵. A very broad definition, as can be seen, which leaves room for both cultural and religious itineraries. On the website of the “Atlas of Italian Walks”, a tool for the initial survey of the Italian cultural routes - according to the same directive of the Ministry - there is a detailed list of criteria that serve to identify a walk. The criteria include: the presence of signage, a georeferenced and safe route, accommodation and catering services along the way, and an updated

https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/cammini_corriere_201224.pdf; TALIGNANI G. (2024), “Alla ricerca di fede e sostenibilità”, *Natura*, december 2024, 20-23 <https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Alla-ricerca-di-fede-e-sostenibilita.pdf>.

15 «Sono considerati ‘cammini’ gli itinerari culturali di particolare rilievo europeo e/o nazionale, percorribili a piedi o con altre forme di mobilità dolce sostenibile, e che rappresentano una modalità di fruizione del patrimonio naturale e culturale diffuso, nonché una occasione di valorizzazione degli attrattori naturali, culturali e dei territori interessati. In coerenza con la visione del Consiglio d’Europa, i cammini attraversano una o più regioni, possono far parte di tracciati europei, si organizzano intorno a temi di interesse storico, culturale, artistico, religioso o sociale».

website providing information on the stages of the journey¹⁶.

At a national level, the Atlas is a first attempt to define this phenomenon. In fact, in Italian tourism legislation, there were no definitions of walks or itineraries previously, although regional legislation had already considered this phenomenon, regulating, in particular, religious routes. However, compliance with the mentioned criteria and the inclusion in the Atlas did not determine particular legal consequences. Beyond a better knowledge - also by users - of the walks listed online, they did not have access to particular benefits, nor did they enjoy the application of specific protection.

More recently, the Ministry of Tourism has been concerned with walks and in particular with religious ones. Aware of the growth of the phenomenon of “walking tourism”, linked to the terms of slow tourism and sustainable tourism, as well as the development of religious or more broadly spiritual tourism, the Ministry has proceeded to allocate a fund, specifically for the benefit of religious itineraries.

More in detail, Act n. 234/2021 on State budget of 2022¹⁷ has allocated a Fund to the Ministry of Tourism «for religious routes, with an endowment of 3 million euros for 2022, for the re-launch and tourist promotion of the so-called “religious walks” and the recovery and enhancement of the properties that characterize them». The Ministry has implemented that provision through the Decree of 23 June 2022 «Implementing measures of the “Fund for religious ways”»¹⁸. In that Decree we can find a definition of religious routes: «hiking

16 The website of the Atlas (<https://camminiditalia.cultura.gov.it/home-camminiditalia/atlante-dei-cammini/>) mentions 11 criteria: «Linear and usable physical routes; Presence of horizontal and/or vertical signs for each stage; Route usable in safety; Percentage of asphalted roads not exceeding 40%; Stages equipped with all the support services for the walker; Online description of each stage on the reference site; Accommodation and catering services within 5 km of the Walks; Presence of a «governing body» of the Walk; Guarantee the surveillance and maintenance of the route; Georeferencing of the route; Website of the Walk constantly updated» («Percorsi fisici lineari e fruibili; Presenza di segnaletica orizzontale e/o verticale per ogni tappa; Percorso fruibile in sicurezza; Percentuale di strade asfaltate non superiore al 40%; Tappe dotate di tutti i servizi di supporto al camminatore; Descrizione on line sul Sito di riferimento di ogni tappa; Servizi di alloggio e ristorazione entro 5 km dal Cammino; Presenza di un «organo di governo» del Cammino; Garantire la vigilanza e la manutenzione del percorso; Georeferenziazione del percorso; Sito del Cammino costantemente aggiornato»).

17 See Act n. 234 of 30 December («Bilancio di previsione dello Stato per l'anno finanziario 2022 e bilancio pluriennale per i triennio 2022-2024»), art. 1, par. 963.

18 Decree 23 June 2022 «Misure attuative del “Fondo per i cammini religiosi” di cui

itineraries with a religious or spiritual theme, which can be travelled exclusively or mainly on foot or with other forms of slow and sustainable tourism, at inter-regional and regional level» (art. 1). Moreover, the decree provides that the resources of the Fund will be allocated for two types of actions. The first one is related to «the re-launch and tourist promotion of the religious routes» and includes the activities «aimed at designing and implementing a coordinated communication strategy for the national tourist product “Religious Walks”» (art. 2, letter *a*). The second type of actions concerns the recovery and the «enhancement actions of the public buildings present on the routes of the Religious Walks, with the aim of enriching the offer of the itineraries with services for the stop, the accommodation, the entertainment of the visitors» (art. 2, letter *b*)¹⁹.

According to articles 2 and 3 of the Decree of 23 June 2022, the Ministry of Tourism, on 28th November 2022, issued a «Public notice for expression of interest for the inclusion in the “Catalogue of Italian Religious Walks”»²⁰. These provisions has created a real national register of religious routes – about a hundred recognized to date – with the aim of «developing a coordinated promotion and communication action» (art. 1.1) and of «identifying and disseminating good practices relating to the organisation and management of the experience of tourism through religious walks» (art. 1.3). The inclusion in the “Catalogue” was regulated with a specific method: first of all, the walks had to be – according to the definition in art. 1, paragraph 2 – «hiking itineraries with a religious or spiritual theme, at an inter-regional or regional level, which can be travelled exclusively or mainly on foot or with other means related to slow and sustainable tourism». They also had to comply with the requirements set out in article 2, which lists various criteria (the presence of a defined pedestrian pathway, the presence of signage, services for pilgrims, etc.)²¹.

all’articolo 1, comma 963, della Legge 30 dicembre 2021, n. 234».

- 19 Article 3 establishes the distribution of the Fund, which will go mostly to the actions included in article 2, letter *b*. Article 4 specifies that the subject in charge for the actions referred to in art. 2, letter *a*, will be the Ministry itself; the subjects who will deal with the actions referred to in letter *b*, may be the owners of the public buildings.
- 20 *Avviso pubblico 28 novembre 2022 per manifestazione di interesse all’inserimento nel “Catalogo dei cammini religiosi italiani” ai fini dell’attuazione dell’art. 5, comma 1 lett. a), del decreto 23 giugno 2022 del Ministro del Turismo “Misure attuative del fondo per i cammini religiosi di cui all’art. 1, comma 963, della legge 30 dicembre 2021, n. 234.*
- 21 Art. 2 (*Requirements for the inclusion within the Catalogue of Religious Walks*): «Sono ammessi al Catalogo di cui all’articolo 1, comma 3, del presente avviso

If they meet these requirements, the walks could be included in the online catalogue (art. 6), available on the website of the Ministry of Tourism. To this end, an application shall be submitted by the persons in charge of «destination management activities, promotion of the route and his maintenance, and of release and management of credentials and *testimonium*» (art. 3); the inclusion in the catalogue shall follow an investigation phase (art. 5)²².

This procedure was recently modified by a decree of the Ministry of Tourism, dated 5 October 2023²³. That decree provides for the establishment of a special commission appointed by the Ministry of Tourism²⁴, which shall evaluate the requests based on a points system (art. 9). It also provides for forms of control on the implementation of the projects relating to the religious routes

pubblico i cammini religiosi che, alla data di invio della domanda di inserimento nel predetto Catalogo, risultino in possesso di almeno tre dei seguenti requisiti:

- a. presenza di un tracciato pedonale definito e pienamente percorribile che privilegi strade inibite al traffico veicolare o a scarso traffico veicolare;
- b. georeferenziazione del percorso;
- c. presenza di un logo del cammino che ne caratterizzi gli strumenti di comunicazione, informazione e segnaletica, nonché ogni altro supporto, anche digitale, utile all'esperienza di viaggio;
- d. presenza di segnaletica direzionale e informativa dedicata al cammino;
- e. disponibilità di un sito internet dedicato al cammino;
- f. presenza di servizi di supporto al turista/viandante/pellegrino, compresi ristoro e alloggio;
- g. possibilità per il turista/viandante/pellegrino di acquisire e utilizzare uno o più documenti (anche in forma digitale) che certifichino l'avvenuto pellegrinaggio per l'intero percorso o per parte di esso (c.d. *testimonium* e *credenziale del pellegrino*);
- h. presenza di uno o più soggetti che svolgano attività di destination management, di promozione del cammino e della sua manutenzione, di gestione e aggiornamento del sito internet dedicato al cammino, nonché del rilascio e gestione di *credenziale* e *testimonium*.»

22 <https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/catalogo-dei-cammini-religiosi-italiani/>.

23 *Decreto del Ministro del Turismo "Misure attuative del Fondo per i cammini religiosi di cui all'articolo 1, comma 963, della Legge 30 dicembre 2021, n. 234" che annulla e sostituisce il Decreto del Ministro del Turismo del 23 giugno 2022, prot. n. 8087 (prot. n. 25710/23 of 5 October 2023)*, available at <https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/cammini-ditalia/>.

24 To this end, the Ministry approved a Decree on 23rd November 2023 (*Decreto di istituzione della commissione per la valutazione di merito delle domande per lo sviluppo dell'offerta turistica dei cammini religiosi italiani, ai sensi dell'avviso pubblico prot. n. 27138/23 del 20 ottobre 2023, articolo 9, comma 1*), available at <https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/cammini-ditalia/>.

(art. 10) and their “stability” (art.13). The effects of the inclusion of a religious route in the Catalogue have not changed: the catalogue still represents the tool for a real accreditation with the Ministry of Tourism, with the possibility of accessing the funds allocated for this issue and any other promotional intervention planned from time to time. For example, the publication of the online Catalogue and the related communication strategy undoubtedly represents a mean for the visibility of the religious walks and for a better knowledge of their presence on the national territory.

Along these State provisions on religious routes, one can note that the Regions already issued several other regulations previously. Some of them, especially starting from the Jubilee of the year 2000, allocated funds and provided for promotional interventions for the recovery and enhancement of historical, cultural and religious itineraries²⁵. Others had even established registers or catalogues of cultural or religious itineraries²⁶.

The promotion of such “tourism products” is therefore elder in the Regions and more recent at the State level. At all levels, the legislator has allocated funds and planned promotional actions for the walks; at the State level, the promotion has a particular focus on the religious ones.

3.2. Religious Routes and Sustainable Tourism

The most recent developments - even at a legal level - emphasize some characteristics of the cultural and religious routes, connected with the sustainabil-

25 For example, the Molise Region Act of 14 December 1998 n. 16 “Molise towards and beyond the Jubilee of 2000” (“Il Molise verso e oltre il Giubileo del 2000”) was about promoting «interventions aimed at enhancing tourist-religious itineraries and sites of high historical, cultural, artistic and religious value», to increase «religious tourism flows». The regional legislator proposed, for religious tourism as for the walks, “spending” interventions that allowed the implementation of initiatives and projects.

26 For example, the “Register of the Routes of Sardinia and of the Religious and Spiritual Tourist Itineraries”, established by the Resolution of the Regional Council of 11 December 2012 (<https://www.regione.sardegna.it/atti-bandi-archivi/atti-amministrativi/liste-elenchi/registro-dei-cammini-di-sardegna-e-degli-itinerari-religiosi-e-dello-spirito>). Another example is the “Regional Circuit of Walks and Pilgrimage Routes” of the Emilia Romagna Region (www.camminiemiliaromagna.it) established thanks to a project by APT Servizi in partnership with the Region and the Episcopal Conference of Emilia Romagna. Moreover, the “Rete Cammini Lazio”, with its own catalogue, based on what is established by the Regional Act of 10 March 2017, n. 2 «Provisions for the creation, maintenance, management, promotion and valorisation of the network of walks of the Lazio Region».

ity goals. In this sense, religious tourism can represent not only a driving force for the tourism industry and for the valorisation of cultural heritage, but also for the raise of sustainable forms of tourism.

In fact, if we keep in mind the three pillars of sustainability - environmental, economic, and social - it is easy to observe that the walks comply with each of them. First, with regard to environmental sustainability, tourism that takes place along the cultural and religious routes has a minimal impact on the environment: in fact, people travel on foot or with non-motorized vehicles; they use pathways, often immersed in a less urbanized environment; accommodations are shared. With regard to economic sustainability, it consists in the ability of an economic system to generate lasting growth in economic indicators, guaranteeing income and work to the population, through economic policies and practices that favor long-term development, economic diversification, innovation and the efficient use of resources. It can be said that the walks are economically sustainable as they can promote diversified and not just seasonal tourism.

Finally, social sustainability focuses on promoting physical and social well-being through fair distribution of resources and opportunities. With regard to cultural and religious routes, they can increase respect and contacts between tourists and the local community and the territory; they can help generating work and value for the places crossed by the walks.

The relationship between a walk and the communities is a difficult relationship to build, but strategic for both parties. It is strategic for the enhancement of the walk and its “sustainability” over the long term; it is strategic for the communities and territories crossed by the walk, because it represents a resource, an asset, a value. A walk is a development factor for the territories, not only from an economic point of view, but also from a social one. A walk brings to the territories people who are generally attentive and respectful of the context, and this favours the meeting between the “locals” and the “foreigners”, and their welcome as well. Even the smallest villages, or the most internal territories, are enhanced by the gaze of those who walk through them, and this also leads the inhabitants to rediscover traditions, memories, stories of the places and the community. A non-secondary effect is also the rediscovery of the environment and the landscape, the desire to redevelop the existing, to eliminate degradation²⁷.

27 WA-BI Association (2022), “Libro Bianco sui cammini lombardi”, chapter 4 (from personal contacts with the Association). The White Paper was written in 2022 following the work of a Technical Table of the Lombardy Walks, promoted by the Lombardy Region with the participation of various local associations and tourist

The growing number of religious and cultural routes shows the development of forms of sustainable tourism in recent years. The focus on sustainability in tourism actually has its roots in various international documents, among which we should mention at least the Code of Ethics of Tourism (adopted by the UNWTO in 1999)²⁸ and the Charter of Lanzarote for a sustainable tourism, signed on 27-28 April 1995 by the participants at the World Conference on Sustainable Tourism²⁹. Although these are soft law instruments and not binding law for States, these documents, together with others that have followed over the years, have determined a greater attention to the issue of sustainability in the tourism area³⁰. Up to the explicit inclusion of some references to tourism in the Millennium Goals of the United Nations³¹.

4. Religious communities and religious tourism. In particular: the point of view of the Catholic Church

The issue of sustainability has therefore become central in various actions and interventions – of the international community, of the States, of local administrations – related to the theme of tourism, including religious tourism. It is also taken into consideration by stakeholders and social groups. Among them, religious communities have a particular importance. In fact, within religious laws, thoughts and interest in the “care of creation” and sustainability emerge more and more often. This has also marked the actions and teachings of religious denominations regarding tourism.

In this regard, the evolution of the thought of the Catholic Church is emblematic, which for several years has reflected extensively on “religious tourism” and on both the positive and critical aspects that its development has brought in the societies³².

entities.

28 UNWTO, Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, available at <https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism>.

29 UNWTO, Charter for Sustainable Tourism, available at <https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/unwtodeclarations.1995.05.04>.

30 *Vid.*, FUMAGALLI MERAVIGLIA M. (2010), *Politiche e strategie internazionali per un turismo al crocevia delle sfide globali*, in DEGRASSI L. AND FRANCESCHELLI V., *Turismo. Diritto e diritti*, Milano, Giuffrè, 45-86.

31 See the webpage on the site of UNWTO “Tourism in the 2030 Agenda” <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-in-2030-agenda>.

32 As recently noted, «the awareness of the growing economic weight of the sector, of its importance for many territories and of the involvement of a growing segment of the world’s population as travellers and workers has led the ecclesial Magisterium

On the one hand, tourism has given rise to the need for the Church to reflect on a “pastoral of tourism”, that is, on how to deal with visitors to sacred places, how to offer them spiritual means and, more recently, how to ensure that tourism represents an opportunity for evangelization. In fact, tourism and visits represent for the Church a way to make its artistic and cultural heritage known and to be able to spread, also through it, the Christian message³³.

On the other hand, the magisterium of the Catholic Church has also developed in relation to the care of the environment and the responsibility of the faithful for the protection of creation and for conscious and sustainable actions, which must concern every field of human activity, including tourism.

These two elements (the attention to the phenomenon of tourism and the reflection on ecology) have led to the drafting of various ecclesial documents that take into consideration tourism in its responsible and sustainable development.

The first approach of Catholic Church regarding tourism was in the years following the Vatican Council II. In those years, the Sacred Congregation for the Clergy had focused its attention on the initial development of tourism, alongside the more “classic” pilgrimages (Directory *Peregrinans in terra* of 30 April 1969).

Later on, the development of a true pastoral for tourism emerged with greater clarity. In particular, the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People – that was competent in matters of tourism until the recent reform of the Roman Curia³⁴ – had drawn up the document *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Tourism* (29 June 2001)³⁵. This document reflects on the rapid development of tourism, identifying some of its advantages and critical

to express itself several times in recent years on tourism». See CORRADI V. (2022), *Turismo sostenibile*, in *Dizionario di dottrina sociale della Chiesa*, online at https://www.dizionariodottrinasociale.it/Voci/Turismo_sostenibile.html.

33 About the Catholic Church approach on tourism see GANARIN M. (2023), *Aspetti di interesse canonistico/pastorale* (chapter 2.1), in DANIA V. AND GAZZERRO L. (a cura di), *Fondazioni e beni ecclesiastici di interesse culturale. Sfide, esperienze, strumenti*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 73-101.

34 Today, the competencies in tourism are of the Dicastery for Evangelization (Section for Fundamental Questions regarding the Evangelization in the World). In 2022 Pope Francis transferred responsibility for the pastoral care of tourism from the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development over to the Dicastery for Evangelization, according to the apostolic constitution *Praedicate Evangelium* and following dispositions.

35 Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples (2001), *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Tourism*, available at https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/documents/rc_pc_migrants_doc_20010711_pastorale-turismo_en.html#3.%20Tourism%20and%20Society.

points. In particular, it is emphasized that tourism should be at the service of the person; the Catholic Church proposes, in this sense, to enhance its cultural and religious heritage in order to offer visitors itineraries that suggest certain values. Furthermore, since it is recognized that the impact of tourism is not always positive for the overall development of societies, it is proposed to think about forms of tourism that are respectful of the rights of people and of the environment, thus adapting to the principles of “sustainable development” (n. 12). The basic principles that are mentioned in this regard are: co-responsibility (a «fundamental condition required of tourist activity, whose planning and management of profits is referred to the tour operators, civil authorities and local communities»); harmonization («tourist activity must be harmonized, as far as possible, with the economy of the whole country with regard to infrastructures and services, in particular communications and the use of resources»); respect of the «conditions and even the limits dictated by the surrounding environment»³⁶. Here we can perceive the echo of the reflection on sustainability and its three pillars (social, economic, environmental).

Beyond the aforementioned points on sustainability, the Pontifical Council underlines that tourism should be experienced as a promotion of the person and as an opportunity to strengthen social relationships. The Church in fact acts in order to make tourism “human”: tourism should valorise the work of men and women over time and promote solidarity, a culture of hospitality and a correct use of earthly goods (ecclesial heritage or other assets). The document then recognizes the role and competencies of Episcopal Conferences in the matter of tourism (n. 33)³⁷.

More recently, many documents mention the importance of a sustainable development, also within the tourism sector. Pope Francis, in his encyclical letters, insists on the concept of “integral ecology” and the responsibility of faith-

36 Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant Peoples (2001), *Guidelines for the Pastoral Care of Tourism*, n. 12.

37 For instance, the Spanish Conference of Bishops has a sub-commission for the Pastoral care of Tourism within the sub-commission for Migration and Human Mobility (Sub-Comisión Migraciones y Movilidad Humana) of the Episcopal Commission for the Social Pastoral Care and Human Development (Comisión Episcopal para la Pastoral Social y Promoción humana). Regarding Italy, the Italian Conference of Bishops established, in 1987, the National Office for the Pastoral Care of Free Time, Tourism and Sport (Ufficio Nazionale per la pastorale del tempo libero, turismo e sport). About Italy see GANARIN M. (2023), cit., 83-89; CHIZZONITI A.G. AND GIANFREDA A. (2022), “Il turismo religioso: nuove dimensioni per la valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale”, in *Aedon*, n. 2.

ful for the care of natural environment³⁸. He has also underlined that the arts and cultural heritage can be used in evangelization, «building on the treasures of the past but also drawing upon the wide variety of contemporary expressions so as to transmit the faith» (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 167). Thus, also tourism can represent a tool for evangelization when visitors and travellers meet the “via pulchritudinis” (“way of beauty”), proposed by the Church.

Finally, we can mention a very recent document, the Message for the 44th World Tourism Day on September 27, 2023 (issued on 26th May 2023), dedicated to “Tourism and Green Investment”³⁹. In this message, many of the aforementioned points are underlined. In particular, it is said that tourism is certainly a value, if developed in a way that is attentive to the human development and cultural heritage. Catholic Church reiterates its mission in protecting and supporting «the value and importance of art, culture, and their preservation in order to allow people to know God and keep Christian roots alive». The “way of beauty” is, indeed, «an integral part of our mission to proclaim the Gospel and promote the spiritual growth of believers» (n. 5). Moreover, the message «invites tourism to be designed in a manner that respects people and the environment» (n. 6), as a responsible tourism for care for our “Common Home”.

38 The most important document on this issue is Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'*, of the Holy Father Francis “on Care for our Common Home” (2015). Among the numerous comments, see *Laudato si'. Lettera enciclica sulla cura della casa comune. Testo integrale e commento de «La Civiltà Cattolica»*, a cura di A. SPADARO, Ancora, Milano (2015). About canon law issues see DE GREGORIO L. (2016), “Laudato si’: per un’ecologia autenticamente cristiana”, in *Stato, Chiese e Pluralismo confessionale. Rivista telematica* (www.statoechiese.it).

39 Dicastery for Evangelization, Section for Fundamental Questions regarding Evangelization in the World, *Message 44th World Tourism Day. “Tourism and Green Investment”, September 27, 2023*, available at: <http://www.evangelizatio.va/content/pcpne/en/attivita/Pastorale-del-Turismo/44-Messaggio-Turismo.html>.

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RELIGIOUS TOURISM AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS DRIVERS FOR INCLUSIVE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: REFLECTIONS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL, EUROPEAN AND ITALIAN LEGAL SYSTEMS

Giulia Tiberi

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2. The problematic search for a legal definition of the perimeter of investigation: between “religious tourism”, “intangible cultural heritage” and the specificity of “religious cultural heritage”. – 3. Intangible cultural heritage from the international law perspective. – 3.1. The international global law perspective: the 2003 UNESCO *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* and the positive obligations of safeguarding traditions, rituals, practices and festivals. – 3.2. The international “regional” law perspective: Council of Europe *Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Faro Convention) and the express link with sustainable development. – 4. The EU and cultural heritage: “united in diversity” and the dual dimension of the cultural, religious and humanistic heritages of Europe. – 4.1. The Euro-Mediterranean cultural cooperation and tourism: from the “Euro-Mediterranean Partnership” to the “Union for the Mediterranean” (UfM). – 5. The difficult emergence of intangible cultural heritage in the Italian legal system – 6. Sustainable tourism for safeguarding intangible cultural heritages: the participatory management of cultural heritage as a point of convergence between the international, European and Italian legal systems.

1. Introduction

The concept of religious tourism is not an easy one as it involves the connection between the religious dimension (pilgrimages, trips) and cultural as well as environmental aspects. While initially ‘religious tourism’ was used to indicate the sector of tourism characterised by religion and worship, today it is possible to better define its meaning through a broad notion that is usually assigned to the adjective ‘religious’, no longer strictly linked to motivations exclusively of faith. In fact, religiosity can affect the tourism phenomenon not only for reasons of worship, but also for aspects completely unrelated to it: religious

tourism can be considered as that which can be traced back to the organisational management of religious organisations and structures, or because of the nature of the places visited or visited during a stay – such as sanctuaries, monasteries and places of spiritual retreat – or because of the predominance of cultural heritage of religious interest visited, or even because of the spiritual dimension of the routes and paths taken.

The essay is thus devoted to highlight the interactions, from a legal perspective, between the international, European and domestic legal systems considering the category of intangible cultural property as a common framework for the development of religious tourism as marked by traditions, rituals, pilgrimages and festivals (also with a focus on the Euro-Mediterranean cultural cooperation and tourism).

To this respect the essay will also highlight the restrictive approach initially taken by the Italian legal system, clearly disregarding the evolution that the category of intangible cultural property has undergone in both international and European law.

A final reflection will be devoted to the convergent aspect that the international, European and national legal systems clearly affirm, namely a call for a participatory management of cultural heritage which can be of the most importance also for religious tourism and its sustainable development.

2. The problematic search for a legal definition of the perimeter of investigation: between “religious tourism”, “intangible cultural heritage” and the specificity of “religious cultural heritage”

In light of the experience of recent years, it is possible to arrive at a broad and all-encompassing definition of “religious tourism”, such that we can consider “religious” any form of tourism influenced not only by religious motivations, but also by this aspect in terms of its content (destinations, itineraries/routes, cultural and environmental heritage) or its organisational forms.

In the same line, it is necessary to clarify at the outset what is meant here by intangible heritage¹. It can be understood in a broad sense, encompassing volatile manifestations of culture that are reproducible and indestructible (such as literary works, live performances, cinema, and theatre), but it can also be un-

1 C. BARBATI, M. CAMMELLI, L. CASINI, G. PIPERATA, G. SCIULLO, *Diritto del patrimonio culturale*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2017, 16; V. MANZETTI, *Il patrimonio culturale immateriale tra ordinamento internazionale, europeo e nazionale. Spunti dall'esperienza spagnola*, in *Nomos*, 2018, 3, 8.

derstood in the more precise and circumscribed meaning offered by the Convention that was the first within UNESCO to formally define intangible cultural heritage (see below para. 3).

It is worth also recalling the peculiar concept of “religious cultural heritage”, that is the heritage that incorporates religious or, more generally, spiritual values², which is much broader, as a category, than the set of cultural assets of religious interest.

The specificity of “religious cultural heritage” lies in the quality of incorporating the existence of spiritual values into the testimony of civilisation that it represents. From this perspective, tangible and intangible assets not only have a cultural, historical and aesthetic value, but also assume a spiritual significance. It is therefore clear that in addition to the historical and aesthetic judgement, in this case there is also the implication of a judgement on the relevance of the asset for the faith community, that is to say on the potential of the asset as a tool for achieving the spiritual ends pursued by the religious group.

We are talking about assets that are instrumental to faith groups for the realisation of spiritual objectives and, therefore, transmit religious values; have economic potential (e.g., tourist-religious itineraries); they fulfil a function of social integration, in the form of identity, that is, they shape the structure of community relations in a given territorial context, which is recognised around the physical presence of particular spiritually characterising artistic vestiges.

Furthermore, we are dealing with intangible assets. It is important to distinguish between the intangible dimension of the heritage and the immateriality of the value of the asset to be protected. Legal systems are concerned with this asset, to the point of making it the object of specific regulatory protection, in relation to the intangible cultural function that this asset presides over. In the case of religious cultural heritage, the ‘cultural’ function is further specified

2 See L.M. GUZZO, *Il patrimonio culturale, in particolare quello di rilevanza religiosa, e la Convenzione di Faro*, in *Aedon*, 2022. The concept has been highlighted in the Italian legal studies in the following: F. MARGIOTTA BROGLIO, *Commento all’art. 9. Beni culturali di interesse religioso*, in M. CAMMELLI (ed.), *Il Codice dei Beni culturali e del paesaggio*, Bologna, 2004, 84 ff.; A.G. CHIZZONITI, *Profili giuridici dei beni culturali di interesse religioso*, Tricase, Libellula, 2009; N. COLAIANNI, *La tutela dei beni culturali di interesse religioso tra Costituzione e convenzioni con le confessioni religiose*, in *Stato, Chiese e pluralismo confessionale*, 2012, 21; E. CAMASSA, *I beni culturali di interesse religioso. Principio di collaborazione e pluralità di ordinamenti*, Torino, Giappichelli, 2013; A.G. CHIZZONITI - A. GIANFREDA, *Conservazione, valorizzazione e riuso dei beni culturali ecclesiastici. La disciplina di diritto ecclesiastico italiano*, in *Aedon*, 2021, 3.

by the spiritual one. It is, therefore, necessary to define the overall regulatory framework, moving from the international and European context, and then to address, specifically, the analysis of the Italian model.

3. Intangible cultural heritage from the international law perspective

Global law has been marked by the adoption of two Conventions that have completely reconceptualized the vision of cultural policies by also placing emphasis on intangible cultural property. To this end both the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), at global level, and the Council of Europe, at international “regional” level in the European continent have been very active in such an effort.

Reference has to be made in fact, in particular, to the “Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”, concluded in Paris on October 17, 2003 (henceforth the 2003 UNESCO Convention), and the subsequent Council Europe “Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society”, concluded in Faro on October 27, 2005 (henceforth the Faro Convention).

Along the same lines, in parallel, a broad conception of cultural property has been established at the European level, which as early as the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 recognized the centrality of the so-called cultural heritage of the Member States as an expression of all aspects and forms of cultural property, both tangible and intangible, reaching in 2009 with the Lisbon Treaty the recognition of a dual dimension of cultural heritage articulated on both a common heritage but also on the respect for diversity of each member State.

3.1. The international global law perspective: the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the positive obligations of safeguarding traditions, rituals, practices and festivals

The evolution of the concept of “cultural *property*” as “cultural *heritage*”, conceived as a container of both tangible and intangible cultural goods, is manifestly shown by global law where first this mutation could be observed.

In fact, even the international level has been, for many years, marked by an initial approach focused exclusively on tangible culture as safeguarded by the UNESCO “Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of November 23, 1972”³ and it only arrived at the inclusion of intangible

3 The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of World Heritage, signed in Paris in November 1972, and entered into force internationally in December 1975, was the first international legal instrument to recognize and protect cultural and

cultural heritage only with the approval, with the new Millennium in 2003 in Paris, of the “UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage”⁴, entered into force on April 30, 2006 (hereinafter Convention IHC), whose merit rests in having brought out and given global recognition to the category of intangible cultural heritage⁵.

With the approval of this new Convention, the United Nations agency that deals with Culture, Education and Science recognized cultural value also to those *traditions, rituals, practices, and festivals*, which express the identity of a

natural heritage in order to ensure its identification, knowledge, preservation and transmission to future generations. Recall that according to the ‘72 Convention the following are considered “*cultural heritage*” (Art. 2): monuments (monumental architectural, plastic or pictorial works, elements or structures of archaeological character, inscriptions, caves and groups of elements of outstanding universal value from the historical, artistic or scientific aspect), agglomerations (groups of isolated or united constructions which, by their architectural unity or integration in the landscape have outstanding universal value from the historical, artistic or scientific aspect), sites (works of man or conjugated works of man and nature, as well as areas, including archaeological sites, of outstanding universal value from the historical and aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological aspect), while the following are considered “*natural heritage*” (Art. 3): natural monuments consisting physical and biological formations or groups of such formations of outstanding universal value from the aesthetic or scientific aspect, geological and physiographic formations and closely demarcated areas constituting the habitat of threatened animal and plant species of outstanding universal value from the scientific or conservation aspect, natural sites or closely demarcated natural areas of outstanding universal value from the scientific, conservation or natural aesthetic aspect.

- 4 The ICH Convention is composed of a Preamble and forty Articles, divided into nine Sections: 1) General Rules (Arts. 1-3); 2) Bodies of the Convention (Arts. 4-10), 3) Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage at the National Level (Arts. 11-15), 4) Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage at the International Level (Arts. 16-18), 5) International Cooperation and Assistance (Arts.19-24), 6) Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund (Arts. 25-28), 7) Relationships (Arts. 29-30), 8) Transitional Provisions (Art. 31), and 9) Final Provisions (Arts. 32-40).
- 5 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage approved in Paris on October 17, 2003 by the UNESCO General Conference at its XXXII session. For more on the 2003 UNESCO Convention, see *ex multis* M. JADÈ, *Le patrimoine immatérielle. Perspectives d'interprétation du concept de patrimoine*, Paris, 2006, 33 ff.; S. OGGIANU, *La disciplina pubblica delle attività artistiche e culturali nella prospettiva del federalismo*, Turin, 2012, in part. 5-11; M. FUMAGALLI MERAUVIGLIA, *La valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale nel diritto internazionale*, in L. DEGRASSI (ed), *Cultura e istituzioni. La valorizzazione dei beni culturali negli ordinamenti giuridici*, Milan, 2008, 42 ff;

community and which are not directly traceable to tangible goods.

In the text of this Convention we find for the first time a broad general legal definition of intangible cultural heritage:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, know-how-as well as the tools, objects, artifacts, and cultural spaces associated with them that communities, groups, and in some cases individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage (see Article 2, para. 1, ICH Convention).

This broad definition is also complemented with the specification that:

this intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity.

Therefore, the elements assumed as useful for legally contouring this concept are linked, on the one hand, to the *mode of expression of the cultural factor* (practices, representations, knowledge), and on the other hand to the *mode of transmission of these factors* (intergenerational nature, constant re-creation of cultural factors, sense of community identity).

Still the drafters of the 2003 Convention were well aware of the fact that the definitional work of intangible cultural heritage encounters inherent limits to the category itself, which, being configured as an expression of an “ideal value of civilization”, can only present itself an “open category” as a changing element depending on its interaction with society and environment⁶.

This explains why the text of the Convention complements the above mentioned general open definition with a list of some illustrative and non-exhaustive *expressions* of intangible cultural heritage (see Article 2, para. 2, ICH Convention), identifying five main areas in which “*inter alia*” intangible cultural heritage can manifest itself, such as:

1. oral traditions and expressions, including language, as a vehicle for intangible cultural heritage;
2. performing arts;

⁶ F. RIMOLI, *La dimensione costituzionale del patrimonio culturale*, in *Riv. giur. edilizia*, 2016, 5. V. MANZETTI, *Il patrimonio culturale immateriale tra ordinamento internazionale, europeo e nazionale*, cit., 4.

3. social customs, ritual and festive events;
4. cognitions and practices relating to nature and the universe; and
5. traditional crafts (Art. 2, para. 2).

The doctrine has thus clarified what the objective and subjective elements are to be in place in order to be considered intangible heritage within the meaning of UNESCO, namely a *practise* (objective element), a *community of people* (subjective element or social component) and a *cultural context* (spatial component)⁷.

A systematic reading of the ICH Convention, thus, allows to identify, in what inevitably is to be regarded as an heterogeneous and dynamic category, three specific and peculiar traits that cannot be in any case disregarded: intangibility, as goods that are independent of *res*; referability to the “community,” as goods that must be “recognized” by the communities of reference; and “community participation,” as goods that need to be “transmitted” and “recreated” by the same communities⁹.

Rightly it has been argued that these elements must consequently all be present at the same time in order not to cut the link between cultural value and identity value, as they constitute also a response to the processes of globalization and social transformation, which can pave the way also to dangerous phenomena of intolerance (a trait that has been reaffirmed also in the subsequent UNESCO 2005 “Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions” signed in Paris on October 20, 2005⁸).

And it is precisely the dynamic character of intangible cultural heritage that determines the main peculiar characteristic of public policies concerning this subject matter, namely the “*safeguarding*” of intangible cultural heritage, a concept that differs from the familiar ones of protection, preservation and enhancement. And in fact, by “safeguarding” *the* Convention means “*measures*

7 J. BLAKE, *Commentary on the UNESCO 2003 Convention on the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage*, Leicester, 2006; L. LIXINSKI, *Intangible cultural heritage in international law*, Oxford, 2013; T. SCOVAZZI, *The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. General Remarks*, in P.L. PETRILLO (ed.), *The Legal Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. A Comparative Perspective*, Springer, 2019, pp. 3-18; A. D. RAMOS, *The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, in E. BARONCINI (ed.), *Protection and Enhancement of the World Cultural Heritage in International Law*, Bologna, 2021, 369- 390,

8 See G. POGGESCHI, *Unesco’s “Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions” becomes part of the Italian legislative corpus. A novelty in the panorama of international legal instruments?* in *Aedon*, 2, 2007.

aimed at ensuring the vitality the intangible cultural heritage, including identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, in particular through formal and informal education, as well as the revitalization of various aspects of that cultural heritage” (art. 2, para. 3).

A system, therefore, of protection that the ICH Convention has structured on two levels. At the international level the “safeguarding” reflects a sectorial nature, based on the so-called UNESCO lists, being embodied in both the compilation of two lists – the *Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* and the *List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding* – and the establishment of the so-called Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund. At the national one the “safeguarding” is conceived having a generalist nature, in that it is aimed at “all” the elements present in the territory.

The 2003 UNESCO Convention thus forced an updating, also at the domestic level, of the very concept of “culture” no longer linked to its material dimension (the monument, the architecture, the landscape) but an expression also of its intangible dimension.

The implementation of the Convention has proved to be effective with its “reward system”: since the 4th session of the Convention’s intergovernmental committee held in Abu Dhabi in September 2009, numerous traditions, rituals, and social practices have been included in a special representative List of elements expressing the cultural heritage of specific communities. According to an articulated and complex evaluation procedures, UNESCO has in fact recognized, through the governing body of the 2003 Convention (the Intergovernmental Committee), cultural value for example to traditional dances and dances (such as tango or flamenco), to craft productions (those of Persian carpets), to food practices (such as the Mediterranean Diet), but also to cultural spaces and religious festivals and ceremonies, where such heritage is recreated daily by passing on from generation to generation. As for the latter, it is worth recalling that more than 58 rituals and religious ceremonies have been certified in the “Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity”, as for instance in Italy the *Celestinian forgiveness celebration* and the *Celebrations of big shoulder-borne processional structures*; in Turkey the *Mevlevi Sema ceremony*; in India the well-known *Kumbh Mela*; in Egypt the *Festivals related to the Journey of the Holy family*.

In this way, the ICH Convention has helped to define, in the 180 States that have ratified it, a common regulatory framework of legal instruments for the protection of these heritages.

Still it should not be disregarded that the ratification of the Convention, precisely because of the wide margin of discretion inherent in the procedures for the formation of candidacies and the adoption of legislative and administrative measures in this regard, has given rise to heterogeneous national systems, and not always, as in the Italian case, responsive to the purposes enunciated by the Convention (see below para. 5).

3.2. The international “regional” law perspective: Council of Europe Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention) and the express link with sustainable development

In the European continent the international framework of cultural policies has been completed at regional level by the Council of Europe (CoE), the international organization whose purpose is to promote democracy, human rights, European cultural identity and the search for solutions to social problems in Europe.

The 2005 CoE “*Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society*”, commonly referred to as the Faro Convention⁹, actually brought about a revolution in the process of constructing cultural policies¹⁰, as it conceives cultural rights as fundamental rights as components of the right to life and leads to the qualification of cultural policies as an implementing declination of democracy in Europe.

The Faro Convention does not impose specific obligations of action on the Signatory Countries, leaving them ample freedom to decide on the most convenient means of implementing the measures provided for therein, but it does bring about a revolution as the way of thinking around cultural heritage and people lives.

In fact, the Faro Convention assumes that knowledge and use of cultural heritage are fully part of human rights, and in particular of the right of the individual to freely take part in the cultural life of the community and to enjoy the arts, as stated in art. 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and in art. 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966. This purpose is, moreover, well expressed in the Preamble of

9 In the translation made by the Italian Minister for Culture, was appended as the “Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society”.

10 A. D’ALESSANDRO, *The Faro Convention and the Council of Europe’s New Action Plan for the Promotion of Participatory Processes. The cases of Marseille and Venice*, in L. ZAGATO, M. VECCO (eds.), *Citizens of Europa. Cultures and Rights*, 2015, pp. 77-92.

the Faro Convention, when it states that the Member States of the Council of Europe have set themselves the aim *'to safeguard and promote those ideals and principles which are their common heritage, based on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law'*. The aim of the conservation and management of *cultural heritage* is therefore identified as the development of a more democratic, participatory, peaceful and sustainable human society.

The intent is therefore to transcend the traditional notion of cultural heritage (tangible and intangible) to embrace a broader one, of a sociological and anthropological nature, that emphasises the value of *cultural heritage*, considered as a *'resource for sustainable development and quality of life in a constantly evolving society'*.

The Faro Convention thus provides a broad and dynamic definition of cultural heritage that is no longer limited to artistic and historical assets, but is extended to values, beliefs, knowledge, traditions and *"all aspects of the environment derived from the interaction between people and places through time"*¹¹.

Another new element is the prominent role assigned to people, who become actors in the identification of the *'resources inherited from the past'*, thus reversing our traditional perspective of identifying what is of cultural interest through the activity of the population (and no longer, for instance as in Italy, only through the activity of the Ministry for Culture with its local superintendents).

Furthermore, it is the perspective itself of cultural heritage conservation that changes, as it is no longer aimed only at preserving its scientific value, but also at guaranteeing sustainable development and quality of life, emphasising the contribution of cultural heritage to the development of human beings and society. In fact, the States undertake to encourage a common reflection on the ethics and ways of presenting cultural heritage, respecting the diversity of interpretations and identifying conciliatory procedures to resolve situations in which the same heritage is attributed contradictory values by different communities. It is therefore essential to encourage dialogue between different cultures, stimulating interculturality while respecting differences, to the point of considering *Cultural Heritage* as a *'resource to facilitate peaceful coexistence'* (art. 7 Faro). In this sense, the Ministers of culture of the G7 countries who took part in the Florence Declaration of 30 March 2017 also made a decision, stating

11 The Faro Convention defines cultural heritage as: *'a group of resources inherited from the past which people identify, independently of ownership, as a reflection and expression of their constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge and traditions. It includes all aspects of the environment derived from the interaction between people and places through time'* (art. 2).

that cultural heritage contributes, among other things, to fostering dialogue and intercultural exchange between all nations.

With particular regard to the heritage characteristics of the cultural environment, States undertake to *'promote an integrated approach to policies that concern cultural, biological, geological and landscape diversity in order to achieve a balance among these elements'* (Art. 8), as well as *'define and promote principles for sustainable management and encourage maintenance'* (Art. 9). The emphasis is essentially on the sustainable management and maintenance of heritage, the latter understood in a broad sense, not limited to the conservation and restoration of assets.

Attention is then focused on the economic potential of cultural heritage, considered as a factor in sustainable economic development, placing an obligation on the Parties to implement active policies aimed at increasing this awareness, to consider the specific character and interests of cultural heritage in planning economic policies and, finally, to verify respect for its integrity (Art. 10).

The spirit that permeates the Convention is therefore clear: cultural heritage is not only something to be protected and handed down to future generations, but also something to invest in, a resource for the country's socioeconomic development.

Responsibility and participation represent other key terms in the document, where the contracting parties are required to *"promote an integrated and well-informed approach by public institutions in all sectors and at all levels"*, encouraging the development of innovative methods aimed at achieving effective collaboration between public authorities and the various actors involved (experts, owners, investors, businesses, non-profit organisations and civil society) (Art. 11).

The undisputed innovative value of the Convention has actually led to a slow process of ratification: signed in 2005, it did not enter into force until June 2011 after being ratified only by a small nucleus of states and, to date, it has been ratified by 24 Member States of the Council of Europe, among them Italy with a late ratification approved only in 2020¹².

12 Italy ratified the Faro Convention fifteen years later with Law No. 133/2020 not without a troubled political vote in Parliament, see M. CAMMELLI, *La ratifica della Convenzione di Faro: un cammino da avviare*, in *Aedon*, 3, 2020.

4. The EU and cultural heritage: “united in diversity” and the dual dimension of the cultural, religious and humanistic heritages of Europe

In the EU legal system there is no prescriptive definition of cultural heritage or culture, as EU Treaties prefer – in line with the motto of the EU as “united in diversity” – using evocative formulas relating to the existence of a rich and diverse mosaic of cultural and creative expressions, with the legacy of past generations remitted to future generations, and where the European cultural dimension is articulated on both a common heritage but also on the respect for diversity of each member.

This dual dimension, marked by the coexistence of “cultures,” with their regional and local diversities which constitute the substratum from which a common cultural heritage emerges, is very well reflected even from the Preamble of the Treaty on European Union (as amended by the Lisbon Treaty in 2009)¹³, whereby it is stated that the Contracting States are inspired by “the cultural, religious and humanistic heritages of Europe”, but at the same time they wish to “intensify solidarity among their peoples while respecting their history, culture and traditions” and, again considering the objectives, it is stated that the Union “shall respect the richness of its cultural and linguistic diversity and oversees the preservation and development of Europe’s cultural heritage” (Art. 3, para 3, TEU).

By considering only the primary provisions in the Treaty one cannot actually have a clear picture of the role played by the EU in these areas: in fact, as for the attributions the Treaty provides only a competence for the EU to support, coordinate and complement the action of the Member States¹⁴. Still the bigger picture reflects a more nuanced situation where one can catch that, on the contrary, the EU plays an import part on the intangible dimension of culture. In fact a competence with regulatory powers is entrusted to the EU in several other policies intersecting culture, as for instance under the free movement of services, several directives on audiovisual media services and on copyright in

13 In the TEU Preamble it is stated that the contracting States are inspired by a common past (“the cultural, religious and humanistic *heritages of Europe*, from which have developed the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law”) but they also wish to “intensify solidarity among their peoples while respecting *their history, culture and traditions*”.

