

The Travels and Journals of Ibn Battuta

Edited by Clinton Grant from J. Arno & H. Grady, "Ibn Battuta: A View of the 14th-Century World" (NCHS)

Fourteenth century Islamic civilization in Southwest Asia and North Africa played a pivotal role in integrating Africa, Asia and Europe into a network of trade and cultural exchange that stimulated global exploration and the transformation of the world. Documents 1-3 are intended for full class instruction; A-E for group work and class presentations. For a DBQ, students can answer the question: How do the 14th century journals of Ibn Battuta document increasing global interaction? All materials are edited.

1. Who was Abu Abdullah Ibn Battuta?

The years from 1000 to 1500 AD were a period of expansion for Islam in Asia, Europe and Africa. Followers of Islam migrated to new lands and spread their religious beliefs. Islamic armies conquered other peoples. Merchants introduced their religion to other parts of the world as they established new trade routes.

Abu Abdullah Ibn Battuta (Abu Abdullah, son of Battuta) was born in Tangiers (in present day Morocco) in 1304. About the same time, the Mongol military rulers of Persia and west central Asia converted to Islam. As an adulthood, Ibn Battuta was able to travel widely under the protection of the Islamic religion.

As a young man, Abu Abdullah Ibn Battuta studied law. In 1325, he left his homeland and made a holy pilgrimage, or *hajj*, to Mecca and Medina on the Arabian peninsula. Ibn Battuta became a scholar and visited Islamic centers of learning and traveled to new areas seeking employment, adventure and honor.

In 1356, the ruler of Morocco had a young scholar record Ibn Battuta's experiences and observations about the Islamic world. They worked for two years and produced a *rihla*, or book of travels. After completing the book, Abu Abdullah Ibn Battuta became a judge in a small Moroccan town. As far as we know, he never traveled again. Ibn Battuta died in 1368.

Modern day countries such as Morocco did not exist in the fourteenth century. Ibn Battuta would have described himself as a Muslim, part of the large group of people who identified with the teachings of Mohammed and the Holy Qur'an.

2. Map Showing the Travels of Ibn Battuta



Source:

<http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww/sch618/Travelers/BattutaMap.GIF>

3. Chronology of the life and travels of Abu Abdullah Ibn Battuta

1304	Born Tangier, North Africa
1325-26	Travels from Tangiers to Egypt, Syria and Arabia
1326-32 (est.)	Travels from Mecca to Iraq, Persia, Arabia and East Africa
1330-35	Travels to Anatolia, the Black Sea region, and the Asian Steep
1333-45	Travels to India and Ceylon
1345-46	Travels to Southeast Asia and maybe China
1349-54	Travels in North Africa, Spain and western Africa
1368 or 1369	Ibn Battuta dies, probably in Tangiers, North Africa

A. Ibn Battuta travels to Egypt, Syria and Arabia

At the age of 21, Ibn Battuta left Tangier to make the *hajj*. It was both a holy journey and an adventure. The trip by land from Tangier to Mecca was a 3,000 mile journey across the coastal plains, deserts, and mountains of Mediterranean Africa. Even though the journey was dangerous, pious Muslim scholars made the trek to perform the pilgrimage and study in the mosques and colleges of Egypt, Syria, and Arabia. Ibn Battuta joined a caravan and spent eight to nine months reaching Egypt.

In Egypt, Ibn Battuta visited Cairo and toured the Nile Valley. He probably attended lessons on the *shari'a* at the *madrasas*, or colleges for the study of law and the religious sciences. He later visited Hebron and Jerusalem in Palestine. Hebron was important to Muslims, Jews and Christians because it was the burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, founders of the shared monotheistic tradition. Jerusalem, a small town of 10,000, was filled with shrines that attracted numerous pilgrims and scholars. For Jews, the center of religious focus was the ancient Temple; for Christians it was the church of the Holy Sepulcher; and for Muslims it was the Haram al-Sharif. Within the Haram al-Sharif were several holy sites. The most important was the Dome of the Rock. According to Muslim belief, from this spot Mohammed was transported to the Seventh Heaven of Paradise to stand in the presence of God.

Moving on to Damascus, Ibn Battuta prepared for the *hajj*. Every member of the *hajj* party had to carry most of his or her own supplies southward across the Arabian desert. A generous donor provided Ibn Battuta with a camel and money for the pilgrimage. The journey from Damascus to Medina was about 820 miles and took 45 to 50 days. Medina is the second most holy city for Muslims. It was Mohammed's home for a time, and he is buried there with his wife Fatima.

The final trek to Mecca was a dusty journey across 200 miles of desert. Not far from Mecca, male pilgrims entered a state of spiritual readiness and ritual purity by shedding their ordinary clothes and putting on two large flat sheets of cloth to form a garment called the *ihram*. One cloth was wrapped around the upper body and draped over the left shoulder. Women dressed modestly, without jewelry and without their faces covered. All this was preparation for entering a state of holiness. In Mecca, arguing, cutting of hair or nails, killing of animals and sexual intercourse were prohibited.

The pilgrims arrived at the city before dawn and went immediately to the grand mosque called the Haram or Sanctuary. Here they worshipped by performing the *tawaf*. They walked seven times counterclockwise around the *Ka'ba*, the great stone cube that stands in the center of the mosque. This granite block is covered by a black veil, which is encircled with an inscription in golden Arabic letters. The interior of the *Ka'ba* is simply furnished and contains a copy of the Qur'an. On the exterior of the eastern corner is embedded the Black Stone which Mohammed is said to have kissed. It is about 12 inches in diameter and is set in silver. According to Qur'anic tradition, the *Ka'ba* was built by Abraham to acclaim the one God. Later, polytheistic tribes made it into a house of idols. In the seventh century, Mohammed rededicated it to belief in one God.

Ibn Battuta met new people from all around the Muslim world who had also gathered for the *hajj*. Many poor pilgrims lived in the mosque while they were in Mecca. They ate, slept, and prayed there. The mosque was busy day and night with worshipers. In order to complete the *hajj*, Ibn Battuta joined other pilgrims to journey east of the city through desert ravines to the plain of Arafat. The ceremonies in the desert make up the heart of the annual *hajj* or Great Pilgrimage. Many pilgrims soon returned home to their ordinary lives. For Ibn Battuta, this was an end and a beginning. He had no intentions of returning to Morocco. He had earned the title al-Hajj, which gave him respect in learned circles, and was now ready to continue his travels.

Questions

1. Why did Ibn Battuta leave his home in Tangier?
2. What major cities did he visit on this leg of the journey?
3. Why is the *Ka'ba* in Mecca considered a holy site?
4. Why is the *hajj* an important experience for Muslims?
5. What evidence did Ibn Battuta report of global interaction?

6. In your opinion, what would have been the most surprising discovery on this trip for Ibn Battuta? Why?

B. Ibn Battuta travels to Mesopotamia, Persia, Arabia, and East Africa

In 1326, Ibn Battuta left Mecca in a caravan to Mesopotamia (present day Iraq). In Basra, on the Persian Gulf, he hired a boat and explored the marshes of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Ibn Battuta was a Sunni Muslim. Sunnis believe that Qur'anic revelation are to be interpreted by consensus of the community, not by a leader with special knowledge and wisdom. In this region of Mesopotamia and in Persia (present day Iran), he encountered settlements of Shi'a Muslims. Shi'a believe that a leader-messiah, a descendant of Mohammed's son-in-law Ali, will return and make the earth truthful and righteous until the time of the Last Judgment. Until then, a spiritual leader must guide the Muslim community and interpret the Qur'an. Ibn Battuta was not sympathetic toward the Shi'a because he believed they were in error in their beliefs. At a shrine in a village in Mesopotamia, Ibn Battuta observed Sufi Muslim devotees dancing and twirling to the beat of drums. Some Sufi brethren danced barefoot on hot coals. Ibn Battuta did not support this sort of religious fervor.

Traveling on to Baghdad, Ibn Battuta found a city recovering from the Mongol invasion of 1258. Mosques were being restored and scholarly learning was progressing. The Mongols had conquered the Persians, but in a sense the Persians ended up conquering the Mongols by converting them to Islam and Persian culture. Ibn Battuta was invited to travel with the Sultan of Persia. On one trip he went to Tabriz, a city in northwestern Persia, inhabited by two to three hundred thousand people. This town was the main intersection for the Mediterranean, Central Asia and Indian Ocean trade routes.

In 1330, Ibn Battuta reports that he went to the Red Sea port of Jidda and boarded a ship of a type called a *dhow*. These vessels had wooden hulls made of planks that were tied together with cords of fiber and triangular sails. Ibn Battuta became seasick and had to be put ashore. After that, he traveled to Aden, the great commercial port at the junction of the Red and Arabian Seas.