14 See Art. 6(1)(c) TFEU and Art. 167 TFEU gives the Union the task of contributing “to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and at the same time bringing the common cultural heritage to the fore”.

the digital market have been enacted clearly having an impact on the intangible aspects of culture. But, what matters most, the EU has highly financed through the state aid framework, the structural and investment funds and specific culture-related programs (among them the Creative Europe program) forms of public support for cultural heritage protection activities in the Member States under the direct control of the Commission, and has developed many *soft law* instruments based on multi-year Work Plans adopted by the Council of Ministers in the form of conclusions. In this way, also using the open method of coordination, the EU has provided a space for voluntary coordination between States coordinated and monitored by the Commission, based on the appointment of expert groups, the identification of good practices in the national policies and the issuance of non-binding recommendations.

In the last decade the EU has clearly conceived cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a more sustainable Europe, as addressed since 2014 in the Council Conclusions¹⁵ and later in 2018 with the institution of the European Year of Cultural Heritage where Member States, European Institutions and also international organizations such UNESCO and the Council of Europe had the opportunity to cooperate also involving numerous networks of associations. Again since 2020, during and after the pandemic, the EU has boosted the funding of the Creative Europe Program so to better support the cultural sector heavily impacted by the pandemic.

Now, what has happened in the last decade is a clear indirect impact of the Unesco ICH Convention in the EU policies, notwithstanding the Convention is not formally part of EU law – as parts of that Convention can only be States. In fact, this Convention has influenced EU policies for the reason that it has become a pattern in international law thus operating beyond the instruments of formal adherence.

Still it is also worth noting the original and peculiar protection afforded at EU level, in comparison to the Unesco ICH Convention, when considering a few aspects and, among them, precisely the role played by both human rights and religion. In fact, while in the European legal system human rights (together with democracy and the rule of law) represent the very content of European cultural heritage also in its intangible dimension, in the ICH Convention the respect for human rights is an external condition for the identification of intangible heritage, thus being a limit for the recognition of a practice for the purposes of the

15 See Council Conclusions, May 21, 2014, on cultural heritage as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe (2014/C 183/08 in OJ C 183/36, June 14, 2014).

Convention that cannot be exceeded (see Art. 2, para 2).

The same peculiarities emerge when we get to religion, in the sense that even religion itself does not belong to the intangible cultural heritage when its theological and moral aspects are relevant, but rituals such as processions or sacred dances are part of the intangible dimension. The Preamble of the TEU states that the Contracting States shall be inspired by the cultural, religious and humanistic heritages from which the universal values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law originated. Article 17 TFEU has also introduced legal obligations to religious denominations for the first time. Thus, the religious element in European law receives its own protection in itself and is a feature of its common identity, without the need for the other objective and subjective elements required by the ICH Convention.

4.1. The Euro-Mediterranean cultural cooperation and tourism: from the “Euro-Mediterranean Partnership” to the “Union for the Mediterranean” (UfM)

The EU has been pursuing cultural cooperation with its Mediterranean partners for decades in order to promote dialogue and understanding between peoples and to enhance the rich and diverse cultural life and heritage of the Euro-Mediterranean region, shaped by the coexistence of different cultures and traditions and millennia of cultural exchanges.

Culture has therefore been a long-standing area of cooperation between the EU and its Mediterranean partners since 1995, guided by the important role that culture plays in achieving sustainable human development.

The EU's privileged partnership with the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean began in 1995, when the then 15 EU Member States and 12 Mediterranean partner countries launched the “Euro-Mediterranean Partnership”, also known as the Barcelona Process. The aim was to create an area of peace, stability and shared prosperity, while promoting better understanding between peoples through social, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Recognising the central role of culture in relations between countries, the partners understood that dialogue between cultures and people-to-people exchanges could further strengthen their relations.

Thus, since 1995, a wide range of initiatives, programmes and projects have been developed to promote the exchange of ideas and to foster better mutual knowledge and understanding. Within the framework of the Barcelona Process, the implementation of the cultural dimension of the Partnership has included the “Euro-Mediterranean Heritage Programme”, which aims to highlight and safeguard the material and non-material heritage of the Mediterranean region.

The evaluation of its first phase, launched in 1998, underlined that the region's shared cultural heritage has been beneficial for dialogue and cultural understanding. The "Euromed Audiovisual Programme", launched in 2000, supported Euro-Mediterranean cooperation projects in the fields of radio, television and cinema. The Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF), launched in 2005, aims to promote intercultural and civil society dialogue by bringing together civil society from across Europe and the Mediterranean to work on issues related to youth, media, values, religion, peace, coexistence and others.

Since 2004, European Neighbourhood policy (ENP) has governed relations between the EU and 16 of its geographically closest eastern and southern neighbours. Under the 2015 revised ENP, a 2021 joint Communication on a renewed partnership with the Southern Neighbourhood proposed a new "Agenda for the Mediterranean" to relaunch and strengthen the strategic partnership with the 10 southern partners. This agenda guides the EU's bilateral, regional and cross-regional cooperation under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI). It also emphasises the need to foster inter-religious and intercultural dialogues and enhance the capacity to combat the illegal trafficking of cultural heritage.

A stronger partnership, building on the Barcelona process, has been launched in 2008 with the creation of a "Union for the Mediterranean" (UfM), an intergovernmental organisation that gathers all the 27 EU Member States and 16 Mediterranean partner countries. It promotes regional cooperation and dialogue through the implementation of projects and initiatives addressing the objectives of regional stability, human development and economic integration also by means of tourism exchanges.

The permanent UfM secretariat, located in Barcelona, works closely with other institutions such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the UfM (PA-UfM) and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) to pursue the Barcelona process objectives.

Taking advantage of the Commission's "New European Agenda for Culture", adopted in 2018, which has identified culture as a vector for sustainable social and economic development and a factor in promoting peace, including through people-to-people contacts fostered by education and youth projects, the UfM launched several successful initiatives for the benefit of enhancing tourism and cultural exchanges within the area.

Among them, to honour the cultural richness of the region the UfM launched the *Day of the Mediterranean*, marked every year on 28 November, to foster a common Mediterranean identity, promoting intercultural exchange and cele-

brate the region's diversity.

Jointly coordinated with ALF and in partnership with ARLEM, the UfM has also recently launched the *Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue*, based on the 2022 Naples Declaration of the Euro-Mediterranean/EU Southern Partnership culture Ministers, who called for the creation of a Capital of Mediterranean Culture modelled on the European Capitals of Culture¹⁶.

A recommendation to the same effect by over 200 young civil society representatives was presented at the 2022 "Forum des mondes méditerranéens". The new initiative, under which a northern and a southern Mediterranean city will be selected each year, is designed to promote the region's cultural diversity and foster better mutual understanding among its people. Following a call for applications, Alexandria in Egypt and Tirana in Albania were chosen to be the first Mediterranean Capitals of Culture and Dialogue in 2025, with a year-long programme planned for each city.

5. The difficult emergence of intangible cultural heritage in the Italian legal system

While the effects of international law on culture, and specifically of the 2003 UNESCO ICH Convention, have been significant in many countries of different areas of the world (as noted, for instance, in countries like Brazil, Spain, Mexico and Burkina Faso) leading to significant changes in their domestic legal systems in order to recognize new instruments for the protection and enhancement of intangible cultural heritage according to the model provided to them by the 2003 Convention¹⁷, the Italian legal system has long been marked by evident "gaps" when seen in comparative perspective¹⁸.

While many democratic systems around the world have recognized

16 In 2022, a Conference of Euro-Mediterranean region culture Ministers for the first time ever was held in Naples, following up on the first G20 meeting devoted to culture, held a year earlier. The protection of cultural heritage and the role of culture in sustainable development were among the topics discussed at the conference. Its outcomes paved the way for new EU programmes supporting cultural initiatives in the Mediterranean.

17 For a in depth analysis see P.L. PETRILLO, *La tutela giuridica del patrimonio culturale immateriale a vent'anni dall'adozione della Convenzione UNESCO del 2003. Profili di diritto comparato*, in *DPCEOnline*, 2023, 1691 ff.

18 A. TARASCO, *Diversità e immaterialità del patrimonio culturale nel diritto internazionale e comparato: analisi di una lacuna (sempre più solo) italiana*, in *Foro amministrativo*, 2008, 2261 ff.

full legal autonomy for the category of intangible cultural elements both in legal studies and in their relevant national legislations¹⁹, for long time in Italy both legal scholars and the legislature have understood intangible cultural heritage as the identity value inherent in a tangible cultural good, thus tracing the legal concept of “good” back to a material thing.

This has been the outcome of delays in Italian legal studies who traditionally have devoted limited attention to intangible cultural heritages, focusing mainly on the means of protection of those tangible cultural expressions that, through tangible goods, manifest the evolution of human civilization²⁰.

Many factors can be singled out for such narrow perspective among Italian legal scholars, generally inclined to neglect the phenomenon of living cultural heritages, among them: the difficulty of identifying an unambiguous definition of what is to be understood by intangible cultural heritage (and, therefore, the awkward identification of the object of legal protection²¹ together with the fear of watering down the concept itself of culture and the impossibility to define its boundaries²²); the attention of Italian jurists being engaged only by tangible cultural goods, because of their overabundance and the poor condition in which many lie, together with a common attitude of undervaluation of those cultural expressions that can be traced back to “local traditions” as regarded as being not high level cultural expressions²³. Thus the Italian legal doctrine has

19 L. ARIZPE, *The genealogy of intangible cultural heritage*, in J. CSERGO, C. HOTTIN, P. SCHMIT, *Le patrimoine culturel immatériel au seuil des science sociales*, Editions de la Maison de Sciences de l’Homme, Paris, 2020, pp. 78 ff; M. FERRI, *Dalla partecipazione all’identità. L’evoluzione della tutela internazionale dei diritti culturali*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano, 2015, esp. pp. 245 ff.

20 See M. CAMMELLI, *The law of cultural heritage: an introduction*, in C. BARBATI, M. CAMMELLI, L. CASINI, G. PIPERATA, G. SCIULLO, *Cultural Heritage Law*, 2nd ed., Il Mulino, Bologna, 2020, 22. Talks about “a real legal inattention” P.L. PETRILLO, *La tutela giuridica del patrimonio culturale immateriale*, cit., 1691.

21 G. MORBIDELLI, *Dei beni culturali immateriali*, in AA.VVV., *Scritti in onore di Ernesto Sticchi Damiani*, vol. 1, ESI, Napoli, 2018, pp. 571 ff. who highlights “the problem of identifying such [intangible] goods awaiting the evanescence and in any case the precariousness of many of the intangible goods” concluding that “intangible cultural goods cannot be examined and read according to the traditional optimum, much less according to a thing-centered perspective.”

22 G. SEVERINI, *Immaterialità dei beni culturali?*, in *Aedon*, 1, 2014, pp. 1 ff. and Id., *Commento agli articoli 1 e 2*, in M. A. SANDULLI (a cura di), *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio*, Milano, 2011.

23 P.L. PETRILLO, *Intangible Cultural Heritage and Comparative Law. Towards a Global Legal Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, in Id. (ed.), *The Legal Protection*

long associated the notion of intangible cultural heritage with the reputational or image or identification value of a *tangible* cultural asset or with the intellectual property resulting from the creation of a tangible work of art²⁴. It followed that, for the Italian doctrine, “cultural heritage” was translatable exclusively as “cultural good” and the very notion of “heritage” coincided with that of “tangible good”²⁵.

Along the same vein, an identical lack of attention has been devoted by the Italian legislature, which until a few decades ago did not deem intangible cultural heritage worthy of legal protection²⁶, as clearly shown by the architecture of the Cultural Heritage Code (Legislative Decree n. 42/2004) characterized by a very restrictive view of the term “cultural property” in the sense that it traces it back to tangible property, excluding, therefore, intangible cultural property, that is, those testimonies having civilizational value that are not contained and represented in a *res*²⁷. What is striking is that this materialist vision ran even contrary to the Italian Constitution, entered into force in 1948, where Article 9, placed among the “Fundamental Principles” of the Constitution, in providing that the Republic “promotes the development of culture and of scientific and technical research. It shall safeguard the natural beauties and the historical and artistic heritage of the Nation”, leaves room for an understanding of the term culture that, as emerges from the work of the Constituent Assembly, must refer also to the totality of human behaviour and beliefs²⁸.

In such a context, one would have expected a natural adjustment on the part of our legal system to the international and European legal framework

of Intangible Cultural Heritage. A Comparative Perspective, Springer 2019, pp. 231 ff. and, *ibid*, P.L. PETRILLO, T. SCOVAZZI, B. UBERTAZZI, *The Legal Protection of ICH in Italy*, pp. 187 ff.

- 24 G. SEVERINI, *L'immateriale economico nei beni culturali*, in G. MORBIDELLI, A. BARTOLINI (a cura di), *L'immateriale economico nei beni culturali*, Giappichelli 2018, pp. 9-40; C. GALLI, *L'immateriale economico dei beni culturali come oggetto della proprietà industriale*, in G. MORBIDELLI, A. BARTOLINI (eds), *L'immateriale economico dei beni culturali*, Giappichelli, Torino, pp. 131 ff.
- 25 G. SEVERINI, *Immaterialità dei beni culturali?*, in *Aedon*, 1, 2014, pp. 1 ss. e *Id.*, *Commento agli articoli 1 e 2*, in M. A. SANDULLI (ed), *Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio*, Giuffrè, Milano, 2011.
- 26 G. MORBIDELLI, *Dei beni culturali immateriali*, in AA.VV., *Scritti in onore di Ernesto Sticchi Damiani*, vol. 1, ESI, Napoli, 2018, pp. 571 ff.
- 27 A. BARTOLINI, *Beni culturali* (dir. amm.), in *Enc. dir. Annali*, VI, Milan, 2013, 110
- 28 F. MERUSI, *Sub art. 9*, in *Commentario della Costituzione*, in G. BRANCA (ed.), Bologna-Roma, Zanichelli, Foro italiano, 1975; M. AINIS, *Cultura e politica. Il modello costituzionale*, Padova, 1991.

previously considered and in this process one could think also imaginable that the appropriate venue for such an adjustment should be the “Cultural and Landscape Heritage Code”, the organic body of provisions on the cultural and landscape heritage of the Italian Republic enacted by Legislative Decree No. 42 of 2004. But this was not the case, as on the contrary the choice of the Italian legislature at that time (a year later than the Unesco Convention) had been to restrict the discipline to tangible cultural goods only. Even later, in 2007, with the ratification of the Unesco Convention the legal provisions maintained that the category of intangible cultural property subsists insofar as it is represented by *tangible evidence*, thus going so far as to modify the very purpose of the Convention, which instead aimed to safeguard precisely those cultural goods not related to things²⁹. What is even worse, the above-mentioned regulatory gap at the national level has been filled by regional legislators thus reflecting a complex and non-uniform normative framework. In fact, in the last two decades in the aftermath of the adoption of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, numerous Italian Regions have intervened, on one hand, with *ad hoc* laws aimed at protecting individual expressions of intangible cultural heritage (and among them the safeguarding and promotion of the ancient religious paths³⁰) and, on the other hand, to regulate organically the instruments for the protection and enhancement of intangible heritages³¹. These regional laws make direct reference to the protection of Intangible Cultural Heritage, i.e., those areas that fall under the definition in Article 2 of the UNESCO Convention (which mentions oral traditions and expressions, including language; performing arts; social customs, *rituals and festive events*; knowledge and practices about nature and the universe; handicrafts).

29 Art. 7a was inserted in the Cultural and Landscape Heritage Code by Art. 1, para 1, letter. c), Legislative Decree No. 62 of 2008.

30 See for instance Lazio Region Law No. 19/2006, *Provisions for the cultural, tourist and environmental enhancement of the Via Francigena and other regional cultural routes recognized by the Council of Europe*.

31 See for example Regional Laws of Molise No. 5/2000, *New regulations on cultural promotion*; Sardinia Region, Law No. 14/2006, *Regulations on cultural heritage, institutes and places of culture*; Tuscany Region, Law No. 21/2010, *Testo unico delle disposizioni in materia di beni, istituti e attività culturali*; Apulia Region, Law No. 17/2013, *Disposizioni in materia di beni culturali*; Basilicata Region Law No. 27/2015, *Disposizioni in materia di patrimonio culturale, finalizzate alla valorizzazione, gestione e fruizione dei beni materiali ed immateriali della Regione Basilicata*; Lombardy Region Law No. 25/2016, *Politiche regionali in materia culturale - Riordino normativo*.

Thus, it has been the global dimension that has imposed a total rethinking of the legal category of cultural heritage in Italy³².

6. Sustainable tourism for safeguarding intangible cultural heritages: the participatory management of cultural heritage as a point of convergence between the international, European and Italian legal systems

There is a final profile that is important to be stressed: the convergence between Unesco Convention on ICH, Coe Faro Convention, European and domestic policies relating to the participatory management of cultural heritage. This aspect is of the most importance when we think about the development of religious tourism as a way for safeguarding intangible cultural heritages as drivers for inclusive sustainable development, a multidimensional concept requiring to accommodate the needs of current and future generations and successfully integrate not only economic and environmental considerations in decision making, but prominently also the social ones.

As to the latter, it has already been mentioned that in the Unesco Convention the subjective component is a distinctive character, as it recognizes that communities, groups, and in some cases individuals, play a decisive role in the production, preservation, conservation, transmission, and recreation of intangible cultural heritage and requires the participation of custodians or practitioners in the identification and management of intangible elements in national territories [Articles 11(1)(b), 15]³³. This community element and the related

32 S. CASSESE, *Il futuro della disciplina dei beni culturali*, in *Giornale di diritto amministrativo*, 7. 2012, pp. 781 ff. Likewise L. CASINI, *Introduction. Cultural heritage and globalization*, in Id. (a.), *La globalizzazione dei beni culturali*, Bologna, 2010, pp. 20-22 and A. GUALDINI, *I beni culturali immateriali: una categoria in cerca di autonomia*, cit., 2.

33 The Unesco ICH Convention, in devolving the enhancement of representativeness of intangible cultural expressions to the national level, in essence, remitted to States the task of identifying, with “participation” of communities, groups, and NGOs, the elements of cultural heritage intangible present in its territory, as well as that of adopting the legislative and administrative measures deemed necessary to ensure its preservation. State parties should, therefore, in order to ensure “representativeness,” identify tools to enhance the “participation” of “communities” both in procedures for identifying UNESCO nominations and in procedures aimed “safeguarding” the innumerable traditions present in the territories. See S. URBINATI, *Considerations on the role of “communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals” in the application of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*, in T. SCOVAZZI, B. UBERTAZZI, L.

participation are intrinsically linked to the very nature of the intangible good as a “practice” that, in order to survive and be transmitted, requires be continuously recreated, as if the community ceases to exist, the practice itself is lost.

It was then specifically CoE Faro Convention that introduced the concept of “*heritage community*”, together with the recognition of a “*right to participate in cultural life*” as a right of individual and collective participation, clearly pushing towards a *bottom-up*” and definitely not “*top-down*” perspective of cultural policies, as it identifies as a key aspect the “participation” of communities as the only ones capable of “identifying” and “transmitting” “cultural heritage”. This also entails, according to the Faro Convention, that the States and their administrations in the management of cultural heritage have “to develop innovative methods” aimed at triggering cooperation with other actors involving community participation in public decision-making processes.

In this perspective, community participation in the design and management of cultural policies can be read as a contribution to the pursuit of sustainable development of society, as well as to the affirmation of economic, social and territorial cohesion policies. Consistently therefore, the Faro Convention draws attention to the economic potential of cultural identities, particularly for communities of reference, thus configuring, a new relationship between “economy and cultural heritage”.

At the European level, too, participation in cultural governance is deeply-rooted in the participatory governance scheme enacted since the early 2000s and in 2014 the Council adopted a policy act specifically dedicated to participatory governance of cultural heritage, referred not to the identification and management process of individual heritage elements, but to policy making through regulatory, policy, planning acts, complemented with the appointment of a group of experts to collect and examine national participatory best practices.

In Italy, too, with the express recognition in the Constitution of the horizontal subsidiarity principle³⁴ and the prominent role assigned by the Third Sector Code (Legislative Decree no. 117/2017) to the “Third Sector Entities” (ETS),

ZAGATO (eds.), *The Intangible Cultural Heritage in its Different Dimensions*, cit., 51-73, spec. 55.

34 See Art. 118, para 4, Italian Constitution as introduced in 2001 by constitutional law No.3/2001 stating “The State, regions, metropolitan cities, provinces and municipalities shall promote the autonomous initiatives of citizens, both as individuals and as members of associations, relating to activities of general interest, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity”.

namely private NGOs and not-for-profit organisations³⁵, the so-called “shared administration” is gaining momentum with co-programming and co-planning being two fundamental procedural instruments for strengthening collaboration between public administrations and the not for profit organizations in order to build effective policies aimed at citizens and communities wellbeing. within the broader scope of activities of general interest defined by the Third Sector Code. Among these activities of general interest where the ETS are very active we find precisely the organization and management of interventions for the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage and of the landscape, of cultural, artistic or recreational activities of social interest, of tourist activities of social, cultural or religious interest (Art. 5).

Shared administration has thus become a new innovative way of intervention as recognized by the Italian Constitutional Court clearly acknowledging that ETS have a specific aptitude to participate together with public bodies in the attainment of the general interest as they are representative of the “solidarity society”, constituting a widespread local network of proximity and solidarity, sensitive in real time to the needs that stem from the social fabric³⁶. Thus, they are able to provide the public bodies with valuable information and an important organisational/intervention capacity, and this also explains the success of this shared administration as shown by the many municipal regulations for the management of public goods, or in subsidiarity and community pacts, networks of partnership on specific initiatives³⁷, aspects that are of the most importance for the development of religious tourism along a sustainability path.

35 In the Third Sector Code the ETS are identified as a limited set of legal persons with specific characteristics (Article 4), aimed at “pursuing the common good” (Article 1) and undertaking “activities of general interest” (Article 5) on an individual non-profit basis (Article 8), subject to a public registration system (Article 11) and to strict controls (Articles 90 to 97).

36 Italian Constitutional Court decisione No, 131/2020.

37 See *amplius* S. STAIANO, *La sussidiarietà orizzontale: profili teorici*, in *Federalismi*, 2016, 5; L. GORI, *Terzo settore e Costituzione*, Torino, 2022; G. ARENA, *Sussidiarietà orizzontale ed Enti del Terzo Settore*, in *Impesa sociale*, 2020, n. 3, 11; E. ROSSI, *Costituzione, pluralismo solidaristico e terzo settore*, Modena, 2019.

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BEYOND THE EXCLUSIVE IMAGERY OF ‘USEFUL INVADERS’. YOUNG MUSLIM AND THEIR RELIGIOUSNESS

Roberta Ricucci

SUMMARY: 1. Young Muslims and their ‘secularized’ religious identities. – 2. Beware of Islam: a biased and segmented narrative. – 3. The potential energy among young Muslims is waiting to be discovered. – 4. City, intersection of migration and religious affiliation. – 5. Conclusions.

Migration is a structural element of the current scenario, i.e. an issue that must be managed globally and according to overarching perspectives and principles in all parts of the world. However, those who migrate are very different in terms of their origins, their biographies, their migration experience, their integration paths, but also in terms of their rights and the integration and citizenship policies from which they can benefit (Ambrosini, Cinalli e Jacobson, 2020).

Today’s newcomers, especially in Southern Europe, often come from sub-Saharan Africa or Southeast Asia, do not share a common language (at least not with the majority of Europeans, as many speak Bambara, a language widely spoken in several Central African countries) and have religious affiliations ranging from Islam, including its variant of Muridism, to animism and Catholicism (Ricucci 2018). In this context, questions such as “who we are” and “who we want to become” are once again coming to the fore. Above all, people are asking how “they” can become “us”, or even “who can we welcome?”.

The debate rarely revolves around other topics. Migrants are citizens who develop their biographies in different environments (family, work, leisure, friendships), take on different roles, become consumers, residents who pay attention to the quality of life in their neighborhoods, innovators and entrepreneurs of a *mixité* that, from time to time, becomes involved in intercultural or ethnic dynamics (sometimes with negative connotations) (Erisen and Vasilopoulou, 2022). Immigrants who have entered the fourth phase of the migration cycle (stabilization and transformation of the migration project from a temporary to a permanent phase) adopt lifestyles and behaviors peculiar to the natives. The second generation is the best example of this. Indeed, in their

biographies, we can easily understand the transformation from “useful intruder” to recall Ambrosini (2001) to “citizen”. Or rather, we could understand it if the processes of discrimination did not continue to cast a shadow over the ‘energy potential’ that the children of immigrants, often citizens, represent for demographic, social and economic dynamics. They are young people, beyond their migration background. And young people are in many ways at the center of interest, because they are consumers, users of products and services, recipients of advertising campaigns (Toivanen, Riniolo and Mezzetti, 2023).

The presence of immigrants is now a structural element of European immigrant societies, which are multiethnic and multicultural. The children of immigrant families are one of the most visible and significant aspects of this change, and it is no exaggeration to say that they determine part of the EU’s future, just to be only focused on the EU scenario. At the same time, the obstacles they face in the transition to adulthood are obvious. This also applies to their relationship with adults, both in their communities of origin and with the “other nationals, i.e. French, Portuguese, Italians, Greek, Germans”, who find it difficult to distinguish them from their parents and recognize their unique characteristics. They live their lives in a scenario that is very similar to that of their peers, and yet there are significant differences in many areas. These include entering the world of work, volunteering and interacting with others, building their own value system and the way the media and public opinion observe and describe them (Valtolina and Zanfrini, 2023).

In a volume on tourism, this chapter aims to outline the characteristics of ‘potential tourists’ identified among second generations, i.e. those who – educated and socialized to Islam – cultivate a religious identity. A warning is in order. The tourist potential of the children of Muslim immigrants must be included in a process of secularization and transformation of the relationship to religion that also pervades the world of Islam and that defines the relationship to the sacred as a cultural rather than an active and convinced one. The chapter focuses on the Italian contest, and particularly – for some examples – on city which could be considered representative of the Muslim presence in the country. The city of Turin, indeed, has been one of the first immigration cities in Italy back in the ‘70s with a strong Muslim community, mainly from Morocco and Egypt (Cingolani and Ricucci, 2014). The following sections discuss some issues dealing with a specific group of Muslim-tourists, who gather those who are children of Muslim immigrants: in European immigration countries, and in Italy too, they represent a potential huge basin for the touristic industry development which is rarely taken in account by economic, political and social players

(Moiso and Ricucci). Considering that, the chapter starts framing the religious identity and its transformation and continuing to discuss to profile of young Muslims in a relatively recent immigration country like Italy is¹.

1. Young Muslims and their 'secularized' religious identities

Contrary to the expectations of many observers of modernity, we are not experiencing an escape from the religious sphere today, but rather a different way of belonging to it and expressing it (Costa and Morsello, 2020; Fedele, 2020). Faith is increasingly becoming a private matter, which goes hand in hand with less participation in religious life and adherence to religious rules in the various spheres of life (from sexuality to morality, from economics to legal issues). This aspect and the difficulty of religious institutions to understand religious- and spiritual- people's needs and their responses to advanced modernity put Berger's (1992) "lonely believer" at the forefront of the discussions among both religious and non-religious institutions today and reinforce various other forms of relations between people and the faith, as "believing without belonging", "Belonging without believing" or "cultural religiosity" (Dollahite et al., 2020).

In addition to the following two dynamics:

1. the persistence of religion in people's lives and
2. the growing individuality of belief, which are transversal among young and adult people, men and women, those who have a migratory background have to cope with another one: indeed, it is the never-ending confrontation with stereotypes and discriminatory processes based on one's identity as a migrant (Esses 2021).

All this seems to be even more specific for Muslims (especially for people with a Muslim background, i.e. second and third generations), regardless of whether they are still foreigners or already citizens of the immigration country where they are born or have been raised and even European citizens (Martiniello and Verhaeghe, 2022).

Young people of foreign origin are a significant group and an important issue in the European scenario. Hardened over time and sometimes difficult to trace because the migration paths of their parents have left no trace, whether in

1 This chapter uses and updates Ricucci's contributions already published in Ricucci, 2017 and Ricucci, 2021. Furthermore, the contribution uses qualitative materials collected in the last five years in the framework of various projects (Second generations on the move – funded by University Local Funds; TORAG – Transmission of Religion Across Generations – Funded by Templeton Foundation).

the form of dual citizenship or in the form of conspicuous and visible somatic and/or phenotypic characteristics (skin color), the children of immigrants are a heterogeneous universe that is difficult to define. This group includes both the now-adult second generation, represented by the children of labor migrants before the 1973 entry blockade, and children, adolescents and young people approaching adulthood, as representatives of the second generation that make up the old emigration countries in immigration ones both in the Mediterranean region and in Central-Eastern Europe (Bazurli and Kaufmann 2023). In Europe, the topic of the second generation has gained attention and space both on the agenda of governments and on the research agenda of scientists from different countries, albeit with different perspectives. Especially after the (st attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) and more recently after the attacks in several other cities, but also after the riots in the suburbs of some French cities, in England and more recently in Italy and Spain, the need for a deeper understanding of this reality has grown (Ricucci, 2023). All these events have drawn attention to the results of integration processes as well as to relations between different cultural groups, raising a dangerous specter of intolerance and discrimination against people from Muslim countries (Vertovec and Rogers, 2018). In a climate of mistrust, the children of immigrants, who are sometimes also European citizens, are under renewed scrutiny and it becomes clear that the conferral of citizenship is not enough to avoid processes of differentiation and discrimination based on cultural origin (Mostfa and Younès, 2018). On the contrary, these conflicts, which are exploding in urban suburbs, are commented on as a further indicator of the need for urgent reflection on the effectiveness of integration policies and the fates of the second generation (Modood, Triandafyllidou and Zapata-Barrero). Destination countries, which are still characterized by strong marginality and precarity, attest to the fact that in migration history the transition from one generation to the next is not always associated with social advancement. Among the various aspects that determine the path of integration, religious identity and what some authors refer to as religious symbols are at the forefront (Cesari, 2013).

Do local authorities consider interfaith and intercultural policies as a tool to combat social exclusion and promote the social inclusion of Muslims? If so, how? Any discussion and/or demand for recognition that includes Islam inevitably fits into the wider debate on migration/integration/inclusion (Heblin, 2012). Even in cities with a long tradition of welcoming people: despite the fact that the flow of refugees and asylum seekers associated with the so-called “Mediterranean crisis” has triggered a deep social and political crisis in several

European countries, contributing to anti-immigrant feelings (Ponce, 2024). Although the scale and nature of migration has changed significantly over time, one fact remains constant: it is inextricably linked to religion. And when it comes to religious affiliations, identities and practices, the question of integration becomes complicated. In this respect, religious and cultural identities are an important part of current discourses on diversity in the European context, both at international and national level.

2. Beware of Islam: a biased and segmented narrative

As Ricucci has pointed out in 2017², despite claims of increasing religious pluralism, research in Europe has focused on the growing presence of Islam. Qualitative research and studies have been conducted from various points of view: religious beliefs and practices, the desire for a certain type of society (secular versus Islamic), identity definition (religious, Italian, cosmopolitan), orientation on child rearing and mixed marriages, the demands on different European societies (recognition of holidays, religious education in schools). In addition, the deepening of the relationship with the sacred was often linked to issues of employment (are Muslims discriminated against in access to the labor market compared to other religious communities?), school education (does the increase in Muslim students lead to demands for secularization and changes in educational pathways?), city plans and spaces with special requirements for food, burial sites, etc. The attacks from the early 2000s to the recent massacres are also of strategic importance for analyzing this particular group in order to understand whether its members could become new actors of fundamentalism in Europe.

Furthermore, the views of young people in the specifically religious sphere have been underrepresented in research in Europe for a long time (Foner e Alba 2008). For them, the “processes of social integration as well as the definition of a cultural identity are in many cases filtered through the relationship to religious institutions and educational socialization processes and the support they provide” (Ambrosini 2008, 8). And religious transmission is part of the socialization process.

Religious education is imparted to children by their families. For the children of immigrants, however, the relationship with religion must be viewed from two different perspectives (Patacchini and Zenou, 2016). On the one hand, the acculturation process, i.e. how these children fit into the host society (Berry

2 This section has been drawn from RICUCCI 2017, reframing the text and updating the literature.

1998). On the other hand, how they define their identity as young people with a migration background in a globalized world (Crespi and Ricucci, 2021).

How the cultural identities of foreigners change over time and under the influence of the social context in which they are embedded, as well as the characteristics of the relationship between them, are questions that are generally considered crucial to the study of the second-generation integration process. For immigrant children born elsewhere and reunited with their parents, this journey is more complex as it intersects with the broader task of identity formation that begins in the country of birth and then continues in the host society. Adolescents and young people can choose between several options: If they do not resolve the cultural identity issues they face, identity confusion itself can become their hallmark (Marcia 1994). They acquire adaptive patterns of behavior, personal characteristics, values and social responses in the family that are transmitted to them in the cultural traditions to which they belong. For this reason, the characteristics of religious affiliation and the way in which one expresses one's faith must be located, so to speak, at the intersection of different sociological (and psychological) disciplines: there is evidence of the importance of religion to the ways in which immigrants form intercultural relationships and their pathways to integration (Guveli and Platt, 2021).

In the recent years, the debate about the role of "immigrant" religions has split into two interpretations.

The first deals with the conservative role of cohesion of the new national group through the use of language and the customary way of organizing rituals: religious beliefs and rituals unite people and provide the social context necessary for the transmission of values and traditions (Güngör, Fleischmann, and Phalet, 2011). A second perspective views ethnic *musallas* as part of an assimilation process that includes the role and goals of religious organizations. That is, as with behaviors, values, and traditions, the need for ad hoc places of worship (would be gradually abandoned in the transition from the first to the second generation in order to achieve the integration of immigrants into the pre-existing religious structures of the host society. Structures which, in this perspective, should (again) take on intercultural aspects. Ethnic places of worship would then be faced with the choice of either becoming intercultural or dying out (Rizzo et al., 2017).

So, religious places are a mirror of what happens outside them, in society, where there are still many who argue for having separate services (including for prayers, not just for education, welfare, job placement) and special procedures for foreigners. Yes, that's right, foreigners. But many of them are no

longer or no longer interested in maintaining such close ties to their culture of origin (also in religiously terms). For society – and also for religious groups – this raises the question that some young people of foreign origin and children of parents who immigrated from abroad have already formulated: “When will we stop carrying the burden of being children of immigrants on our shoulders? When will we be accepted? It is not enough that we have passports, because – even in the churches – we are always the children of immigrants. Was it like that before when you immigrated?” asks Wisam, a 35-year-old Italian-Moroccan who works in an IT start-up. Unfortunately, the answer is yes. In all immigration stories, regardless of latitude and age, we see the same phenomenon.

3. The potential energy among young Muslims is waiting to be discovered

Italy has been facing up to the presence of foreign adults and minors for about fifty years. Since the 1990s it has begun to pay particular attention to the component of minors in the immigration phenomenon, both because of their growing numbers and the challenges and problems they present at the local level – from welcoming to academic policies, from free-time activities to relations with parents rediscovered after a long time (Borkert and Caponio, 2010). This attention has led to various initiatives dedicated to (especially academic) insertion, to language learning, to educational assistance and foreign minors' expressive play. This involvement and efforts made on behalf of the youngest immigration component may be put down to so-called «assimilation anxiety» characterizing receiving societies wonders: one whether attending Italian schools will educate the children of immigration to the country's values, norms, and style of life, weakening the particular characteristics which are least in tune with society (from religion to language to dress). In short, assimilation anxiety would wish to observe straight-line assimilation, while for some time studies have been showing that insertion paths do not always result in assimilation, but sometimes lead to an alternate biculturalism, sometimes a revival of ethnic identity, and sometimes event to marginalization paths. In these integration paths there are no differences by gender and by religious belonging, as someone could imagine. Indeed, the bicultural approach is widespread among the majority of young people with a foreign origin.

Foreigners are an integral part of the country's socio-economic fabric, albeit the general migratory tendency in recent years has been a slowing-down of the growth of the number of foreigners in Italy.

It is difficult to outline the characteristics of the Muslim population because

there are no available statistics based on religion. Generally speaking, the Muslim population can be divided into three groups (Ricucci, 2023):

1. Albanians: They have a very low rate of attendance at the mosque;
2. Moroccans, Egyptians and Tunisians: they represent most of the Muslim population in several Italian cities and the migratory flows dates back in the '80s.
3. People from Sub-Saharan countries: the most numerous are immigrants from Senegal, the Ivory Coast and Somalia, followed by Cameroon, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria. They represent the most secularized group of the Muslim population, both in the first and second generations.
4. People from Asia: from an Islamic point of view, Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are the main migrants in this group. Both communities have arrived later compared with other Muslim communities and are still mainly embedded in migrant groups their own ethnic communities and musallas. The second generation has yet to be developed: The migration circle is still in its first phase: single men living together in shared accommodation and integrated into the poorest and lowest labor market positions (Roy and Verdun, 2019).

Furthermore, attention should be paid to young people, to those who are still foreigners and to those who have already become Italians. According to various qualitative studies (Zanfrini, 2020), an interesting development among second-generation immigrants is the polarization that is taking place with regard to the importance of religion in their own lives. Indeed, there is a growing number of second-generation youth who are opting for a more secular way of life, while an increasingly large group is choosing a more conscious form of Islam (Miglietta, El Brashy, and Ricucci, 2024). For second-generation young people, who often have only a small ethnic social network compared to the connections they have with Italians and other peers of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, Islamism can provide a transparent, supportive and all-encompassing frame of reference.

The mosque question can serve as a prism that separates the positions of the first and second generations. One young interviewee reminds us that in a context of adult immigration and entrenched backgrounds, the mosque is a demand that can no longer be postponed.

There is no religious life here. It doesn't exist. If I am religious and want to practice, I can't. Italian mosques are the ugliest places in the world. This is one of the main reasons why I want to go back to Egypt. Here, I can't prac-

tice the way I would like to. There are neither instruments nor structures. Relationship with religion is difficult here because you are in a different society. Islam is a religion for the whole world but if you have no mosque, you suffer because it's hot and smelly with people shamefully packed together, if they close the mosques it will be extremely hard to practice one's religion and develop one's religious ideas. (M, 26, Egypt).

Parents and children agree with this demand, but with a different approach and attribute different meanings to it. For the latter, a mosque is only a religious point of reference and should be seen as such in terms of its structure and furnishings. Parents, on the contrary, who see their authority threatened because their children want to integrate into society try "to regain their status as a member of the mosque and find the symbolic motivational power to transfer it within the family" (Dassetto, 1994, 73). This different approach implies a logical progression from one generation to the next: all the younger, as it has emerged in several interviews, reduce the mosque to a purely religious function, which represents a clear break with the first generation. This attitude could be also applied to several other aspects of the Muslim life, including the associative participation and the economic behavior, both as consumers and as investors.

For young people, being part of the Muslim universe, as the associations should be, is about a path of reflection and commitment that transcends their origins: the criterion for access is the recognition of Islam as a cultural-religious reference point. As one of them recalls:

We don't ask our members for a certificate testifying that they are good Muslims. Our association is called 'Young Muslims of Italy, so the access criteria are clear. We are not bound to any particular country: Italy is our common reference and that of our section is Turin. (M, 22, Morocco).

Another difference lies in the way young people want to display their religiousness in their daily-life. Besides those young people who are strong believers and are searching to live following all the Sharia rules in Italy, in a non-Muslim country (from buying halal clothes and cosmetics, using only halal medicines, trying to be sharia-complaint in managing savings), the great majority seems to be more interested in be perceived as "good citizens", more interested in display civic behavior than religious traits (Mezzetti and Ricucci 2019).

4. City, intersection of migration and religious affiliation

In the Italian scenario, Turin, a city in the norther-Western part of the country, was one of the first Italian municipalities to develop initiatives and projects to manage the increasing flows of migrants³. In the last forty years, the municipality has shifted from “action on demand”, generally multiculturally oriented, to a more coherent and specific intercultural policy. Attention to the second generations emerged mainly in the last fifteen years of the city’s policy evolution. In fact, recently, a new era seems to have come about: the consolidation of intercultural discourse has taken place in tandem, generating a large number of practices, projects and experiences mainly based on the notions of dialogue, mutual exchange and social interaction. Attention to second generations – particularly those with a Muslim background – and their civic involvement has come onto the stage. These young people are considered the drivers of the integration process on both sides: on the one hand, supporting immigrants to be engaged with the city and, on the other hand, helping Italian citizens understand the multiple aspects of immigration in the city. The result of all these initiatives was the active involvement of young people as organizers, animators and educators of other foreign minors who are following insertion and growth paths in the city of Turin. In the meantime, these activities have strongly involved second generations in the city’s life by considering them active citizens, even if all these initiatives did not change the perception of these young people mainly continued to be considered primarily as Muslim and then good citizens (Caponio, Ponzio and Ricucci, 2016). However, the intercultural declination of many activities and discourses (less so of politics), in the sense of an “inclusive intercultural politics”, pushes out of the (explosive and reductive) dichotomy of immigrants vs. citizens. Not only that: for the second Muslim generation, it is no longer a question of limiting themselves to discourses and initiatives reserved for immigrants, whose gaze is benevolent and who are rejected according to the logic of welcome, but of bringing the discourse on their presence (regardless of whether they are active citizens) into the more desirable debate on the relationship between young people and the paths to economic, housing, personal and family autonomy, freeing it from the link with immigration. Those of them who choose to be active and politically engaged (even if only as an association) invest energy in building relationships of partnership and gain spaces of credibility and recognition. In other words, they become reliable in-

3 In this section, I have drawn from RICUCCI 2021 and RICUCCI 2023, updating the consideration on the basis on interviews with stakeholders carried out in 2024.

terlocutors of institutions, businesses and the multiple realities that build and promote social cohesion in a territory. These new actors often have no direct experience of migration, sometimes they are nationals: in other words, young people looking for a space and expressing a desire to be recognized as *part costruens* of society and *part dolens*, as a child of immigration. These characteristics can also be observed in many European metropolitan areas: Brick Lane in London, Kreuzberg in Berlin, Esquilino in Rome. The development of such a debate highlights three problematic nodes that are inevitably linked in Islam to an imaginary rather than real religious affiliation: the representation of the second generation and the characteristics of their transnational ties; the effective possibility of access to important rights; and finally, the recognition of the individual's responsibility for civic duties and their potential authority arising from the degree of recognition within and outside ethnic associations and communities grouped together on a national or religious basis. On the side of representation, one might sometimes ask: "Who speaks for whom?" While it is true that the debate around foreign-born youth is often lively and vital, one wonders whether the direct protagonists have managed to make themselves heard, as their opinions are different (and sometimes even contrary) to those of the first generations and the many "experts" who pose as translators of their demands. On the other hand, the strongest and most heard positions are those of the minority, which can organize itself and can draw on greater social capital and intellectual resources. This is a risk faced by many social research that focus on the most marginalized groups or on those who are more visible as an active part of the national community, risking overshadowing all others but the majority of the population. Another crucial aspect of the characteristics of the presence of immigrant children in Italian society (and beyond) is how the debate on rights will proceed. In terms of how citizenship is obtained, with its symbolic charge, but also its concrete capacity to influence young people's ability to take the lead. The topic of discussion entails important changes for many of those who make up the social fabric: a process that is undoubtedly underway, but about which it is very difficult to make predictions, especially in terms of timing.

We have to get involved ourselves, no one will do it for us [...] not our parents who are not interested in speaking out, they want to live in peace [...] This is our country, many of us have citizenship, so we should not be afraid. What can happen to us? They can't send us away if we speak out, in associations, in consultation forums and why not, even in the city council [...] If we don't go into politics, we risk always remaining under guardianship as

'minors' and adults who know nothing about us young people will speak for us. Will the cultural mediators speak? The club leaders? We are grateful for what they have done for our parents, but they know nothing about us and could be harmful if they talk about us as if we were like their photocopies. We need to talk about ourselves, but for that we need to prepare and learn. We don't improvise to be leaders. (Latifa, Italian of Moroccan origin, 27).

Finally, the space of second-generation representation is the area in which the actual ability of those directly involved to make a difference in Italian society should be measured. In organized structures, especially at the local level, personalities can emerge who are able to guide collective decisions and, by extension, political action. This is due to an authority "that is earned" on the ground", i.e. acquired through internal dynamics on the one hand and the external exercise of associational activities on the other. As we have seen, this aspect is not limited to ethnic or religious associations, even if these are widespread, but also refers in perspective to the many immigrant children who are active in social, cultural and sporting institutions on a voluntary or professional basis. An even broader perspective concerns the contribution that these young people can make to the country in terms of cultural production and innovation. From this point of view, too, the debate is open, especially with regard to the ability of Italian society to grasp this wealth and make it its own.

5. Conclusions

The growth of a Muslim population that becomes German, Spanish, Dutch or Italian marks a symbolic change with concrete effects in the European landscape. A change that affects the direct protagonists (especially young people) and has an impact on their relationship to society, their relationship to religious identity and the broader debate that closely links Islam to terrorism and security issues. The entry of the children of Muslim immigrants into adult life and into the European community challenges scholars and professionals, service providers, teachers and residents to become aware of the fluidity and the many possible declinations in terms of religious identities and to deal with the risks of stigmatization and marginalization of the younger generations. In this sense – and also on the side of faith – the interviewees give voice to a reality that no longer wants to be in the spotlight because it is foreign or can be associated with practices and rituals of other geographical contexts, but must be seen as real for the generation of young people who are now studying at college, looking for work, trying to grow up and build an independent life and income.