Southwest Asia was a hub connecting Africa, Asia and Europe. Goods moving among these regions had to pass this bottleneck. Ibn Battuta took advantage of this trade activity to join a group of Muslim merchants setting sail from Aden for ports along the East African coast.

The *dhow* he traveled on sailed under winter monsoon winds and reached the port of Mogadishu (in present day Somalia) in 15 days. Ships coming to this city brought porcelain, silk, glassware, books, paper and tools. They were exchanged for ivory, gold, frankincense, myrrh, animal skins, ambergris, rice, mangrove poles, and slaves. In Mogadishu, the local religious scholars treated Ibn Battuta to a meal of stew with chicken, fish, and vegetables served over rice and cooked in ghee (unclarified butter). They also ate bananas in milk and a dish of sour milk with green ginger, mangoes, pickled lemons, and chilies. Ibn Battuta boarded a ship to visit the region south of the equator. Kilwa was the center of the East African gold trade. Here on the edge of Dar al-Islam, Ibn Battuta was delighted to find stone houses with sunken courtyards and indoor plumbing. The well-to-do people wore silk and fine jewelry and ate from porcelain dishes.

Because of summer monsoons winds, which blow off the African continent toward Asia, Ibn Battuta returned quickly to the southern shore of Arabia. He crossed the rugged heartland of Oman and returned once again to Mecca.

Questions

1. How do the beliefs and practices of Shi'a, Sunni and Sufi Muslims differ?
2. How does Ibn Battuta describe Baghdad?
3. How did Ibn Battuta travel on the Red Sea?
4. What evidence do you have of the importance of trade in the 14th century Muslim world?
5. What evidence did Ibn Battuta report of global interaction?
6. In your opinion, what would have been the most surprising discovery on this trip for Ibn Battuta? Why?

C. Ibn Battuta travels to Anatolia and the Asian Steppe

In the 13th century, the Mongols and Turkish allies established domination over eastern and central Anatolia. The Mongols tightly regulated the vast areas they controlled. The result was the Pax Mongolica, or period of peace in the region. Anatolia was known in ancient times as Asia Minor (today it is called Turkey). Ibn Battuta described it as one of the finest regions in the world with people who were cleanly dressed and delicious food. In Ibn Battuta's time, the region was in a state of political and cultural transition as Muslim Turks defeated the Christian Byzantine Empire. As an Islamic territory, Anatolia became a center for trade in metal wares, leather, silk woolens, grain, fur, timber and slaves.

Ibn Battuta was hosted at the courts of Turkish princes and honored as a religious and legal scholar. The Turkish rulers, all descendants of rough-hewn warriors, were anxious to acquire the fine points of their new faith and the sacred law. One ruler, Sultan Orkhan, asked Ibn Battuta to write down traditions of the Prophet which were translated into Turkish.

From Anatolia, Ibn Battuta crossed the Black Sea on a ship bound for the Crimea. He made his way to Kaffa, which had a large community of Christian merchants from Genoa. In the middle of the night, he heard church bells ring. As a Muslim, Ibn Battuta considered bells to be a devilish form of sacrilege. From the minaret of a mosque, he began to loudly chant the Qur'an and the call to prayer. The local *qadi* stopped him because he feared that Ibn Battuta might provoke hostility between Muslims and European Christians.

Ibn Battuta continued to Al-Quram, the provincial capital of the Mongol kingdom known in European history as the Golden Horde. Al-Quram was a staging area for trans-Asian caravans. Ibn Battuta purchased three wagons equipped with round tents called *yurts*, and joined a caravan to Kipchak.

When Ibn Battuta met Ozbeg Khan, the Mongol ruler of Kipchak, he was seated in a huge golden yurt on a silver throne surrounded by his four wives, or *khatuns*. Ibn Battuta was struck by the equality Turkish and Mongol women enjoyed with men. The khatuns owned lands of their own and sometimes made administrative decisions or signed decrees. When the senior khatun entered the golden tent, the khan went to the entrance of the pavilion, greeted her, escorted her to her couch, and did not sit himself until she was seated. Unlike the secluded women of Southwest Asia, the khatun was in full view and unveiled. One khatun was the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor. Hers was an arranged marriage, designed to improve relations between the Mongols and the Christian Byzantines. This princess received permission to return to Constantinople to give birth to a child in her father's palace. Ibn Battuta asked and received permission to go with her.