Although the religious landscape in European cities is increasingly pluralistic, the focus is always on Islam. A polycentric universe, even if stereotypes and simplifications continue to portray it as distinct and faceless. Or, indeed, of fractures. But there are, and many of them. There is also an increase in the number of reference people and the degree of their interaction with the local, national and even European reality. There is concern about people with a Muslim background and how they are perceived in European society, about how to ensure religious socialization in a context where, as a minority denomination, one often does not have adequate spaces and is still faced with closures, as happened at the beginning of immigration. As a side effect, this situation could have a negative impact on social inclusion: lack of recognition, persistent experiences of discrimination and false perceptions of identity could increase feelings of marginalization and open the door to negative attitudes towards the city/country of residence – up to and including radicalization. There are ways to change this picture. In fact, developments in all cities show that it is possible to develop “large-scale” intervention strategies that work on multiple fronts towards a single goal: in other words, in addition to helping young people of Muslim origin to enter the various sectors of society, action must also be taken in the areas where these young people live (e.g. social promotion, urban regeneration projects). The factors that explain the success of these initiatives include a careful analysis of the characteristics of the areas in which the projects are carried out and the implementation of structural initiatives that do not just focus on randomly funded micro-projects. For example, supporting young people in their educational choices must necessarily go hand in hand with promoting school performance and/or family involvement. These are complex projects involving various actors and often bringing together different approaches to work: the challenge of working both with the beneficiaries (young people) and with their environment (from families to ethno-religious associations to the area in which they live). The effectiveness of these projects sometimes depends on the availability of resources (primarily human and financial, but also political and cultural) and on the fact that the idea of “doing something” can take precedence over specific know-how: That is, there is a tendency to increase the number of activities without always ensuring that the right professional know-how is applied.

All cities show that it is a mistake to look at today’s Muslim generation from the same perspective from which the initiatives were conceived and designed for those who came to Europe in the 1950s and 1960s. The situation requires a paradigm shift that takes into account the specific characteristics of European citizens who belong to Islam. The situation calls for a paradigm shift that takes into

account the particular characteristics of European citizens who belong to Islam. In terms of policy transferability, it is clear that the challenge of reducing the risks of radicalization and insecurity should take into account the following lessons:

- any policy should be based on continuous and updated monitoring of the characteristics of the Muslim population: Research programs and policy-oriented analysis can provide local governments with useful insights for policy-making;
- involve NGOs and grassroots associations in both the planning and implementation of policies targeting Muslims;
- encourage the participation of Muslim stakeholders in decision-making processes dedicated to discussing integration/social inclusion initiatives;
- provide cross-cultural initiatives instead of projects targeting only Muslims: Muslims are residents, and projects for them need to be embedded in a broader scenario that takes into account the feelings (and reactions) of the entire local population.

The last consideration concerns the need to promote actions that are effective but also integrated into the various sectors of society, thus ensuring continuity. Interesting but “isolated” experimental initiatives that address the risk of marginalization and could become pathways to radicalization cannot be the norm for local institutional policies to achieve valid and lasting effects in the field of inclusion. In fact, all the cities studied show that any programs focusing on social inclusion through an intercultural approach should not be a one-off project, but an ongoing and dynamic process that is open to considering other issues as they become important. Projects promoting civic education, participation and solidarity between Muslim and non-Muslim residents thus represent a willingness to think outside the box and look to the future.

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EXPERIENTIAL RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN ISRAEL. THE CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGE TO THE «LAND OF THE SAINT»

Mariagrazia Falcone

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2. Holy Land: devotion or experience? – 3. The value of experience. – 4. The Gospel Trail Experience. – 4.1 The role of KKL. – 5. Pilgrimage bridges the Old and New Testaments. – 5.1 The Jubilee of 2025: between devotion and innovative offering.

1. Introduction

At one time, religious tourism was regarded as a subcategory of cultural and social tourism.

Such thinking has been partly modified today given the economic and social power that religious tourism has assumed in recent years. In fact, according to sociological scholars, religious tourism today can amalgamate both tourists in the narrow sense and pilgrims. If we analyze the historical origins that prompted individuals to embark on a journey to cult destinations, it becomes apparent that this form of travel is very ancient: examples can be found as early as pre-Roman times. Pilgrimages were being carried out as early as 300 A.D., although the most organized forms can be traced back to the period of the Middle Ages with the Templars and journeys to the Holy Land.

According to Dr. Paolo Costa, “Pilgrimage is a form of faith practice that takes place at the various levels in shrines, pilgrim houses, abbeys, monasteries and convents where the pilgrim is guided by the mystical quest that leads him or her to seek meaning in the transcendent or to make amends at sites deemed sacred by taking *a defined and predetermined route*¹”.

Although the places visited are the same, what therefore differentiates pilgrimage from religious tourism are the motivations and purposes of the jour-

1 See: <https://uetnews.it/turismo-religioso-in-italy/#:~:text=Secondo%20Costa%20%E2%80%9Cil%20pellegrinaggio%20%C3%A8,o%20to%20make%20ammenda%20in%20sites.>

ney: the pilgrim is driven to travel in order to strengthen his or her faith through an experience of seeking God, through a usually collective experience, a privileged means of reaching, to paraphrase St. Augustine, that heavenly homeland from which man comes and toward which he or she “turns after a temporary and ephemeral sojourn in the sensible world.”

Having thus defined the fundamental difference between pilgrimage and religious tourism, we next want to emphasize the difference between the “excursionist” pilgrim and the “tourist” pilgrim. The former visits the locality within a day and does not stay in the accommodations; the latter stays there and is therefore classified as a tourist: hence the meaning of “religious tourism?”

We will therefore want to carry out an analysis here of the pilgrimage “par excellence” chosen by the tourist pilgrim: Israel, the Holy Land³.

2. Holy Land: devotion or experience?

Beginning in the 4th century, Western visitors are attracted to that N eggs Jerusalem built by Emperor Constantine on the remains of Hadrian’s *Capitoline Aelia* after its destruction in 132 CE⁴.

Pilgrims were certainly attracted by the *inventio* of the cross by Helena, mother of Constantine, as reported by Eusebius of Caesarea. In any case, Christian pilgrimages began well before the Edict of Milan in 313 CE, which sanctioned freedom of Christian worship, and it seems that the first written record of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem is contained in a letter cited by Eusebius of Caesar-

2 Cf. ZOLLO A. *Religious Tourism. Comparison Italy Spain. Journal of Tourism Science*. 2018.

3 A pilgrimage proposal that can be classified as a “tourist” pilgrim experience that did not, however, involve a hotel stay has been implemented in the past. These were the religious travel proposals carried out by the pilgrimage organizers ODPT, Opera Diocesana Pellegrinaggi di Torino, in 2015 and 2016, respectively: these were the “Jubilee in Jerusalem” proposal, a project carried out in collaboration with EL AL, Israeli Airlines, which involved a 24-hour trip with only a visit to Jerusalem, using EL AL’s evening flight for the outward journey, departing from Milan Malpensa at 10 pm.30 and arrival at Ben Gurion in Tel Aviv at 03.20 am with return to Milan Malpensa the same day with a 18.10 flight from Tel Aviv. The project, carried out with promotional intent, was implemented twice in 2015 and once in 2016 and was then replicated by the Sant’Anselmo Viaggi operator from Mantua.
<https://www.odpt.it/>; https://www.facebook.com/profile/100063569140810/search/?q=24%20ore%20a%20Gerusalemme&locale=it_IT

4 Common Era.

ea that would report on the journey of Meliton of Sardis around 170 CE⁵, who traveled to the East to visit the places where the events recounted in the Old Testament took place.

If, on the other hand, one wanted to look for a date for the beginning of a true Christian pilgrimage literature, one could refer to the moment when the experience of traveling in a religious key begins to be accompanied by the need for an expressive form to represent it. Such conditions occur precisely in the same fourth century and are witnessed within the very famous *Itinerarium Egeriae* (or *Peregrinatio Aetheriae*), between 381 and 384, considered as the starting point of the literary genre, dealing with a Galician nun who writes to her sisters a long description of her pilgrimage, giving rise to a sacred geography that is taken up and adapted, from time to time, to the devotional needs of pilgrims⁶.

3. The value of experience

While broad is the debate that seeks to situate pilgrimage within the religious tourism experience, more rarefied is the possibility of understanding the evolution of pilgrimage itself toward a global dimension of experiential tourism.

Why does pilgrimage today have an experiential dimension, placing this side by side with the more traditional devotional one? How has this changed pilgrimage and the organization of it in the pilgrimage destination par excellence, the Holy Land?

Homo viator: like Abraham in the Bible, described as a person on a journey, whose adventure ends in the Promised Land⁷, so Jesus' ministry is identified

5 "The Roman Observer". *To the Roots of Faith*. 08/05/2009.

"A route repeated by Joseph, Mary and Jesus. Then by apostles and followers of the crucified rabbi. By passionate women - such as Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine, and sixty years later, around the year 385, the Spanish pilgrim Egeria - and by men of all times. From Bishop Meliton of Sardis, who went there around the year 170 to see the sites of Scripture, to Jerome, who researched the "Jewish truth" of the Bible there, until the return of Peter's successors."

https://www.vatican.va/content/osservatore-romano/it/editorials/documents/08_05_2009.html.

6 Cf. CUSCUNÀ G., *Overseas. Mapping the sacred through the pen of the medieval pilgrim*. November 2024. https://www.egramma.it/eOS/index.php?id_articolo=5695.

7 Gen. 12.1: "And the LORD said to Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and out of thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee."

https://www.vatican.va/archive/ITA0001/_PC.HTM#5.

with a journey starting from Galilee to the Holy City⁸. Going up⁹ to Jerusalem. For to Jerusalem, one goes up. With body and spirit.

From etymology to respect for creation. The word pilgrimage is derived from the Latin *for ager*, meaning “across the fields”, or *for eger*, meaning “border crossing”: both roots refer to the distinctive dimension of undertaking a journey. There are many itineraries to choose from, and contemplation of nature and creation are also part of this, thus becoming “an essential expression of faith in God and obedience to his will¹⁰”.

In the footsteps of Francis? In harmony with creation

St. Francis of Assisi undertook a significant journey to the Holy Land in 1219, during the Fifth Crusade. He set out from Ancona in June 1219 and arrived in Acre in July of the same year. The main objective of his journey was to meet with Sultan al-Malik al-Kamil, Saladin’s nephew, to promote peace and interreligious dialogue.¹ The Holy Land was a place of peace and interreligious dialogue.

Francis and his companion, Brother Enlightened, crossed enemy lines and were initially captured by Muslim soldiers, who brought them before the sultan. Al-Malik al-Kamil received Francis with courtesy and respect, and the two had a meaningful meeting that lasted several days¹. Despite religious differences, Francis tried to convey the Christian message of love and brotherhood.

This journey had a lasting impact on the Franciscan presence in the Holy Land. The Franciscans were later recognized as custodians of the Holy Places, a

8 Lk. 8:51: “As the days were being fulfilled in which he would be lifted up on high, he made a firm decision to set out for Jerusalem.”
<https://www.bibbiaedu.it/CEI2008/nt/Lc/9/>.

9 Mk. 10:33: “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be delivered up to the chief priests and the scribes: they shall condemn him to death, they shall deliver him to the Gentiles.”

10 “Therefore, the spiritual dimension of the Jubilee, which calls for conversion, should be combined with these fundamental aspects of social living to form a coherent unity. Feeling that we are all pilgrims on the earth in which the Lord has placed us so that we might cultivate and care for it (cf. Gen. 2:15), let us not neglect, along the way, to contemplate the beauty of creation and to care for our common home. I hope that the upcoming Jubilee Year will also be celebrated and lived with this intention. Indeed, a growing number of people, including many young and very young people, recognize that care for creation is an essential expression of faith in God and obedience to his will.”

LETTER OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS TO S.E. MONS. RINO FISICHELLA FOR JUBILEE 2025.
<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/letters/2022/documents/2022-0211-fisichella-giubileo2025.html>.

role they still maintain today¹¹.

The experience of nature pilgrimage: the great rediscovery

Pilgrimage as a form of spiritual experience in nature, respecting creation, with the spirit of Francis: it has been for many years now that even in Israel pilgrimage has been perceived as a form of harmony of the creative action of the Highest with man who experiences, immersivity, in nature itself¹².

Here are some of the novel pilgrimage proposals following the footsteps of the signs left by the Gospels and Old Testament texts aimed at experiencing the experiential novelty of between nature and spirituality.

4. The Gospel Trail Experience¹³

The Gospel Trail in Israel is a pilgrimage route that follows the footsteps of Jesus through the Galilee region. This trail, about 60 km long, begins in Nazareth and ends in Capernaum, passing through significant places in Jesus' life.

The main stages of the Gospel Trail are:

- Nazareth: Starting point of the route, where the Basilica of the Annunciation is located.
- Cana: Famous for the miracle of the transformation of water into wine.
- Mount of Beatitudes: Place of the Sermon on the Mount.
- Tabgha: Site of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes.
- Capernaum: Destination, with the ancient synagogue and the House of Peter.

11 In 1342 Pope Clement VI issued the bulls *Gratias agimus* and *Nuper carissimae* and entrusted the Franciscan Order with the custody of the Holy Places, giving legal status to the Custody of the Holy Land by sanctioning its internationality. CAFULLI G., ed: *Franciscans in the Holy Land. A history 800 years long*. ETS. Holy Land Editions. 2018. Holy Land Foundation.

12 Cf. ENCYCLICAL LETTER *LAUDATO SI'* BY THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS ON THE CARE OF THE COMMON HOUSE. "We Christians, moreover, are called to accept the world as a sacrament of communion, as a way of sharing with God and neighbor on a global scale. It is our humble conviction that the divine and the human meet in the smallest detail of the seamless garment of God's creation, even in the last speck of dust on our planet."
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

13 At this link: <https://cdn2.assets-servd.host/material-civet/production/images/documents/Gospel-Trail-brochure.pdf> can be viewed the official pdf prepared in cooperation with Israel's Ministry of Tourism where all the stages of the project are explained.

The Gospel Trail offers a unique and original spiritual and cultural experience, allowing pilgrims to immerse themselves in the history and geography of the Holy Land. It is basically chosen by lovers of nature and walking and is divided into about 15 km per day¹⁴.

This proposed itinerary and pilgrimage is done mainly on foot, and to facilitate the realization of the route, Israel's Ministry of Tourism has marked the paths and routes: of course, the route can also be done by car or bicycle¹⁵.

The project is aimed at enthusiasts of walking and hiking tourism, but also at so-called *repeaters* that is, those who, having already made a traditional pilgrimage and therefore of devotional content, wish to make a different experience aimed at deepening their knowledge of that region, Galilee precisely, where Jesus has been a protagonist since his childhood. These travelers are particularly important for sustainable tourism because they tend to develop a deeper connection with the local community and environment, thus contributing to greater awareness and responsibility toward the destination.

Repeaters in religious tourism often return for spiritual reasons, to participate in annual religious events or to deepen their faith experience. This type of tourism can have a positive impact on sustainability, as *repeaters* are more likely to respect local practices, support the local economy and promote environmental conservation.

4.1 The role of KKL

A significant role in the creation, implementation, and maintenance of this proposed "outdoor" pilgrimage is that played by the KKL, or the *Keren Kayemet Leisrael* better known as the *Jewish National Fund* (JNF), an organization involved in environmental, development and reforestation projects in Israel.

14 In support of the significance of this type of pilgrimage, part of the introduction of Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi's book, *The Great Book of Creation: Bible and Ecology*, is given below.

"God has written a wonderful book whose letters are the multitude of creatures present in the universe." Thus St. John Paul II in his catechesis of January 30, 2002: he was picking up an image implicit in the Bible itself, which read in creation a kind of cosmic revelation to be juxtaposed with Holy Scripture, as sung in Psalm 19, which we shall have occasion to comment on. Pope Wojtyla's statement is echoed in *Laudato Si'* (no. 85), where it is commented on through the impassioned words of a Pastoral Letter from the bishops of Canada (Oct. 4, 2003), "From the widest vistas to the slimmest forms of life, nature is a continual source of wonder and reverence. It is, moreover, a continual revelation of the divine."

15 <https://ibt.org.il/en/2-about-the-trail>.

KKL plays a significant role in promoting sustainable tourism¹⁶ and pilgrimage to the Holy Land, including the Gospel Trail.

In fact, the KKL helped create and maintain this trail, making it accessible and well-marked for pilgrims and tourists. Along the trail, travelers can admire natural landscapes, historical sites and places of great spiritual significance.

Experience of spirituality and dialogue¹⁷

Referring to the action of KKL, one cannot here fail to mention the creation of a forest dedicated to the memory of the cardinal of Milan, Archbishop Carlo Maria Martini¹⁸.

The Forest was inaugurated on June 16, 2013 and is located near the town of *Givat Avni*, in the vicinity of Lake Tiberias and offers a breathtaking view of the *Lavniel* valley. The forest itself is a tribute to the Jewish-Christian friendship that the Cardinal himself cultivated throughout his life and has now become a place of pilgrimage¹⁹ aimed at wanting to experience the search for one's roots in the Land of Israel.

16 <https://www.kklitalia.it/>.

The Keren Kayemet Leisrael (KKL) has played a key role in reforestation and environmental conservation in Israel since its founding in 1901. The KKL has planted millions of trees throughout the country, helping to transform barren land into green and fertile forests.

Some of KKL's major projects include:

Forest planting: KKL has planted more than 240 million trees throughout Israel, creating numerous forests and green spaces.

Water resource management: KKL has built dozens of reservoirs and water reservoirs to collect and store water, helping to improve water availability for agriculture and local communities.

Development of parks and recreational areas: KKL has created numerous national parks and nature reserves, providing green spaces for recreation and biodiversity conservation.

Environmental education: KKL promotes environmental education through school programs, community events and outreach initiatives.

Thanks to KKL's efforts, Israel is now one of the few countries in the world to have significantly increased its forest area during the 20th and 21st centuries.

17 Learn more about KKL's role and connections to Italian politics and institutions at this site: <https://www.issrmilano.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2022/03/2b.PRESENTAZIONE-COMPLETA-KKL-Sola-lettura>.

18 <https://www.lastampa.it/vatican-insider/it/2012/10/12/news/una-foresta-in-israele-per-ricordare-martini->

19 https://www.travelquotidiano.com/tour_operator/geaway-viaggio-in-israele-sulle-orme-del-cardinale-carlo-maria-martini/tqid-326417.

The path dedicated to Mary

An exceptional spirituality offering for Marian devotees is the path dedicated to Mary that runs from Sefforis Park²⁰, in Lower Galilee, to Nazareth.

The proposal increasingly fits into the vision of pilgrimage as a form of experience in harmony with nature, considering nature itself as a “living document of God’s presence in the world²¹”.

The path dedicated to Mary to be built within Sefforis National Park is a response to the recent *mission* of the Israel National Park Authority namely to make Israel’s parks available for pilgrimage experiences in complete harmony with nature.

Specifically, Dr. Hagai Dvir²² developed this idea, and he himself studied the path dedicated to Mary, which sees its centrality in Sefforis, a city that, from the year 55 CE, was the capital of Galilee, inhabited mostly by Jews. Its history goes back, however, to the first century BCE, to the Hellenistic period. The name Sefforis derives from the Hebrew “Zippori” because the city sits atop the hill “perched” like a bird. The so-called “Pearl of Galilee”, was a highly developed region where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds lived together. It is believed that at the beginning of Christianity, a Judeo-Christian community lived there that recognized Jesus as the Messiah.

Sefforis is also considered the birthplace of St. Anne, the mother of the Virgin Mary. A tradition borne out by the remains of the three-aisled Crusader-era church dedicated to her²³. The ruins are located in the vicinity of the National Park, on land purchased by the Custody of the Holy Land in 1841. Narratives about Mary’s birth in Sefforis come from oral tradition and are attested in the proto-gospel of St. James.

The Way of Silence: the Way to Jerusalem project is born

For centuries, Jerusalem has been a spiritual and cultural destination for pilgrims from all over the world.

20 Israel Park Authority: <https://en.parks.org.il/reserve-park/tzipori-national-park/>

21 See paragraph 164 of the ENCYCLICAL LETTER LAUDATO SI’
https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

22 Dr. Haga Dvri is a researcher from the Galilee, responsible for tourism products at the Israel National Park Authority, an advocate of the Pilgrimage Promotion Project within Israel’s Parks and a consultant to Israel’s Ministry of Tourism.

23 RICCIOTTI G., *Life of Jesus Christ*, Mondadori 1954.

This age-old tradition finds new life in The Way to Jerusalem²⁴ the brainchild of two scholars and friends Yael Tarasiuk and Golan Rice: an approximately 450-kilometer itinerary designed to rediscover the ancient pilgrimage routes, offering a unique journey between spirituality, intercultural dialogue and personal discovery. The section currently passable is the last one, called “The Silent Way”, which runs along an exciting 111-kilometer route leading from Jaffa to Jerusalem.

An association of the same name was born around the initiative, which proposes the pilgrimage not only as a spiritual experience, but also as an opportunity to immerse oneself in the history of the Holy Land of Israel and its local communities. Through encounters and exchanges with different cultures, the Way to Jerusalem represents a bridge between past and present, fostering dialogue and unity among people. Indeed, walking it represents a unique experience that combines spirituality, human encounter and self-discovery. Yael and Golan have created a welcoming network involving local communities, encouraging them to actively participate in the project. The project is also supported by the Custody of the Holy Land²⁵ which has made available some of its facilities to accommodate pilgrims on the way²⁶,

Stones tell: archaeology and pilgrimage to the Holy Land

Israel is a fascinating destination for archaeological tourism and religious pilgrimage. The Holy Land offers a wealth of historical and religious sites that attract visitors from all over the world.

Religious experience and pilgrimage in archaeological parks

Israel has eighty-one national parks and four hundred nature reserves²⁷ places these all under the superintendence of the National Parks Authority.

Israel recently launched a significant project to improve the accessibility of national parks and nature reserves for all visitors, including people with disabilities. The Israeli Ministry of Tourism²⁸ has allocated a budget of about 5 million euros to make tourist sites accessible to a wide range of physical, cognitive and sensory disabilities. This project aims to improve the tourism experience for both domestic and international visitors, ensuring that everyone can enjoy

24 www.thewaytojerusalem.org.

25 <https://www.custodia.org/en/news/on-the-way-to-jerusalem/>.

26 Project source: Israeli National Tourist Office, Milan.

27 Source Israel Ministry of Tourism: goisrael.com.

28 Source of the Project: Israeli National Tourist Office, Milan.

the country's natural and historical beauty without restrictions, offering a new dimension in the pilgrimage experience. Among the various initiatives underway is one related to being able to organize masses and religious experiences within the parks themselves²⁹. The project is being implemented in cooperation with the Custody of the Holy Land and through the Christian Information Center in Jerusalem, which is precisely responsible for organizing the masses themselves³⁰.

5. Pilgrimage bridges the Old and New Testaments

The Ophel and the Davidson Center in Jerusalem are archaeological sites of great significance for understanding the historical roots of Christianity and are significant stops for Christian pilgrims.

The Davidson Center³¹ in the Jerusalem Archaeological Park reopened to the public on March 13, 2023 after being closed for three years for renovations. Located in Jerusalem's Old City at the foot of the Temple Mount, the Davidson Center now provides tourists with a unique combination of ancient archaeological artifacts, innovative technology, artistic representations and interactive galleries. The Davidson Center renovation project, which included an expansion of the building and a complete content upgrade, was led by the Israel Antiquities Authority³² with funding provided by the William Davidson Foundation³³.

Davidson Center

The Davidson Center, part of the Jerusalem Archaeological Park, is located near the Western Wall in the Old City. This center exhibits archaeological finds from different eras, including the Second Temple period (515 B.C.-70 A.D.), fundamental to the history of Christianity. Finds include a main road that led to the Temple Mount, used by pilgrims, and remnants of ritual baths (mikveh) that illustrate purification practices of the time.

29 <https://en.parks.org.il/>.

30 <https://www.cicts.org>. The Christian Information Center in Jerusalem has initiated this important collaboration with Israel's Ministry of Tourism to organize Catholic masses within the Parks.

31 <https://travelrova.co.il/language/en/the-archeological-garden-davidson-center-2/>.

32 The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) is the government body responsible for the management, preservation, research and regulation of archaeological heritage in Israel. Established in 1990, it replaced Israel's Department of Antiquities and is now one of the most important bodies for archaeology in the Middle East: <https://www.iaa.org.il/en/>.

33 <https://williamdavidson.org/>.

Relationship with Christian religion and pilgrimage

For Christians, Jerusalem is the city where Jesus lived the last moments of his life. The proximity of the Ophel and the Davidson Center to holy sites such as the Temple Mount and the Western Wall makes them points of interest for Christian pilgrims who wish to deepen their understanding of the historical and archaeological context of their faith. Visiting these sites provides an opportunity to connect with the historical roots of Christianity and to reflect on the spiritual significance of Jerusalem while meeting the ever-growing need to experience a pilgrimage that takes into account the historical development of Christianity itself. The Ophel includes archaeological remains from the First and Second Temples, which are crucial to understanding the context in which Jesus lived and preached. During the Second Temple, Jerusalem was a place of pilgrimage for Jews, and Jesus himself went there several times, teaching in the Temple and interacting with the priests and doctors of the law (Luke 2:41-50)³⁴.

Walking the ancient pilgrim routes

Among the Ophel findings are sections of the ancient processional road that led to the Temple Mount. This road was traveled by Jewish pilgrims, including Jesus and his disciples, when they went to the Temple for religious festivals (Matthew 21:12-17)³⁵.

34 Luke 2:41-50. His parents went every year to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. When he was twelve years old, they went up again according to custom; but after the days of the feast had passed, as they resumed their way back, the boy Jesus remained in Jerusalem, without his parents noticing. Believing him to be in the caravan, they made a day's journey, and then set out to look for him among their relatives and acquaintances; not finding him, they returned in search of him to Jerusalem. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the doctors, listening to them and questioning them. And all who heard him were filled with amazement at his intelligence and answers. On seeing him they were amazed, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you made us like this? Behold, your father and I, distressed, were looking for you." And he answered, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must attend to the things of my Father?" But they did not understand his words.
[https://www.laparola.net/wiki.php?riferimento=Lc2,41-50&versioni\[\]=C.E.I.](https://www.laparola.net/wiki.php?riferimento=Lc2,41-50&versioni[]=C.E.I.)

35 "Jesus then entered the temple and drove out all those whom he found there buying and selling; he overturned the tables of the money changers and the chairs of the dove sellers and said to them, "The Scripture says, *My house shall be called a house of prayer* but you make it *a den of thieves*." Blind and crippled people in the temple came to him and he healed them. But the high priests and scribes, seeing the wonders he did and the children cheering in the temple, "Hosanna to the son

Walking these same paths offers a unique spiritual experience and a sense of continuity with the pilgrimage tradition.

Discover purification practices and Christian baptism

Excavations have uncovered several ritual baths (mikveh) used by Jews for purification before entering the Temple. These purification practices are partly the basis of the Christian sacrament of baptism, making the site especially significant for Catholic pilgrims.

Preparation for the visit to the Holy Sepulcher

The Ophel, with its connection to the Temple and the history of Jerusalem, offers an important spiritual preparation for Catholic pilgrims on their way to the Holy Sepulcher. Understanding the Jewish and historical context of the city helps to experience more intensely the sites of Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection while also fitting into a dimension of more traditional devotional experience.

5.1 The Jubilee of 2025: between devotion and innovative offering

The Jubilee of 2025 is part of a major renewal of tourism offerings in Israel that is intended to target the world of pilgrimage with novel proposals that can increasingly take into consideration the current needs of the pilgrim.

In this regard, an exceptional exhibition will be held next December to mark the 60th anniversary of the Israel Museum, which can be considered the most outstanding example of the ability to link the religious tradition of the Old and New Testaments with an exceptional, almost legendary, archaeological find: the Great Scroll of Isaiah.

In fact, for the first time the Scroll³⁶, from the Qumran excavations, will be on display after restoration work that began immediately after its discovery back in 1947. Preserved at the Temple of the Book in Jerusalem³⁷ the Great Isaiah Scroll will be displayed in an exhibition that in one breath can enshrine the

of David," were outraged and said to him, "Do you not hear what they say?" Jesus answered them, "Yes, have you never read, *Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have procured praise?*" And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany, and there he spent the night.

36 <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah>.

37 <https://www.imj.org.il/en/wings/shrine-book>.

connection between spirituality, devotion and archaeology, Old and New Testament. The exhibition project has Professor Marcello Fidanzio³⁸, considered one of the foremost experts on the subject, who has been working at Qumran since 2011, as one of the heads of the scientific committee. It was through Professor Fidanzio's work that some of the relationships between the contents of the Scroll and the significance of the Jubilee for the Catholic world were highlighted³⁹, so that through the work of Israel's Ministry of Tourism, it was possible to include a visit to the exhibition and to the Temple of the Book in Jerusalem as an essential novelty in a pilgrimage itinerary not only, once again, devotional, but aimed above all at finding in the archaeological evidence a consolidation and growth of one's faith, in the knowledge that the Holy Land will always be, to recall Pope Paul VI, The Gospel⁴⁰.

Investment for pilgrimage to Israel

Concluding this brief excursus on the current significance of pilgrimage, we would like here to refer to the importance of pilgrimage to the Holy Land by recalling the current investments being made by Israel's Ministry of Tourism to make pilgrimage increasingly usable, starting right from the current year, the year of the Ordinary Jubilee of 2025, projecting toward what will be the extraordinary Jubilee of 2033.

Israel's Ministry of Tourism has invested more than nine million euros by 2025 to improve sites of spiritual interest. Among the most are: significant redevelopment of Qasr al Yahud, the site of Jesus' Baptism on the Jordan River,

38 Professor Marcello Fidanzio is a full professor at the Theological Faculty of Lugano, University of Italian Switzerland, and a research associate at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française in Jerusalem and at the Center for the Study of Manuscript Culture at the University of Hamburg; considered one of the leading experts on the subject, he has been working at Qumran since 2011. His research and study project on the Great Isaiah Scroll is currently in the process of study and publication.

39 "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring glad tidings to the poor, to bind up the wounds of the brokenhearted, to proclaim the freedom of the slaves, the release of the captives, to promulgate the Lord's year of mercy, a day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all the afflicted, to gladden the afflicted of Zion, to give them a crown instead of ashes, oil of gladness instead of a mourning garment, a song of praise instead of a sad heart" (*Isaiah* 61:1-3a). Cf. PACOMIO L. Jubilee in the Bible. https://www.vatican.va/jubilee_2000/magazine/documents/ju_mag_01051997_p-78_it.html.

40 <https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/travels/documents/terrasanta.html>.

itself a jubilee pilgrimage site⁴¹; Kiryat Ye'arim, which became a place of worship because the Ark of the Covenant stopped here⁴²; the establishment of a tourist welcome center in the region of northern Samaria; the up of setting an educational and audiovisual exhibition in the Fortress Hospitaller in Akko⁴³; improvements in the alleys and Old City of Jerusalem⁴⁴ and Safed⁴⁵.

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41 <https://en.parks.org.il/reserve-park/baptismal-site-on-the-jordan-river-qasr-al-yahud/>.

42 <https://www.amicidisaxum.it/kiryat-yearim-br-dove-sosto-larca-dellalleanza/>.

43 <https://www.akko.org.il/it/attraction/le-sale-dei-cavalieri/>.

44 <https://www.terrasanta.net/2019/10/gerusalemme-vecchia-piu-accessibile/>.

45 <https://www.safed-home.com/>.

RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN TURKEY IN THE SHIFT FROM SECULAR TO ISLAMIC NATIONALISM: THE CASE OF HAGIA SOPHIA

Rossella Bottoni

SUMMARY: 1. The research question. – 2. Turkey’s attractiveness for religious tourism. – 3. The development of religious tourism in Turkey. – 4. Hagia Sophia as a symbol of the changing national identity. – 5. Hagia Sophia at the interplay of worship-related adjustments, tourist interests and conservation needs. – 6. Concluding remarks.

1. The research question

Turkey is one of the most visited countries in the world. In 2024, it drew more than 50 million foreign visitors, with Istanbul alone attracting 18.6 million tourists¹. However, only approximately 0.7 percent have travelled for religious tourism (*inanç turizmi*)² in the past 15 years. The reason is not the lack of sites of religious significance. In fact, the country has a great potential for religious tourism, which remains nevertheless largely undeveloped³.

On the one side, Turkey’s interest in it is fairly recent, and it may be argued that time is needed in order to fully benefit from this economic sector. The infrastructure is still inadequate, from the shortage of tourist accommodation to the need for the building of new roads and the modernization and enlargement of airports⁴. On the other side, one wonders whether there are

1 See <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/istanbul-welcomed-more-than-18-million-visitors-last-year-205331>.

2 On the definition of religious tourism, see CHIZZONITI A. G. AND GIANFREDA A. (2020), “Il turismo religioso: nuove dimensioni per la valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale”, *Aedon*, 2: 120-121.

3 BOZKURT A. D. AND TEKEOĞLU A.N.T. (2024), “Turkey’s Tourism Strategies: Building Spiritual and Cultural Experiences Through Anchoring”, *Tourism and Rural Development Studies*, 9, 4: 128 and 132.

4 EGRESI I., BAYRAM B., KARA F. AND KESIK O.A. (2012), “Unlocking the potential of

deeper cultural and ideological reasons behind the little, or slow, expansion of religious tourism. In particular, can the official notion of national identity be one of such motives? This research question will be addressed by examining the case of Hagia Sophia.

2. Turkey's attractiveness for religious tourism

Antolia has an enormous historical importance: all the major ancient Mediterranean and Near-Eastern civilizations were present, and the region was the crossroads of many cultures and religions. Some sites are important for all the three Abrahamic religions: these are the cases of Mount Ararat, believed to be the landing place of Noah's Ark⁵, and of Şanlıurfa, which is linked with Abraham's birthplace⁶.

Others are religion-specific. Turkey's tourist offices depict Eyüp Sultan mosque and mausoleum as the fourth holiest Islamic site, after Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem – and it certainly was so for Ottoman Muslims. The mosque is the first one to have been built after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453 and is part of a once larger complex (*külliyeye*) including a madrasa, a soup kitchen and a hammam, built on the burial ground of Eyüp Ensari (Turkish form of Abu Ayyub al-Ansari). He was a companion of the Prophet Muhammad who had taken part in the 669 siege of Constantinople and, having fallen ill after a battle, had asked to be buried at the city walls⁷. The complex is visited by circumcised children⁸ and believers who make a vow⁹. Another religious destination is Konya's shrine of Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, a Hanafi jurist and Sufi

religious tourism in Turkey", *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 1, 9: 68.

- 5 Genesis 8, 4: «[...] in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat». All Bible quotes are from https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0839/_INDEX.HTM. See also Koran 11, 44.
- 6 Şanlıurfa was selected as the Tourism City of the Year 2023 by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.
- 7 The building of the *külliyeye* was part of the larger program of reshaping Constantinople from both a physical and symbolic point of view, and of converting it from a sacred Christian city to an Islamic one. See ÖZASLAN N. (1999), "From the shrine of Cosmidion to the Shrine of Eyüp Ensari", *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, 40: 379-399.
- 8 KARAGÖZ M. A. AND TOPÇUBAŞI M. (2024), "Holistic Conservation Approach to Intangible Cultural Heritage and Places of Eyüp", *Journal of Architectural Sciences and Applications*, 9, 1: 685.
- 9 TÜRKER N. (2016), *Religious Tourism in Turkey*, in Egresi I., ed., *Alternative Tourism in Turkey Role, Potential Development and Sustainability*, Springer, Cham, 163.

poet and mystic who lived in the 13th century¹⁰. His son and grandson founded the Mevlevi *tarikat* (Sufi brotherhood), which has become worldwide famous for its *sema*, a religious practice characterized by whirling dances and music. In 2008 the *sema* was inscribed in the UNESCO's list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity¹¹. The *Şeb-i Arus* ("Wedding Night") is a celebration held annually in December to commemorate the master's death, and it is one of the most popular religious tourism-related events. In 2023 (the 750th anniversary) it was attended by around 294,381 persons¹².

Turkey is also home to important sites for Christians. Virgin Mary's house in Ephesus is the place where, according to tradition, she moved with John the Apostle and Evangelist¹³, and where she spent her final years¹⁴. Ephesus is also the city of one of the communities mentioned in the Book of Revelation and called, for this reason, the Seven Churches of Revelation¹⁵. Another important church is St. Peter's in Antakya, which was built in the cave connected to the Apostle's predication and to «the disciples» that «were first called Christians»¹⁶. A number of sites are related to Paul, such as the church and the well in his birthplace, Tarsus, and the about 500-km trail established in 2004 from Perge to Yalvaç¹⁷, which partly follows the path of the Apostle's first missionary

10 "Mevlana" means "our master". "Rumi" is related to *Rum* ("Rome"), the Western portion of the Ottoman Empire, where Celaledin spent most of his life. See https://sacredsites.com/middle_east/turkey/shrine_of_rumi_konya.html.

11 See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/mevlevi-sema-ceremony-00100>.

12 BOZKURT A. D. AND TEKEOĞLU A.N.T., cit., 128.

13 John 19, 25-27: «Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved, he said to his mother, "Woman, behold, your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Behold, your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his home».

14 GALLAGHER A. (2016), "Mary's House in Ephesus, Turkey: Interfaith Pilgrimage in the Age of Mass Tourism", *Vincentian Heritage Journal*, 33, 2: article 2; ÖTER Z. AND ÇETINKAYA M.Y. (2016), "Interfaith Tourist Behaviour at Religious Heritage Sites: House of the Virgin Mary in Turkey", *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 4, 4: 1-18.

15 Revelation 1, 10-11: «I was caught up in spirit on the Lord's day and heard behind me a voice as loud as a trumpet, which said, "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea"». The churches are mentioned also in Revelation 2 and 3.

16 Acts 11, 26.

17 CLOW K. (2015), *The St Paul Trail*, in BAMBI G. AND BARBARI M., eds., *The European Pilgrimage Routes for Promoting Sustainable and Quality Tourism in Rural Areas*.

journey¹⁸. The Sumela Monastery in the province of Trabzon is a pilgrimage destination for Orthodox Christians of Greek descent¹⁹, whose ancestors lived in the region until the Convention concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations signed on 30 January 1923 in Lausanne forced them to expatriate²⁰.

3. The development of religious tourism in Turkey

Turkey is a leading destination for international visitors. The tourist sector has made a significant contribution to the country's economic growth, but its development has been largely uneven. The mass tourism centered on the sun, the sea and the sand attracts travelers on a budget, who flock in a small number of provinces (those on the coast) in a specific, and limited, period of the year (mostly, summer). As a result, both the environment and the local communities experience a strong pressure. Employment is also affected: tourism-related jobs tend to be seasonal. The solution has been found, as in other national contexts, in the promotion of alternative forms of tourism, for example rural, cultural and medical²¹.

In this context, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism started to promote religious tourism in 1993²², with the Faith Tourism Project and the preparation of a list of 316 sites of religious interest, of which 167 Islamic, 129 Christian and 20 Jewish ones. Turkey is especially interested in Christianity-related tourism because of the attractiveness it can have on European and North Americans visitors. It has been noted that Catholics visit mainly churches and

International Conference proceedings. 4-6 December 2014, Firenze – Italy, Firenze University Press, Florence, 243-255.

18 Acts 13, 1-15, 35. See also TEMİZEL G. AND ATTAR M. (2015), *Faith Tourism Potential of Konya in terms of Christian Sacred Sites*, in *Proceedings. 3rd Mediterranean Interdisciplinary Forum on Social Sciences and Humanities, MIFS 2015, 17-19 May 2015, Barcelona, Spain*, European Scientific Institute, Kocani, 131-132.

19 BOZKURT A. D. AND TEKEOĞLU A.N.T., cit., 128.

20 See *inter alia* HIRSCHON R., ed. (2003), *Crossing the Aegean. An Appraisal of the 1923 Compulsory Population Exchange Between Greece and Turkey*, Berghahn Books, New York; ROSSI E. (1930), "Lo scambio obbligatorio delle popolazioni tra la Grecia e la Turchia", *Oriente Moderno*, 10, 9: 397-418; DE LEONE E. (1930), "Lo scambio greco-turco delle popolazioni", *Nuova Antologia*, 65, 1410: 510-538.

21 EGRESI I., BAYRAM B., KARA F. AND KESİK O. A., cit., 65-67 and 78.

22 ÇÖP S., ÇETINKAYA Ö. AND VERGÜL A. M. (2023), *Examining Istanbul in Terms of Faith Tourism Through SWOT Analysis*, in TUNA M., KAYA G., HAZARHUN E., MUTLU H. U., YILDIZ N. AND BAYAR S. B., eds., *Anatolia Landscape and Faith Tourism: Ancient Times to Present*, Detay Yayıncılık, Ankara, 441.

places of worship, whereas Protestants are more interested in biblical sites. There are fewer information about the Christian Orthodox²³, despite the significance that this branch of Christianity has had in the territories that are now part of the Republic of Turkey.

The 2023 Tourism Strategy has identified a corridor for the development of *inanç turizm* from Tarsus to Mardin, whose cultural landscape, which includes the Syriac Orthodox monastery of Deyrulzafaran, is in the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites in Turkey²⁴. It has also planned the building of a superhighway between the two cities to make the region more accessible and to increase the number of tourists. Generally speaking, religious tourism has been mostly fostered in or around those destinations that are already well-established stops on tourists' routes. Furthermore, most of the sites continue to be promoted for their archeological and historical relevance instead of their spiritual or sacred dimension²⁵. Last but not least, heritage conservation is an issue.

An example is offered by the places connected to the celebration of the first seven ecumenical councils (ECs). The first and the seventh ECs took place in Nicaea (today's Iznik), respectively in 325 and 787. Pope Francis and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew have announced a joint trip in May 2025 to Iznik for the 700th anniversary of the first EC²⁶. The church of Hagia Sophia was the venue for the second EC of Nicaea. It was converted into a mosque in 1330, then abandoned and, in the 19th century, it found itself in a dilapidated condition. In the 1930s, it was partly restored and opened to visitors, although it never became formally a museum. In 2010, the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism selected Hagia Sophia, along with other places in the country, as pilgrimage destinations for the celebration of Christian religious ceremonies. The same year, regular Islamic worship was resumed: the *naos* has been carpeted and is currently used for prayers, whereas the *pastophorion* and the side aisles can be visited by tourists. There are concerns for the conservation of the frescoes, because the monument is not regulated by the same rules applying to museums and heritage sites. Although it can be accessed by visitors, conservation and restoration are now subordinated to the needs of Muslim worship²⁷. The third EC, held in Ephesus in 431, was celebrated in the

23 TÜRKER N., cit., 156-158.

24 See <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1406>.

25 TÜRKER N., cit., 154-155 and 168.

26 See <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/260757/pope-francis-to-join-orthodox-patriarch-in-turkey-for-nicaea-council-anniversary>.

27 AYKAÇ P. (2018), "Contesting the Byzantine Past: Four Hagia Sophias as Ideological

church of the Virgin Mary. Only some ruins survive and the archeological area, albeit open, is seldom visited by group tours²⁸. The Church of St. Euphemia the Great Martyr in Chalcedon (today's Kadıköy, a district on the Asian side of Istanbul), where the fourth EC convened in 451, no longer exists. It probably was destroyed during the Persian wars in the 7th century²⁹.

Three ECs were celebrated in Constantinople: the second EC in Hagia Irene in 381; the fifth and the sixth ECs in Hagia Sophia, respectively in 533 and in 680-681. Hagia Irene was the city's cathedral until the building of Hagia Sophia. It has never been converted into a mosque: it served as an arsenal in Ottoman times until the 19th century, as the Empire's first museum in 1869, again as a depot and, from 1908 to 1940, as a military museum (a rather odd destination when one thinks that the original church was dedicated to the holy or sacred peace). Its official website notes that this monument «has a special meaning as the first place where Turkish museology was born»³⁰, but makes no mention of the role it played in the history of ecumenical councils. Hagia Sophia, for its turbulent history and for being the focus of this essay, deserves a separate treatment.

4. Hagia Sophia as a symbol of the changing national identity

Hagia Sophia – inscribed in the UNESCO's world heritage list in 1985 as part of Istanbul's historic areas – has been one of the architectural marvels of Christianity. In 537, Emperor Justinian had it built on the site where a Christian place of worship existed from at least 360. Tradition holds that he aimed to make the building – meant to be the mother church of Orthodox Christianity and the seat of the Patriarch of Constantinople – grander than Salomon's Temple in Jerusalem. It survived the devastation caused by crusaders during the sack of the city in 1204 and, after the Ottoman conquest of 1453, it was converted into a place of Muslim worship through the establishment of a *wakf* (Turkish form of the Arabic *waqf*, generally translated as “pious foundation”³¹). It became the first Imperial mosque under the name of Ayasofya and the architectural model

Battlegrounds of Architectural Conservation in Turkey”, *Heritage & Society*, 11, 2: 158-160.

28 See <https://turkisharchaeonews.net/object/church-virgin-mary-ephesus>.

29 See <https://archons.org/chalcedon-and-its-monuments>.

30 See <https://muze.gen.tr/muze-detay/ayairini>.

31 For a detailed treatment, see PETERS R. (2002), *Wakf in the Classical Islamic Law*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill, Leiden, XI: 59-63.

of all Ottoman ones for the subsequent four centuries³².

During the Ottoman Empire's expansion (especially in the 15th and 16th centuries), the creation of *vakıf*³³ was a very important political instrument in the project of Islamization of the conquered territories and border regions. One of its important components was the conversion of Christian and Jewish places of worship into mosques. After the massacre of the Janissaries and the dissolution of their corps in 1826 (called "Auspicious Incident" in Turkish historiography, because it swept away the opposition to the program of reforms and freed the Emperor from the continued military threat they posed), the State established the first Ministry of *vakıf* in order to centralize and extend the government's control over the vast and rich pious foundations that until then had been administered by high officials³⁴. Evidence of the great diffusion of this institution in the Ottoman Empire is the fact that non-Muslim minorities themselves established *vakıf*, although they had to obtain an on-purpose authorization to open a church or a synagogue. This requirement was lifted only in the age of *Tanzimat*³⁵, when non-Muslims were emancipated in the context of a reform program aimed at saving the State from dissolution. As known, one of the important causes of the Empire's decline was the intense interferences in the Ottoman internal affairs by the Christian Powers, which pushed for the concession of increasingly greater autonomy for religious minorities. As is also known, all attempts to save the Ottoman Empire failed. The "birth certificate" of its successor State is the Treaty of Lausanne, signed on 24 July 1923: the "new Turkey" – bearing, for the first time in its history, the ethnic name of the Turkish people (Türkiye) – established itself as an entity independent, both for-

32 AMJAD-ALI C. (2021), "The Historical Vicissitudes of Hagia Sophia: From Church to Mosque to Museum, and Back to Mosque", *The Journal of World Christianity*, 11, 1: 135-141; STEINER S. AND NEUMEIER E. (2021), "'A Church is Never Just a Church': Hagia Sophia and the Mutability of Monuments", *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 8, 1: 216-217; SQOUR S. (2016), *Influence of Hagia Sophia on the Construction of Dome in Mosque Architecture*, 2016, <https://www.openaccessjournal.com/article-file/20201028591156621912influ.pdf>.

33 In order to ease the reading, I will use the singular form *vakıf* also for the plural (which in Turkish is *vakıflar* or, as is still found in many texts, *evakf*, from the Arabic plural form *awqaf*).

34 DEGUILHEM R. (2002), *Wakf in the Ottoman Empire to 1914*, in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Brill, Leiden, XI: 88-90.

35 AYKAÇ P., cit., 168. *Tanzimat* is the Turkish form of an Arab word meaning "reorganizations".

mally and substantially, from the Christian Powers' interferences³⁶.

Mustafa Kemal's "New Turkey" – as all State entities originated from a revolution – promoted a new idealtype of citizen, imbued with the new official notion of national identity: the *Homo Kemalicus*³⁷, an ethnic Turk and Sunni Muslim, devout but not attached to allegedly archaic religious principles and practices. The "six arrows" of Kemalism, that is, nationalism, populism, statism, secularism (*laiklik*) and revolutionism³⁸, were transposed into Art. 2 of the constitution in 1937 and, as a consequence, they became the country's ideological pillars. This identity model characterized Republican history until the rise to power of the AKP (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – Justice and Development Party).

The idea of a Turkish version of the *Kulturkampf*, which the "Father of the Turks" allegedly carried out against Islam, is not historically accurate. As highlighted by his declarations – not last his famous 6-day speech (*Nutuk*) – he aimed not at the eradication of Islam but at the promotion of a "contemporary" version (*çağdaş İslam*). In his view, progress was hindered not so much by Islam in itself, as by superstitions and false beliefs accumulated over centuries of obscurantism. Turks had to be emancipated from ignorance and taught that the version of religion propagated by the Republic – grounded on reason – was the most authentic³⁹.

All practices and institutions conveying an image of a backward country had to be suppressed. A decree of 2 September 1925 dissolved the *tarikat*, closed their *tekke* (houses), provided for their conversion into schools or their sale, and abolished the titles and offices of sheik, dervish and novice. It also closed the Ottoman emperors' *türbe* (mausoleums) and suppressed the office of *türbedâr* (mausoleum's guardian), which had been a traditional source of income. The law of 30 September of the same year prohibited the use of such titles as *dede*, *baba*, emir, caliph and other expressions indicating the dervishes. The activities connected with such titles as well as the wearing of their traditional attire

36 On this complex historical period, see BOTTONI R. (2012), *Il principio di laicità in Turchia. Profili storico-giuridici*, Vita e pensiero, Milan.

37 This expression has been coined by YAVUZ M. H. AND ESPOSITO J., eds. (2003), *Turkish Islam and Secular State*, Syracuse University Press, Syracuse.

38 See KILI S. (1969), *Kemalism*, Robert College, Istanbul.

39 See inter alia BOZDÉMİR M. AND BACQUÉ-GRAMMONT J.-L. (1994), "Mustafa Kemal et le Califat", *Les Annales de l'autre Islam*, 2: 84; SAKALLIOĞLU Ü. C. (1996), "Parameters and Strategies of Islam-State Interaction in Republican Turkey", *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28, 2: 236; BİLİCİ F. (2006), *Islam, modernité et éducation religieuse*, in BİLİCİ F., ed., *Islam Institutionnel, Islam Parallèle de l'Empire Ottoman a la Turquie Contemporaine (XVIe-XXe siècles)*, Istanbul, Isis, 102-103.

were prohibited. The rules on the *türbe* closure were extended to the mausoleums of figures revered as saints, through which – according to Art. 1(3) of the law – the *tarikats* had always exploited the people’s credulousness. In the subsequent years, this regulation was partly mildened with the authorization in 1949 of the reopening of the *türbe*⁴⁰, and in 1954 of the Mevlevis’ practices in Istanbul, Konya and abroad for tourism-related cultural and economic reasons⁴¹. The need to promote a contemporary version of Turkish Islam is also the reason why Turkey has never proclaimed the separation between State and religion. The achievement of Mustafa Kemal’s aims required the establishment of a State department selecting the contents of official Islam, promoting it and fighting alternative versions⁴². The Presidency of Religious Affairs – as it was renamed in 1950 – was made a constitutional organ by the constitution of 1960. Under Art. 136 of the current constitution, it exercises its duties in accordance with the principle of *laiklik*. The AKP’s Islamic reorientation of the official ideology – which has led contemporaries observers to talk about the emergence of a second “New Turkey” – has relied inter alia on the well-established institutional mechanisms and resources offered by the Presidency of Religious Affairs⁴³, which is competent for the administration of mosques and the training, appointment and dismissal of ministers of worship⁴⁴. Decree no. 2729 of 10 July 2020, signed by President of the Republic Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which has reconverted Hagia Sophia into a mosque, has also transferred its management to the Presidency of Religious Affairs⁴⁵.

Back in the Kemalist period, the birth of the “New Turkey” and the proc-

40 KREISER K. (1986), *Notes sur le présent et le passé des ordres mystiques en Turquie*, in POPOVIC A. AND VEINSTEIN G., eds. *Les ordres mystiques dans l’Islam*, Editions de l’Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 50.

41 REED H. A. (1980), *Atatürk’s Secularizing Legacy and the Continuing Vitality of Islam in Republican Turkey*, in PULLAPILLY C. K., ed., *Islam in the Contemporary World*, Cross Roads Books, Notre Dame, 336.

42 See inter alia ERDEM G. (2008), “Religious Services in Turkey: From the Office of Şeyhülislâm to the Diyanet”, *Muslim World*, 98: 199-215.

43 ÇITAK Z. (2020), *The transformation of the state-religion relationship under the AKP: the case of the Diyanet*, in BEDIRHANOĞLU P., DÖLEK Ç., HÜLAGÜ F. AND KAYGUSUZ Ö., eds., *Turkey’s New State in the Making: Transformations in Legality, Economy and Coercion*, Bloomsbury Publishing, New York: 167-187.

44 See <https://www.diyenet.gov.tr/en-US/Institutional/Detail//1/institutional-structure-of-presidency-of-religious-affairs>.

45 The English translation of the decree is available at <https://portal.shariasource.com/documents/3777>.

lamation of the Republic did not entail the restitution of Hagia Sophia to the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople. In 1931, the Council of Ministries authorized the Byzantine Institute of America to remove the plaster that had covered the monument's mosaics in Ottoman times and to restore them⁴⁶. A decree signed on 24 November 1934 by the President of the Republic, the President of the Council of Ministers and other ministers turned Hagia Sophia into a museum, putting a (temporary) end to its centuries-long destination as a (first Christian and then Muslim) place of worship. The decree mentioned the Ministry of Education's note no. 94041 of 14 November 1934, which urged a decision concerning the musealization of Hagia Sophia: «the conversion of the Hagia Sophia mosque in Istanbul, which is an unmatched architectural and aesthetic monument, into a museum would make the entire Orient happy, given its historic status, and would gift humanity a new site of knowledge»⁴⁷. The document also took into account the General Directorate of *Vakıf*'s opinion no. 153197/107 of 7 November, according to which the site did not have a *vakıf* status because of its Byzantine origins. Furthermore, «even though, following its conversion into a mosque, it was endowed with certain incomes by sultans and the public, [...] the Islamic tithe endowed by sultans have been repealed and [...] the endowments by the public are for Qur'ān recitations and other activities that [...] can be done anywhere»⁴⁸. Lastly, its lack of income did not allow it to operate any longer as a *vakıf*. The issue was discussed on 24 November, when the government decided that the mosque should be converted into a museum, the surrounding shops should be expropriated and demolished in order to embellish the site, and other buildings also to expropriate should be restored. The expenses were to be paid by the Ministry of Education.

The received wisdom is that this change of destination was part of the broader project of Mustafa Kemal's building of a secular State, based on modernity and the superiority of science⁴⁹. The musealization of Hagia Sophia served nev-

46 NELSON R. S. (2004), *Hagia Sophia, 1850-1950: Holy Wisdom Modern Monument*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago: 155-186.

47 The English translation of the decree is available at <https://portal.shariasource.com/documents/3779>.

48 Ibidem.

49 KATIPOĞLU C. AND CANER-YÜKSEL C. (2010), *Hagia Sophia 'Museum': A Humanist Project of the Turkish Republic*, in ESMARK K., RASTRICK O., BILSEL C. AND KIZILYÜREK N., eds., *Constructing cultural identity, representing social power*, Pisa University Press, Pisa, 205-225. For a detailed historical background, see ELDEM E. (2021), "The Reconversion of the Hagia Sophia into a Mosque: A Historian's Perspective", *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 8, 1: 249-254.

ertheless two purposes. The first one was preservation. It is little known that the mosque of Hagia Sophia, albeit still active in the 1930s, was in a state of dilapidation and looked like quite different from the image of majesty that it conveys today. Restoration was thus needed to bring it back to the ancient glory. The second one was the intention to show, through a symbolic act of goodwill, Turkey's commitment in the promotion of the peaceful coexistence of the different religious components in the country. This, in turn, «would help Turkey become a part of the Balkan Pact against Bulgaria's designs on the territories of Turkey, Greece, Romania, and Yugoslavia»⁵⁰.

The issue of the restitution of Hagia Sophia to Muslim worship was not first raised by the AKP. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, there were calls for its reconversion into a mosque or its use as both a place of worship and a museum⁵¹. In the same years, the use of the imperial lodge for the *salat* and the call to prayer from the minarets was authorized on a few occasions. In 2013 Bülent Arınç – co-founder of the AKP and, at that time, Vice-Prime Minister – issued some controversial declarations concerning his wish to see Hagia Sophia a mosque again⁵², and the Nationalist Movement Party presented a proposal in this regard⁵³. While other buildings were reopened for Muslim worship⁵⁴, the Turkish Association for the Protection of Historical Monuments and the Environment reiterated its petitions for the reconversion of Hagia Sophia. Its appeal was rejected in 2008, but admitted in 2016 by the Council of State⁵⁵.

Bu virtue of the decision no. 2020/2595 of 2 July 2020, the judges finally declared the 1934 decree invalid on the grounds that it constituted misappropriation of the *vakif* created by Mehmet II in the aftermath of the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople. The Council of State noted inter alia that the protection afforded to Hagia Sophia by UNESCO was not legally relevant for the solution of the controversy, because Art. 6(1) of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Pro-

50 AMJAD-ALI C., cit., 132.

51 TARHAN H., URIARTE Y. T. AND CATONI M. L. (2022), "Embodied ideologies: Hagia Sophia contended status between mosque and museum", *Il capitale culturale*, 25: 529-530.

52 AYKAÇ P., cit., 157.

53 AMJAD-ALI C., cit., 132.

54 This has been the case of three churches also named Ayasofya in İznik (as already mentioned), Trabzon and Vize. See AYKAÇ P., cit., 158-164 e 169.

55 [N.A.] (2021), "Property Law - Medieval Charitable Trusts - Turkey's Highest Administrative Court Annuls Ataturk's 1934 Decision Converting the Hagia Sophia into a Museum - Daniştay, Onuncu Daire [Council of State, Tenth Chamber] Matter No. 2016/16015, Decision No. 2020/2595, July 2, 2020", *Harvard Law Review*, 134, 3: 1279-1280.

tection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage recognizes the full respect of «the sovereignty of the States on whose territory the cultural and natural heritage [...] is situated [...] without prejudice to property right provided by national legislation»⁵⁶. Interestingly, the judges did not mention the circumstance that there exist numerous sites inscribed on the World Heritage List and used as places of worship, which in principle does not violate the abovementioned convention's obligations⁵⁷. They rather stressed that the Republic of Turkey is sovereign⁵⁸, consistently with the traditional position of the relentless defense of Turkish sovereignty, symbolized by the Treaty of Lausanne. This has been a recurrent theme in the ideological discourse of all regimes that have ruled the country, from the Kemalist to the AKP's Islamic-oriented one. Thus, it is not surprising that "sovereignty" is the key concept reiterated inter alia by Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Selim Kiran in an article devoted to Hagia Sophia, «symbol of peace and diversity»⁵⁹. Incidentally, one may debate the extent to which this form of sovereignty, which finds a place only in the «emotional topography» of populist regimes, is effective or illusory⁶⁰.

56 Text available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext>. For a general treatment of the legal protection of the sites inscribed in the UNESCO's world heritage list, see GIANFREDA A. (2024), "Lo statuto internazionale dei beni culturali di interesse religioso dichiarati "patrimonio dell'umanità": aspetti di rilievo ecclesiasticistico", *Ephemerides Iuris Canonici*, 64: 387-406.

57 By contrast, this argument has been stressed by scholars. See inter alia KIRCHMAIR L. (2020), "Turning Hagia Sophia into a mosque (again) – Has international law anything to say about that?", *Völkerrechtsblog*, 21 July, <https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/de/turning-hagia-sophia-into-a-mosque-again>.

58 The English translation of the judgement is available at <https://beta.shariasource.com/documents/3778>. A summary, accompanied by a commentary, can also be found in Tecimer C. (2021), "Recent Case: The Turkish Decision on Hagia Sophia", *Journal of Islamic Law*, 2: 116-145. See also BOTTONI R. (2023), "La condizione giuridica dei luoghi di culto nella Repubblica di Turchia, con particolare attenzione alla questione di Santa Sofia", *Ephemerides Iuris Canonici*, 63, 226-228.

59 KIRAN Y. S. (2020), "Hagia Sophia: Symbol of Peace and Diversity", *Insight Turkey*, 22, 3: 67-73.

60 SOFOS S. A. (2021), "Space and the emotional topography of populism in Turkey: The case of Hagia Sophia", *Cogent Social Sciences*, 7, 1: 1-15. On the use of cultural heritage management in the context of emotional politics, see LALES E. (2023), *Cultural heritage and nationalism. A case study of the (re-)conversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque*, <https://mau.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1763670&dsid=2766>. See also KONAÇI M. (2023), "Electoral Consolidation Through Islamic Populism and Religious Grievance: The Case of Transformation of Hagia Sophia in Turkey", *Lectio Socialis*, 7, 2: 47-56.

On 10 July 2020 (the same day of the publication of the judgment), Mr. Erdoğan signed the abovementioned decree on the reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque. The prayers inaugurating this change of destination took place on Friday 24 July, on the occasion of the 97th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Lausanne⁶¹. The reconversion of Hagia Sophia into a mosque was commented by President Erdoğan in the following terms: «Hagia Sophia's doors will be, as is the case with all our mosques, wide open to all, whether they be foreign or local, Muslim or non-Muslim. With its new status, Hagia Sophia, the shared heritage of humanity, will continue to embrace all in a much more sincere and original way»⁶².

5. Hagia Sophia at the interplay of worship-related adjustments, tourist interests and conservation needs

The monument is now both a functioning mosque and a tourist attraction, as the Blue Mosque and other sites in the city and the country alike.

The change of destination required adjustments to the interior. An area of 4,000 square meters at the ground floor was carpeted. The choice of the color (turquoise) and design was reportedly made by Mr. Erdoğan himself. The 100%-wool carpet was woven by Özkul Hali, a fourth-generation, family-managed company specialized in the production of customized carpets in Turkish mosques, and alleging that its fibers were designed to lean in the direction of the Mecca⁶³. It was also announced that only the mosaics in the apse, where the mihrab indicating the qibla is located and where Muslims look at when praying, would be covered with curtains at prayer time⁶⁴.

The question of the impact that Hagia Sophia's reconversion could have on tourism was raised: the negative image of Turkey, as portrayed in Western press, could have resulted in a decrease of foreign visitors and, thus, of related revenues⁶⁵. However, these fears have not come true. Until the beginning of

61 KIRCHMAIR L., cit.

62 Quoted in <https://www.akparti.org.tr/en/news/president-erdogan-with-its-new-status-hagia-sophia-the-shared-heritage-of-humanity-will-continue-to-embrace-all-13072020-091500>.

63 See <https://www.decor-mag.com/hagia-sophias-carpet-woven-by-ozkul-hali>.

64 See <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/hagia-sophia-mosaics-will-be-covered-with-curtains-during-prayers-turkish-pres-idUSKCN24L06O>.

65 ACAR Y. (2020), "Ayasofya-i Kebir Cami-i'nin İbadete Açılmasının Dünya Basınında Yansımaları ve Turizm Faaliyetlerine Etkisi (Reflections of Opening Hagia Sophia Grand Mosque to Worship in World Press and Its Effect on Tourism Activities)",

2024, entry was free, which made the number of tourists skyrocket. By way of comparison, 3.5 million tourists in 2014⁶⁶ and 13.6 million in 2022 visited Hagia Sophia⁶⁷. Tourists had to wait in long queues in order to enter, and their high number increased the monument's vulnerability.

There were reports of vandalism, as in the case of the damage to one of the nine doors to the main hall, which was reserved for the emperors and, for this reason, is called Imperial Gate or Door⁶⁸. The moisture produced by breathing also contributed to the deterioration of Hagia Sophia: in September 2022, fragments of concrete fell from the dome. President of the Art History Association Şerif Yaşar reportedly declared that «if Hagia Sophia is not restored, it will collapse with the first earthquake. When Hagia Sophia was a museum, that is, before it was converted into a mosque, there was a scientific council. At its last meeting before it was abolished, the council ruled that Hagia Sophia is 1,500 years old and if it is not restored as soon as possible, it will be destroyed in the event of an earthquake. In Hagia Sophia, groups of no more than 25 people should be accepted»⁶⁹. In the same year, the General Directorate of Foundations of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism launched a project for an high-analysis scan of the monument, which was completed in 2024. A digital twin has been created and archived, in order to rebuild Hagia Sophia faithfully in case of destruction⁷⁰. Last but not least, an entry fee of 25€ was introduced starting from 15 January 2024 for foreign tourists. Last year, their total number was 4.5 million, with a reduction of about 30 percent per month⁷¹. Furthermore, the area that can be visited is now restricted to the upper galleries. Hagia Sophia is open every day, but no visits are allowed on Friday between 12:30 and 2:30, that is, during the congregational prayer. Turkish citizens can still enter for free. Entrance of Muslims from other countries at prayer time is also free⁷².

Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies, 8, 4: 3407.

66 TÜRKER N., cit., 159.

67 See <https://www.dailysabah.com/turkiye/istanbul/21-million-visit-turkiyes-hagia-sophia-grand-mosque-since-reopening>.

68 See <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/imperial-gate-in-hagia-sophia-mosque-damaged-173144>.

69 Quoted in <https://orthodoxtimes.com/hagia-sophia-fragments-fall-from-dome-next-to-visitors-video>.

70 See <https://www.ihh.com.tr/istanbul-haberleri/ayasofya-camiini-gelecek-nesillere-tasiyacak-degisimler-yapildi-99916213>.

71 Ibidem.

72 See <https://muze.gen.tr/muze-detay/ayasofya>.

6. Concluding remarks

Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk reportedly said: «to convert it [Hagia Sophia] back to a mosque is to say to the rest of the world, unfortunately we are not secular anymore»⁷³. Likewise, the European Parliament has defined this event as a threat to secularism⁷⁴. These statements are but two examples of the selective blindness of a certain approach to Turkey, which links the AKP's Islamic reorientation to the country's democratic deficit. In fact, a large part of contemporary observers ascribe it to the repudiation of the 'good-old-days' *laiklik* and to its substitution with Islamism. The change in Turkey's ecclesiastical policy is undeniable, but the premises of the AKP's authoritarianism should be looked for elsewhere and, first of all, in the weight of the country's ideological heritage. For most of its history, Turkey has been characterized by an assimilationist identity model. In the Kemalist regime one of its pillars was the principle of secularism, which the AKP has substituted with a conservative vision of Islam. Nevertheless, elements of continuity are more numerous than those of discontinuity, as highlighted by those scholars who have defined "Erdoğanism" as «an updated version of Kemalism», «religious Kemalism», «Islamic Kemalism» or «Kemalo-Islamism»⁷⁵. A common trait is the defensive attitude towards sovereignty, understood not merely in a territorial and jurisdictional sense, but also as cultural heritage to place at the very heart of the official notion of national identity⁷⁶. This, in turn, may be one of the explanations for the scarce development of religious tourism vis-à-vis its enormous potential: in the Kemalist and post-Kemalist periods, the promotion of *inanç turizm* might have been inconsistent with the State-endorsed secular identity; nowadays, it may as well be seen as liable to open up to manifestations of religious diversity, which the current regime – like its predecessors – regrettably tends to see unfavorably.

Hagia Sophia has always been used as a symbol to forge imperial identity: first Byzantine and then Ottoman. The first and second "New Turkeys" have

73 Quoted *inter alia* in CHANIOTIS A. (2020), *The Ambiguous Loss of Hagia Sophia*, <https://www.ias.edu/ideas/chaniotis-hagia-sophia>.

74 See STANICEK B. (2020), *Hagia Sophia: Turkey's secularism under threat*, July, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/652026/EPRS_ATA\(2020\)652026_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2020/652026/EPRS_ATA(2020)652026_EN.pdf).

75 YILMAZ I. (2020), *Erdoganism: Death of Kemalism or Resurrection of Kemalism?*, 21 September, 3, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3696237>.

76 See HISARLIOĞLU F., KARAGIANNPOULOU C. AND YANIK L. K. (2024), "Identity, Cultural Heritage and the Politics of Sovereignty: Narrating Turkey and Greece Through Ayasofya", *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, 27, 1: 36-55.

continued to rely on this symbolically powerful heritage: the former managed the monument as a secular museum, de-emphasizing its religious history and disregarding the sacred values that people continued to attach to it⁷⁷; the latter has resurrected one of its faith dimensions (the Muslim one) at the expenses of the other⁷⁸. Both policies seem to have deprived Hagia Sophia of the possibility to display its multiple historical and spiritual meanings and to fully develop its potential as a religious heritage site.

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77 AVDOULOS E. (2015), "Istanbul's Hagia Sophia: Challenges of Managing Sacred Places", in CASTILLO MENA A., ed., *Segundo Congreso Internacional de Buenas Prácticas en Patrimonio Mundial. Personas y Comunidades*, Universidad Complutense, Madrid, 180.

78 This also applies to other sites, such as the Panorama Museum 1453. See HASSAN C. G. AND POSOCCO L. (2023), "Promoting Muslim Nationalism in Turkish Museums: A study of visitors' responses to the *Panorama Museum 1453*", *Trauma and Memory*, 11, 1: 55-71.

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THE FIFTH PILLAR OF ISLAM (HAJJ): RITUALITY, TRADITION, SPIRITUAL VALUE, ECONOMIC-LEGAL ASPECTS

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SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – Hajj: its role in a Muslim's life. – 3. Hajj: rituals and stages. – 4. The extent of the phenomenon and the business of pilgrimage. – 5. Hajj leave in employment. – 6. Concluding remarks.

1. Introduction

Pilgrimage is one of the oldest forms of religious tourism, dating back to Ancient Egypt in the 4th millennium BC, and widespread in all ancient civilisations and historical eras. Among the various forms of travel, pilgrimage has a deep symbolic and metaphorical meaning. Among the various forms of travel, pilgrimage has a deep symbolic and metaphorical meaning. The pilgrimage is not simply a crossing of territories to reach a destination. It is also an inner journey, an experience that can have a profound impact on one's system of values, certainties and world-views¹. The pilgrimage is both a spiritual, emotional and physical challenge and a rebirth after leaving the previous life. Pilgrimages are a widespread devotional practice in many religious groups, and their several meanings, which extend to different areas of the believer's life – not just the religious one – make them a very complex and interesting form of cultural expression to analyse. This is evidenced, for example, by UNESCO's 2017 inscription of the Kumbh Mela² on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The pilgrimage to Mecca, explored in the following pages, is a fundamental expression of centuries-old Islamic culture. The pilgrimage to Mecca, the topic of the following pages, is a fundamental expression of the centuries-old Islamic culture.

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- 1 In the past, pilgrims used to write their last will and testament before setting off. They did not know if they would arrive and in what condition they would return.
 - 2 The Kumbh Mela is a major religious and cultural festival in India and is considered the largest religious gathering in the world, attended by over 100 million people. It is celebrated at regular intervals in four holy cities: Allahabad (now Prayagraj), Haridwar, Ujjain and Nashik, near rivers considered sacred (the Ganges, the Yamuna, the Saraswati, the Kshipra and the Godavari).

2. Hajj: its role in a Muslim's life

In Islamic terminology, Hajj refers to the obligatory annual pilgrimage that Muslims make to Mecca with the intention of performing certain religious rites as prescribed by the Prophet Muhammad.

The prescription is found in several parts of the Qur'an³, particularly in the Surets Al-Hajj⁴, Al-Baqara⁵ and Al-'Imran⁶. Every Muslim is obliged to go to Mecca at least once in his life if his physical and economic condition allows him to do so.

Since the foundation of Islam, the Hajj has been an opportunity for millions of Muslims of all origins and geographical backgrounds to meet not only religiously, but also socially and culturally. In the holy mosque of Mecca stands the Kaaba, which Mohammed proclaimed to be the oldest temple on earth built to worship the true God⁷. According to tradition, this cubic temple, which is venerated by pilgrims, was built by Abraham with his son Ishmael⁸. It is empty because it is filled with spiritual presence and is therefore the symbol of Taw-

3 Quotations from the Qur'an are covered in: *The Qur'an, A new translation* by M. A. S. ABDEL HALEEM, Oxford world's classics, Oxford University Press, 2004.

4 The Sura Al-Hajj (22:27-29) states the meaning of pilgrimage, its prescriptions and spiritual importance: «27. Proclaim the Pilgrimage to all people. They will come to you on foot and on every kind of swift mount, emerging from every deep mountain pass 28. to attain benefits and celebrate God's name, on specified days, over the livestock He has provided for them – feed yourselves and the poor and unfortunate – 29. so let the pilgrims perform their acts of cleansing, fulfil their vows, and circle around the Ancient House'».

5 The Sura Al-Baqara (2:196) refers to both the major pilgrimage (Hajj) and the minor pilgrimage (Umrah): «196. Complete the pilgrimages, major and minor, for the sake of God. If you are prevented [from doing so], then [send] whatever offering for sacrifice you can afford, and do not shave your heads until the offering has reached the place of sacrifice. If any of you is ill, or has an ailment of the scalp, he should compensate by fasting, or feeding the poor, or offering sacrifice. When you are in safety, anyone wishing to take a break between the minor pilgrimage and the major one must make whatever offering he can afford. If he lacks the means, he should fast for three days during the pilgrimage, and seven days on his return, making ten days in all. This applies to those whose household is not near the Sacred Mosque. (...)».

6 Sura Al-Imran (3:97): «(...) Pilgrimage to the House is a duty owed to God by people who are able to undertake it. (...)».

7 Qur'an, 2, 125-127.

8 For more on the history of the Kaaba: M. GAUDEFROY-DEMOMBYNES, *Le pèlerinage à la Mekke: étude d'histoire religieuse*, Paris, 1923, 31 ss., in <https://archive.org/details/lepelerinagelame00gaud/page/30/mode/2up>.

hid⁹, of faith in the One God, of Islam, of Muslims. The Kaaba is the centre of the world, the point to which all Muslims turn when they pray¹⁰.

The pilgrimage constitutes the fifth pillar of Islam¹¹ and takes place between

9 The concept of Tawhid means the unification of the real, a unicum in which all human activities are interdependent and subject to the will of Allah; see D. ATZORI, *Fede e mercato: verso una via islamica al capitalismo?*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2010.

10 Qur'an, 2, 149-150.

11 The first pillar is the profession of faith (Shahāda); it marks the act of conversion and entry into the Islamic community (Ummah). The second pillar is the obligatory prayer (salat); it must be performed five times a day (dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening), facing the direction of the Kaaba (qibla). Midday prayer on Fridays, is communitarian and takes place preferably in the mosque; the men arrange themselves neatly in rows in the central hall of the mosque, while the women pray in another room, or at the back of the mosque. The third pillar, ritual almsgiving (Zakat), is a kind of debt to God that the Muslim must pay for what Allah has given him. It is obligatory to give a fixed portion of one's possessions to the poor in order to purify oneself and make everything one owns "legal". For Sunnis, Zakat is generally equivalent to 2.5% of a person's net worth, which is defined as the assets and savings accumulated during a lunar year, excluding essentials such as a house, clothes and work tools. Ritual almsgiving differs from Sadāqa, which is alms given freely to anyone in need, Muslim or non-Muslim, without precise limits and based on the donor's intentions and means. It can be anything ☐ money, food, clothing, even a smile or a kind word. Those without the means to fulfil this obligation must do a good deed or avoid a bad one.

The fourth pillar is the Sawm, the obligatory fast that takes place during the lunar month of Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar in which the Qur'an was revealed. As the Islamic calendar is not tied to the seasons, the month of Ramadan can fall at different times. Ramadan consists of fasting and abstinence from food and drink from sunrise (Fajr) to sunset (Maghrib). Fasting serves to purify the soul, strengthen devotion and faith in Allah, develop self-control, patience and self-discipline, and encourage generosity and empathy towards the less fortunate. The fast begins before dawn with a meal called Suhoor and ends at sunset with a meal called Iftar, often started with dates and water, following the tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. The break at sunset is usually celebrated in a communal atmosphere. Fasting is obligatory for those who are able to maintain it, who are adults and mentally healthy; children up to puberty, the elderly, the chronically and seriously ill, travellers, pregnant or breastfeeding women, during the menstrual cycle or in the post-partum period are exempt. Travellers or women with special conditions can offset the obligation at a later date. During this period, Muslims must also abstain from sexual relations, lying, quarrelling, slandering and smoking. In addition to Ramadan, Muslims may observe voluntary fasting on other occasions: on Mondays and Thursdays, on the lunar mid-month days (13th, 14th and 15th of the Islamic calendar), during Arafat Day (for non-pilgrims) and

the eighth and thirteenth day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, the last day of the Islamic calendar. Mecca is the House of God, the place of spiritual presence par excellence, where one must go to purify oneself: «Whoever performs Hajj for the love of Allah and does not utter an obscene word or commit an evil deed will return (free from sin) as his mother bore him»¹².

3. Hajj: rituals and stages

The Hajj must follow precise rituals and stages for spiritual, symbolic and normative reasons. The rituals are not only formal, but also a means of strengthening the bond with Allah, recalling the prophetic history, promoting unity and equality of the Islamic community, and purifying the soul. This spiritual path, if properly followed, profoundly transforms the pilgrim. The pilgrim's departure is accompanied by a sacred ritual that in some ways has its roots in pagan rites¹³. Before leaving, the believer must liquidate all his past and prepare to be a different person; he must repent of his mistakes and erase their consequences, pay his debts, establish a clear budget for his family and ensure that his family has the necessary resources during his absence. At the moment of departure, the believer recites two raka'at (prayer sessions), accompanied by the recitation of specific surahs.

Clothing also follows strict guidelines, based on uniformity, humility and devotion. This clothing is known as ihram and is different for men and women. The ritual dress with which the Muslim believer is covered after ablution is the archaic and traditional costume of the oriental peasant, made up of two pieces of unstitched white fabric: the Rida is the upper piece that covers the

on Ashura Day. Sawm is not only a physical abstinence, but also a state of spiritual awareness that helps to improve character and connection with Allah. On the last day of Ramadan, the breaking of the fast is celebrated with Id al-fitr, the second most important holiday in the Islamic calendar; Muslims thank Allah for supporting them in their efforts to make the sacrifices of fasting, and on this holiday they perform the duty of collecting alms (Zakat).

12 The verse is a hadith of the Prophet Muhammad narrated by Abu Huraira and recorded in two of the most authentic collections of hadith: Sahih al-Bukhari 1521: Book 25, Hadith 9. This hadith emphasises the spiritual purity and forgiveness that a person can obtain through Hajj, provided it is performed with sincerity and righteousness.

13 See M. GAUDEFROY-DEMOMBYNES, *Le pèlerinage à la Mekke: étude d'histoire religieuse*, op. cit., 155.

shoulders and back, the *Izar* is the lower piece that covers from the waist to the ankles. Clothing is simple and unadorned, representing equality and humility. No sewn or tight-fitting clothing or clothing that covers the head (such as hats) is allowed. When pilgrims go to Mecca, there is no visible difference between them. All are equal in the eyes of Allah, and clothing makes the crowd resemble a white sea that erases socio-economic and cultural differences. On the other hand, there is no specific dress code for women as there is for men, but they too must dress modestly and in accordance with Islamic principles. They usually wear a simple, loose-fitting dress that covers the entire body except for the face and hands.

The colour of the clothing may vary (white is preferred but not compulsory), as long as the clothing is plain and without ostentatious ornamentation. They must not cover the face or hands; the *niqab* or gloves are not permitted while in the state of *ihram*. Like men, women are not allowed to wear perfume or ostentatious jewellery. Shoes must not be closed: men and women must wear sandals or shoes that leave the ankle and back of the foot uncovered. Changing clothes is one of the most important and meaningful acts of *Ihram* (ritual purity); it is a rite of passage observed in many religions. In order to perform a religious act, the believer enters a new state, he dies to his previous existence to be reborn to a new life, that of an initiate. He marks this new form of his personality with a special custom¹⁴.

The pilgrim must remain bareheaded. This is one of the riskiest prescriptions for the pilgrim's health and life itself. At the time of the Prophet and in the years immediately following his death, these rules were easily accepted by the people of Arabia, who were accustomed to the rigours of sedentary or nomadic life. In the centuries that followed, military conquests extended Islam to populations accustomed to less harsh living conditions, and therefore less prepared to face the fatigue of travel, and to obey prescriptions that required hard tests of physical endurance. For example, it was permitted to take shelter by any means: holding a hand, a cloth, an umbrella over one's head without touching it directly; it was permitted to take shelter in the shade of a wall, a tent or a camel, at rest or on the move, as long as one did not constantly use it as shelter¹⁵. According to the doctrine, the pilgrim will appear in his *Ihram* on the day of the Last Judgement and will therefore be buried with two unstitched pieces of cloth; many pilgrims bring special pieces of cloth to Mecca which they

14 *Ibidem*, 170.

15 *Ibidem*, 175.

moisten with Zamzam water¹⁶, then dry them on the stones in the courtyard of the Haram ech Ghérif' and keep them until the day of their burial¹⁷.

In addition to the duties, there are many prohibitions: behaviour and language must be carefully controlled, smoking, sexual intercourse, swearing, shaving one's hair, killing game or helping others to kill game in any way, cutting one's nails, using perfume or scented soap must be avoided. The prohibition on using perfume is probably related to the prohibition on sexual intercourse, since «the use of perfume is considered a preparation for sexual intercourse»¹⁸.

The ritual of pilgrimage is well defined; one of the main rites of pilgrimage, both during the Hajj (major pilgrimage) and during the Umrah (minor pilgrimage), is the Tawaf, which consists of circling the Kaaba seven times in an anti-clockwise direction¹⁹. The circuit begins at a specific point in front of the Black Stone (Hajr al-Aswad), which is set in a corner of the Kaaba. Pilgrims raise their right hand to greet the Black Stone or, if possible, touch or kiss it. During each round, pilgrims recite supplications (du'a) and prayers and, after completing the seven rounds, pray in a designated area near the place known as

16 The water of Zamzam is holy to Muslims and comes from a well in Mecca's Grand Mosque (Masjid al-Haram), near the Kaaba. The origin of the well of Zamzam is linked to the story of the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), his wife Hagar (Hajar) and their son Ishmael (Ismail): after being left in the desert by divine order, Hajar sought water for her thirsty son and walked seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa. As Agar prayed and searched desperately, an angel (often identified as the Archangel Gabriel, Jibril) miraculously caused water to gush from the ground where the child was stamping his feet; when Agar saw the water flowing, he exclaimed "Zamzam!", asking the water to stop and not to disperse. This is how the spring got its name. The well of Zamzam is therefore seen as a symbol of divine grace and answer to prayer. The water of Zamzam is consumed during the pilgrimage (Hajj e Umrah) and taken home as a gift for friends and family. It is believed that drinking this water with devotion and prayer can bring spiritual and physical benefits.

17 M. GAUDEFROY-DEMOMBYNES, *Le pèlerinage à la Mekke: étude d'histoire religieuse*, op. cit., 176.

18 *Ibidem*, 185.

19 «There are five types of Tawaf: 1. Tawaf al-Qudum: this Tawaf is performed by anyone coming to Makkah for any reason, whether for Umrah, Hajj, business or just for a visit; 2. Tawaf al-Ifadha: this Tawaf must be performed by all pilgrims undertaking Hajj; 3. this is the last ritual before leaving the Holy City of Makkah on completion of your Hajj or whatever you came for; 4. this Tawaf may be performed at any time and as often as desired; 5. this Tawaf is performed as part of the rituals of Umrah», Ministry of Hajj, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Notes on different types of Tawaf, in www.hajjinformation.com/main/f35.htm.

Maqam Ibrahim (Abraham's Station)²⁰. The next ritual is the Sa'i, which consists of running seven times between the hills of Safa and Marwa; the running recalls Agar's desperate search for water, abandoned by Abraham with the infant Ishmael in the desert of Mecca by order of Allah as part of a test of faith. Another ritual phase is the moment of reflection and prayer during the standing stop at Mount Arafat, the place where the Prophet Muhammad delivered his farewell speech. The rites on Mount Arafat must be performed on the 9th day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah. On the same day, the cloth covering the Kaaba, the Kiswa, is changed in a special ceremony symbolising renewal and purity²¹. The Kiswa is a single large black silk cloth sewn in several pieces and embroidered with Qur'anic inscriptions in gold and silver thread on geometric and arabesque designs, weighing 120 kg and measuring approximately 14 metres high and 47 metres long. The old cloth is removed, cut into small pieces and distributed as a symbolic gift to Muslim dignitaries and religious institutions.

After the rituals on the ninth day of the month of Dhu al-Hijjah, Hajj pilgrims stop to spend the night at Muzdalifah, one of the milestones of the Islamic pilgrimage, a holy site located between the hills of Arafat and Mina, near the city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia. Muzdalifah has an important spiritual and ritual significance in the pilgrimage. Pilgrims stop to pray and collect small stones (usually 49 or 70, depending on the ritual they follow) which they will use in the symbolic ritual of stoning the devil (Ramy al-Jamarat) in Mina. Staying in

20 The Station of Abraham (Maqam Ibrahim) is a place near the Kaaba where Abraham is said to have prayed after building the holy structure with his son Ishmael.

21 The history of the Kiswa is rich in religious and cultural symbolism. The tradition of covering the Kaaba with a cloak dates back to pre-Islamic times. It is said that some Arab tribes covered the Kaaba with cloth to honour it, considering it a holy place even before the birth of Islam. With the advent of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad maintained and renewed this practice, emphasising its religious value. After the conquest of Mecca in 630 AD, he ordered the Kaaba to be purified of idols and covered with a new mantle. During the Umayyad (661-750 AD) and Abbasid (750-1258 AD) periods, caliphs oversaw its construction. During the Mamluk (1250-1517) and Ottoman (1299-1922) periods, the Kiswa was made in Egypt, in the royal workshop known as "Dar al-Kiswa", and then transported in spectacular processions called "Mahmal" that accompanied Egyptian pilgrims to Mecca. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1922) and the rise of the Saudi Kingdom (1932), Egyptian influence waned. Today, Kiswa is produced entirely in Saudi Arabia, in a special factory in Mecca known as the King Abdulaziz Complex for Holy Ka'ba Kiswa; see R. HARRIS, *The Centuries-Old Tradition of the Kiswa*, available in www.qnl.qa/en/blogs/13237?utm_source=chatgpt.com and www.visitsaudi.com/en/makkah/attractions/the-kiswa-factory-of-the-holy-kaaba-in-makkah, Accessed 27 January 2025.

Muzdalifah until dawn is considered an act of devotion. Another Hajj ritual is the Ramy al-Jamarat, a symbolic stoning of three pillars (called Jamarat), stone structures representing the devil, in Mina, the city of the tent camps, about eight kilometres from Mecca. This rite²², an act of spiritual purification for the pilgrim, symbolises the rejection of Satan, resistance to temptation and negative influences, and the renewal of the pact with Allah to avoid sin. The throwing of stones recalls the episode in which Abraham fended off Satan's temptations on three separate occasions as he prepared to sacrifice his son Ishmael in obedience to God's command. Satan manifested himself to dissuade him, but Abraham repelled him by throwing stones at him. The sacrificial phase (Qurbani or Udhiyah)²³, which is the culmination of the spiritual rites of the Hajj, takes place after the ritual of throwing pebbles, on the day of Eid al-Adha (10 of Dhu al-Hijjah) and may be extended to the following days of Tashreeq (11-13 of Dhu al-Hijjah). The sacrifice commemorates the episode when the Prophet Abraham (Ibrahim), obeying Allah's command, was ready to sacrifice his son Ishmael. However, Allah replaced Ishmael with a ram. This event is described in the Qur'an (Sura As-Saffat, 37:102-107). Allowed animals are lambs, sheep, goats, cows, bulls or camels. The animal, which must be healthy and free of deformities, is sacrificed according to the Islamic method (Dhabiha), invoking the name of Allah. Pilgrims can choose to sacrifice the animal themselves or delegate the task to an official organisation to perform the sacrifice on their behalf²⁴.

22 Throwing stones to ward off evil is an apotropaic ritual. The fight against evil, the devil and negative energies has been a constant concern of mankind since the earliest civilisations. Numerous apotropaic rituals have been developed over time to protect against negative influences and to ward off bad luck or evil spirits. Practices to ward off evil are often associated with magical-religious beliefs and may include objects (amulets, talismans, sacred symbols or figurative representations), gestures (hand signs, touching iron or the sign of the cross), words and formulae (prayers, exorcisms, incantations or words uttered to neutralise a danger), rituals (symbolic actions such as burning herbs, sprinkling holy water or making sacrifices). These practices reflect the human desire to control unseen forces perceived as dangerous or hostile. Many apotropaic practices, although considered superstition, are still widespread in popular cultures today.

23 Sacrificing an animal (Qurbani) is not obligatory during Umrah (Minor Pilgrimage).

24 The complex logistics of ritual sacrifice during the Hajj are managed by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) through a well-structured programme known as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Project For Utilisation Of Hady & Adahi (Adahi). This project was established in 1983 to help pilgrims perform their religious obligation efficiently, hygienically and in accordance with Islamic principles. The organisation provides for slaughter in modern, well-equipped, designated facilities near Mecca,

The sacrifice symbolises devotion and submission to Allah, promotes social solidarity through the distribution of meat to the less fortunate, and is an act of purification for the pilgrim. After throwing the pebbles at Jamarat al-Kubra and sacrificing the animal (Qurbani), men cut or shave their hair completely, while women cut only a small part of their hair²⁵. It is an obligatory act for all pilgrims, except for women who are menstruating or have recently given birth. After performing the rite of Tawaf al-Wada', the pilgrim leaves the state of Ihram for good, all the restrictions associated with it are lifted and he can leave Mecca to return home. As will be seen in the following pages, the pilgrimage is not only of great spiritual importance but also represents a significant source of economic revenue for the host country.

4. The extent of the phenomenon and the business of pilgrimage

Economically, the pilgrimage is an important source of revenue for Saudi Arabia, supporting a wide range of industries²⁶. Over the past 30 years, the Royal Family has promoted numerous projects to improve reception, to meet the growing needs of pilgrims and to manage religious tourism. In 1993, King

designed to handle large numbers of victims in a short period of time, under the control of qualified personnel (veterinarians, experienced butchers and religious supervisors) who are responsible for ensuring that each victim meets Islamic requirements. Pilgrims purchase an Adahi voucher from the IDB, representing the cost of the sacrifice. The coupon prices charged cover the costs of veterinary checks, Sharia checks, execution, processing, freezing, packaging, internal and external transportation, and distribution. The bank is then authorised to make the sacrifice on their behalf. The system ensures efficiency, hygiene and sustainability, and allows pilgrims to concentrate on the rituals of the Hajj without worrying about the logistics of the sacrifice. Some of the meat is distributed locally to the needy in Mecca and surrounding areas. The rest is frozen and exported to various countries around the world, particularly poor Muslim communities, through a well-organised global distribution system. See www.adahi.org/en/Pages/home.aspx e www.isdb.org/search?q=Adahi&locality=&search=. For more on how Islamic Banking works, see A. CUPRI, *La banca islamica come strumento di integrazione per l'Islam della diaspora*, in *Coscienza e Libertà*, 69, 2025, in corso di pubblicazione.

25 During the Umrah (minor pilgrimage), the hair is shaved or cut at the end of the rituals, after the completion of the Tawaf (circumambulation of the Ka'ba) and the Sa'i (walking between the hills of Safa and Marwa).

26 Pilgrimages to Mecca constitute the second largest source of revenue after oil. Saudi Arabia has 16% of the world's oil reserves. See Worldometers, Saudi Arabia Oil, 2016, www.worldometers.info/oil/saudi-arabia-oil/, Accessed 27 January 2025.

Fahd replaced and reorganised the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Subsidies into two separate bodies: the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah²⁷ and the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Subsidies, Convocation and Guidance²⁸.

The promotion of religious tourism is an integral part of Saudi Arabia's economic and social development strategy. The Saudi Embassy website explains the Vision 2030 programme as follows:

Vision 2030 is built around three primary themes: a vibrant society, a thriving economy and an ambitious nation. (...) In order to achieve a vibrant society, Saudi Arabia will focus on its people and the Islamic faith. This will happen through a series of commitments, including: increasing the number of Umrah visitors from 8 million to 30 million annually; establishing the largest Islamic museum in the world; doubling the number of Saudi heritage sites registered with UNESCO (...) ²⁹.

In line with the Vision 2030 programme, Saudi Arabia has promoted several initiatives, including the Haramain High Speed Rail (HHR) project³⁰, the Abraj Al-Bait project³¹ and the Rua Al Madinah project³². Saudi Arabia has imple-

27 «The Ministry of Hajj and Umra upgrades the provided services to pilgrims by using new technologies and facilitates Hajj and Umrah in coordination with all agencies. Its job is also to work for the sake of staff development and training to receive pilgrims, as well as to provide opportunities to citizen volunteers to contribute to enhancing the provided services», see urly.it/314caa.

28 «The Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Dawah and Guidance supervises the endowments of charitable mosques, the affairs of mosques, and centers. It also prints the Quran, arranges the local and international competitions for the Qur'an and the Sunnah. As well as, it sets advocacy programs, assists minorities, and Muslim communities, with providing support to Islamic universities and institutes abroad»; see urly.it/314d00.

29 www.saudiembassy.net/vision-2030?utm_source=chatgpt.com. The Vision 2030 programme points out that in just ten years the number of pilgrims has tripled: «Our expansion of the Two Holy Mosques has led to a tripling in the number of foreign Umrah visitors over the last decade, reaching eight million in 2015», see www.saudiembassy.net/sites/default/files/u66/Saudi_Vision2030_EN.pdf.

30 The Train connects Mecca to Jeddah and Medina, with a total length of 453 km, facilitating pilgrims' travel between the holy cities.

31 Abraj Al-Bait is a government-owned complex of seven skyscraper with a gross floor area of over 1.5 million square meters in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. These towers are a part of the King Abdulaziz Endowment Project that aims to modernize the city in catering to its pilgrims and contains over 800 retail outlets with the capacity of 75.000 residents.

32 The Rua Al Madinah project is an urban development initiative in Medina that aims

mented several technological measures to improve the safety, efficiency and overall experience of pilgrims during the Hajj³³. The Vision 2030 programme states that one of the goals is:

to increase women's participation in the workforce from 22% to 30%. (...) Our economy will provide opportunities for everyone – men and women, young and old – so they may contribute to the best of their abilities. (...) Saudi women are yet another great asset. With over 50 percent of our university graduates being female, we will continue to develop their talents, invest in their productive capabilities and enable them to strengthen their future and contribute to the development of our society and economy³⁴.

In 2021, a decision by the Ministry of Hajj officially allowed women of all ages to travel without a male relative, the mahram, for the first time, provided they travel in a group. In the same year, women were allowed to serve as policewomen in the security services guarding pilgrims in Mecca and Medina. The small steps towards women's emancipation and the reforms of the Saudi Crown Prince Moḥammad bin Salmān Āl Sa'ūd cannot hide the fact that Saudi Arabia is one of the most conservative countries in the world, with little inclination to respect human rights and gender equality, as Amnesty International's

to accommodate up to 30 million pilgrims by 2030, with the construction of hotels and infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience; see <https://ruaalmadinah.com/rua-al-madinah-project/>.

33 The Ministry of Hajj and Umrah introduced electronic bracelets that store essential data about each pilgrim. In 2023, the Transport General Authority launched a fleet of self-driving electric buses to serve Hajj pilgrims. These buses utilize artificial intelligence, cameras, and sensors to operate autonomously along selected routes, offering an environmentally friendly transportation option. The IoT technologies have been employed to monitor and manage crowd movements, ensuring safety and efficient navigation. AI-based systems have been developed to detect and identify pilgrims, aiding in crowd control and ensuring safety. These systems utilize convolutional neural networks to process images and monitor crowd dynamics effectively. The Saudi government has launched interactive applications to provide pilgrims with essential services, including locating emergency centers, holy sites, currency exchanges, restaurants, and accommodations. These apps are available in multiple languages. Aerial surveillance with Networked Flying Platforms (NFPs), such as drones and airships, has been implemented to monitor large crowds during Hajj. These platforms can provide real-time surveillance and communication, improving security and connectivity.

34 See Vision 2030, in www.saudiembassy.net/sites/default/files/u66/Saudi_Vision2030_EN.pdf, pp. 37, 39.

2023-2024 Report and USCIRF's 2024 Report on Religious Freedom in Saudi Arabia show³⁵.

Despite the impressive security measures taken by the Saudi authorities, going on the Hajj can be risky. The gradual increase in the number of pilgrims has led to many serious accidents in recent decades. Data compiled by the ISPI, covering the period from 1975 to 2024, shows an increasing number of accidents, generally caused by crowding, high temperatures, fires, clashes and attacks; in 1990 and 2015, more than 2.000 pilgrims died due to crowding; in 2024, more than 1.000 people died due to temperatures reaching 52 degrees³⁶. Saudi King Fahd described the victims of the 1990 Mecca tunnel fire, which killed 1.426 people, as "martyrs of the Islamic nation". In 1994, the Saudi mufti at the time, Sheikh Abd al-Aziz bin Baz, even issued a fatwa forbidding access to the precincts of the Mecca Mosque for the seriously ill and the elderly who were unable to support themselves and who came to die in the holiest of Islamic places in order to be sure of going to paradise³⁷. Indeed, Islam guarantees paradise for those who die in a state of ihram in the holy city of Mecca or dur-

35 Amnesty International, *Arabia Saudita, Report 2023-2024, Middle East and North Africa*, in www.amnesty.it/rapporti-annuali/rapporto-2023-2024/medio-orientee-africa-del-nord/arabia-saudita/?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed 27 January 2025. The USCIRF (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Religious) in its 2024 Annual Report recommended that the U.S. State Department re-designate Saudi Arabia as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for engaging in systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom: «Freedom conditions in Saudi Arabia remain poor, despite some recent improvements. The Saudi government has lifted certain religious restrictions on women's rights and issued a new personal status law that codifies certain legal provisions. However, the public practice of any religion other than Islam is prohibited, and no houses of worship other than mosques are allowed in the kingdom»; USCIRF, *Report on Religious Freedom in Saudi Arabia*, August 1, 2024, available in www.uscifr.gov/countries/saudi-arabia, accessed 25 January 2025.

36 ISPI (Institute for International Policy Studies), *Pellegrinaggi tragici. Morti nei peggiori incidenti durante i pellegrinaggi alla Mecca (1975-2024)*, 21 June 2024, in www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/mecca-oltre-1000-morti-nel-pellegrinaggio-178343. For this reason, Saudi Arabia has issued strict health regulations for the Hajj 2025, banning entry to pilgrims with certain medical conditions, which include kidney, heart, lung and liver diseases, and cancer; see www.intellinews.com/saudi-arabia-tightens-hajj-rules-after-deadly-2024-pilgrimage-egypt-acts-on-violations-341041/, accesso 4.01.2025, accessed 25 January 2025.

37 V. COLOMBO, *Il Pellegrinaggio alla Mecca e Abramo*, 5 July 2012, in www.culturacattolica.it/attualita/in-rilievo/ultime-news/2012/07/05/il-pellegrinaggio-alla-mecca-e-abramo.

ing the pilgrimage. Approximately 2.5 million people participated in the rituals in 2019, but due to the pandemic, the number of participants significantly reduced in the following two years. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in 2020, Saudi closed its borders and Hajj was restricted to 1.000 domestic pilgrims. In 2021, numbers were still limited to 60.000³⁸.

About 1 million Muslim pilgrims arrived in Mecca for the first post-pandemic Hajj³⁹. The Arabia's General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT) announced that in 2024 more than 1.83 million pilgrims performed Hajj in 2024 «A breakdown of international pilgrims shows that 22.3 percent came from Arab countries, 63.3 percent, the largest group, from Asian non-Arab countries, 11.3 percent from African non-Arab countries, 3.2 percent from Europe, America, Australia, and other unclassified regions. Most of the international pilgrims, The vast majority of international pilgrims, 1.546.345, arrived by air, 60.251 through land border crossings and 4.714 by sea»⁴⁰. The number of pilgrims allowed to participate in the Hajj is determined by the government of Saudi Arabia, specifically by the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah, in collaboration with local and international authorities. This number is influenced by a combination of logistical, security, and public health factors. The Saudi government decides the total number of pilgrims on the basis of its organisational capacity. Each country receives a quota of pilgrims, usually based on a standard ratio: 1 pilgrim per 1.000 Muslims in the national population. Quotas are decided in consultation with the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. Under normal circumstances, the total number of pilgrims admitted to Hajj may exceed 2 million.

5. Hajj leave in employment

In many countries with an Islamic majority, there are legal provisions regarding time off work to attend the Hajj. In Saudi Arabia, for example, according to Art. 114 of the Saudi Labour Law (Royal Decree No. M/51 of 23 Sha'ban 1426H, 27

38 Islam Channel, *Saudi says no restrictions on number of Hajj pilgrims in 2023*, January 9, 2023, in <https://islamchannel.tv/saudi-says-no-restrictions-on-number-of-hajj-pilgrims-in-2023/>, accessed 27 January 2025.

39 M. SALEM-M. ABU GANEYEH, *Muslim pilgrims flock to Mecca for first post-pandemic haj*, 5 July, 2022, in www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/muslim-pilgrims-flock-mecca-first-post-pandemic-haj-2022-07-01/, accessed 27 January 2025.

40 G. OBEID, *Hajj 2024 in numbers: Annual pilgrimage draws over 1.83 mln worshippers, in Al Arabiya English*, 16 June, 2024, https://english.alarabiya.net/News/saudi-arabia/2024/06/16/hajj-2024-in-numbers-annual-pilgrimage-draws-over-1-83-mln-worshippers-?utm_source=chatgpt.com, accessed 27 January 2025.

September 2005)⁴¹, a worker shall be entitled to a paid leave of not less than ten days and not more than fifteen days, including Eid Al-Adha holiday, to perform Hajj only once during his service if he has not performed it before. To be eligible for this leave, the worker must have spent at least two consecutive years of service with the employer. The employer may determine the number of workers who shall be given this leave annually in accordance with work requirements.

In the United Arab Emirates, Article 87 of the UAE Labour Law (Federal Law No. 8 of 1980) recognised unpaid leave for the Hajj for a maximum of 30 days, which could be taken only once during the period of employment with the company. The new law (Federal Law No. 33 of 2021)⁴² does not provide for specific leave for Hajj, but allows for the possibility of unpaid leave, subject to the employer's consent (Article 33). However, there are specific provisions for employees of the Abu Dhabi Global Market ("ADGM")⁴³. In fact, they can benefit from unpaid "special leave": «A Muslim Employee, who has completed 1 year or more of continuous employment, shall be entitled, not more than once during the period of employment, to special leave not exceeding 30 Days without pay, to perform the Haj pilgrimage» (Employment Regulations 2019, art. 28, "Special leave")⁴⁴. Similarly, for employees of the Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC)⁴⁵, Article 33 of the DIFC Employment Law No. 2 of 2019⁴⁶ grants special unpaid leave of up to 21 days to perform the Hajj pilgrimage.

In Bahrain, Hajj leave is paid and is available under the following conditions (Article 67, Law No. 36 of 2012): «A Muslim worker who has served his employer for a continuous period of five years shall have the right to leave on full pay for fourteen working days to perform his pilgrimage obligation. Such leave shall

41 Available in English in www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/14685.

42 Federal Decree-Law Regarding the Regulation of Employment Relationship, available in English in <https://u.ae/-/media/Documents-2022/Federal-DecreeLaw-No-33-of-2021.ashx>.

43 The Abu Dhabi Global Market ("ADGM") is an international financial center located in Abu Dhabi. It has its own legal framework, based on the English common law. For more see: <https://atblegal.com/blog/adgm-labour-law/>.

44 Adgm Employment Regulations 2019 (Consolidated Version June 2024), in <https://en.adgm.thomsonreuters.com/rulebook/employment-regulations-2019>.

45 The Dubai International Financial Centre (DIFC) is a financial free zone in Dubai, established in 2004. It serves as a hub for companies operating in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia markets. The DIFC has its own independent court system, separate from the legal systems of Dubai and the UAE government.

46 Available in www.difc.ae/business/laws-and-regulations/legal-database/difc-laws/employment-law-difc-law-no-2-of-2019, accessed 27 January 2025.

be granted once to the worker during his service period unless he has taken it during his employment with another employer. An employer shall decide the number of workers who are granted such leave in every year according to the business requirements, provided that priority shall be given to the worker who has spent the longest period of continuous service»⁴⁷.

In Indonesia, civil servants' leave, including for Hajj, is regulated by the Peraturan Pemerintah Nomor 11 Tahun 2017⁴⁸, which, in Article 316, allows civil servants who have worked continuously for at least five years to take "Cuti Besar" (long leave of up to three months) also for religious purposes, such as Hajj, by foregoing annual leave in the year in question. In the private sector, however, Undang-Undang Nomor 13 Tahun 2003⁴⁹, Art. 3(2)(e) states that the employer must continue to pay wages if the employee is unable to work because he or she is performing a religious obligation prescribed by his or her faith, including the Hajj; a similar provision is also contained in Art. 28 of the Wages Ordinance 2015 (Pemerintah Nomor 78 Tahun 2015 tentang Pengupahan)⁵⁰.

In Egypt Article 53 of the Labor Law⁵¹ states that an employee who has spent five consecutive years in service has the right to a fully paid leave for a period not exceeding one month for performing pilgrimage or to visit Jerusalem. An employee is entitled to said leave only one time during his entire service. In all countries, other provisions may be laid down in company or collective agreements.

In the Western context, there are no specific rules about Hajj leave, but generally, and depending on national regulations, leave could be taken as annual leave or as special unpaid leave. Company bargaining and collective bargaining can be a valid and flexible means of fulfilling this religious duty. It should be noted, however, that the latter have the disadvantage of often being subject to power relations; in this sense, for example, company bargaining may not have the weight and sensitivity of the most representative trade unions behind it. In the Anglo-American context, recognition of Hajj leave could be included in an employer's duty to reasonably accommodate employees' religious needs, as long as it does not result in an undue burden⁵².

47 Law no. 36 of 2012, available in English in Kingdom of Bahrain, Labour Market Regulatory Authority, <https://lmra.gov.bh/files/cms/shared/file/labour%20law.pdf>.

48 Available in <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/5831/pp-no-11-tahun-2017>.

49 Available in <https://peraturan.bpk.go.id/Details/43013>.

50 Available in www.hukumonline.com/pusatdata/detail/lt562df69e60c13/peraturan-pemerintah-nomor-78-tahun-2015/.

51 Available in https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=64693.

52 The duty to provide reasonable accommodation is enshrined in US law in Title VII

6. Concluding remarks

The Hajj is an experience of profound spiritual and social significance for Muslims. The positive aspects of this millennia-old ritual are manifold. Participation in the Hajj offers believers the opportunity to deepen their faith through rituals that symbolise purification and submission to God and help to consolidate individual and collective religious identity. The Hajj is also a moment of cohesion, unity and brotherhood for the Muslim community. This global gathering promotes cross-cultural understanding and strengthens ties within the Ummah, the worldwide Islamic community.

The pilgrimage has a considerable impact on Saudi Arabia's economy, stimulating sectors such as tourism, transport and services. Investment in infrastructure to accommodate millions of pilgrims has led to improvements for both visitors and the local population. The Hajj promotes the values of peace, tolerance and equality, as pilgrims, regardless of their origin, dress simply, thus eliminating social and economic differences; participation in the pilgrimage helps to reflect on the importance of peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. In conclusion, the pilgrimage to Mecca offers numerous benefits, ranging from individual spiritual growth to the strengthening of community ties, thus contributing positively to both the religious and socio-economic field.

However, there are some problematic aspects. The increase continues in the number of pilgrims and the rapid urban growth has posed problems, health, social, utilities, security and the environment. The massive concentration of millions of people during the Hajj raises environmental concerns; the use of single-use plastics, waste and consumption of natural resources risks damaging

of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended in 1972. The amendment was proposed by Senator Randolph, a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and passed unanimously in the Senate and by a large majority in the House of Representatives. For more see: E. BRIBOSIA, J. RINGELHEIM, I. RORIVE, *Reasonable accommodation for religious minorities. A Promising Concept for European Antidiscrimination Law?*, in *Maastricht Journal of European and Comparative Law*, 17, 2010, 140, A. MADERA, *Le istanze di accomodamento religioso sul luogo di lavoro negli U.S.A.: un commento alla decisione E.E.O.C. v. Abercrombie & Fitch Stores, Inc.*, in E. CAMASSA (eds.), *Democrazie e Religioni. Libertà religiosa, diversità e convivenza nell'Europa del XXI secolo. Atti del Convegno Nazionale ADEC Trento, 22-23 ottobre 2015*, Editoriale Scientifica, Napoli, 2016, pp. 171-184.

The duty of reasonable accommodation was introduced into Canadian law by the Supreme Court in 1985.

the surrounding ecosystem⁵³. Mecca's resident population of about 200.000 swells to well over two million during the Hajj season. This rapid increase in numbers poses many challenges, including ensuring adequate food, water, and sanitary facilities in Mecca and the neighbouring deserts of Mina and Arafat, which pilgrims must visit as part of the Hajj ritual⁵⁴. Saudi Arabia has introduced initiatives such as waste recycling and the use of renewable energy, but these need to be expanded and supported by awareness campaigns. However, the Islamic community, like many other religious organisations, is attentive to environmental issues⁵⁵.

Another critical issue is affordability; as Gatrads and Sheikh note, the rising cost of pilgrimage makes it unaffordable for many Muslims, in part contradicting the ideal of equality and universality⁵⁶. Mandaville criticised the increasing commercialisation of the Hajj, highlighting how the economic focus risks overshadowing the spiritual essence of the ritual⁵⁷. Managing the flow of millions of people remains complex. Incidents such as the mobs during the devil stoning ritual (2006 and 2015) have raised questions about crowd management and the transparency of investigations. Improving pilgrimage management requires a more inclusive and sustainable approach, in line with the ethical and spiritual principles of Islam. The pilgrimage to Mecca remains a milestone in the spiritual life of Muslims, but its management raises a number of issues that

53 A. ABONOMI, T. DE LACY, J. PYKE, *Environmental Impact of the Hajj*, in *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 12, <https://doi.org/10.21427/nv9g-6c27>, Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol10/iss1/12>.

54 A. R. GATRAD, A. SHEIKH, *Hajj: Journey of a Lifetime. Introduction*, in *British Medical Journal (BMJ)*, vol. 330, no. 7483, pp. 133-137, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.330.7483.133>.

55 R. ALUFFI, *Comunità umane solidali e inclusive. Il punto di vista islamico sugli obiettivi 4, 10, 11 e 16 dell'Agenda ONU 2030*, in I. ZUANAZZI, L. BATTAGLINI (eds.), *Religioni e Sviluppo sostenibile*, Accademia University Press, Torino, 2021, pp. 191-196. The protection of the ecosystem is the object of the attention of many religious groups, which are increasingly promoting the values of respect for the environment, human dignity and the common good. Numerous documents testify to this concern, including Giovanni Paolo II, *Centesimus annus*; Benedetto XVI, *Caritas in veritate*; Francesco, *Laudato si'*; *A Rabbinic Letter on Climate Crisis*, 29 October 2015; *Bhumi Devi Ki Jai! A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change*, 23 November 2015; *Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change*, 18 August 2015; *The Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change*, 14 May 2015.

56 A. R. GATRAD, A. SHEIKH, *Hajj: Journey of a Lifetime*, cit.

57 P. MANDAVILLE, *Global Political Islam*, 2007, Routledge, London.

require attention. A balance must be struck between spirituality and commercialisation, between economic growth and sustainability, between modernisation and respect for tradition, and between the exercise of Muslim workers' right to religious freedom and the protection of employers' needs. Addressing these challenges effectively will ensure that pilgrimage continues to be a source of inspiration and unity for Muslims around the world, while preserving its spiritual essence and religious significance.

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HALAL TOURISM: EVOLUTION, TRENDS, AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Flavia Cortelezzi

SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2. Early Stages Pre-2000s, 2000s and Initial Market Development. – 2.1. Halal-Friendly Services in the Mainstream Travel Industry and in Non-Muslim-Majority Destinations. – 3. 2010s - The Rise of the Halal Tourism Industry. – 3.1. Institutionalization of Halal Tourism. – 3.2. Expansion of Muslim-Friendly Travel Agencies and Islamic Financial Services. – 3.3. Technology in Halal Tourism Growth. – 4. 2020s - Digitalization, Sustainability, and Luxury Halal Travel. – 5. Future Outlook - Global Expansion and Diversification of Halal Tourism. – 6. Conclusion. The Future of Halal Tourism: a Dynamic and Inclusive Industry.

1. Introduction

Halal tourism has undergone a significant transformation over time, driven by the increasing demand for travel experiences that are in accordance with Islamic principles. Initially centred on religious pilgrimages, this segment of the global tourism industry has adapted to the needs of Muslim travellers worldwide, evolving to encompass a broader range of travel and tourism products and services. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have both recognized the potential of halal tourism in contributing to global economic growth. The OECD reports that tourism is a major driver of economic development, accounting for 10.4% of global GDP and creating one in ten jobs worldwide. In fact, Halal tourism is rapidly emerging as a significant global phenomenon in the last years. According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2020/21, the global Muslim tourism market has shown substantial growth, reflecting the increasing economic power and travel preferences of Muslim travelers. In 2019, Muslim travelers spent approximately \$194 billion on travel, highlighting the significant contribution of this demographic to the global tourism industry. The re-

port projects that this spending will rise to \$300 billion by 2026¹, underscoring the expanding economic impact of Muslim tourism. This growth is driven by a combination of factors, including the rising Muslim middle class with greater disposable income and a strong desire for travel experiences that respect their cultural and religious values, enhanced awareness and availability of halal-friendly services², and the proliferation of digital platforms that cater to the specific needs of Muslim travelers. Domestic tourism holds the largest share of the halal tourism market, highlighting the importance of catering to the needs of Muslim travelers within their own countries. As far as international tourism, the top destinations for Muslim travelers include countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates, branding themselves as prime halal-friendly destinations and developing comprehensive tourism infrastructures that cater to Muslim travelers' specific needs. Simultaneously, non-Muslim majority countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Thailand are recognizing the economic potential of halal tourism and are increasingly tailoring their services to attract Muslim visitors by offering halal food options, prayer rooms in public spaces, and staff training on cultural sensitivities.

Additionally, The MasterCard-CrescentRating Global Muslim Travel Index (GMTI) 2021 highlights that the global Muslim population is expected to grow to 2.2 billion by 2030, further boosting the potential market for halal tourism. This demographic shift signifies a massive opportunity for the tourism industry. As the Muslim population expands, so does the demand for travel experiences that align with Islamic principles. The IMF highlights that the global middle class is expected to expand significantly by 2030, with a substantial portion of this growth coming from Muslim-majority countries. According to the IMF, countries such as Indonesia, Turkey, and Egypt will see notable increases in their middle-class populations, driven by economic development and rising incomes. This expansion is likely to fuel further growth in halal tourism, as more middle-class Muslims seek travel experiences that align with their religious beliefs and cultural values. The table below provides data on the projected

1 The Halal Tourism market has consistently grown, with revenues from with revenues rising from USD 245.78 billion in 2022 to USD 324.96 billion in 2030. This growth is reflected in the compound annual growth rate of 4.07% projected from 2023 to 2030 (see <https://www.credenceresearch.com/report/halal-tourism-market> for details).

2 This segment of the tourism industry focuses on offering amenities that adhere to the halal lifestyle, including halal-certified food, prayer facilities, gender-segregated swimming pools, and accommodations that ensure privacy and modesty.

growth in the middle-class population in key Muslim-majority countries and the expected increase in Muslim travel spending by 2030:

Table 1: Expected Middle Class Growth and Increase in the Travel Spending. Source: Author's Elaborations on IMF Data

Country	Projected Middle-Class Growth (2020-2030)	Expected Increase in Muslim Travel Spending by 2030
Indonesia	35%	\$50 billion
Turkey	25%	\$40 billion
Egypt	30%	\$20 billion
Malaysia	20%	\$15 billion
Saudi Arabia	22%	\$18 billion

These projections underscore the critical role that Muslim-majority countries will play in the future of global tourism. As the middle-class population in these countries grows, so too will the demand for travel services that cater to their specific needs, such as halal food, prayer facilities, and culturally appropriate accommodations. The IMF's analysis suggests that by 2030, the total spending by Muslim travelers could exceed \$300 billion, driven by this expanding middle class. This growth presents significant opportunities for countries and businesses worldwide to invest in halal tourism infrastructure and services, tapping into a lucrative and rapidly growing market. The economic benefits of embracing halal tourism extend beyond increased travel spending; they also include job creation, cultural exchange, and the promotion of inclusivity and diversity in the global tourism industry. Thus, the OECD and IMF's recognition of the potential of halal tourism highlights its importance as a key driver of economic growth and development in the coming decades. In Europe as well, the growing halal tourism market represents a dynamic and rapidly expanding segment of the continent's tourism industry. European countries are recognizing the economic potential of this niche market and are making significant efforts to accommodate Muslim tourists. Key destinations such as the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Spain are leading the way in offering halal-friendly services.

Finally, it is worth noticing that the younger generation of Muslims, who are tech-savvy and travel enthusiasts, are driving much of this growth, with their expectations for seamless, inclusive, and authentic travel experiences. Along this trend, the digital revolution has further propelled the growth of halal tour-

ism, with numerous digital platforms and travel apps that offer comprehensive halal travel guides, restaurant reviews, and prayer time notifications are becoming essential tools in the planning and enjoyment of their travels.

Concluding, the growth in the Muslim population, coupled with their increasing disposable income, globalisation, digitalization and distinct travel preferences, is set to transform the global tourism landscape, making halal tourism a critical component of the industry's future. This trend not only promises significant economic benefits but also fosters greater cultural exchange and understanding, as more destinations around the world become welcoming and accommodating to Muslim travelers.

In this article, we examine the evolution of the Halal tourism (par. 2 and 3), its trends and future market opportunities (par. 4 and 5) and finally conclude (par. 6)

2. Early Stages Pre-2000s, 2000s and Initial Market Development

Muslim travel prior to the 2000s was predominantly driven by religious obligations rather than leisure. The Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia constituted the most significant form of travel, representing a fundamental aspect of Islamic tradition spanning over a millennium and attracting millions of Muslims from across the globe. However, beyond the context of religious travel, tourism was predominantly pursued without dedicated halal accommodations. Muslim travellers seeking to explore the world had to self-manage their religious needs, including the availability of halal food, as they often had to cook their own food or rely on vegetarian or seafood options; prayer facilities, as they needed to find mosques or suitable private spaces for prayers; and modest lodging, as finding hotels that respected Islamic modesty standards, such as privacy-friendly accommodations, was challenging. Muslim-majority countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, and Egypt naturally catered to halal requirements, but in non-Muslim-majority destinations, the concept of halal-friendly travel was virtually non-existent. This lack of infrastructure meant that most Muslim travellers primarily visited destinations where they could easily maintain their religious obligations, such as other Muslim-majority countries or locations with significant Muslim populations.

This shift was influenced by several factors, primarily the economic growth and rising Muslim middle class. As Muslim-majority countries experienced economic growth, an increasing number of middle-class Muslims had the financial means to travel for leisure. Furthermore, within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), particularly in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Ara-

bia, there was a discernible increase in affluent travellers who sought premium travel experiences while adhering to their religious convictions. Consequently, Muslim-majority countries initiated efforts to position themselves as premier halal-friendly destinations, catering not only to domestic tourists but also to international Muslim visitors. Malaysia, Turkey, and Indonesia were particularly proactive in this endeavour. The Malaysian government initiated programmes to position the country as a global halal hub, extending beyond food into tourism, and the Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board actively promoted halal tourism by encouraging hotels and restaurants to acquire halal certification. As a result, Kuala Lumpur and other key cities witnessed an increase in shariah-compliant hotels offering prayer facilities, halal kitchens, and gender-segregated pools and spas. Turkey, with its rich Islamic history and blend of European and Middle Eastern influences, positioned itself as a top Muslim-friendly holiday destination. Istanbul and resort towns such as Antalya and Bodrum saw the emergence of halal beach resorts, offering family-friendly, alcohol-free environments with private beach sections for women. Indonesia, as the world's largest Muslim-majority country, capitalised on its natural beauty and Islamic heritage sites to attract regional Muslim travellers. The government introduced certification programmes for halal restaurants and hotels, thereby further strengthening the country's appeal.

2.1. Halal-Friendly Services in the Mainstream Travel Industry and in Non-Muslim-Majority Destinations

The early 2000s marked a significant turning point in the development of the halal tourism industry, as the travel sector began to recognise the potential of Muslim travellers as a distinct and lucrative market³. This shift was influenced by several factors. As the halal travel market expanded, international travel providers and hospitality businesses began to introduce services tailored to Muslim travellers. Aeronautical companies, for instance, Middle Eastern carriers such as Emirates, Qatar Airways, and Etihad Airways pioneered the provision of halal meals, onboard prayer facilities, and qibla (prayer direction) indicators. Some airlines introduced prayer-friendly flight schedules, avoiding the serving

3 The halal tourism moved beyond pilgrimage to accommodate the broader leisure, adventure, and luxury travel needs of Muslim travellers (Smith, 2019). This period laid the foundation for the rise of digital halal travel platforms, luxury halal experiences, and global halal tourism initiatives in the following decade (Jones, 2021). The growing awareness among governments, hospitality brands, and service providers contributed to the industry's rapid expansion (BROWN, 2022).

of meals during fasting hours in Ramadan. Furthermore, global hotel chains such as Marriott, Hilton, and Accor have begun offering halal-certified menus and prayer facilities in locations with a high influx of Muslim guests. In addition, dedicated Islamic hotels have emerged, featuring no alcohol, segregated wellness facilities, and gender-specific swimming pools. Finally, specialised travel agencies have begun to offer bespoke Islamic tour packages, including visits to Islamic heritage sites, halal dining experiences, and prayer-friendly itineraries. Platforms such as CrescentRating and HalalBooking provide Muslim travellers with information on halal-certified accommodations, prayer facilities, and dining options across various destinations.

It is evident that the economic potential of attracting Muslim tourists has been recognised by several non-Muslim-majority countries, who have initiated measures to this end. For instance, in Thailand, halal tourism zones have been introduced, ensuring that major cities such as Bangkok and Phuket have halal restaurants and prayer spaces. Japan initiated a certification programme for halal restaurants, equipped airports and hotels with prayer rooms, and developed Muslim-friendly travel guides in collaboration with local tourism boards. South Korea established Muslim-friendly initiatives, including halal dining guides, prayer facilities in airports and tourist attractions, and Muslim-friendly accommodation listings. Finally, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Islamic tourism organisations began establishing standards and guidelines for halal travel. The establishment of global tourism expos, such as the World Halal Travel Summit, aimed to foster dialogue and collaboration among industry stakeholders.

3. 2010s – The Rise of the Halal Tourism Industry

The 2010s marked a significant transformation and institutionalization of halal tourism. This period saw the global expansion of Muslim-friendly travel services, with both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries recognizing the economic potential of catering to Muslim travelers. The industry experienced significant structural developments, including official halal certification programs, increased investment in Muslim-friendly travel agencies, and the integration of Islamic financial services in tourism. Additionally, the role of technology became more pronounced, with the advent of halal travel apps, online booking platforms, and artificial intelligence-driven travel services. The acknowledgement of Muslim travellers as a discrete and valuable consumer demographic has prompted governments, businesses, and international or-

organisations to allocate resources towards the development of necessary infrastructure, ensuring that the industry is well-positioned for further expansion in the 2020s and beyond. By the close of the 2010s, halal tourism had become one of the fastest-growing sectors in the global travel industry, contributing significantly to the economies of Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries alike. In 2019, the global Muslim travel market was valued at \$220 billion, with projections estimating growth to \$300 billion by 2026 (Mastercard-CrescentRating GMTI Report 2019).

3.1. Institutionalization of Halal Tourism

The 2010s witnessed a marked increase in the formalisation of halal tourism, as international organisations and governmental bodies established guidelines and certifications to standardise Muslim-friendly travel experiences. In this context, several global and regional tourism boards developed strategies to attract Muslim travellers, who accounted for 10% of global tourism spending in 2016, amounting to approximately \$155 billion.

In response, governments and private institutions have introduced halal certification programs for various sectors, including hotels, resorts, and restaurants, to ensure compliance with Islamic dietary and hospitality standards. Leading countries in this regard include Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and the UAE, which have established comprehensive certification processes, thereby setting a benchmark for other nations to follow. Certification agencies, such as the Halal Industry Development Corporation (HDC) in Malaysia and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), have played a crucial role in regulating and endorsing halal-friendly accommodations.

Malaysia, for instance, has been recognized as the leading halal tourism destination, with the Muslim travel market contributing significantly to its economy. In 2019, Malaysia welcomed 5.2 million Muslim tourists, generating approximately \$3 billion in revenue. This success is supported by Malaysia's robust halal certification system, widespread availability of halal food, and numerous hotels and resorts that cater specifically to Muslim tourists. Indonesia, with its rich Islamic heritage, also attracts millions of Muslim travelers annually. In 2019, the country welcomed over 3.6 million Muslim tourists, contributing significantly to its tourism revenue and supporting its goal of becoming the world's top halal tourism destination by 2024. The Indonesian government has been actively promoting halal tourism, with destinations like Lombok and Aceh being marketed as prime halal-friendly spots, complete with certified halal food outlets, prayer

facilities, and gender-segregated recreational areas. Turkey, renowned for its historical and cultural attractions, has seen a steady increase in Muslim visitors. Istanbul, a major tourism hub, attracts over 10 million tourists annually, a significant portion of whom are Muslim. Turkey's appeal lies in its rich Islamic history, from the grandeur of the Hagia Sophia to the bustling Grand Bazaar, which provides a culturally immersive experience for Muslim travelers. The country's strategic investment in halal-friendly services, such as halal-certified restaurants and accommodations, as well as facilities for prayer, has further cemented its status as a key destination for Muslim tourists. According to the State of the Global Islamic Economy Report 2020/21, Turkey's revenue from halal tourism is substantial, reflecting the growing demand and economic potential of this market segment. The UAE, particularly Dubai, has positioned itself as a luxury halal tourism hub with world-class facilities and services.

These countries' efforts in enhancing their halal tourism infrastructure have not only boosted their economies but also set benchmarks for other destinations aiming to attract Muslim travelers. The continued growth of halal tourism in these nations underscores the importance of catering to the specific needs of Muslim tourists, which, in turn, promotes cultural understanding and inclusivity in the global travel industry. By providing an environment that respects and supports their religious and cultural practices, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey are not only drawing more visitors but also fostering a more inclusive and respectful global tourism landscape.

Among non-muslim majority countries, Japan has seen a notable increase in Muslim tourists, particularly from Malaysia and Indonesia, and has responded by increasing the number of halal restaurants and prayer facilities in key tourist areas. For example, the number of halal-certified restaurants in Japan has grown by 20% annually since 2015. This growth is complemented by initiatives such as the Japan Halal Association, which provides certification and promotes halal tourism. Similarly, South Korea's efforts to become a more halal-friendly destination have included the establishment of the Korea Muslim Federation, which works to expand halal certification and promote Muslim-friendly services. South Korea saw an 18% increase in Muslim tourists between 2018 and 2019, highlighting the effectiveness of these initiatives. The Korea Tourism Organization (KTO) has also developed the Halal Restaurant Week to promote halal-certified establishments and increase awareness among both locals and tourists. Thailand, another popular destination, has also increased its halal tourism offerings, with cities like Bangkok and Phuket now home to numerous halal-certified hotels and restaurants. The Thai government, through the Halal Standards Institute of Thailand, has been proactive in certifying halal prod-

ucts and services, ensuring a welcoming environment for Muslim tourists. This trend not only boosts the travel experiences of Muslim tourists but also fosters greater cultural inclusivity and understanding globally. By catering to the unique needs of Muslim travelers, the tourism industry as a whole is becoming more diverse and inclusive, benefiting both travelers and host communities alike.

International tourism organisations, including the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), have acknowledged the significance of the halal tourism industry and encouraged destinations worldwide to cater to this growing market. Major travel expos, such as the World Halal Tourism Summit in Abu Dhabi, have become key platforms for discussing the future of halal tourism.

3.2. Expansion of Muslim-Friendly Travel Agencies and Islamic Financial Services

The demand for travel experiences tailored to the needs of Muslim travellers has seen the emergence of a number of specialised travel agencies. According to the 2019/2020 State of the Global Islamic Economy Report, Muslim expenditure on travel reached \$194 billion in 2018, and is projected to grow further. This growth has been accompanied by the emergence of companies such as HalalBooking, CrescentRating and Rihaala, which provide Muslim travellers with access to halal-certified hotels, restaurants and leisure activities. In the 2010s, there was an expansion in the provision of travel packages that were customised to meet the needs of Muslim travellers. These packages included Islamic heritage tours, halal culinary experiences, and alcohol-free resort stays that were suitable for families. Islamic financial services also expanded into the travel industry, ensuring that Muslim travellers could plan their trips in a shariah-compliant manner. Islamic finance principles were applied to travel insurance (takaful), ensuring that coverage was free from interest (riba) and unethical investments. The 2010s also saw the emergence of Islamic travel insurance providers such as Salama Islamic Arab Insurance and Takaful Malaysia, which introduced policies specifically tailored to Muslim travellers. Furthermore, financial technology (fintech) companies developed halal payment platforms to facilitate seamless and interest-free travel transactions, while banks in Muslim-majority countries introduced Islamic credit cards with travel benefits tailored to halal tourism.

3.3. Technology in Halal Tourism Growth

The digitalisation of travel has played a significant role in the expansion of halal tourism, thereby facilitating the discovery of halal-certified accommodations, prayer-friendly destinations, and shariah-compliant services by Muslim

travellers. The development of numerous halal travel applications and online booking platforms has further contributed to this growth. Mobile applications such as HalalTrip, Muslim Pro, and Have Halal, Will Travel have become popular for locating halal restaurants, mosques, and prayer rooms. The development of halal-friendly hotel booking platforms, such as HalalBooking and Muslim-friendly Airbnb alternatives, has further facilitated the search for halal-compliant accommodations, offering Muslim travellers bespoke search filters. The integration of AI-driven algorithms has enabled travel agencies to personalise halal travel experiences, taking into account factors such as prayer times, halal dining preferences, and family-friendly activities. Big data analytics has enabled companies to analyse Muslim traveller behaviour and preferences, leading to the development of more targeted marketing strategies.

4. 2020s – Digitalization, Sustainability, and Luxury Halal Travel

The 2020s have ushered in a new era of halal tourism, defined by luxury, sustainability, digital innovation, and post-pandemic resilience. Muslim travellers now have access to ultra-luxury halal vacations, eco-conscious tourism, AI-driven travel planning, and safer, contactless experiences. As the industry continues to evolve, destinations and businesses that adapt to these emerging trends will be best positioned to capture the growing halal travel market, which is expected to surpass \$300 billion by 2026.

This decade has witnessed a transformation in the manner in which Muslim-friendly experiences are curated, with a shift towards high-end travel, environmental responsibility, and advanced technological integration. The advent of the Coronavirus disease (Covid-19) pandemic has further accelerated these shifts, precipitating the emergence of contactless travel solutions, personalised AI-driven services, and an increased emphasis on safety and hygiene. As the purchasing power of Muslim travellers continues to grow, demand for luxury halal travel experiences has surged. The global Muslim travel market was valued at \$255 billion in 2023 and is projected to exhibit a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 5%, with affluent Muslim travellers propelling demand for high-end, exclusive vacation options (UnivDatos Market Insights). Luxury halal-friendly beach resorts in destinations such as the Maldives, Seychelles, and Dubai offer private infinity pools, alcohol-free minibars, and on-demand halal gourmet dining. Exclusive private villas cater to Muslim families and honeymooners, ensuring seclusion, women-only pool areas, and 24/7 prayer facilities. Brands such as Anantara Hotels & Resorts and Banyan Tree Hotels have adapted their services to cater to Muslim guests, including halal-certified in-

room dining and dedicated prayer spaces.

The concept of halal luxury cruises has gained traction, with companies offering gender-segregated spa and pool facilities, onboard prayer rooms, and halal dining options. Turkey, Indonesia, and the UAE have pioneered these cruises, catering to high-net-worth Muslim travellers. Personalised Islamic heritage tours in Spain, Morocco, and Uzbekistan offer luxury accommodations and private guided tours of historic Islamic landmarks. Adventure-focused halal safari experiences in South Africa and Kenya have emerged as a niche offering for affluent Muslim travellers seeking both adventure and halal compliance. The intersection of sustainability and halal tourism has emerged as a significant trend in the 2020s, with Muslim travellers increasingly seeking ethical and environmentally responsible experiences. Islamic principles encourage eco-conscious travel, aligning with the broader global trend toward sustainable tourism.

Destinations such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Turkey have pioneered eco-lodges and nature retreats that adhere to halal principles while prioritising environmental sustainability. Solar-powered resorts, zero-waste hospitality, and organic halal-certified farm-to-table dining have become integral to Muslim-friendly eco-tourism. Muslim travellers are increasingly opting for wildlife sanctuaries and nature reserves that avoid exploitative animal tourism. Destinations such as Costa Rica, New Zealand, and Thailand have been proactive in offering eco-friendly excursions tailored to Muslim travellers, including halal food provisions and prayer accommodations.

The Hajj and Umrah industry has introduced sustainable pilgrimage programmes, including the use of recyclable ihram garments, carbon-neutral transportation, and water conservation measures. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 includes sustainability efforts within its religious tourism sector, with a view to reducing plastic waste and promoting eco-conscious accommodations in Makkah and Madinah.

Technological advancements have revolutionised halal tourism in the 2020s, with AI-driven applications, smart prayer alerts, and immersive AR/VR travel experiences enhancing the convenience of Muslim travellers. Smart halal travel assistants use AI-powered recommendations to curate personalised itineraries based on prayer times, halal dining, and Muslim-friendly attractions. Platforms such as HalalBooking and Tripfez integrate machine learning to match travellers with tailored halal travel experiences. Applications such as Muslim Pro and HalalTrip offer real-time Qibla directions, prayer time alerts, and AI-powered local mosque locators. AI-driven virtual assistants provide instant halal restaurant recommendations based on user preferences and location. Virtual reality (VR) has enabled Muslim travellers to explore destinations before booking, en-

sureing their chosen locations offer halal-friendly amenities. Augmented reality (AR)-assisted tour guides provide Islamic heritage insights in destinations like Andalusia, Istanbul, and Samarkand.

Secure, interest-free blockchain transactions cater to Muslim travellers seeking shariah-compliant payment solutions, whilst crypto-based halal travel cards ensure seamless transactions in Muslim-friendly destinations.

The advent of the novel Coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic had a profound impact on the realm of halal tourism, precipitating a swift acceleration in the adoption of digital solutions and a concomitant prioritisation of health-conscious travel. Muslim travellers have become more selective, opting for contactless experiences, hygiene-focused accommodations, and remote-friendly travel solutions. QR-code-based halal restaurant menus have replaced traditional menus in hotels, airports, and fine-dining establishments. Moreover, the advent of AI-powered halal food delivery apps has facilitated real-time verification of ingredients and the provision of prayer-friendly restaurant filters. In response to these developments, major hospitality brands, including Hilton, Accor, and Rotana, have initiated contactless check-in/out services, digital room keys, and AI-driven concierge services tailored for Muslim guests. Hotels have also introduced hygienic prayer spaces, individual prayer mats, and sanitized ablution areas as part of their post-pandemic safety protocols.

The emergence of “halal digital nomads” has given rise to an increase in Muslim-friendly co-working spaces, shariah-compliant work retreats, and long-term halal accommodation solutions in destinations such as Bali, Dubai, and Malaysia. The pandemic has also catalysed growth in halal-friendly wellness tourism, with travellers seeking alcohol-free spa retreats, women-only wellness centres, and nature-focused mental health retreats.

5. Future Outlook – Global Expansion and Diversification of Halal Tourism

The global halal tourism market is on a trajectory of unprecedented growth and diversification, with projections estimating its value at \$300 billion by 2030⁴. As international awareness of Muslim travelers’ needs increases, both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries are expanding their halal tourism infrastructure. The next decade will likely be defined by advanced AI-driven personalization and wider geographic inclusivity, tailored to Muslim travelers.

In the contemporary context of growing demand for halal-friendly experiences, there is an observable trend of non-Muslim-majority destinations

4 Mastercard-CrescentRating GMTI (2023).

adapting their tourism offerings to attract Muslim travellers. This adaptation is evidenced by the development of halal infrastructure in countries such as the UK, Germany, Spain, Australia, South Korea, and Japan, which recognise the significant economic benefits of catering to this market.

In Europe, the United Kingdom, for example, has seen a substantial increase in halal restaurants, prayer facilities, and hotels that cater to Muslim guests, particularly in cities like London, Birmingham, and Manchester. London alone boasts over 1,200 halal restaurants, reflecting the city's commitment to accommodating Muslim travelers. France, with its significant Muslim population, is also enhancing its tourism infrastructure to appeal to Muslim travelers by providing halal food options and prayer spaces in popular tourist areas such as Paris and the French Riviera. Paris has more than 500 halal dining establishments, and the city has integrated prayer rooms in major tourist attractions to make it more convenient for Muslim visitors. Germany and Spain are not far behind, with both countries increasingly promoting their halal-friendly services to attract visitors from the Middle East and North Africa. Germany has seen a rise in halal-certified hotels, with cities like Berlin and Munich leading the charge. Spain, particularly in regions like Andalusia, has capitalized on its Islamic heritage where cities like Granada, Seville, and Córdoba are reviving their Moorish cultural legacy. By promoting historical sites such as the Alhambra and the Great Mosque of Córdoba, make it a top destination for Muslim tourists. The rise in halal tourism in Europe is also driven by strategic marketing and collaboration with Muslim-majority countries. European tourism boards and agencies are actively participating in halal travel fairs and exhibitions to showcase their offerings and attract a larger share of the Muslim travel market. For instance, Spain has launched initiatives to promote Andalusia's rich Islamic heritage, drawing Muslim tourists interested in exploring historical sites and cultural landmarks. Germany has focused on enhancing its appeal to Muslim travelers by highlighting its halal-certified dining options and ensuring that major cities are equipped with mosques and prayer facilities.

In the Asia-Pacific region, Japan and South Korea have been integrating halal services, including prayer spaces at major airports, halal-certified dining options, and Muslim-friendly travel guides. Australia has expanded its Muslim-friendly tourism sector, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne, by promoting halal food precincts, prayer accommodations, and Islamic history tours.

The Americas are adapting to halal travel needs, with the United States and Canada experiencing a rise in halal-conscious travel services, particularly in New York, Toronto, and Los Angeles, where Muslim communities are growing. Brazil

and Argentina are promoting halal tourism in connection with Islamic heritage and nature-based experiences, such as eco-friendly rainforest retreats.

The second point regards the AI-Driven Personalized Travel Planning for Halal Tourists. The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has precipitated a paradigm shift in the realm of halal tourism, endowing Muslim travellers with highly personalised and seamless experiences. AI-driven chatbots, operational on platforms such as HalalBooking, HalalTrip, and Tripfez, facilitate the identification of halal-compliant accommodations, proximate mosques, and dining establishments that adhere to Islamic dietary laws. These intelligent virtual assistants meticulously analyse user preferences and historical bookings, thereby ensuring real-time itinerary optimisation and a stress-free journey for the traveller. Furthermore, AI-powered virtual concierge services in hotels and airlines enhance convenience by addressing halal-related inquiries, arranging private accommodations, and even offering automated adhan alerts and Qibla direction guidance. The integration of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) further empowers Muslim travellers by allowing them to explore destinations before booking, verify halal facilities, prayer spaces, and gender-segregated amenities in advance. Virtual heritage tours of Islamic landmarks in cities such as Mecca, Istanbul, and Granada are a further example of the transformative impact of AI on the travel experience of Muslim travellers. Finally, The future of halal tourism is increasingly shaped by mainstream travel companies embracing halal-conscious services and promoting greater inclusivity. Major hotel chains like Hilton, Marriott, and Accor are incorporating Muslim-friendly amenities such as alcohol-free minibars, Qibla indicators, and prayer mats, making global travel more accommodating for Muslim travellers. Furthermore, cruise operators such as Royal Caribbean and MSC Cruises are adapting their services to include halal dining options and prayer facilities on board. Furthermore, the rise of Muslim travel influencers and content creators is transforming the manner in which destinations market themselves, with global tourism boards collaborating with Muslim bloggers and YouTubers to highlight inclusive travel experiences. Beyond the hospitality sector, interfaith tourism is gaining traction in destinations like Bosnia, Jordan, and Egypt, where Islamic, Christian, and Jewish heritage sites coexist, offering deeper cultural engagement. Examples of this include Andalusia's Islamic-Spanish revival, Jerusalem's Islamic landmarks, and Morocco's Jewish-Muslim historical tours, which are drawing travellers eager to explore shared histories. As halal tourism expands, these developments signal a future where Muslim-friendly travel is seamlessly integrated into the global tourism industry.

6. Conclusion. The Future of Halal Tourism :a Dynamic and Inclusive Industry

Halal tourism has undergone a significant metamorphosis, transitioning from a religiously motivated practice centred predominantly on pilgrimage travel to a multifaceted, billion-dollar global industry encompassing luxury, digital innovation, sustainability, and cultural heritage. Once confined to Muslim-majority countries, the halal tourism sector is now a major player in shaping the global travel landscape, with destinations across Europe, Asia, the Americas, and even the space industry adapting to accommodate Muslim travellers.

The next decade will be defined by technological advancements, increased sustainability efforts, and greater inclusivity in global travel offerings. As AI-driven travel platforms, virtual reality experiences, and personalised halal tourism services emerge, Muslim travellers will experience unprecedented convenience and customisation. At the same time, the growing emphasis on eco-tourism and responsible travel aligns with Islamic values of environmental stewardship, driving the adoption of green halal tourism initiatives.

The industry's projected value of \$300 billion by 2030 underscores the increasing demand for Muslim-friendly travel experiences, providing significant opportunities for both established and emerging destinations. For countries, businesses, and travel providers, embracing halal tourism is no longer just an option—it is a strategic necessity. Destinations that proactively invest in halal-friendly services, integrate digital innovations, and commit to inclusivity will attract a growing demographic of Muslim travellers and ensure long-term success in the evolving travel landscape. As the industry continues to diversify, the future of halal tourism promises to be more accessible, technologically advanced, and globally integrated than ever before, solidifying its role as a transformative force in the modern travel industry.

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HALAL TOURISM: A BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURE AND SPIRITUALITY

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SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2. Methodology. – 3. Results. – 3.1 Descriptive statistics – 3.2 Source Analysis. – 3.3 Author’s analysis. – 3.4 Analysis of the leading publishing countries. – 3.5 Keywords analysis. – 3.6 Thematic analysis. – 4 Discussion and conclusion. – 4.1 Theoretical implications.– 4.2 Practical implications. – 4.3 Limitations. – 4.4 Future research avenues.

1. Introduction

The global tourism industry has experienced significant growth over the past few decades, positioning itself as a vital component of the worldwide economy. Within this dynamic landscape, specialized forms of tourism have developed to meet the diverse needs of various traveller groups. Among these, Halal tourism — a form of tourism that adheres to Islamic guidelines — has emerged as a rapidly growing niche. Catering primarily to Muslim travellers, Halal tourism ensures their religious and cultural needs are respected, providing services such as Halal food, prayer facilities, and accommodations that observe Islamic practices. This niche tourism sector is gaining increasing recognition in Muslim-majority and non-Muslim countries keen to tap into the expanding Muslim consumer market (Battour & Ismail, 2016).

As the global Muslim population grows in size and economic influence, Halal tourism is increasingly recognized as a lucrative market segment. What makes this form of tourism unique is its ability to seamlessly blend leisure and religious observance, offering Muslim travellers a travel experience that meets both their spiritual and recreational needs.

Beyond the traditional markets of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, countries like Japan, South Korea, and various European nations have also begun to see the value of adapting their tourism services to attract Muslim tourists (El-Gohary, 2016). Despite its evident growth, Halal tourism should be explored in academic research.

A notable gap in the current literature is that most research on Halal tourism has narrowly focused on individual elements such as the industry's economic impact, the availability of Halal food (Secinaro & Calandra, 2021), or specific religious accommodations. These studies often need to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Halal tourism operates across different cultural contexts, especially in non-Muslim-majority countries. In addition, the research lacks a robust theoretical grounding that explores how religious principles, cultural values, and business practices interact within the sector (Han et al., 2019; Suhartanto et al., 2021). There is a pressing need for studies that offer a holistic view of Halal tourism, its evolution, and its broader implications for the global tourism industry.

This study seeks to fill this gap by conducting a bibliometric analysis of the academic literature on Halal tourism from 2010 to 2024. Bibliometric analysis systematically evaluates scholarly output, providing insights into trends, key contributions, and emerging themes within a field. By examining the intellectual structure of Halal tourism research, this study aims to offer a comprehensive overview of its development, identifying key areas of focus and gaps that future research could address (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017; Lanzalonga et al., 2023) Our paper addresses several essential research questions (RQ):

1. What are the major trends and themes in Halal tourism research over the past decade?
2. Which theoretical frameworks have been most influential in shaping the field?
3. What challenges and opportunities do businesses and policymakers face in the context of Halal tourism, particularly in non-Muslim-majority countries?

The remainder of the chapter is structured as follows. The methodology, including the data collection process and bibliometric tools, is discussed in the next section. This is followed by analysing the results and identifying key trends, leading authors, and thematic clusters within Halal tourism research. The discussion then connects these findings to relevant theoretical frameworks and practical implications. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of the main insights and suggestions for future research.

2. Methodology

Among the numerous scientific methodologies for studying a particular subject, bibliometric analysis is one of the critical approaches. Originating in the early 20th century, bibliometrics is a precise science that leverages mathematical and scientific tools to analyse patterns in the distribution of scientific publications.

While researchers have debated bibliometric analysis over the years, it has regained significant relevance in our study, partly due to the availability of citation databases that facilitate easy source retrieval (Caputo et al., 2022). The analysis of scientific studies relies on global databases containing articles that result from the efforts and quest for knowledge of research stakeholders such as researchers and professors (Uluyol et al., 2021).

Different methodologies can be used in the management field to review scientific production. For instance, bibliometric reviews can employ a quantitative approach to evaluate and monitor published research by analyzing data on authors, journals, and countries (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Similarly, as Tranfield et al. (2003) argued, literature reviews help manage the diversity of knowledge by mapping and assessing the existing body of research, typically qualitatively (Calandra et al., 2024; Cappellesso & Thomé, 2019).

In this context, although the subject of religion has attracted the interest of researchers and professionals (El-Gohary, 2016) regardless of the importance of religious studies, religious tourism is still very much under-represented in the literature. In fact, it is distressing to find that little is known about religious tourism in many developed and developing economies. Meanwhile, Islamic tourism (or Halal tourism, the field of halal tourism remains underexplored, especially from a service-oriented perspective in non-Muslim countries. Studies have focused on the implications of Sharia in the tourism and hospitality sectors and the principles and teachings of Islam that must be adopted in the industry's various components (Battour & Ismail, 2016). Additionally, several studies highlight the relationship between the halal hospitality sector and halal food.

In this regard, the research aims to extend this area's knowledge stream. This paper applies several fundamental research steps, including study design, data collection, analysis, visualization, and subsequent interpretation (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

One of the first steps in the research design involved the selection of keywords, which, in this case, was driven by the desire to explore the knowledge flow on halal tourism. Subsequently, the author included several critical elements, such as:

- Selection of keywords “Halal” AND “Tourism”;
- Selection of the database “Scopus”;
- Limiting the search to peer-reviewed journal articles;
- Focusing on the areas of “Business, Management and Accounting,”;
- Limiting the sources to English language publications.

The following search string was used:

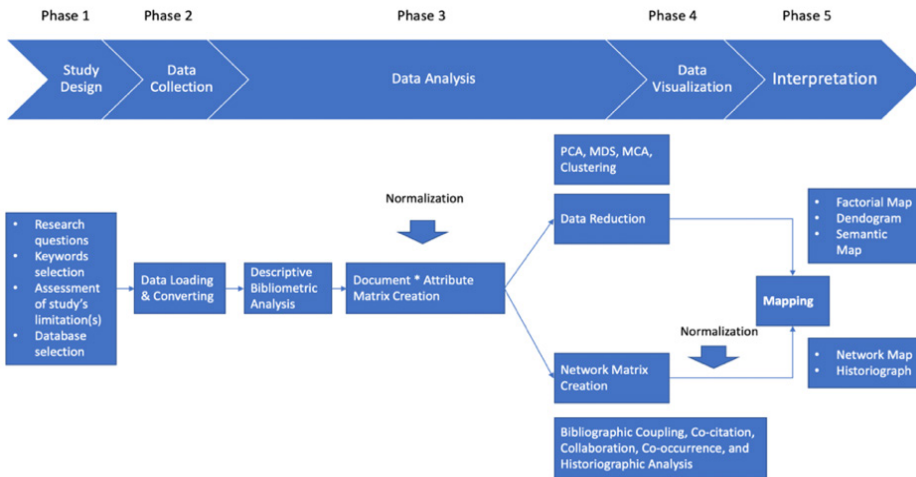
TITLE-ABS-KEY (“Halal tourism”) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, “BUSI”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , “ar”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, “English”)) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE , “j”)).

The research continued with a search in the Scopus database, with the bibliographic data downloaded in .bib format. The data were then analyzed using the “bibliometrix” code in R-Studio software, enabling precise analysis of the quantitative research variables (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

Figure 1 illustrates the research process followed in the study.

Figure 1. Research design.

Source: Adapted from Aria & Cuccurullo (2017)



3. Results

As mentioned earlier, bibliometric analysis allows for the immediate visualization of the most essential variables in a research flow. In this study, we have analyzed 154 peer-reviewed articles published between 2010 and 2022. The following subsections provide a comprehensive overview of the key findings from the bibliometric analysis, thematic mapping, and network visualization of Halal tourism research.

3.1. Descriptive statistics

Figure 2 and Table 1 present the key descriptive statistics for the analyzed documents. Over the 14 years (2010–2024), 177 papers were published across 61 scientific journals involving 495 unique authors. The average number of citations per document is 21.45, indicating that the field of halal tourism is gaining increasing attention from the academic community. The international co-authorship rate is 35.03%, highlighting the global collaborative nature of research in this area.

The analysis also reveals that the first significant academic contribution in this field was made in 2010, which can be considered the starting point for scientific research on Halal tourism. Since then, the field has shown an average annual growth rate of 32.77%, with a noticeable increase in publications from 2017 onwards.

Figure 2. Descriptive information.
Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix



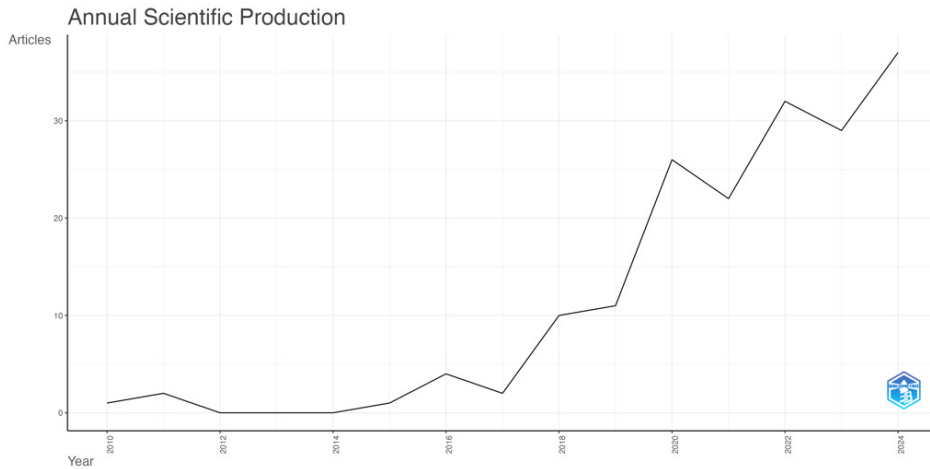
Table 1. Main information.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Documents	177
Sources	61
Keywords	527
Years	2010-2024
Average citations per document	21,45
Number of authors	495
Authors of single-author documents	22
Co-authors per document	3,49
International co-authorships %	35,03%

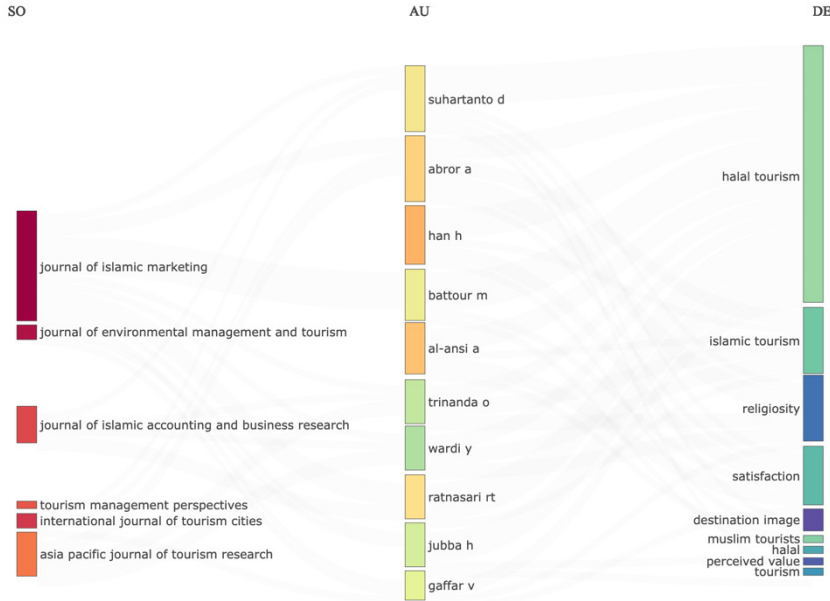
Figure 3 illustrates the growth of scientific publications in Halal tourism. The number of publications has risen steadily since 2018, peaking in 2020, with over 10 articles published that year. This surge in interest is likely linked to the increasing spending power of the global Muslim population and the growing interest in accommodating Halal requirements in the tourism sector. The 2020 peak can also be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic, where researchers may have had more opportunities to focus on academic contributions while travel was restricted (Giacomini et al., 2021). The significant increase in 2022 reflects the efforts of researchers to explore various dimensions of Halal tourism, even as traditional tourism industries were affected by the global pandemic. This suggests that Halal tourism is a promising and resilient segment within the more significant tourism industry.

Figure 3. Scientific production per year.
Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix



By analyzing Figure 4, we can easily visualize the most critical bibliometric variables: on the left, the names of the leading scientific journals that published the articles; in the centre, the most frequent and relevant authors; and on the right, the keywords most commonly used by the authors in their titles and abstracts. As can be seen, the *Journal of Islamic Marketing* stands out as a cornerstone in research on halal tourism (Harahsheh et al., 2020). Among the most prominent authors are Suhartanto D., and Abror A., each with more than six publications in this field. In addition to the search string, other significant keywords include factors such as the satisfaction of Muslim travellers abroad and the need to find religious facilities. Furthermore, as shown at the bottom right of the figure, the literature frequently explores the role of trust for Muslim travellers when away from home and their satisfaction during and after their trips.

Figure 4. Three-field diagram.
 Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix



3.2. Source analysis

Table 2 and Figure 5 show the benchmark journals for any researcher who would like to approach the topic for the first time or who, following a study, would like to make a scientific publication in this field. What is interesting in this context is that, although the first source is an international journal entirely dedicated to Islamic economics and marketing, numerous publications have also been accepted by non-typically Islamic international journals (Ainin et al., 2020). Therefore, this is also a sign of interest and curiosity on the part of non-traditionally Islamic journals.

Table 2. Relevant sources.

Source: Authors' elaboration

Journal of Islamic Marketing	47
Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism	14
International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage	10
International Journal of Tourism Cities	6
Journal of Islamic Accounting and Business Research	5
Tourism Management Perspectives	5
African Journal of hospitality, tourism and leisure	4
Journal of hospitality and tourism insights	4
Tourism and hospitality research	4

Figure 5. Source growth.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

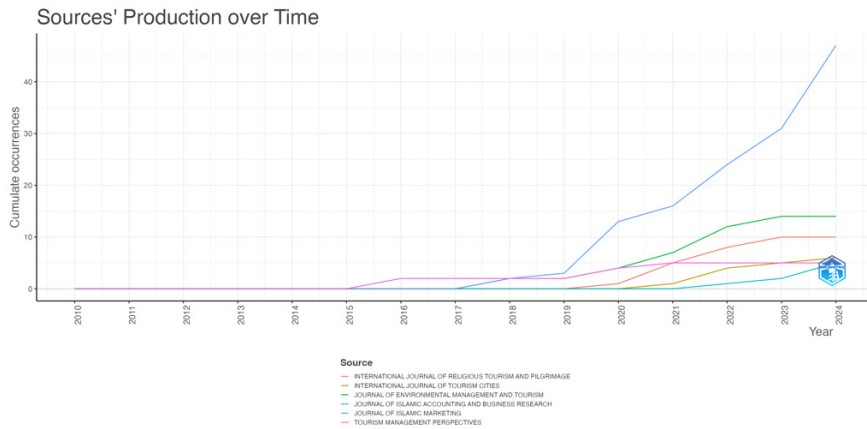


Table 3 shows the scientific sources most cited by researchers worldwide. The most-cited source is *Tourism Management*, a journal not exclusively concerned with Islamic economics, followed by *Tourism Management Perspectives* and the *Journal of Islamic Marketing*.

Table 3. Most Cited Sources.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Journal of Islamic Marketing	975
Tourism Management Perspectives	342
Tourism Management	326
Journal of Destination Marketing and Management	306
Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research	265
Tourism Analysis	162
Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing	136
Tourism Review	123
Tourism Recreation Research	98
Current Issues in Tourism	92

3.3. Author's analysis

Table 4 shows the most relevant authors by number of articles written. Han H. is the author with the highest number of scientific articles. His research interests include the impact of Halal-friendly services on non-Halal establishments and analyses of the concept of fair pricing and travel confidence in Muslims. He is followed in terms of some articles by Al-Ansi A. with contributions investigating the motivations for halal travel and the search for halal food during the travel period. Finally, Abror A. has made several scholarly contributions, focusing on the halal medical tourism sector and analysing the characterization factors of halal hospitals.

Table 4. Most relevant authors by the number of articles written.

Sources: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Han H	8
Al Ansi A	7
Abror A	6
Ratnasari Rt.	6
Suhartanto D.	6
Battour M	5
Gaffar V	4
Jubba H	4
Trinanda O	4
Wardi Y	4

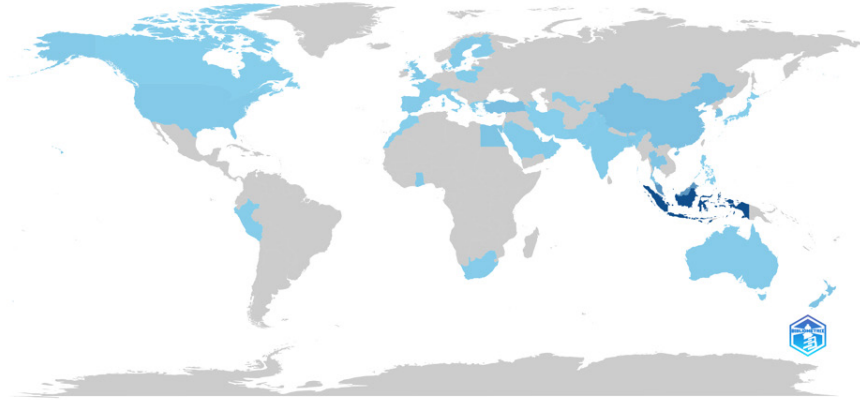
3.4. Analysis of the leading publishing countries

Looking at the countries, Figure 6 and Table 5 show the scientific interest in this field. As can be seen, the interest is far from being exclusively in countries with a typically Muslim tradition. Indeed, while it is true that the majority of authors are based in countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Turkey (Akram, 2010), the remainder of the published articles come from countries such as China, South Korea, Egypt, New Zealand, in the European area, Spain and Italy and, finally, the United States (US). This further confirms the interest in the field by researchers from institutions in more Western countries with a secular culture.

Figure 6. Scientific production of world countries.

Source: Authors' elaboration

Country Scientific Production

**Table 5.** Scientific production of world countries.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Indonesia	161
Malaysia	68
Turkey	17
China	16
South Korea	14
Egypt	12
New Zealand	11
Thailand	11
Bangladesh	10
United Arab Emirates	7

Let us now analyze the most influential articles and their significance for the broader domain of halal tourism, incorporating insights from recent research (Table 6). Among the most cited works, foundational studies, such as those by Al-Ansi and Han (2019), explored the interplay between halal-friendly performances, satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, particularly in non-Muslim contexts. Integrating the findings of Han et al. (2019), the domain has expanded to analyze specific regional applications, like South Korea's initiatives to attract Muslim travellers. Han et al. (2019) identified five key attributes shaping a halal-friendly destination image: food, facilities, local interactions, social environment, and services, emphasizing how this impacts destination loyalty. Battour (2010) is a fundamental book that laid the groundwork for this field by exploring halal tourism's essential principles and potential as medical halal tourism.

While these articles provide critical insights, they also highlight that the domain remains nascent, with significant opportunities for further exploration. The predominance of studies focusing on fundamental attributes rather than interdisciplinary links suggests a need for deeper investigations into intersections like digital transformation, sustainability, and cross-cultural adaptation in halal tourism. This emerging field's limited scope, coupled with its high potential for academic and practical contributions, positions it as fertile ground for future research and innovation. Halal tourism's growth trajectory points to untapped areas that could yield novel insights into the interplay of religion, culture, and global economic dynamics.

Table 6. Top cited papers.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix

Authors, Year, Journal and Citation	Total citations (TC)	TC per year
Al-Ansi A, 2019, Journal of Destination Marketing & Management (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019).	221	36,83
Han H, 2019, Tourism Management (Han et al., 2019a)	203	33,83
Battour MM, 2010, Tourism Analysis (Yousaf & Xiu-cheng, 2018)	146	9,73

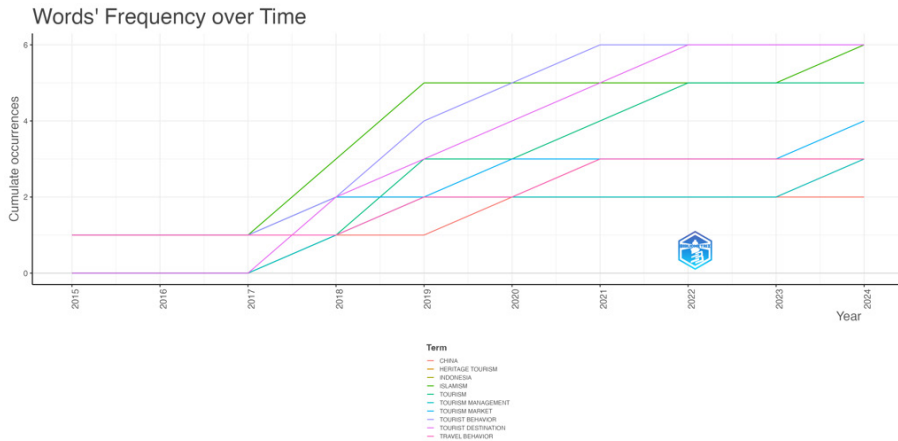
Yousaf S, 2018, <i>Tourism Management</i> (Yousaf & Xiu-cheng, 2018)	123	17,57
Wardi Y, 2018, <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i> (Wardi et al., 2018) this concept is still not well known; thus, it needs to be developed in certain areas. The research was conducted to see the link between the attributes of Halal tourism (i.e. Islamic facility, Halalness, general Islamic morality, and alcohol drinks- and gambling-free	116	16,57
Oktadiana H, 2016, <i>Tourism Management Perspectives</i> (Oktadiana et al., 2016a)	102	11,33
Rahman M, 2020, <i>Tourism Review</i> (Rahman et al., 2020)	97	19,40
Razzaq S, 2016, <i>Tourism Management Perspectives</i> (Razzaq et al., 2016)	93	10,33
Abror A, 2019, <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research</i> (Abror et al., 2019)	92	15,33
Isa SM, 2018, <i>Journal of Islamic Marketing</i> (Isa et al., 2018) The partial least square structural equation modelling uses SMART-PLS for 170 Muslim tourists and uses a positive research approach with a quantitative basis of enquiry. Six variables of Muslim tourist perceived value, such as price, social, emotion and quality, and Halal physical and nonphysical attributes are examined. In addition, this study also examines the mediating effect of destination experience in Malaysia's environment (i.e. infrastructure, atmosphere and culture	83	11,86

3.5. Keywords analysis

Figure 7 shows the cumulative frequency of the keywords used over time and their trend from Loess' regression analysis (Jacoby, 2000)2000. Among the most relevant topics when selecting halal tourist destinations is the presence or absence of companies active in the same sector.

Figure 7. Keywords growth.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix



3.6. Thematic analysis

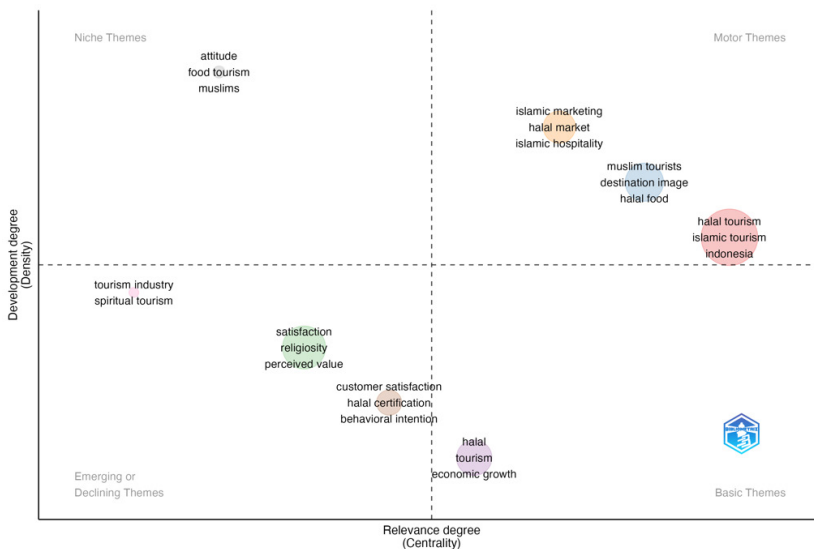
Figure 8 shows the evolution of research topics according to the density of discussions (Development degree) and their centrality (Relevance degree) (Noyons, 2001). The quadrant analysis reveals significant insights into the structure of the field.

The top-right quadrant, representing motor themes, highlights well-developed and highly central topics such as Islamic marketing, the halal market, Islamic hospitality, and essential elements like Muslim tourists, destination image, and halal food. These themes are pivotal to the field, as well as both theoretical and practical cornerstones that drive research and industry applications. The top-left quadrant, representing niche themes, features areas with high density but lower centrality, such as attitude, food tourism, and Muslims. While specialized and thoroughly investigated, these topics need more integration into broader discussions and connections with more central themes in the field. In contrast, the bottom-left quadrant identifies emerging or declining themes with low centrality and density, such as the tourism industry and spiritual tourism. These areas may represent either underexplored opportunities or aspects of halal tourism that need to be more prominent within the research landscape. The bottom-right quadrant houses basic themes, which

exhibit high centrality but low density, indicating foundational yet underdeveloped areas. Key topics include halal tourism, economic growth, certification, customer satisfaction, and behavioral intention. These foundational themes are crucial as they connect various subfields and provide the structural basis for future research and industry development. However, their relatively low density suggests a need for more in-depth exploration and detailed studies to realize their full potential. Overall, the thematic map underscores a dual opportunity: refining motor themes to consolidate the core strengths of the field further while expanding and integrating emerging and foundational areas to promote a holistic understanding of halal tourism. The emphasis on themes such as destination image, halal food, and the economic implications of halal tourism reflects the current priorities of academia and industry, while the presence of underdeveloped topics like spiritual tourism and halal certification points to untapped potential for future research and innovation.

Figure 8. Thematic map.

Source: Authors' elaboration using Bibliometrix



In addition, Figure 9 identifies the factorial analysis of the most relevant topics and the ramifications created by them. This representation is widely used in the literature due to its graphical synthesising capacity, which joins the keywords most used by authors in the titles and abstracts of articles (Aria & Cuc-

curullo, 2017; Secundo et al., 2010). This allows us to identify the literature’s focus on critical concepts. The graph will enable us to identify three relevant research nodes, one dedicated to trust and loyalty.

The green cluster focuses on Islamic marketing, hospitality, and the halal market, representing the theoretical foundation of halal tourism research. These areas establish the broader conceptual framework and strategies for engaging with Muslim travellers, highlighting the role of marketing in fostering cultural connections and branding destinations as halal-friendly.

The red cluster emphasizes destination image, satisfaction, and perceived value, underscoring the consumer experience within halal tourism. This cluster highlights how the perceived value of halal-friendly destinations significantly influences satisfaction and behavioral outcomes like trust and loyalty. The findings align with studies demonstrating the role of halal-friendly services in shaping positive tourist perceptions, particularly in non-Muslim countries such as South Korea (Han et al., 2019a) and Indonesia (Suhartanto et al., 2021).

Another distinct segment reflects loyalty and trust, further validating their foundational role in retaining customers and enhancing the competitiveness of halal destinations. These themes are pivotal for ensuring halal tourism continues aligning with religious principles and evolving market demands.

Figure 9. Factorial analysis.

Source: Authors’ elaboration using Bibliometrix



change, which shows that the entrepreneurial energies of society are generated and exogenously provided (Lestition, 2000). It is precisely in this area that corporate efforts concern compatibility with religious beliefs and that products and services must be managed by sharia (Islamic law). Finally, as discovered by (Rharma, 2022), halal tourism has unique characteristics compared to other types of mass tourism. Halal tourism shows unlikely similarities with non-mass tourism. It tends to be traditional mass tourism, especially from the point of view of the type of activities, interactions with the environment and local communities, and core values with different meanings according to geographical areas and countries.

Sustainability of Halal Tourism businesses

A more recent strand of publications analyses the sustainable actions of tourism companies towards halal travellers (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2020). In this sense, the international debate concerning “Corporate Social Responsibility” regarding ethical values and stakeholders also includes and captures pioneering aspects of the theory that comes into practice through the needs expressed by travellers (Leopizzi et al., 2016). This includes both direct and indirect actions.

Within direct actions, it is possible to think of the issue of non-financial disclosure that companies providing halal tourism services can diffuse (Corsi & Arru, 2021). As Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral (2020) indicated, the young customer segment promotes sustainable actions by tourism companies by reiterating the theme of external stakeholders’ participation in internal change (Gherardi et al., 2021). Finally, with indirect actions, the opportunity to apply sustainable management models based on the circular economy emerges (Salvioni & Almici, 2020), which could attract a tourist segment of young Muslims. This might require intensive learning efforts and institutional work towards sustainable business models.

Tourism and travel behaviour when choosing a destination

Among the most recurring themes of international authors is the placement of this topic within the subcategory of religious tourism. On this assumption, numerous contributions explore the characteristics tourists seek within a halal-friendly destination and the typicalities that Muslim travellers hinge on. For example, Oktadiana et al. (2016) their study attempts to identify the needs of Muslim travellers based on the norms of culture, verbal and non-verbal communication traditions, and do-mines of relationships passed down from generation to generation. Other contributions include Battour et al. (2021) outlining

essential services for Muslim travellers, such as performing daily prayers and finding halal food when needed. The results related to the booking period are attractive, but it can take a very long time to identify all necessary services.

Research on halal consumer behaviour is also a beacon for companies wishing to offer an appropriate service. Primary contributions investigate tourists' perceptions, especially in countries such as Indonesia and South Korea, and identify the role of education and image that a halal tourist destination can offer in changing behavioural intentions (Han et al., 2019b).

4. Discussion and conclusion

The primary objective of this study was to conduct a comprehensive bibliometric analysis of Halal tourism literature from 2010 to 2024. The analysis revealed several significant trends and themes in this growing field. Over the 14 years, 177 peer-reviewed articles were published across 61 journals, with 495 unique authors contributing to the field. The number of publications has surged since 2015, reaching its peak in 2020, likely influenced by the increased focus on the global Muslim market and the COVID-19 pandemic, during which research activity accelerated. Moreover, the international collaboration rate of 35,03% highlights the worldwide interest and cooperation in Halal tourism research.

Key journals such as the *Journal of Islamic Marketing* and the *Journal of Environmental Management and Tourism* emerged as leaders in the field. At the same time, prolific authors like Han H., Al Ansi A., and Abror A. have made significant contributions. The keywords and thematic clusters analysis showed that topics related to tourism destinations, customer satisfaction, and religious facilities have been central to the field, with emerging themes like cultural heritage, sustainability, and consumption behaviour.

4.1. Theoretical implications

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the field of Halal tourism, building on existing frameworks and offering new insights. First, this research aligns with Weber's theory of social change (Lestition, 2000), which emphasizes the role of religious and cultural values in shaping economic and entrepreneurial activities. By analyzing the rise of Halal tourism, the study extends Weber's theory by demonstrating how Islamic principles directly influence consumer behaviour and business strategies in the tourism industry. Halal tourism represents an intersection of religious obligations and consumer desires, compels businesses to innovate while maintaining compliance with Sha-

riah principles. This reinforces the importance of religion in guiding economic choices, especially in the context of emerging markets, which often diverge from purely secular motivations.

Second, this study advances the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991)1985, Ajzen, 1987 by providing empirical insights into how subjective norms and perceived behavioural control influence Muslim travellers' choices. The theory suggests that individuals' behaviour is guided by their attitudes, subjective norms (what others expect them to do), and perceived control over their behaviour. In the context of Halal tourism, Muslim travellers are influenced by their religious and cultural beliefs (subjective norms), which drive them to seek Halal-certified services. This finding aligns with research by (Battour & Ismail, 2016), which showed that adherence to religious principles significantly affects Muslim tourists' decision-making processes.

Third, the consumer decision-making theory (Engel et al., 1968) is expanded in the context of Halal tourism. Specifically, this study reveals how religious beliefs are an additional filter in consumer decision-making, particularly in information search and evaluating alternatives. The availability of Halal services and Sharia-compliant facilities influences Muslim travellers' decisions to visit specific destinations. This suggests that traditional models of consumer behaviour need to incorporate religious variables when applied to sectors like Halal tourism, as shown by El-Gohary (2016) regardless of the importance of religious studies, religious tourism is still very much under-represented in the literature. In fact, it is distressing to find that little is known about religious tourism in many developed and developing economies. Meanwhile, Islamic tourism (or Halal tourism who explored how religion affects consumer choices in Halal-friendly services.

4.2. Practical implications

From a practical perspective, this study provides actionable insights for tourism stakeholders, policymakers, and businesses. The results show that the global Muslim population is a lucrative segment with growing demands for Shariah-compliant services. Tourism operators, especially in non-Muslim-majority countries, can use these insights to customize their offerings and expand their market share by incorporating Halal-friendly services such as Halal food, prayer facilities, and culturally sensitive activities. This demand for Halal-compliant services also underscores the importance of partnering with Halal certification bodies, a practice highlighted by Suhartanto et al. (2021), to build trust and

ensure the legitimacy of their offerings (Secinaro et al., 2021).

The study also underscores the role of destination marketing in targeting Muslim travellers. Marketing campaigns can emphasize religious inclusivity and trust-building factors, such as Halal-certified food options, gender-segregated facilities, and proximity to mosques. This is particularly relevant in regions with growing Muslim populations or countries looking to tap into the Halal tourism market, as El-Gohary (2016) noted. Additionally, the study has practical implications for corporate sustainability. As CSR theories increasingly integrate ethical practices, companies in the tourism sector can differentiate themselves by promoting Halal standards as part of their sustainable business models. This is not only a moral obligation but also a strategic move to attract young, ethical consumers, as Vargas-Sánchez & Moral-Moral (2020) described.

4.3. Limitations

Although this study provides a comprehensive analysis, it is essential to acknowledge its limitations. Firstly, the study relies solely on Scopus-indexed articles, which may exclude valuable research published in non-indexed journals or regional publications. This analysis also considers English-language publications, potentially needing more research in Arabic, Malay, or other languages prevalent in Muslim-majority regions.

Secondly, while the bibliometric approach offers a robust quantitative analysis, it needs a qualitative exploration of the depth of theories and content presented in the literature. Future studies should consider conducting systematic literature reviews or in-depth case studies to provide richer insights into the practical implementation of Halal principles in tourism.

4.4. Future research avenues

Given the growing interest in Halal tourism and the findings of this study, there are several promising areas for future exploration. One potential area of inquiry involves cross-cultural studies that could investigate how Halal tourism is interpreted and developed in both Muslim-majority and non-Muslim-majority countries. Such research would provide insights into the cultural adaptations and variations of Halal practices across different tourism markets, shedding light on how these markets cater to Muslim travellers' specific religious and cultural needs. Additionally, future studies could delve into the psychological motivations behind Muslim tourists' preferences for Halal-certified services. By incorporating psychological theories such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs

or Herzberg's motivation theory, researchers could develop a more nuanced understanding of the deeper psychological drivers influencing the decisions of Muslim tourists. This could reveal how religious and ethical considerations interact with other needs, such as comfort, security, and self-actualization, in the context of travel.

The role of digitalization in promoting Halal tourism also presents an important avenue for future research. With the rise of Halal-friendly travel apps and online booking platforms, there is significant potential to explore how technology can enhance and expand Halal tourism services. Studies could examine the impact of digital platforms on the accessibility and visibility of Halal services, as well as how Muslim travellers use these tools to plan and customize their trips.

The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Halal tourism sector also merit further investigation. While this study has briefly addressed the surge in Halal tourism research during the pandemic, future work could focus on the lasting changes in traveller behaviour and priorities in a post-pandemic world. Understanding how Muslim tourists' preferences have evolved in response to health concerns and travel restrictions could inform how the Halal tourism sector adapts and innovates in the years to come.

Lastly, sustainability and Halal tourism offer fertile ground for future studies. As global demand for eco-friendly and ethical tourism grows, researchers could explore how Halal tourism businesses adopt sustainable practices, particularly in circular economy models. Investigating how these businesses balance environmental sustainability with adherence to Halal principles could provide insights into how they can meet the expectations of increasingly conscientious Muslim travellers. Such research could further contribute to the emerging dialogue on ethical and sustainable tourism in religious and secular contexts.

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SUSTAINABLE HALAL HOSPITALITY AND ISLAMIC TOURISM

Giuseppe Baudo

Of the various meanings in which Islamic tourism can be understood, I would like to focus on the discover through experience of the Divine Reality That Created All Things. The travelling on earth is a mixture between the experience of history and the experience of nature: nature and history glorify God the Almighty. The holy Quran states in verse 137 of Surah Al-Imran: "Verily before you there were many stories and traditions. Travel the earth and discover the fate of those who have rejected the Truth."

Travelling on the earth to see the remains of civilizations, to see that they had more riches than you and ended up this not only to be a warning, to not idolize oneself too much, but also to understand how there is a variety of forms with respect to the Creator, of forms through which it is only possible to recognize Him.

We will show them Our signs on the horizon and in themselves until it becomes clear to them that this is the truth... (Quran, Surah Fussilat, XLI 53)

Concerning the historical presence of Islam in Italy which dates back to the early Middle Ages and then continued until 1300 it is usually considered the result of an ambition of conquest and studded with wars.

Between one war and another, between a union and a separation, there are in fact periods of peace.

Five hundred years of uninterrupted presence of Islam in Italy especially in the south, but also for example in Piedmont, there have been long periods of peace that have borne fruit that if they are no longer visible as they are in other parts of Europe, for example in Andalusia, this depends on an osmosis, a stratification and, if you like, a covering, a camouflage, in an alternation of civilizations that, however, have not completely hidden them.

It's not so much an archaeological desire. The desire is to find vitality in a world that in some way has also known Islam. This is where Muslim travelers

and Muslim tourists can really find an interest.¹

Islam, which, as in Jerusalem, does not replace previous traditions nor does it present itself in an exclusive way, making them forget but alternates how God does in manifestation his revelations.

Therefore a tourism interested in the knowledge of the Creator and not only in consumerism it also goes well with the search for a better life on the part of those immigrants who arrive in Italy and Europe still driven by necessity. In respect and in the search for mutual acceptance. Like the first conquerors of Sicily in 700 A.D., they did not want to conquer by force, but they wanted to know, not animated by an exclusivist and abrogationist spirit but, on the contrary, ecumenical and tolerant.

We see that Sicily, more than 1000 years later, is still considered a middle ground but animated by the spirit in the same way as the land on the other side of the Mediterranean can be considered.²

In the era in which Islam was more stable in the Italian South that is, in the era of Kalbites dynasty, that had the emirate of Sicily, around the year 1000, Palermo was the capital of a Mediterranean environment, an Abrahamic environment that had in Jerusalem the first model.

Sicily, this earth in the shape of a triangle, "trinacria", was also a symbol of this triplicity of the revelations of monotheism abrahamic: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

1 Many Italian cities possess Islamic artistic masterpieces, even in the north (see for example the arabic manuscripts in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana of Milan) or evidence from the medieval period emblematic of an ancient and often happy coexistence: one could cite as an example of the latter the fresco in the Tower of San Zeno in Verona depicting the visit to the city of Frederick II with the pluri-religious and multi-ethnic entourage in procession of visitors who came to pay homage to him in the first half of the 1200s.(see VON SACKEN (1865), GEROLA (1927) and ZULIANI (1992) believe that the fresco of the Tower of San Zeno in Verona represents the homage of verses peoples to Frederick II, the author instead sees in the scene the meeting of Salomone with the Queen of Sheba (..). MARCHI G.P. (2016), *Interpretazioni dell'affresco della torre abbaziale di San Zeno a Verona*, Università di Verona, *Medioevi 2-2016*.

2 Some recent studies have revealed how some typical Sicilian irrigation canals (qanat), still sometimes fundamental for agricultural production, were built at the time of Islamic domination (see Review n. 6 – Italus Hortus 14 (4), 2007 BARBERA G., (2007) Dipartimento di Colture Arboree, Università di Palermo, *Orchards and garden in the "Conca d'oro" (Sicily) between IX and XII centuries*. Some architectural structures but also colors and shapes, recipes and habits in clothing and social life that are no longer found in modern Islamic countries have been preserved in Italy and are familiar to tourists and Muslim migrants.

The presence of peoples of african, barbarian and oriental origin, it made this land truly a universal land that recognized itself in the actuality of a renewed Abrahamic monotheism.

The cultural rapprochement of southern Italy, but also of Spain, Greece, with Muslim peoples and in general with the East and Africa, beyond the commercial aspect of tourism and the dramatic aspect of migration, contributes to a process of maturation of a new society with intellectual horizons no longer limited by lack of direct knowledge of others, and calls for the virtues of correspondence and patience that can be shared in different religions.

Islam had a persian component from its origin, Salman al Farsi for example one of the Prophet's companions of the first time was of persian origin, it had a vitality in Turkey and it was different from the Arab one, it also had a vitality in Italy, as it later happens to see Islam with a different vitality in Middle Eastern countries such as India for example or Malaysia.

We would like to emphasize the possibilities of happiness in tourism rather than the catastrophes that have occurred in history and that we hope will not be repeated. The idea in Italy for example of being able to work with Africa while also promoting life there and not from a colonial point of view. experience and direct The intercultural world of work, the multiplicity of small and medium-sized enterprises in Italy, which are particularly widespread in Italy. The harmonization of different habits related to civilization and religion, such as eating habits. All these things and others make Italy a truly privileged place that it should invest more in the possibility of osmosis also in terms of tourism, of travel, of infrastructure and work and, of course, of culture and education and, why not, also of language.

On the other hand, for those who have always lived in a occidental country, a simple visit to a city clearly characterized by monumental Islamic architecture such as the nearly city of Istanbul, for example, can sometimes help to open the mind and the heart and avoid the danger of exclusive visions. To give the to Muslims, who are now more than three million in Italy, to feel recognized by a country that historically has their tradition in its history, even if it is not always so explicitly known. Thats not absolutely hotel only a political question, if not perhaps in terms of Platonic politics, it is rather a dimension of the Spirit.

Even if in certain phases they eventually became so, we must not think of the historical and geographical realities such as the Emirato of Bari as enclaves or the Frederick state of Lucera as Islamic enclaves within a foreign territory; but as the natural dimension in which they coexisted Jews, Christians and Muslims in the same places, at the same time.

It seems that reality has anticipated the mentality.

Still today it is not only to provide the Muslims with halal food or to give them the compass or to mark in the hotel rooms the direction of the gible or to offer them entertainment that is shariah compliant or private beaches, the important thing is to overcome the sense of foreignness and prejudice and to some extent find a true naturalness of communication.

In conclusion, we can say that the fundamental thing, therefore, for the Islamic tourism is the cognitive intention. Once this principle is admitted, so to speak figuratively, we could say that the address of the Islamic tourism agency and that of the sustainable tourism are the same address. But at the same time for some of us the knowledge we are talking about cannot be separated from a radical change in life. The profound meaning of the journey, summarized in that of pilgrimage, but without a strictly confessional connotation, present in all religions, can be that of life.

God the Most High says in a saying reported by the Prophet Muhammad in which Allah speaks of himself in a Hadith Qudsi: "I was a hidden treasure, I wanted to be known and I created the world."

Whether you travel or not, life itself is a journey. This might not be so easy to accomplish if there wasn't someone to help us discover the real reason for things. The knowledge guides who can give us this type of help, evidently, are also you, the tourism university students who take a fundamental role of communication between the peoples of our time.

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ISLAMIC TOURISM AND HOSPITALITY

IlhamAllah Chiara Ferrero

SUMMARY: 1. The intention of the journey. – 2. Two examples of hospitality: Egypt and Iran. – 3. Services for Muslim tourists in Italy. – 4. Conclusion.

1. The intention of the journey

Today we see Muslims mainly as migrants, yet this character of displacement is inherent in Islam, according to a famous prophetic teaching to “seek knowledge as far as China”¹. We only become aware of Muslim tourists through the veiled women who increasingly stroll through Italy’s historical centres and shopping streets.

A new form of tourism requiring services linked to specific confessional identities is becoming increasingly popular globally, which is different from religious tourism and pilgrimages. The demand for hospitality that is more attentive to cultural and religious needs seems to be the backbone of this new form of tourism, which also directly involves the Islamic world.

To speak of *halal* or *shariah* compliant tourism implies a combination of quite different realities. The “permissible” (*halal*) and the “forbidden” (*haram*) are two terms that are understood within the religious sphere in which Islamic law, *shariah*, contains teachings oriented towards the pursuit of Good and the prohibition of Evil² expressly addressed to Muslim believers. The declination of the terms *halal* and *haram* in a non-Islamic context must take into account the different non-confessional legal framework and the composition of society with its plurality of cultural, ethnic, religious, secular and atheist identities.

The indigenous Islamic communities in the various Western countries have a responsibility to confront and translate the demands of Muslim tourists by fostering the best possible hospitality. The aim would be to create inclusive hospitality, not an alternative or substitute for the renowned Italian or Islamic hospitality.

The principles of Islamic hospitality concern both honour due to the guest and thanksgiving to the host. To host means to receive a blessing, a wealth

1 Teaching reported by Ibn Majah.

2 Quran, 3, 104.

and thus nourishment for the spirit. Welcoming a guest symbolically implies being willing to receive a message even if it involves an effort of adaptation and knowledge. The inner attitude of the traveller and host is to know how to receive in peace and reciprocate by wishing for peace.

It may happen that some offers of hospitality, however generous, are not accepted because they are unsuitable. It is therefore necessary to know who the guests are and why they are travelling, what is the intention of their journey. In addition, it is necessary to beware of formalisms that reduce hospitality to a mere ceremony of etiquette, the focus on luxury and the maintenance of prejudices on both sides.

Hospitality consists in manifesting with gestures, words and attention a sacred level of dignity of the host and guest. This has nothing to do with the degree of wealth or poverty of the persons, nor with their social rank, but with the ability to know how to go beyond human misery, ignorance, arrogance and pride.

The habit of hospitality is even found in some expressions of the Arabic language such as *Marhaban*, “be welcome”, “be comfortable”, with the allusion to a deeper meaning such as: “Our heart and our home are big enough for you”. Another widely used expression is *Ahlan wa sahlán*, where *ahlan* can be translated as “You are among your family” in the sense of “you will find in us close people who will be familiar to you and will never make you uncomfortable”; the translation of *sahlán* is “that you will be facilitated in the things you do”, “with us everything will be easy, none of your desires will be difficult to realise”.

The important thing, therefore, is not to artificially recreate the living conditions of other peoples or cultures, but rather to recognise and favour, without prejudice, the dignity of people who know how to adapt to contexts very different from their own and find in them the pleasure of knowing other rules and lifestyles. Even the hospitality of a noble person, whatever his or her level of wealth, should privilege knowing how to serve with perfection and dedication rather than flaunting the excesses of material goods, despite the fact that in some decadent situations in contemporary Islam, the opposite seems to be true.

The traveller’s intention represents his true direction regardless of the final destination. In fact, a prophetic tradition reports: “Actions are according to intentions, and everyone will get what was intended. Whoever migrates with an intention for God and His Messenger, the migration will be rewarded as such. And whoever migrates for an affair of this world or to marry a woman, then his migration will count as such”³. This means that there may be people who travel

3 Teaching reported by Al-Bukhari e Muslim.

with a religious intention even if the contingent cause that prompted them to move is related to business needs. Or people who travel to escape their responsibilities and pursue their desires.

There are numerous pieces of advice and teachings in Islamic tradition on how travellers should behave. For example, it is recommended to travel together and not alone by taking a different route on the outward and return journey. In addition, the traveller is expected to behave well by respecting different peoples and cultures, the places he is in and the natural surroundings. There are many traditional references concerning respect for agreements, order and security in society, respect for good neighbourly relations, local customs and traditions and minorities. All this is the basis of Islamic law, *shariah*, and should also guide the behaviour of Muslims outside Muslim-majority countries and when travelling, whether for work, tourism, permanent relocation or pilgrimage. It remains for the practising Muslim the obligation to make the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca, at least once in a lifetime, as stipulated in the fifth pillar of Islam.

The Islamic world is dotted with places that have hosted miraculous events, places that became, in turn, destinations for pilgrimages and traditional visits. A continuous circulation of people, books, knowledge, treasures, merchandise that neither wars, diseases, distances, climatic phenomena nor geographical conformations have been able to stop, so as to perpetuate rituals, symbols and traditions that Islam still preserves today after 14 centuries. The convenience and speed of travel - fundamental variables in our times - seem to become irrelevant in relation to moving in the name of God, in the action of the pilgrim, the traveller, the tourist and the migrant to reach their destination. "And there is not one of us who does not have a prescribed place"⁴.

2. Two examples of hospitality: Egypt and Iran

The extent of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) area is such that it is home to 6% of the world's population spread over 17 countries, not all of them Muslim like Israel and Cyprus, and of those Muslim, not all of them Arab-speaking like Turkey and Iran. Enormous are the differences within the Muslim countries of the area and therefore different are the ways of approaching Muslim tourists from all over the world and tourists of other denominations or non-believers.

Each country would deserve its own in-depth study because of the richness it represents, but we will take two emblematic examples: a Sunni-majority

4 Quran 37, 164.

country like Egypt and a Shia one, Iran. If we wanted to find one thing in common, these are two nations that have been home to great pre-Islamic civilisations, ancient Egypt and Persia, and later were at the centre of Islamic empires. Tourists travel to these countries for an interweaving of cultural and artistic elements of great significance.

The point we would like to make is that in many cases these are not just ancient archaeological sites recognised by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites (28 in Iran and 7 in Egypt) but living places, frequented by the indigenous population itself. This means that there is a natural encounter between the residents and those who are there occasionally.

There is, therefore, an osmosis of various intentions in visiting pre-Islamic places, mosques and mausoleums with tombs of Muslim saints and sages, holy places of other religions, palaces, museums and, finally, the incredible natural beauty. In both countries, Egypt and Iran, the hospitality of the population is remarkable, although it takes different forms.

There is a linguistic limitation in Iran whereby English is not widely spoken, yet this is not always an impediment to hospitality. There is a great tradition of Persian cuisine that favours an excellent welcome for the guest who, although a foreigner, is never looked upon with distrust. In Egypt, the great flow of tourists established over the years can sometimes lead to over-familiarity. So many human dynamics that, depending also on the tourist's behaviour, may favour a sense of welcome or not.

What we would like to emphasise, however, is how much the populations are still connected to the blessings of the places they guard, whose sacredness depends on the passage or stopover of religious figures, such as the descendants of the prophet Muhammad in both Sunni and Shiite areas. At Mashhad in Iran, the mausoleum dedicated to Imam Ali Reza (765-818), the eighth Shia imam, is one of the largest mosques in the world and is visited by around 25 million Iranians every year. It is in effect a spiritual centre of pilgrimage, housing museums and one of the oldest libraries in the world. Such primacies, largely unknown in the West, call a Western Sunni Muslim visiting Mashhad to go beyond his own conception of space and time, in the wonder that the world is always a projection of God's greatness.

What is surprising is that this shrine also houses the tomb of the famous Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid (763-809) of Baghdad from the Sunni Golden Age, father of Caliph Al-Mamun who killed Imam Reza. History is just one of the threads by which God holds up the stage of his sacred theatre, and when Muslims visit these places they recognise the vitality of blessings and the in-

scrutability of divine plans.

Being able to recognise each other among Muslims of different branches because one has visited certain places, without misunderstanding the differences and difficulties that exist within the various Islamic communities, is also thanks to the hospitality inherent in the people who live there. For non-Muslims, all this may be of little relevance, but it is always a matter of taking the journey as an opportunity to get to know new customs in order to return home richer. Curious questions asked by tourists are often answered superficially, so learning to ask the right questions and to show the appreciation that certain things and people deserve is the first key to opening the hearts of Muslim hosts.

While the Italians are great frequenters of Egypt's Red Sea and the tombs of the pharaohs, a Western Sunni Muslim visiting this land discovers that it has always been a land of transit between Africa and Asia and a stopover for the caravans of pilgrims on their way to Mecca. This character has allowed many excellent figures to converge here, from the companions of the Prophet who brought Islam to Egypt, to the family members themselves, such as Sayyida Zaynab, niece of the Prophet, sister of Hassan and Hussein, and Sayyida Nafisa, who taught jurists of the rank of Imam al-Shafi, founder of one of the four Sunni legal schools. Nafisa is Hussein's daughter and wife of the son of Imam Jafar al Sadiq, the sixth Shia Imam. The mosque dedicated to her, attended by Sunni Muslims, is located in Cairo's City of the Dead, along with many other mosques housing the tombs of great saints, often unknown to tourists and not much visited even by Muslim tourists.

It is a spiritual heritage that is becoming less and less accessible, unlike shrines such as Mashhad visited by millions of people, as Egypt is not perceived as a religious destination. Ensuring access to sacred sites in the future is a way to preserve the vitality of religion and cultivate faith in men and women.

This process goes far beyond the recovery of historical memory and artistic heritage, as it involves the dignity of peoples to live their traditions for what they are without religion being instrumentalised to foment social unrest or threaten people's safety. Always directing tourist visits to the same places whose safety is guaranteed is useful, as long as one does not increasingly narrow the angle with which one looks at a given country and its relations with the world.

Even a tourist's journey can become a testimony to the circulation of the blessings of particular places, helping mankind to see the signs of God, as the Quran states: "One of His signs is that He created the heavens and the earth and your various languages and your various colours. In this is a sign for those

who can understand”⁵. A knowledge that from the eye descends into the heart and from the heart is communicated to others. When tourists come to Italy and discover the quantity of churches scattered everywhere - which are perhaps considered by Italians more as museums than places of the sacred - they can recognise in the artistic beauty the reflection of a spiritual reality, the true author of the construction of that church. This is also evident for mosques.

Travelling means being willing to change the point of view with which you view the world. Such a change is naturally disorienting. That is why it is important to get to know each other so that no one exploits disorientation to impose their own culture and rules. If one knows the other, one is better prepared to scale down inappropriate requests or excessive hospitality, but also to recognise the dignity of the guest.

3. Services for Muslim tourists in Italy

The world’s Islamic community counts around 2.5 billion people spread all over the world, not only in Muslim-majority countries. A great variety of nationalities and cultures that nevertheless need a few essential things to practice their religion during a business trip or tourist visit. Key points are to provide clear information about what is permissible, or not, according to Islamic doctrine, in a restaurant, hotel or on a plane, and to offer the possibility, even in a private and discreet manner, of performing daily ritual prayers and fasting during the month of Ramadan.

Every year, Italy attracts thousands of Muslim visitors from all over the world. High-end accommodations welcome tourists from Gulf countries that have certain characteristics, while there is a whole middle class of tourists with lower spending power who would also like to be able to find halal food.

Italy lags far behind other European countries, such as Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom, which in recent years have been able to deal with these requests with more far-sightedness, perhaps also thanks to the presence of more structured Islamic communities than the Italian one. Therefore, these countries remain the preferred destinations precisely because they are better equipped and more professional in knowing how to offer adequate hospitality to the Islamic world in general and not just the Arab world.

Mistakenly, one thinks one has to “confessionalise” the structures, for example, equipping the rooms with prayer mats and copies of the Quran. Instead, Italy’s strong point is its food and it would be strategic to start from there. Once

5 Quran 30, 23.

a serious offer on halal food, food considered permissible, has been developed, it is necessary to make it accessible and communicate this option, on a par with other ethical diets such as kosher, organic and vegan.

The possibility of certification is undoubtedly the best business card that guarantees the reliability of an establishment on the halal issue and avoids the gaffes of “do-it-yourself”. The visibility that comes with certification can be very profitable for accessing internal advertising channels in the various countries with an Islamic majority (there are 54 of them).

Increasingly, hotels are being subjected to a myriad of strains to customise their services according to the origin of the clientele, halal certification should, however, keep the facility usable for more types of tourists.

There are actually very few food restrictions, though the sophistication of industry should be taken into account. Thus, to give a few examples, pork and its derivatives are not allowed, so also animal jellies inside ice creams. Meat must be slaughtered according to a religious rite, as in the Jewish tradition, so even the rennet used for cheese must come from ritually slaughtered animals. Wine and spirits are not allowed, not even in the preparation of dishes such as risotto and tiramisù. Then there are some prescriptions that are declined differently according to the different Islamic legal schools. This is the case with fish: some schools do not consider octopus, molluscs and crustaceans lawful, while others allow them.

Finally, it is necessary not to confuse halal quality with ethnic cuisine. It is precisely this confusion between exoticism, ethnic traditions and religious needs that have to be clarified in order to make the services of accommodation facilities effective and efficient.

In addition to food, to be Muslim friendly it is necessary to have cultural and possibly also linguistic training to accommodate those tourists who do not necessarily speak English and French but Arabic, Farsi, Turkish, Russian, Urdu and Malay.

After this first step, the next is not to associate a person's nationality with his or her religion. Having an open mind in recognising cultures and traditions that the Islamic world expresses through a civilisation of great richness and even refinement could help overcome prejudices and stereotypes.

At the discretion of hotel managers, it is possible to offer a courtesy service for Muslim guests by allocating an empty room for prayer that can be used by guests even after check-out. Furthermore, during the month of ritual fasting, Ramadan, it would be useful to implement room service at night, thus also investing in staff. Attention and courtesy done with intelligence and good taste far from the fear of “Islamising” the West.

It has to be said that in the last ten years, interest in the halal world has changed a lot, even among Muslims themselves. A new way of presenting halal is emerging in which Islam has almost become secondary, in the sense that halal is not promoted to protect something religious but rather something ethical and healthy. It is a trend of behaviour that concerns more the Islamic lifestyle rather than religious observance.

This is a fact gathered from the activity of Halal Italia, an Italian halal certification body, which has been working in this field since 2008 and is in constant dialogue with many halal bodies and institutions around the world. The requirements of international halal standards call for an alignment that is in line with ISO standards rather than the Islamic legal tradition. A different orientation that intends to present halal as something cultural, leaving religion in the background.

On the other hand, even the implementations that Halal Italia has introduced, since the beginning of its certification activity, have been moving towards greater respect for the procedures implemented by conventional certification bodies. From the registration of the first Italian halal mark filed in 2009 with the Ministry of Economic Development, and subsequently recognised, to the professionalism of Muslim auditors, there has been a steady improvement in the certification service.

The issue of ritual slaughtering, always in the media spotlight, has been tackled seriously through theoretical and practical training of slaughterer men through to a traceability system that the company must implement with halal production batch certificates.

Expertise and experience must be combined with a great deal of work to raise cultural awareness, so that the business that still exists in this area can develop further into a halal offer on the Italian market, which, taking note of an objective lack of halal services in the tourism sector in Italy, goes on to produce virtuous examples of integration and peaceful coexistence.

In 2023, tourism contributed 18% to Italian GDP⁶ and is growing. Being able to use the tool of halal food to complete the tourist experience in Italy could become a resource and a flywheel also for Italian agro-food companies and for all Made in Italy.

4. Conclusion

The Muslim tourists in Italy do not claim a confessional identity in the sense of demanding mosques, although when they find them they rejoice. Those

6 Source: Italian Ministry of Tourism.

who come to visit Italy have a desire to get to know it, not to transport their customs to another country. Hospitality is a sign of civilisation that helps to leave a more intense taste of the journey. It is a value that also has religious connotations, if we think that the prophet Abraham, patriarch of Jews, Christians and Muslims, is the host par excellence.

If the fear of migrants continues to be ridden in the media, let's hope that at least tourists can be seen differently, reflexively helping a maturing of society in a multicultural and multi-ethnic perspective.

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BALANCING GLOBAL OPPORTUNITIES WITH RELIGIOUS INTERESTS: THE CASE OF *HALAL* TOURISM

Alessandro Cupri

SUMMARY: 1. *Halal* tourism: a definition of a growing phenomenon. – 2. Understanding *halal* hospitality. – 3. Issue and challenges.

1. *Halal* tourism: a definition of a growing phenomenon

This paper aims to investigate the phenomenon of *halal* tourism and its development. The analysis begins with an in-depth study of the distinctive features of the Islamic religion, as the term *halal* refers to what is considered lawful and permitted by Islam. For a Muslim believer, religion represents a way of life that they are not willing to renounce even while travelling. Because of globalization, Islamic finance success, the technological revolution, and generational change, Muslims are now able to travel even for leisure purposes, but as much as they can they have to comply with religious guidelines. To cater to the constantly evolving and growing segment, operators in the tourism industry have endeavored to offer tailor-made travel solutions and services that respect the concept of *halal friendly*. The aim of this paper is to study a tourism phenomenon and understand its business opportunities.

To understand the *halal* tourism¹ it is essential – according to the author’s perspective – to grasp both its semantic and conceptual significance. Despite the absence of a universally accepted definition, a substantial body of academic literature characterizes *halal* tourism as a subcategory within the broader domain of religious tourism. However, this categorization may not be entirely convincing, as religious tourism is traditionally understood as the travel undertaken by followers of a particular faith to visit sacred sites, such as shrines, churches, or monasteries. In contrast, *halal* tourism encompasses more than just visits to religious sites by Muslims; it broadly refers to any form of tourism

1 In Islam, *halal* (lawful) indicates that which is permissible in every sphere of life and is contrasted with *haram* (forbidden). F. CASTRO, *Il modello islamico*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2007, 12 ss.; S. FERRARI (ed.), *Introduzione al diritto comparato delle religioni*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2022, 197 s.

that adheres to Islamic principles, extending beyond religious destinations to include various products and services that comply with *Shari'ah*².

Consequently, the scope of *halal* tourism extends beyond the conventional religious practices associated with pilgrimages to Mecca³, such as the *Hajj* or *Um-rah*, encompassing a segment of the tourism industry that caters specifically to Muslim travelers who seek to align their travel experiences with Islamic values, even when travelling abroad. This emergent sector offers a range of services and products designed to enable Muslim tourists to observe Islamic principles while travelling. Consequently, *halal* tourism can be regarded as a developing niche within the global tourism market, catering to the needs of Muslim individuals who wish to maintain religious observance whilst exploring the world.

Consequently, tourism is a distinctive phenomenon due to its inherently

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- 2 The term *Shari'ah* literally "beaten road", "the path that leads to the fountain from which to drink". It is the set of rules of life and behavior dictated by God for the moral, religious, and juridical conduct of his faithful, and which indicates the path to salvation that must be traveled by the faithful to achieve safe access to the world beyond. These concepts can be found in the Qur'an and *the Sunnah*, i.e., the sayings, actions, sometimes silences of the Prophet Muhammad, transmitted in *hadith* (stories of the Prophet's companions). Finally, the *Shari'ah* is completed with Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), based on the process of interpretation (*igtihad*) that experts apply in the event of unclear rules, using deductive-analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) or relying on the consensus of experts (*igma*). *Ex multis* S. FERRARI (ed.), *Introduzione al diritto comparato delle religioni. Ebraismo, Islam e Induismo*, Il Mulino Bologna, 2008, 191 ss.; F. CASTRO, *Il modello islamico*, cit., 12 ss.
 - 3 The pilgrimage to Mecca, a mandatory undertaking for Muslims, is considered one of the five pillars of Islam. Muslims are required to undertake this sacred journey at least once in their lifetime, during a designated time of the year. In the Islamic lunar calendar, the Hajj commences on the eighth day of the month of *Dhu al-Hijjah*, which corresponds to the final day of the Islamic year and concludes on the thirteenth day of *Dhu al-Hijjah*. It is imperative to underscore that the financial and physical capacity of the Muslim faithful is a prerequisite for undertaking the pilgrimage to Mecca. This stipulation denotes an obligation of relative scope, as it permits certain derogations. The dimension of a code of conduct is clearly delineated in Islam: it is sufficient to recall the obligation of every believer to comply with the five pillars, that is, the profession of the Oneness of God, prayer five times a day, fasting in the month of Ramadan, pilgrimage to Mecca and finally the payment of a tithe for the needy. It is evident that Islam pays particular attention to the whole dimension of right behavior, in fact, it "orders good and forbids evil" as can be seen from the Qur'an, III: 104-110. It is possible to cite the following source: P. BRANCA, *I musulmani*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2016, pp. 46-62. In this work, the author develops a study of the binomial belief-cult, analyzing orthopraxis norms and behavioral practices.

global character. In the context of religious interests, the tourism industry assumes a pivotal role in catering to the specific needs of various religious communities, including, notably, the Islamic faith.

The notion of 'journey' within Islamic teachings is of pertinence to this report. Since the time of the Islamic Revelation, individuals capable of undertaking travel have been regarded as possessing knowledge, with the journey being viewed as an opportunity for personal enrichment and cultural exchange⁴. In this sense, tourism can be regarded as a conduit for the individual believer to encounter new territories, cultures, and customs, thereby deepening their understanding of the divine majesty of *Allah*. Consequently, the Islamic Revelation encourages the exploration of new geographical locations, albeit with a clear set of guidelines-namely, a respect for the principles and rules of Islam. This suggests a form of movement that is conditioned by Islamic law, a 'freedom of movement' that remains structured by religious boundaries.

In this context, the term *halal* assumes particular significance in conjunction with 'tourism'. Muslim travelers are advised to utilize tourist services that offer specific provisions to ensure their travel experience is in accordance with Islamic principles. These principles encompass the expectation that accommodations will be equipped with prayer mats and ceiling markers indicating the direction of Mecca; that rooms will be free of alcoholic beverages; and that dining facilities will serve food that complies with Islamic dietary laws, including meat prepared through ritual slaughter.

The designation of an establishment as *Muslim Friendly* is contingent upon its acquisition of *halal* certification, a process that is overseen by various certification bodies. These entities provide an attestation to the establishment's adherence to *halal* products and practices, thereby ensuring that its services are in accordance with Islamic principles. Following the attainment of *halal* certification, the establishment is permitted to utilize various promotional channels, including online portals, to advertise its services. Examples of such portals include specialized websites such as *HalalBooking*, *Salam Standard*, and *Halal Trip*⁵. These digital platforms facilitate the search for accommodations by potential customers, who can filter results to meet their specific needs in accord-

4 V.M. DONINI, *Regola morale e Pragmatismo economico nel diritto islamico dei contratti*, Istituto per l'Oriente, Roma, 2012, 17.

5 Respectively available at the following web addresses: <https://halalbooking.com/>; <https://salaamgateway.com/story/salam-standard-launches-premium-rating-for-muslim-friendly-hotels-develops-api-for-mainstream-plugin>; <https://www.halaltrip.com/>.

ance with Islamic principles. Additionally, companies have developed rankings to assist Muslim travelers in identifying products and destinations that comply with Islamic guidelines. A notable player in this area is Crescent Rating, which, in collaboration with MasterCard, has created the Global Muslim Travel Index. This numerical indicator has been a significant development for Muslim consumers, as it provides a means of identifying which countries are actively catering to the halal tourism market. The index is periodically updated to reflect the latest trends and developments in the sector.

2. Understanding halal hospitality

The legal distinction between what is considered lawful and what is considered unlawful exerts a significant influence on tourism activity. Within the framework of the code of conduct to be observed by the faithful, the rules pertaining to religious food practices occupy a primary position⁶. It is through the application of analogical reasoning that we can derive legal-economic prescriptions⁷.

The Divine Lawgiver expressly prohibits the consumption of grape wine and that made from dates as substances with an intoxicating effect, since they cause an effect of obnubilation of the mind and consciousness. From this decree, through the application of analogical reasoning, the general prohibition of the consumption of any substance capable of producing a similar effect was deduced⁸. Therefore, the use of any substance derived from ethanol is strictly forbidden due to its well-documented detrimental effects on bodily health⁹, to maintain a clear conscience and ensure optimal capacity in one's actions, it is essential to adhere to the principles and practices outlined in Islamic teachings. The state of drunkenness is a specific provision of the criminal law¹⁰ subject to

6 A. FUCCILLO, *Il cibo degli dèi. Diritto, religioni, mercati alimentari*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2015.; A. FUCILLO, *Saziare le anime nutrendo il pianeta? Cibo, religioni, mercati*, in AA. VV., *Cibo, Religione e Diritto. Nutrimento per il corpo e per l'anima*, A.G. CHIZZONITI (a cura di), Libellula Edizioni, Tricase, 2015, 27 ss.; V. VACCA, S. NOJA, M. VALLARO, *Sahih al-Buhari. Detti e fatti del Profeta dell'Islam*, Torino, 1982, 526.

7 See A. CUPRI, *L'Economia del Profeta: la finanza islamica e i fondamenti religiosi del diritto islamico dei contratti Shari'ah Compliant*, n. 20, 2021, *inter alia* p. 34.

8 Qur'an, V: 90 «O ye who believe! Verily, wine [...] is filth, the work of Satan; avoid it, that ye may prosper».

9 See *hadith* 4 and 5 in *Sahih al-Buhari, kitab al-asribat*.

10 The punishment for the crime of wine intoxication is specified as a minimum of eighty lashes. Cfr. L. ASCANIO, *Le regole alimentari nel diritto musulmano*, cit., 187.

immutable Quranic penalty – *hadd* –¹¹.

The initial interpretation of the food ban was as a requirement of sobriety during periods of prayer¹²; subsequently, the *ayat*'s recollection of the prohibition on gambling led to a precise delineation of the ban. The divine will endeavor to preserve the cognitive faculties of the adherent, thereby enabling them to actualize their existence and to act in accordance with divine directives without impediment¹³. Alcohol-based substances have a direct impact on cognitive function, exerting adverse effects on individuals and society from a moral, hygienic, and ultimately a public order perspective. This observation gives rise to a preliminary indirect economic corollary: it is therefore deemed unethical and morally reprehensible for commercial activities or legal transactions, in the broadest sense, to involve alcohol, as this could potentially invalidate the entire transaction.

The prohibition previously described is not the only religious dietary norm prescribed by the Islamic religion. In fact, the Quran explicitly prohibits the consumption of pork and all its derivatives, including lard and jellies¹⁴. The reasons associated with the origins of this prohibition are not homogeneous¹⁵.

11 Cf. *Sahih al-Buhari, kitab al-asribat*, 1.

In the context of the Islamic penal system, reference is made to the monograph by D. SCOLART, *L'Islam, il reato, la pena dal figh alla codificazione del diritto penale*, Istituto per l'Oriente C.A. Nallino, Roma, 2013, 3-195; L. BERCHER, *Les délits et les peines de droit commun prévus par le Coran. Leur réglementation dans les rites malékite, chaféite et hanéfite*, Tunisie, Société Anonyme de l'imprimerie rapide, 1926 ; S.A.A. ABU SAHLIEH, *Les sanctions en droit musulman. Passe, present et avenir*, Beirut, CEDRAC, 2007 ; B. ATALLAH, *Le droit pénal musulman ressuscité*, *Annuaire de l'Afrique du Nord*, 13 (1974), 227-252 ; E. CHAUMONT, *Pene coraniche fisse*, in : *Dizionario del Corano*, Milano, Mondadori, 2007, 640-647 ; R. PETERS, *Crime and Punishment in Islamic Law*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

12 The Qur'an, XLIII: 43.

13 The prohibition of alcoholic beverages also has historical roots. To maintain public order, the Prophet Muhammad formally articulated this prohibition with a view to avoiding violent clashes between inebriated individuals. For further elucidation on this point, see L. ASCANIO, *Le regole alimentari nel diritto musulmano*, cit., 120; V. VACCA, S. NOJA, M. VALLARO, *Sahih al-Buhari. Detti e fatti del Profeta dell'Islam*, cit., 546.

14 See P. DIENER, *Ecology, Evolution, and the Search for Cultural Origins: The Question of Islamic Pig Prohibition*, in *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 19, n. 3, 1978, 493-540.

15 *Ex multis* F. ERSILIA, *Introduzione alle regole alimentari islamiche*, Istituto per l'Oriente, 1995, Roma; H. BOUSSEROUËL, *Pourquoi le porc est interdit dans Thora, la Bible et dans le Coran?* Paris, 2001, 44 e ss.

The justification behind this prohibition is that swines pose a threat to the ecological integrity of North Africa and the Middle East, regions that have historically been characterized by pastoral nomadism in arid landscapes with limited irrigation capacity. Indeed, pig is considered incapable of tolerating elevated temperatures, and does not contribute to the production of essential resources for sustenance¹⁶. Conversely, an alternative argument affirms that the justification relies on the behavioral patterns exhibited by these animals, such as coprophagy, and, more broadly, their propensity for consuming wastes¹⁷. According to religious doctrine, the consumption of this animal's meat is strictly prohibited due to its status as a source of uncleanness and facilitating vector-borne diseases¹⁸.

In addition to the proscription against the consumption of pork, the Quran and the prophetic tradition include the interdiction against the ingestion of domestic donkeys, horses, and mules¹⁹; and wild animals that have canines or tusks²⁰.

The dietary obligations relating to meat are affected by an additional obligation on the part of the faithful: the ritual slaughtering of animals²¹, which must

16 L. ASCANIO, *Le regole alimentari nel diritto musulmano*, in *Il Diritto Ecclesiastico*, n. 2, 2010, 120; J. SCHACHT, *Introduzione al diritto musulmano*, Fondazione G. Agnelli, Torino, 114.

17 L. ASCANIO, *Le regole alimentari nel diritto musulmano*, cit., 114.

18 L. ASCANIO, *Le regole alimentari nel diritto musulmano*, cit., 114.

19 The Qur'an, XVI: 8, which reads as follows: «And He has given you horses, mules and asses to ride, beautiful ornaments, and He is creating things that you do not know. It is noteworthy that the Qur'an does not explicitly prohibit the consumption of donkey, mule, or horse meat, which is intended for human transport. About horse meat, the Prophet's Sunna does not seem to prohibit its consumption in the same way as for donkey meat. The *Sahih al-Bukhari, Kitab al-asribat*, 27 and 28, states the following: It is stated therein that on the day of the Battle of Haibar, the Messenger of God [...] forbade donkey meat and permitted horse meat. The same source also reports that God, may He be blessed and given eternal health, forbade the eating of donkey meat».

20 See on this point the Sunnah of the Prophet in *Sahih al-Buhari, Kitab al-Asribat*, 29, which reads as follows: [“God bless him and grant him eternal health - he forbade eating the flesh of predatory animals that have canines (or fangs). For more details see L. ASCANIO, *Le regole alimentari nel diritto musulmano*, cit., 120; J. SCHACHT, *Introduzione al diritto musulmano*, cit., 115.

21 However, it is an irrefutable fact that all legal animals must be slaughtered according to *halal* ritual slaughter. This process involves the simultaneous cutting of the jugular vein, carotid artery, and windpipe with a very sharp iron knife. The act of cutting is known as *tadhkiya*. Furthermore, according to the Sunna, the

be performed to follow a *halal* diet.

It is imperative to emphasize that the dietary rules under scrutiny in this study underscore a nutritional framework that is emblematic of a commitment to safeguarding the health of Muslims. This commitment is predicated on the belief that Muslims are subjects who must be protected from potentially harmful substances and substances that may compromise their physical integrity. The underlying rationale for these dietary rules is twofold: first, to ensure the health and well-being of individuals, and second, to maintain the social order

person who performs the act of slaughter must be a Muslim, must recite the name of Allah now of cutting, and must make sure that the blood flows out. The subject is extensive, and it is possible to recall C. HAMES, *Le Sacrifice animal au regard des textes islamiques canoniques*, in *Archives des sciences sociales des religions*, 1998, 18; J. ROSSELL, *Prescripciones alimentarias en el Islam: sacrificio ritual y alimentación halal*, in *Los musulmanes en España: libertad religiosa e identidad cultural*, Madrid, 2004, 205 e ss.

In the Abrahamic tradition, Islam and Judaism similarly stipulate the ritual slaughter (shechita) of kosher animals, which is also referred to as kosher in Ashkenazi pronunciation. For further details on this topic, please refer to the following sources: R. DI SEGNI, *Macellazione rituale (shechitah)*, in *Macellazione rituale e sofferenza animale*, Presidenza del Consiglio dei ministri, see this website: <http://www.governo.it/bioetica/pdf/55.pdf/>.

To comprehend the legal implications of the practice of Jewish ritual slaughter, it is necessary to refer to the relevant literature on the subject P. LERNER, A.M. RABELLO, *Il divieto di macellazione rituale (shechitah kosher e halal) e la libertà religiosa delle minoranze*, Università degli Studi di Trento, Trento, 2010.

Regarding the distinction between *kashèr* and *tarèf* foods, see E. LOEWENTHAL, *Ebraismo. Storia, dottrina, diffusione*, edizione italiana, Idealibri, Rimini, 1998, 120 e ss.; L. SACERDOTI LIBERANOME, *Israele a tavola. Storia, sapori e ricette dal mondo nel segno della tradizione di un unico popolo*, Proedi editore, Milano, 2006, 9 e ss.; A.G. CHIZZONITI, *Appartenenza religiosa e regole alimentari: diritto e diritti*, in *Notizie di Politeia*, n. 114, 2014, 63 e ss.; R. DELLA ROCCA, *L'Alimentazione kasher e l'incontro tra spirito e materia*, the website contains the relevant information: www.mosaico-cem.it/; J. M. LEBEAU, *The jewish dietary, sanctify life*, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, Edited by Stephen Garfinkel, New York, 1998; R. DI SEGNI, *Guida alle regole alimentari ebraiche*, Edizioni Lamed, Roma, 1996, 14 e ss.

It appears to be an insurmountable task to recollect the extensive corpus of Jewish dietary doctrine in this context. Nevertheless, it is intriguing to draw attention to the following text D. PAVANELLO, *Cibo per l'anima. Il significato delle prescrizioni alimentari nelle grandi religioni*, Edizioni Mediterranee, Roma, 2005, 70 e ss. In particular, the article focuses on the theme of festivals in Judaism, enriching the discussion with a list of culinary specialties prepared for certain festivals.

of the Muslim community²².

Muslim believers do not deny the religious aspect of their existence; however, they aspire to experience different encounters, including interactions with other cultures and environments other than their own. Turning our gaze to the object of investigation, it is necessary to verify the profiles that should be introduced, improved, or eliminated to better accommodate Muslim travelers and ensure that their vacation experiences are compatible with their religious beliefs.

Consequently, the Muslim faithful do not repudiate the religious aspect of their existence; nevertheless, they aspire to experience diverse encounters, including interactions with other cultures and environments that differ from their own.

The objective of this section is to ascertain the elements that should be introduced, improved, or eliminated to better accommodate Muslim travelers and ensure that their vacation experiences are compatible with their religious beliefs²³.

It is crucial to acknowledge the absence of a consensus on the precise characteristics that would officially designate a hotel or similar establishment as *Muslim Friendly*. Consequently, upon examining various properties that claim to be *Muslim Friendly*, one can observe many variations in the implementation of this concept²⁴.

However, it is possible to identify certain common characteristics in practice that serve as a baseline for *Muslim friendly* accommodations. These features can be regarded as the minimum requirements for catering to Muslim travelers. Primarily, the provision of *halal* meat dishes is a paramount, ideally incorporated into a diverse menu selection to circumvent the creation of separation or discomfort among customers.

Additionally, it is imperative to ensure the explicit enumeration of all ingredients in culinary offerings, thereby averting the inadvertent provision of food-stuffs that are incompatible with Islamic dietary principles²⁵.

22 The analysis of the Islamic dietary code once again highlights the pervasiveness of the divine prescriptions in the daily life of the believer and emphasizes, in the same way as in contractual matters, how the ethical-religious factor is relevant and is mixed with the role of tradition, pre-Islamic customs, and finally with local practice.

23 See, on this point, E. RUPINI, *Turismi fuori luogo? Opportunità e sfide del turismo halal*, in *Fuori Luogo*, n. 1, 2017, 74.

24 In this sense, it is worth recalling the considerations of V. FRONZONI, *Certificazione religiosa halal per il rilancio del turismo sostenibile in Italia. Standard muslim friendly and hospitality*, in *Rivista Diritto e Religioni*, n. 2, 2020, pp. 118-130.

25 *Ivi*, 128.

Furthermore, it is imperative that beverages served at dining tables and in guest rooms are free of alcohol. In guest rooms, the provision of prayer mats (or multiple mats) is essential to enable Muslim guests to perform their ritual prayers. A small sticker indicating the direction of Mecca can be placed in the corner of the room for this purpose. Additionally, it is ideal to have a copy of the Qur'an available in the room²⁶.

It is imperative that accommodations provide amenities conducive to ritual ablution, such as a bidet in the bathroom. Furthermore, the guest room's décor should be devoid of depictions of human or animal faces, incorporating geometric patterns or natural and artificial landscapes instead.

Moreover, it is imperative that the entertainment options and attractions, both within the property and those offered by external partners, are appropriate for Muslim guests. This necessitates the exclusion of gambling, alcohol, and any forms of media (e.g., music, imagery) that convey controversial or sexually explicit content²⁷.

Another aspect on which we must focus a lot is the staff of the structure, who must respect the *dress code* and the moral code of conduct. In addition, specific training courses would be necessary for the staff of a *halal* facility since who to serve first if men or women; in the case of families how to position them in the rooms (children with women or with men); look into the eyes or avoid; shake hands with both men and women, and much more²⁸.

These and many other questions emerge in the sessions created by organizations specialized in training the staff of structures that want to become *Muslim Friendly*, thus allowing them to have the appropriate tools to accommodate this target.

It is imperative for establishments aspiring to allocate a substantial proportion of their commercial endeavors to this market segment to adopt financial and business practices that are in alignment with the tenets of Islamic finance. This needs the implementation of promotional and marketing strategies that adhere to social and environmental ethics, utilizing interest-free loans (considered unlawful by Islamic doctrine) and making periodic charitable contri-

26 E. RUPINI, *Turismi fuori luogo? Opportunità e sfide del turismo halal*, cit., 63.

27 *Ibidem*.

28 *Ex multis* H. EL-GOHARY, *Halal Tourism, is it really Halal?*, in *Tourism Management Perspectives*, n. 19, 2016, pp. 126-127; M. SPOTORNO, *The growth of Islamic Tourism in Maghreb seasonal return of emigrants, diffusion of halal tourism and need for a revision of 'western-oriented' tourist policies*, in *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana*, 4, 2015, pp. 577-597.

butions. A pivotal element of this approach entails the adherence to transparency and integrity, both from a financial perspective and in relation to pricing policies, to avoid profiteering and the exaggeration of prices. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure the protection of consumers, particularly given the significance of prayer in the Islamic context. In the context of travel, Muslims have the right to consolidate their five daily prayers into three times during the day. Consequently, if an establishment offers sightseeing tours of the destination, encompassing activities such as local cuisine (excluding strictly *halal* meat) and shopping, it is essential to guarantee that these activities are scheduled according to prayer times, ensuring the availability of prayer rooms. It is important to note that the onus remains with the Muslim tourist to locate suitable locations for prayer.

3. Issue and challenges

Several factors impede the full expansion of this market segment. A salient concern articulated by certain stakeholders in the tourism industry pertains to the question of whether this mode of travel, according to Islamic religious principles, facilitates the expression of individual identities. This concern is further compounded by the possibility that such travel might, in fact, engender a state of isolation, thereby reinforcing the boundaries between different communities²⁹.

The tendency of Muslim travelers to opt for *halal* tourism may be interpreted as a deliberate strategy to avoid integration with local cultures and environments;³⁰ nevertheless, this perspective is not universally accepted. Indeed, Muslim travelers are frequently distinguished by their educational attainment and open-mindedness³¹.

Furthermore, travel is frequently linked to an inclination to embrace novel experiences and cultivate a sense of curiosity about the world. Internet makes easier the dissemination of information, thereby empowering Muslim tourists to arrive at their destinations with a robust understanding of their respective locations. This, in turn, has served to mitigate concerns regarding social isola-

29 See the scientific survey conducted by F. CARDINI, *Europa e Islam. Storia di un malinteso*, Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2012.

About the subject under discussion in this contribution, please refer to the following sources: M. MELOTTI, E. RUPINI, E. MARRA, *Migration, Tourism and Peace: Lampedusa as a Social Laboratory*, in *Anatolia an international journal of tourism and hospitality research*, n. 2, 2018, pp. 215-224.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*

tion and insularity³².

Another important issue is inextricably linked to the core principle of freedom of religion. This entails the provision of services that not only accommodate but also actively promote the practice of religious beliefs, thereby mitigating potential conflicts of conscience among Muslim travelers. This is a matter of consequence, as encountered barriers to practicing their faith can lead Muslim tourists to forgo their travel plans entirely. Furthermore, a tourist destination that does not align with Islamic principles may result in the traveler choosing not to return to that location in the future.

The presence of Islamophobia has been identified as a significant impediment to the growth and development of the *halal* tourism industry, a phenomenon characterized by the widespread presence of anti-Islamic sentiment³³. This is particularly pronounced in the Western world, largely attributable to the limited understanding of Islam prevalent in these societies. The adoption of such an approach serves as a substantial obstacle to the advancement and legitimization of *halal* tourism. Moreover, it has the capacity to contribute to the dismantling of preconceived notions and biases directed towards the Islamic community³⁴.

In conclusion, as stated in the Qur'an, Islam encourages its followers to travel and appreciate the creations of God. Furthermore, as part of the five pillars of the faith, Muslims are obliged to perform the *Hajj*, or pilgrimage to Mecca, at least once in their lifetime. While the act of travel is actively encouraged by religion, how this is experienced is determined, as previously mentioned, by a range of issues derived from religious beliefs, which generate specific needs and obligations that must be met. Similarly, regardless of how religiosity is practiced, it can be stated, as discussed in this article, that there are fundamental

32 For a thorough examination of the relationship between Islamic law and the Internet, please refer to the research conducted by M. PAPA, *Diritto islamico e modernità nell'era digitale*, in G. FILORAMO (a cura di), *Le religioni e il mondo moderno – Islam*, Vol. III, Einaudi, Torino, 2009, pp. 345-374.

33 The extant literature on this point is particularly extensive, with numerous sources citing, among others: *Islamofobia e razzismo. Media, discorsi pubblici nella decostruzione dell'altro* a cura di G. PROGLIO, Edizione Seb27, Torino, 2020.

34 J. JAFARI, N. SCOTT, *Muslim word and its tourisms*, in *Annals of Tourism Research*, n. 44, 2014, pp. 1-19. The Authors say that thanks to the joint action of the tourism industry and the Ministries of Tourism with awareness campaigns of the tourism actors themselves, it will be possible to positively influence the minds of Western tourists to reduce Islamophobia.

needs that must be satisfied, even during travel³⁵.

The primary categories encompass accommodation, food and beverages, and public spaces. The provision of suitable products and Muslim-friendly facilities, along with *halal* food and designated places of worship, appears to be the fundamental requirements to meet the needs of the Muslim community. As for the secondary categories, the services and products offered are complementary. Consequently, as proposed by Crescent Rating, these should be regarded as “nice to have” rather than essential. While these supplementary services can undoubtedly enhance a tourist destination’s appeal, they are not strictly necessary³⁶.

The field of finance occupies a pivotal position within this overarching category, a fact that is particularly salient in regions where most of the population is Muslim, such as the Middle East. Conversely, in other regions, this sector remains underdeveloped or in its nascent stages of growth. In such contexts, it can be posited that the absence of Islamic financial services in a business’s offerings does not preclude it from positioning itself as Muslim-friendly, though it cannot be regarded as fully *halal*. This is because it would not meet one of the fundamental criteria required for an activity or service to be deemed permissible according to Islamic law. To illustrate this point, consider a hotel that offers amenities designed to accommodate Muslim guests, such as Quran copies in rooms, prayer mats, *halal* food options, and segregated facilities. However, if the hotel’s financial practices do not align with Islamic principles, it cannot be classified as *halal* because it does not satisfy all the necessary conditions of Islamic law³⁷.

The term *Muslim friendly* has been proposed as a close parallel to the concept of *halal*, insofar as it seeks to offer a wide array of services and products that are suitable and beneficial for the Muslim community. Consequently, a delineation can be established between *halal* tourism, Muslim friendly tourism, and Islamic tourism, predicated on the extent to which the requirements of

35 On this point, in addition to what has already been stated in the previous paragraphs, please refer to the contribution of S. BALDASSARRE, *The fifth pillar of Islam (Hajj): rituality, tradition, spiritual value, economic-legal aspects*, included in this volume.

36 *Crescent Rating*, one of the most important agencies of the sector, published a partnership proposal for the travel agents of many countries, among which Morocco; the preliminary condition to join was to be «*capable of understanding the requirements of Muslim customers and are able to cater to them*» (www.crescentrating.com).

37 P. BIANCONE, S. SECINARO, *Finanza islamica e globalizzazione attraverso il turismo halal*, in *Quaderni di diritto e politica ecclesiastica*, n. 1, 2021, pp. 131-142.

Muslim travelers are addressed and the way these requirements intersect with the tourism industry. Islamic tourism, by its very nature, is rooted in religious motivations, as it is inherently a matter of faith. In contrast, *halal* and Muslim friendly tourism encompass a broader spectrum of travel motivations, some of which may not be inherently religious in nature.

As for the cross-cutting category, finance holds significant relevance in Muslim-majority countries, such as those in the Middle East, yet in other regions, it is still emerging or has yet to be fully established. Considering this, it could be argued that if an establishment does not offer Islamic finance, it can aspire to be Muslim-friendly but cannot be considered fully *halal*, as it would fail to meet one of the fundamental requirements for an activity or service to be deemed lawful under Islamic law. To illustrate, a hotel might offer a range of Muslim friendly amenities (e.g., a copy of the Quran in the room, prayer mats, a buffet, segregated facilities), but if its financial operations are not compliant with Islamic principles, the hotel cannot be classified as *halal*, as it would not satisfy all the necessary conditions set out by Islam for an establishment to be considered *halal*.

As previously discussed, the term *Muslim friendly* is believed to be closely associated with the concept of *halal*, signifying the provision of a diverse array of services and products that are deemed appropriate, suitable, and beneficial to the Muslim community. The distinction between *halal* tourism and *Muslim friendly* tourism is predicated on the extent to which Islamic requirements are observed and their correlation with the tourism industry. While Islamic tourism is predominantly motivated by religious tenets and is inherently a matter of faith, *halal* and *Muslim friendly* tourism involve travel for a variety of purposes, which are not necessarily exclusively religious.

The delineation between these concepts, as previously articulated, pertains to the way services that facilitate religious obligations are provided. In the context of *halal* tourism, all activities, facilities, actions, and goals are required to fully comply with *Shari'ah* law. In contrast, the concept of *Muslim friendly* tourism aims to create an enjoyable experience for Muslim travelers by addressing their basic needs while still allowing for the presence of elements, services, or products that may be considered *haram* (forbidden) in the same environment.

In conclusion, although there is some overlap in the concepts related to Islam and tourism, it has been demonstrated that the presence of forbidden elements precludes the classification of a destination or service as *halal*. Consequently, the term *Muslim friendly* emerges as a more precise descriptor for such accommodations.

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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM: AN OVERTURE

Antonio Angelucci

SUMMARY: 1. Premise. – 2. The policy of religious tolerance as a foundation of religious tourism in the UAE. – 3. The cd. “Mosque Tourism”. – 4. The social impact of religious tourism. – 5. Conclusions: the UAE model of religious tourism.

1. Premise

Religious tourism is emerging as a rapidly growing segment within the global tourism landscape, representing a significant market not only for its economic value but also for its cultural and social impact. Traditionally understood as the visit to places of spiritual or religious interest, motivated by faith or cultural discovery (Henderson, 2011; Olsen, 2014, 42), this form of tourism is characterized by its ability to create a bridge between spiritual and cultural motivations, generating multidimensional travel experiences.

In the context of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), religious tourism offers an intriguing perspective: the Emirates represent, in fact, a particularly compelling case study to explore given the cultural and economic context (Sharpley, 2008). The UAE is distinguished by an inclusive and strategic approach to tourism, marked by openness to religious diversity while firmly maintaining Islamic cultural roots. This distinctive trait currently positions the country as a significant case in the global religious tourism panorama, where the spiritual dimension intersects with modernity and innovation, creating a (unique) model of tourism offering.

Moreover, the country’s rapid economic development has transformed the United Arab Emirates into one of the most sought-after tourist destinations worldwide. According to data from the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (2022), the tourism sector has become a cornerstone of the Emirati economy. Within this framework, religious tourism also emerges as a segment with growth potential, supported by targeted investments in infrastructure, marketing, and the development of specific tourism products.

What makes the UAE particularly unique is its ability to offer a model of religious tourism that stands apart from the traditional models seen in majority-Muslim countries, by integrating modernity, luxury, and sustainability, all while respecting the traditional values that define the local cultural identity (Stephenson, 2013; Stephenson & Ali-Knight, 2010, 280). This deliberate vision is expressed through the creation of spaces that foster interreligious dialogue and the organization of high-profile international events that promote religious tolerance, such as the signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* held in Abu Dhabi in 2019 (Francis & Al-Tayyeb 2019).

From this perspective, the present contribution aims to explore religious tourism in the United Arab Emirates, analyzing its specificities, development strategies, and prospects. The analysis includes, without claiming to be exhaustive, the religious tolerance policies that have fostered intercultural and interfaith growth, the main sectoral initiatives, as well as a reflection on the challenges and opportunities in a rapidly evolving context. The objective is to contribute to the understanding of a phenomenon that is still relatively under-explored in the literature, but which could serve as a meaningful model for other regional contexts, since tourism – especially religious tourism, known since antiquity – is characterized by dynamism and an ability to evolve (Timothy & Olsen, 2006, 3–5). Therefore, the study of the UAE case may offer valuable insights for understanding the future directions of this evolution in the region, which are clearly outlined in the *UAE Vision 2021* (UAE Government, 2010).

2. The policy of religious tolerance as a foundation of religious tourism in the UAE

The tolerance policies promoted by the United Arab Emirates are a key element in fully understanding the dynamics of the phenomenon under investigation. These policies have, in fact, created the institutional and cultural foundation necessary for the development of an inclusive and diversified tourism offering.

The basis of religious tolerance in the UAE is rooted in the 1971 Constitution, which guarantees freedom of worship and religious practice in accordance with established traditions. This principle has been progressively strengthened through the adoption of specific legislation protecting religious minorities and promoting interfaith dialogue. As a result, a balance has developed in the UAE between religious openness and adherence to religious norms (Kéichichian, 2008). This approach has translated into concrete initiatives, such as the allo-

cation of land to various religious denominations for the construction of places of worship, which over time have become both attractions for religious tourism and a distinctive feature within the Gulf region.

Religious tolerance in the United Arab Emirates is expressed through concrete institutional initiatives that have reinforced the country's position as a hub of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Particularly significant was the designation of 2019 as the "Year of Tolerance", during which numerous initiatives were organized to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue. The visit of Pope Francis to Abu Dhabi in February 2019 – the first papal visit to the Arabian Peninsula – was a symbolically pivotal moment, culminating in the signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*. The Document also reflects the leadership the UAE has developed over the years through a strategic vision that positions the country at the heart of intercultural dialogue, with the dual aim of attracting international visitors and promoting an image of modernity and openness (Stephenson, 2013). This strategy also aligns with a clear vision for tourism development aimed at diversifying the offer beyond luxury and business (Hazime, 2011, 4736).

Indeed, religious tolerance policies have had a significant impact on the development of religious tourism in the country. As highlighted by data from the Dubai Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing (2022), visitors interested in the UAE's cultural and religious heritage constitute a growing segment, contributing to the diversification of tourist flows to the country. It has long been noted that the UAE's ability to present itself as a bridge between East and West – even, though not exclusively, in religious terms – represents a considerable advantage in the global tourism market (Stephenson & Ali-Knight, 2010, 280). This strategic choice has enabled the UAE to develop a model of religious tourism that meets the needs of various market segments, from Muslim tourists seeking an environment aligned with Islamic principles to non-Muslim visitors interested in exploring the region's cultural and religious heritage in a context of tolerance.

The growth of religious tourism in the UAE is also confirmed by the *Global Muslim Travel Index* (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2024, 40, 43, 51, 56, 65; for the post-Covid-19 period: Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2022, 21, 28, 32), which consistently ranks the Emirates among the top OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) destinations for Muslim travelers, further supported by halal best practices, particularly in terms of travel accessibility for persons with disabilities (Mastercard-CrescentRating, 2024, 24). This success is the result of a deliberate plan that seeks to enhance the religious component as a defining feature

of the tourism offering, amid a growing demand for authentic tourism experiences of cultural and spiritual significance (Timothy & Olsen, 2006).

A distinctive element of the UAE's model of religious tolerance is the promotion of interfaith dialogue not only as a cultural value but also as a tourism draw. The ambition to position itself as a crossroads of cultures is realized through tourism initiatives that, in a pioneering way for the Gulf, elevate religious diversity as a unique and appealing feature: the Emirates have allowed the promotion of visits to sacred sites belonging to various religious traditions, thereby creating, in some respects, thematic paths that positively celebrate the country's spiritual diversity.

This vision aligns with the objectives of the *UAE Vision 2021* (UAE Government, 2010), previously mentioned, which identifies cultural and religious tourism as a key sector for the country's future economic development. The promotion of religious tolerance has thus become not only a social value but also a strategic asset for the UAE's economic diversification and international positioning – an ethical choice as well.

3. The cd. “Mosque Tourism”

The religious tolerance policy of the United Arab Emirates has laid fertile ground for the development of various tourism segments, including mosque-centered tourism, a key element in supporting the growth of Muslim tourism (Kessler, 2016). While religious tolerance forms the institutional foundation, the public accessibility of mosques – symbols of the country's cultural and religious identity – represents a manifestation of this choice.

Within this framework lies the phenomenon of so-called “Mosque Tourism”, defined as «a central feature of Islamic Tourism and present it as a sustainable tool for Halal Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Religious Tourism and a focal point of Muslim tourists» (Kessler, 2016, 12), where mosques play a fundamental role, serving as an “axis” of reference from an economic, geographical, cultural, and religious perspective for the Muslim world, and becoming significant attractions – even for non-Muslims – due to their architecture and the historical and identity-defining value they represent (Kessler, 2016, 23).

In the UAE, the most emblematic example of this phenomenon is the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, which can accommodate over forty thousand worshippers at once and serves as a major draw not only for its artistic value but also for its national historical and symbolic identity, attracting visitors from different faiths (Kessler, 2016, 26-27). With its 107-meter-high minarets,

1,096 columns, and the world's largest hand-knotted carpet, the mosque is a perfect example of how a place of worship can become a tourist attraction of international importance.

"Mosque Tourism" should also be appreciated as a form of interfaith tourism, an emerging trend in which the UAE is positioning itself at the forefront. The Sheikh Zayed Mosque was designed from the outset with a dual purpose: a place of worship for Muslim faithful and a national identity site accessible to non-Muslims, featuring dedicated routes, interpretation centers, and guided tours in multiple languages. According to Emirates News Agency – WAM (2025), during the most recent Ramadan alone, the mosque attracted 1.9 million visitors, confirming its broad appeal, with more than 6.5 million visitors in 2024, based on data from the mosque's official website as of March 2025 (www.szgmc.gov.ae).

The goals of "Mosque Tourism" in the United Arab Emirates are thus multiple and perfectly aligned with the country's tolerant yet interfaith-oriented vision, where one of the main aims is to foster understanding of Islam and its culture. This contributes positively to reducing prejudice and stereotypes through a concrete approach that promotes Islamic cultural and religious heritage in an accessible, sustainable, and appealing form for visitors from various backgrounds (Kessler, 2016, 28).

"Mosque Tourism" in the UAE stands out for its ability to integrate spiritual and cultural-touristic elements, through infrastructure and services aligned with Islamic values, such as *Sharia*-compliant hotels and restaurants (Kessler, 2016, 22), thereby creating a complete tourism ecosystem. This integration is particularly evident in the UAE through the creation of tourist routes linking mosques to other cultural and historical attractions, offering visitors an immersive experience of the country's heritage.

The Jumeirah Mosque in Dubai is another significant example of "Mosque Tourism" in the UAE. Built in traditional Fatimid style, this mosque is open to non-Muslims and offers guided tours explaining the core principles of Islam, Islamic architecture, and religious practices. It reinforces the idea that "Mosque Tourism" in the UAE also excels at building bridges between different cultures and religions.

Finally, it should be noted that the economic importance of "Mosque Tourism" is significant – not only in supporting the growth of Islamic tourism (Kessler, 2016), but also in contributing to economic diversification and the strengthening of the country's tolerant cultural identity. It aligns perfectly with the strategic vision of positioning the UAE as a hub of intercultural and inter-

faith dialogue aimed at promoting greater mutual understanding and respect among different religious and cultural traditions.

4. The social impact of religious tourism

The expansion of religious tourism in the United Arab Emirates is part of a well-planned framework of general tourism growth.

In November 2022, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum launched the *UAE Tourism Strategy 2031*, with the goal of strengthening the country's position among the world's top tourist destinations. This strategic plan aims to increase the tourism sector's contribution to GDP to AED 450 billion, with an annual growth of AED 27 billion, attract AED 100 billion in new investments, and welcome 40 million hotel guests by 2031 (UAE Tourism Strategy 2031, 2024; Emirates News Agency – WAM, 2022).

The strategy includes twenty-five initiatives and policies based on four main pillars: reinforcing a unified national tourism identity, developing, and diversifying specialized tourism products, building tourism capacity by encouraging national workforce participation, and increasing investments across all tourism sectors. This vision, developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy, various federal and local entities, national airlines, and international organizations, aims to create an integrated tourism ecosystem that offers a distinctive experience to tourists from around the world, thereby contributing significantly to the UAE's economic diversification and global competitiveness.

However, within the broader strategic framework, it is necessary to consider the social impact of tourism and how it affects the local population (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017), bearing in mind the country's unique demographic composition.

In this context, where Emirati citizens represent only about 20% of the total population, significant perceptual differences emerge between nationals and immigrants regarding the effects of tourism. One study, for instance, revealed that although both groups recognize the economic benefits of tourism, their perceptions of negative impacts differ sharply: «citizens reported greater perceived impacts of the negative economic and environmental impacts», whereas immigrants «did not perceive any negative impacts of tourism of any kind» (Mannaa, 2020, 63).

Previous literature had already explored this divide, identifying specific social issues such as «ethnic distinctions in migrant housing and geographical location», and shortcomings in heritage infrastructure. This study showed that tourism development has progressively generated «socially divided life-

styles», contributing to the social stratification of the territory (Stephenson & Ali-Knight, 2010, 278, 280).

The identity dimension of this issue emerges clearly in another qualitative study that documents the concerns of young Emiratis about cultural erosion. One interviewee explicitly expressed this fear, stating: «our traditions are being demolished so our children in the future will not know much about our traditions» (Paris et al., 2012, 9). This testimony reflects a widespread anxiety regarding the preservation of cultural identity in a rapidly modernizing context.

Despite these criticalities, studies consistently identify a generally favorable attitude toward tourism development, particularly in the post-COVID-19 period. As a recent study highlighted, «both groups perceived the effects of the positive socio-cultural impacts positively while both groups reported no negative socio-cultural impacts», suggesting that perceived economic benefits outweigh sociocultural concerns (Mannaa, 2020, 63).

This apparent contradiction is partly resolved through strategic proposals made by young Emiratis, who suggest six strategies for sustainable development: promoting intercultural interactions, preserving local identity, adopting environmentally responsible practices, organizing cultural events, increasing community participation, and diversifying tourism offerings while maintaining a focus on luxury. This optimism reflects Dubai's transformative capacity and opens perspectives for future research, which should further explore the perceptions of different populations and generations and critically investigate acculturation processes (Paris et al., 2012, 11–12).

Such a pragmatic approach represents an attempt to reconcile economic development with the preservation of cultural authenticity, in a social context characterized by rapid change and continuous renegotiation of the balance between modernization and tradition.

Another, though less recent yet still valuable, study conducted on a sample of 428 Emirati citizens found that the majority (90.7%) of the local population supports the presence of tourists and tourism activities. This finding suggests that most of the Emirati community accepts tourism and its impacts, partly due to the significant economic benefits and partly because there seem to be no viable alternatives to reverse this trend (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017, 299).

Regarding perceptions of differences between tourists and locals, the study revealed that most participants (69.9%) believe there are significant behavioral differences between Emiratis and tourists, while 62.4% perceive important cultural differences (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017, 301–302). These perceptions are particularly relevant in the tourism context, where cultural and behavioral dif-

ferences can become sources of tension if not properly managed.

Despite these perceived differences, it is interesting to note that 69.9% of Emiratis surveyed did not perceive a significant financial gap between themselves and tourists, and 44.4% did not consider leisure activity preferences to be different (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017, 301–303). This substantially reduces the potential for resentment based on economic inequality, which often serves as a source of tension in tourism contexts in developing countries. Resentment is minimized when economic disparity is not perceived as significant (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017, 302).

To better understand the evolution of residents' attitudes towards tourism, the study applied Doxey's Irridex model (1975), which identifies different levels of host population tolerance to tourism, from euphoria to antagonism. The results indicate that annoyance levels among Dubai's population remain low, suggesting that there is still room for further tourism development without causing significant social tension (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017, 303). However, it is worth noting that most respondents (59.4%) believe that the current number of tourists is appropriate, while only about 30% would support an increase. Additionally, 62.6% feel that development in Dubai is more oriented toward tourists' needs than those of residents (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017, 300).

These data suggest that, although attitudes toward tourism remain generally positive, there is a limit to the social carrying capacity which, if exceeded, could lead to a shift in local attitudes. Therefore, sustainable planning becomes crucial. Tourism planning should not be primarily focused on mass attraction, but rather consider the social and cultural impacts on the identity and quality of life of residents (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017, 305).

As the United Arab Emirates continues to develop its religious tourism sector, it is essential that policymakers carefully consider the destination's social carrying capacity in collaboration with both tourism and spatial planners, regularly monitoring residents' perceptions and attitudes.

5. Conclusions: the UAE model of religious tourism

The Emirati model of religious tourism represents a significant case study within the Gulf tourism landscape. The United Arab Emirates has developed a distinctive approach where tolerance and interfaith dialogue, sustainability, and ethicality emerge as pillars that deserve critical evaluation to fully understand their innovative value.

The uniqueness of this model lies in its ability to transform religious tolerance from a principle into a concrete and effective engine of holistic development (Alfalahi BOS & Alzaabi AAAA, 2025). The interfaith openness policy has created a favorable environment for dialogue among different religious denominations, positioning the UAE as a laboratory of peaceful coexistence in a region often marked by sectarian tensions. This approach found a defining expression in the historic signing of the *Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together* in Abu Dhabi in 2019 – an event that consecrated the Emirates as a pivotal center for global interfaith dialogue and revived the concept of religious tourism as a vehicle for peacebuilding and mutual understanding (see among others, Basanese & Sarrió Cucarella, 2022).

The Emirati model stands out for its ability to combine tourism development with sustainability, interpreted in its multiple dimensions. Economic sustainability is ensured by integrating religious tourism into a financial environment that respects *Sharia* principles, creating virtuous synergies between different sectors of the economy. Social sustainability is reflected in the attention given to the needs of local communities and the creation of employment opportunities that respect indigenous cultural values. Environmental sustainability – though challenging in a desert context – is pursued through the adoption of innovative solutions in the design and management of religious tourism infrastructure, as evidenced, among other things, by the integration of green technologies in worship buildings.

Particularly relevant is the ethical dimension that permeates the Emirati model. Unlike many contexts where religious tourism risks turning into mere commercialization of the spiritual experience, the UAE has developed an approach that keeps the core moral values of hospitality and respect at its center. This is reflected not only in the management of religious attractions but also in the need for proper training of tourism professionals and in the regulation of the sector.

Religious tourism in the UAE is thus configured as a model of ethical hospitality that respects the authenticity of the spiritual experience while integrating it into a tourism excellence framework marked by a deeply rooted culture of tolerance. This dimension is also expressed in the balance between commercialization and the preservation of sacredness. Respect for religious sentiment is a fundamental element for the long-term sustainability of religious tourism, and the Emirati model represents a virtuous example of such balance.

Investments in infrastructure that facilitate interfaith dialogue – such as the *Abrahamic Family House* complex in Abu Dhabi, which hosts a mosque, a

church, and a synagogue – are not only symbols of openness but also tourist attractions that enrich the country's offerings (Verderame, 2024). This approach once again demonstrates how tolerance is not only an ethical value but also an economic resource capable of generating both tangible and intangible value.

In conclusion, the Emirati model of religious tourism outlines an innovative paradigm that places interfaith tolerance, sustainability, and ethicality at the core of its tourism development strategy. Despite the challenges and criticalities to be addressed, this model offers valuable insights for other destinations seeking to develop sustainable and ethical forms of religious tourism. Its strength lies in the ability to transform ethical and spiritual values into resources for economic and social development, demonstrating that it is possible to reconcile tourism growth, intercultural dialogue, and the preservation of religious authenticity.

The future of religious tourism in the United Arab Emirates will depend on the ability to continue innovating while firmly upholding the ethical and sustainability principles that have guided its development – thus confirming the country's role as a laboratory of religious coexistence and a model of sustainable tourism development that resists the pressures of overtourism in an increasingly globalized and interconnected world.

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THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM BETWEEN RESEARCH, TRAINING AND SOCIAL IMPACT

Antonio Angelucci

SUMMARY: 1. Like an afterword. – 2. Dialogue between tradition and innovation: the contribution of different contributions. – 3. Teaching methodologies for teaching religious tourism. – 4. Religious tourism as a bridge between cultures: toward a model of coexistence. – 5. Some conclusions in the digital age.

1. Like an afterword

This volume responds to several needs, including the increasingly felt need to provide a structured theoretical and methodological framework in relation to the religious tourism sector. This ever-expanding field now represents a significant component of global tourism, as evidenced by the data presented on the value of the *halal* tourism market, estimated at approximately \$300 billion by 2030 (F. Cortelezzi, pp. 155-170). The prospect of such growth makes it clear how necessary it is to develop specific skills, capable of combining sensitivity to the cultural and spiritual dimension with the management efficiency required by today's tourism industry. In a world characterized by ever-increasing mobility and a renewed search for holistic experiences, religious tourism takes the shape of a complex domain that transcends the traditional facet of pilgrimage and opens to multiple forms of travel related to spiritual experience, the discovery of cultural roots, and the appreciation of religiously based artistic heritage.

The volume, through the different lines of inquiry, traces a path from the historical and theoretical aspects of the phenomenon to the analysis of its contemporary manifestations and the practical implications for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching and professionalization in the field. The richness of the interdisciplinary approach adopted by the Authors allows the exploration of the multiple dimensions of religious tourism: from the ancient historical-geographical one on sacred mobility in the Greco-Roman world (M. Angelucci, pp. 11-39), to the legal one, deepened in the analysis of regulatory frameworks (S. Coglievina, pp. 41-57) and in the examination of intangible cultural herit-

ages (G. Tiberi, pp. 59-83), up to the sociological, economic and managerial dimensions (R. Ricucci, pp. 85-100; F. Cortelezzi, pp. 155-170; P. Biancone *et al.*, pp. 171- 197). This polyphony of voices and perspectives does not represent a fragmentation of the discourse but, on the contrary, reflects the inherently multifaceted nature of the religious tourism phenomenon, which, to be understood in its complexity, requires interpretative tools from different disciplinary fields. It is precisely this plurality of approaches that constitutes one of the main strengths of this volume, which offers readers-students, teachers, researchers, and professionals in the field-a wide range of interpretive keys and conceptual tools to orient themselves in this fascinating field that focuses not only on the MENA area.

2. Dialogue between tradition and innovation: the contribution of different contributions

The articulate reflection on religious tourism proposed in the volume is developed through a constant dialogue between tradition and innovation, between historical dimensions and contemporary challenges. Mariachiara Angelucci's contribution (pp. 11-39) offers an in-depth investigation of religious mobility and sacred tourism in Greco-Roman antiquity, highlighting how a connection between devotional and cultural travels existed already in classical times. Particularly significant is the analysis of the figure of the *periegete*, an ancient precursor of tour guides, who accompanied voyagers to discover shrines and sacred places. The author shows how this practice was not reducible to a mere ritual experience, but involved complex social, economic, and cultural dynamics even in that period, in a kind of religious proto-tourism that anticipated many features of the contemporary phenomenon. This historical *excursus* is not merely a tribute to antiquity but provides valuable interpretive keys to understanding the roots of spiritual-tourist practices that, although transformed by the contemporary context, maintain significant continuities with the past.

The normative and legal dimensions, crucial for those working in the tourism sector, are explored in the contributions by Stella Cogliervina (pp. 41-57) and Giulia Tiberi (pp. 59-83). The first examination focuses on the legal aspects of religious tourism in the Italian legal system, with particular attention to the issue of "religious paths" and their regulation. The analysis highlights how the legislation on the subject, far from being a merely technical aspect, reflects an evolution in the social and cultural perception of the religious tourism phenomenon, which is increasingly recognized as a factor of territorial develop-

ment and cultural heritage enhancement. The second survey explores the issue of so-called intangible cultural heritage from the perspective of international, European, and Italian law, highlighting the interconnections between religious tourism and the preservation of intangible cultural expressions. Her analysis highlights how international conventions, particularly the 2003 UNESCO Convention and the 2005 Faro Convention, have contributed to redefining the very concept of cultural heritage, including practices, representations, expressions, and knowledge that constitute fundamental elements of the religious-tourism experience. Both authors, while moving within the realm of legal reflection, show how normative and cultural dimensions are inextricably intertwined in the regulation and promotion of this form of tourism.

The Islamic perspective is explored in several contributions that offer an in-depth look at various manifestations of Muslim religious tourism. Rossella Bottoni (pp. 115-133) analyzes the emblematic case of *Hagia Sophia* in Turkey, highlighting how this monument represents a significant diachronic example of national identity and its implications for religious tourism. The author shows how the transformations of this property—from a Christian Basilica to a mosque, from a museum to a mosque again—reflect not only political and ideological changes, but also different conceptions of the relationship between cultural heritage, religious identity, and tourist enjoyment. Silvia Baldassarre (pp. 135-153) ritual, spiritual aspects, and economic-legal effects. It highlights the complexity of a phenomenon that intertwines spiritual dimensions, logistical management of masses of worshippers and economic development, with significant repercussions also on labor organization and visa policies in so-called Muslim-majority countries. Giuseppe Baudo's contribution (pp. 199-203) explores Islamic tourism as an experience of spiritual discovery, emphasizing how travel can represent for Muslims more than an opportunity for recreation an opportunity to deepen their faith through encounters with places and communities that symbolize Islamic tradition. Finally, IlhamAllah Chiara Ferrero (pp. 204-213) analyzes hospitality and Islamic tourism with particular attention to the cases of Egypt and Iran and services for Muslim tourists in Italy, highlighting how the adaptation of tourism offerings to the needs of Muslim customers also represents a form of intercultural dialogue.

Also relevant is Roberta Ricucci's contribution (pp. 85-100), which offers a socio-anthropological look at the phenomenon of young Muslims and their religiosity, highlighting how this dimension influences their tourism and consumption choices. The author, through demographic data, case studies and direct testimony, shows how new generations of Muslims, especially in migration

contexts, are developing forms of religiosity that are reflected in hybrid tourism practices, capable of combining adherence to Islamic principles with contemporary expectations and lifestyles. This contribution provides insight into how religious identities transform and adapt in migration contexts, with significant implications for the tourism sector.

Finally, contributions by Flavia Cortelezzi (pp. 155-170) and the research team coordinated by Paolo Biancone (pp. 171-197) offer an economic-management perspective of the *halal* tourism phenomenon. The first survey traces the evolution of this sector, from its beginnings as a niche market to its development as a global industry, delving into trends and prospects. It notes how *halal* tourism, initially focused primarily on services related to dining and hospitality that conform to Islamic precepts, is evolving toward a broader concept that includes travel experiences that are compatible with the Islamic lifestyle in all its dimensions, from fashion to wellness to leisure to technology. The second investigation, on the other hand, focuses on *halal* tourism as a bridge between culture and spirituality, examining the potential of this market for so-called non-Islamic majority countries. Using research tools from the relevant scholarly literature, the authors identify the main research strands and emerging trends in the field, offering valuable insights for the development of market strategies and public policies that can seize the opportunities offered by this rapidly growing segment.

This mosaic of perspectives, far from generating a fragmentary vision, contributes to outlining an overall picture of religious tourism as a multidimensional phenomenon, in which spiritual, cultural, economic, and social aspects are intertwined in complex and dynamic forms. The dialogue between the different contributions highlights how understanding this phenomenon necessarily requires an interdisciplinary approach, capable of integrating knowledge and methodologies from different fields of knowledge, from history to anthropology, from law and religions to economics, from sociology to social psychology.

3. Teaching methodologies for teaching religious tourism

The different perspectives and the complex nature of the tourism-religious phenomenon also led to reflection on specific teaching methodologies that can translate this complexity into effective training paths capable of integrating theory and practice, reflection and action.

From the analysis of the various contributions implicitly transpire methodological proposals that, critically examined considering current pedagogical debate, reveal significant opportunities for educational innovation.

The interdisciplinary approach highlighted in the editors' introductory note (pp. 7-10) constitutes an essential foundation that finds its natural development in problem-based teaching (*Problem-Based Learning*). This methodology makes it possible to overcome disciplinary fragmentation by mobilizing knowledge, from different fields, around issues such as the sustainable management of a religious site or the design of a tourist-religious itinerary. Students, confronted with real problems, learn to organically integrate historical, anthropological, legal, and economic content, developing the systemic vision necessary to operate in a future working dimension.

The case study method, which emerges implicitly from R. Bottoni's (pp. 115-133) and C. Ferrero's (pp. 205-213) contributions, becomes more effective when implemented through structured *Cooperative Learning*. Cases, such as that of *Hagia Sophia*, offers an opportunity to understand the complex dynamics that characterize religious tourism not only through individual reflection, but also through the comparison of perspectives. The diversification of roles - analyst of economic, legal, cultural, and religious aspects - stimulates in learners the ability to consider a phenomenon from multiple angles, an indispensable skill in cross-cultural contexts.

Experiential learning suggested, in some ways, by G. Baudo (pp. 199-203) is enriched through integration with approaches such as the *Flipped Classroom* and *Service Learning*. Visits to places of worship, participation in religious ceremonies, and meetings with practitioners become meaningful experiences when they are preceded by a phase of self-study and oriented not only to observation but also to interaction and service. Involving students in the enhancement of a little-known religious site or in the creation of multilingual information materials for visitors from different cultures means transforming learning into a process of civic and professional empowerment, in line with the ethical dimension that permeates religious tourism.

The methodology of reflective learning, mentioned in R. Ricucci's contribution (pp. 85-100), finds *Thinking-Based Learning* practices a powerful ally. After visiting a mosque or meeting with representatives of religious communities, structured thinking routines such as "I See - Think - I Wonder" or "Connect - Extend - Defy" guide students in a systematic reflective process, fostering awareness of their own cognitive and cultural schemas and the development of the cross-cultural sensitivity essential for those who will work in the field. This metacognitive process, too often neglected in undergraduate education, is the core of professionalism in fields that require high relational and cultural competence.

Digital methodologies, highlighted by F. Cortelezzi (pp. 155-170), offer further prospects for innovation that go far beyond the instrumental use of technologies. *Digital Storytelling*, for example, allows students to explore the symbolic and narrative richness of religious tourism through the creation of interactive documentaries on sacred places or religious practices, integrating historical research, visual documentation, and anthropological reflection. *Gamification*, on the other hand, makes it possible to simulate complex professional scenarios - such as the design of tourist itineraries respectful of different religious sensitivities - in protected environments, where decisions and strategies can be tested without consequences involved in real-world situations, but with high educational value.

The effectiveness of these methodologies lies not so much in their isolated application as in their organic integration within coherent educational pathways. What they have in common is the shift in *focus* from the transmission of content to the development of complex skills, from teacher-centeredness to student protagonist, from passive learning to active experience. In this sense, they fully meet the training needs of a sector such as religious tourism, which is characterized by high complexity and a strong relational component.

Among the competencies that these methodologies develop, cultural intelligence occupies a central place. This meta-competence, which integrates cognitive, metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral dimensions, enables students to interpret diverse cultural contexts and respond appropriately by finding diverse solutions, which is no small matter for those working in religious tourism. It requires educational experiences that expose students to cultural diversity in a guided and reflective way, enabling them to develop not only knowledge of different religious traditions, but also attitudes of openness, respect, and authentic curiosity.

Ultimately, teaching methodologies for the teaching of religious tourism do not represent simple techniques, but complex training devices that profoundly transform the way in which students relate to this phenomenon. Their choice and implementation are guided by the awareness that training professionals in this field means promoting not only technical skills, but also a deep ethical and cultural sensitivity. In an age of increasing intercultural tensions, religious tourism represents an important space for dialogue and mutual understanding, provided that the training is properly managed, provoking constant reflection on intercultural action and its consequences.

4. Religious tourism as a bridge between cultures: toward a model of coexistence

The lowest common denominator of the various contributions in this volume is religious tourism as a potential tool for intercultural and interreligious dialogue. The religious tourism experience can, in fact, represent an opportunity to get to know each other and overcome prejudices and stereotypes (G. Baudo, pp. 199-203). Religious tourism brings together people of different cultures and faiths, creating spaces of encounter and exchange that can foster mutual understanding and respect for differences: so, it is when a tourist of non-Islamic faith visits a historic mosque, or when a group of Christian pilgrims crosses a Muslim-majority country, opportunities for intercultural contact are created that, if handled with sensitivity and competence, can help reduce possible distances and misunderstandings.

The enhancement of religious cultural heritage can significantly contribute to this dialogue (G. Tiberi, pp. 59-83). Indeed, sacred places, religious monuments, and spiritual traditions represent not only tourist attractions, but also significant expressions of the cultural identity of different communities. Their enhancement, when conducted with respect for their spiritual dimension and with the active involvement of local communities, can foster a greater awareness and mature appreciation of cultural and religious diversity. A significant example is religious sites that have experienced different uses throughout history, such as *Hagia Sophia* (R. Bottoni, pp. 115-133). These sites can become spaces for a complex historical narrative that highlights the interconnections between different religious and cultural traditions, rather than emphasizing their juxtapositions.

The role of education and training in this process is fundamental and must include not only technical and management skills, but also a deep understanding of the cultural and spiritual dimensions of the phenomenon (F. Cortelezzi, pp. 155-170; P. Biancone *et al.*, pp. 171-197). Only properly trained operators are able, in fact, to design and manage tourism experiences that respect the sacredness of places and the spiritual significance of religious practices, avoiding the risk of inappropriate commercialization or trivialization of religious experience. At the same time, these professionals can act as cultural mediators, facilitating encounters between visitors and local communities, between different religious traditions, and between tourist expectations and spiritual sensibilities.

In this context, the Emirati model of religious coexistence and pluralism is a significant example (A. Angelucci, pp. 231-243). The UAE, despite being a Mus-

lim-majority country, has over the years developed an inclusive approach that has allowed for the peaceful coexistence of different religious communities. The recent construction of the *Abrahamic Family House in Abu Dhabi*, a complex that includes a mosque, a Christian church and a synagogue designed by architect David Adjaye, concretely symbolizes this commitment to interfaith dialogue. This space, opening in 2023, not only allows worshippers of different religions to worship in dedicated locations, but also creates opportunities for dialogue through common areas and educational programs. In the tourism sector, this approach translates into policies that, while maintaining respect for Islamic culture, welcome and value cultural and religious diversity, creating a favorable environment for visitors of all faiths. Abu Dhabi's tourism strategy, for example, includes the promotion of itineraries that enhance Islamic cultural heritage but also that of places significant to other religious traditions, such as St. Joseph's Cathedral or the recently opened BAPS Hindu Mandir Temple. This model can offer valuable insights for the development of religious tourism that can combine cultural authenticity, respect for spiritual traditions and openness to dialogue in tolerance.

The potential of religious tourism as a tool for peace and mutual understanding should not, however, obscure the challenges and tensions that can characterize this phenomenon. As highlighted in R. Bottoni's contribution (pp. 115-133), religious places can become the object of political and symbolic contention, in which identity issues are intertwined with economic and geopolitical ones. Similarly, the increasing commercialization of the religious experience can generate tensions between the spiritual expectations of the faithful and the market logic of the tourism industry. The challenge for those working in this sector is, therefore, to strike a balance between economic enhancement, respect for the sacred dimension and the promotion of intercultural dialogue, a balance that requires not only technical expertise but also a deep ethical and cultural awareness.

5. Some conclusions in the digital age

Concluding, the volume opens perspectives that also require reflection on the relationship between education and new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence. This area, still little explored in the literature on religious tourism, deserves a critical analysis that highlights its potential, limitations, and ethical implications.

Artificial intelligence is transforming education in the tourism-religious sector through multiple directions. On the level of linguistic and cultural accessibility, neural machine translation systems and multilingual virtual assistants facilitate understanding of complex religious content, overcoming barriers that traditionally limited communicative effectiveness in multicultural contexts. However, these tools are not neutral: they inevitably incorporate linguistic and cultural biases that risk oversimplifying or distorting religious meanings deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts. Their implementation therefore requires careful critical evaluation and constant monitoring of translation quality, especially for religious terminologies and concepts that resist literal translations.

In the field of educational simulations, virtual and augmented environments allow students to explore geographically inaccessible or historically changed religious sites, creating immersive experiences that enrich the understanding of sacred places. This virtualization of experience, while technically sophisticated, raises questions about the authentic dimension of religious experience: can a digital reproduction convey the sacredness of a place? The pedagogical effectiveness of these tools depends on their ability to integrate symbolic and spiritual dimensions that transcend mere visual reconstruction.

Particularly innovative, but no less problematic, is the use of adaptive learning systems based on generative models, capable of creating customized case studies that reflect real dynamics of religious tourism. These tools can simulate complex cross-cultural mediation scenarios, adapting to the different learning styles of female students. The risk, however, is that algorithms trained on limited or unbalanced data reproduce and amplify stereotypical representations of religious traditions, undermining the educational goal of developing authentic intercultural sensitivity.

The deeper challenge concerns the ethical dimension: the development of culturally sensitive artificial intelligences capable of respecting the diversity of spiritual views requires an interdisciplinary approach that integrates technological, anthropological, and religious expertise. It is in this context that the need emerges for an algorithmic specifically oriented toward religious tourism—an ethical reflection on the algorithms that will shape the experiences of visitors and the training of professionals in the field. This algorithmic of religious tourism should be articulated around fundamental principles: respect for the authenticity of religious traditions in their digital representation; transparency about the processes of selection and presentation of religious content; fairness in the representation of different denominations, avoiding implicit hierarchies; protection of visitors' privacy in sacred places; and, no less important, safeguard-

ing the contemplative dimension of religious experience from technological hyper-stimulation. Training in this area must therefore include not only technical skills on the design and use of digital tools, but also deep critical reflection on the values embedded in such technologies and their consistency with the ethical principles of different religious traditions.

This dialogic approach cannot ignore the direct involvement of religious communities in the design and validation of the digital tools that represent them. The participation of religious leaders, scholars and the faithful in the process of technological development becomes a guarantee of respect and authenticity, transforming technology from a potential threat to a tool for enhancing and preserving spiritual heritage.

The future of training in religious tourism lies neither in the uncritical adoption of emerging technologies nor in the rejection of traditional approaches, but in the construction of a hybrid paradigm that can enhance the complementarity of human presence and technological support. Artificial intelligence, far from replacing human cultural mediation, can amplify the capabilities of the religious tourism professional, supporting him or her in understanding cultural complexity and promoting authentic dialogue between different traditions.

In this perspective, the volume makes a significant contribution to the definition of an approach to teaching religious tourism that, while open to innovation, holds firm to its fundamental objective: to train professionals capable of navigating with competence and ethical sensitivity in cross-cultural contexts, transforming religious tourism into an authentic space of encounter, understanding and mutual respect in a world characterized by increasing tensions and polarization.

This volume addresses multiple emerging needs, foremost among them the growing demand for a structured theoretical and methodological framework concerning the religious tourism sector. This domain, undergoing continuous expansion, now constitutes a significant component of the global tourism landscape, as demonstrated by data on the halal tourism market, projected to reach a value of approximately \$300 billion by 2030. The prospect of such substantial growth underscores the imperative to cultivate specific competencies – skills that integrate a deep sensitivity to cultural and spiritual dimensions with the managerial acumen demanded by today’s tourism industry.

In a world marked by increasing mobility and a renewed quest for holistic and meaningful experiences, religious tourism emerges as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It transcends the traditional notion of pilgrimage to encompass diverse forms of travel motivated by spiritual exploration, the rediscovery of cultural roots, and the appreciation of religiously inspired artistic heritage.

In this context, the volume offers a significant contribution to the development of an educational approach to religious tourism – an approach that embraces innovation while remaining steadfast in its core objective: to prepare professionals equipped to act with competence and ethical awareness in intercultural contexts. The ultimate aim is to transform religious tourism into a genuine space for encounter, mutual understanding, and respectful dialogue in an increasingly polarized and tension-filled global society.

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