As soon as the princess entered Byzantine territory, she changed her behavior. She left behind the Islamic prayers, drank wine, and ate pork (a meat forbidden by the Qur'an). After reaching Constantinople, the khan's wife stayed with her father. Ibn Battuta visited all the sights of the city, including the church of Hagia Sophia. He did not enter the church because he would have had to prostrate himself before the cross. When winter arrived, Ibn Battuta returned to the steppe. He wore three fur coats, two pairs of trousers, two pairs of socks, and boots lined with bear skin. He had to be helped onto his horse because he had on so many clothes.

Ibn Battuta decided to make his way to India. He led an entourage south across the steppe, then crossed the Hindu Kush, where the snow was so deep that clots had to be spread in front of the camels so they could walk. When he descended into the Indus Valley, he joined other Muslims, who looked to India and the Muslim ruler there for employment. Though the date is unclear, he probably arrived in India in 1333.

Questions

1. Why is this period in Anatolia called Pax Mongolica?
2. How was Ibn Battuta treated while he lived in Anatolia?
3. What does Ibn Battuta believe about Christian church bells?
4. How does the reading show differences in cultural beliefs within the Islamic world?

5. What evidence did Ibn Battuta report of global interaction?
6. In your opinion, what would have been the most surprising discovery on this trip for Ibn Battuta? Why?

Muslim Turks from Afghanistan conquered a large part of India in the thirteenth century. By 1333, Muslims formed a ruling elite on top of a stratified Hindu society. Mohammed Ibn Tughluq, the Turkish sultan, united all north and central India for the first time since the Gupta empire of the 5th century. The sultan made Ibn Battuta a judge. Since the Moroccan could not speak Persian fluently, he was assigned two scholars to assist him. Mohammed Tughluq later asked Ibn Battuta to lead an official delegation to China to present gifts to the Mongol emperor.

The Chinese emperor, a descendant of Kublai Khan, had sent Ibn Tughluq gifts of slaves, textiles, robes, dishware, and swords. When the caravan was about 75 miles south of Delhi, it was attacked by Hindu bandits. Ibn Battuta escaped after bribing a guard. He wandered the countryside for seven days until his traveling companions came to his rescue.



Source: http://www.zheng-he.org/images/index/index_5.jpg

D. Ibn Battuta travels to India and maybe to China

Once on the coast of the Arabian Sea, Ibn Battuta hired four ships. Their crews included African spearmen and bowmen who had a long tradition of serving on ships in the Indian Ocean. In Calicut (modern day Calcutta), Muslims and Hindus greeted the diplomatic mission with drums, trumpets and horns. Arrangements were made for the group and their belongings to sail on one large Chinese-style vessel called a junk. This type of ship was made of double timbers attached together with nails. The hull was divided into compartments which kept the ship from sinking even if was pierced below the waterline. A junk could have five or more masts, stern rudders, up to five decks, enclosed cabins, private lavatories, fire fighting equipment, steward service, lifeboats and common rooms. Ibn Battuta boarded a large junk, then transferred at the last minute to a smaller one. A storm came up while he was still on shore and the ships had to leave the harbor. The junk Ibn Battuta was to sail on sank.

The *Rihla* describes Ibn Battuta's journey to China, but some historians questions whether he really made the trip or is reporting on voyages made by other merchants. The trip to China was possible because the Mongol dynasty favored international trade. Cities on China's southern coast teemed with Muslim merchants and Ibn Battuta would have found a welcoming community.

Ibn Battuta claimed to have sailed from the Malay Peninsula to Sumatra, then around the Strait of Malacca to the Chinese harbor city of Ch'uan-chou. He described silks, porcelains, and a variety of foods. He thought the Chinese clever for using paper money and found the travel safe, but was uncomfortable living among people who were not interested in being Muslims. The *Rihla* asserts that Ibn Battuta traveled to Canton and finally to Hang-chou and Beijing by way of the grand canal. However, most historians doubt that he could have traveled further than the southern coastal cities.

Questions

1. How had political stability developed in northern India?
2. Why was Ibn Battuta sent on a voyage to China?

3. How were Chinese style vessels designed?
4. Why is there historical debate on whether Ibn Battuta arrived in China?
5. What evidence did Ibn Battuta report of global interaction?
6. In your opinion, what would have been the most surprising discovery on this trip for Ibn Battuta? Why?

E. Ibn Battuta travels to Morocco, Spain and Mali

When Ibn Battuta returned to Damascus, he found people dying from the Black Plague. The plague may have originally developed among ground burrowing rodents on the inner Asian steppe. Humans caught the disease from fleas that had been in the fur of infected animals. Because both rats and fleas were carried on caravans along with trade goods, the plague easily infected people who were moving from town to town.

By the end of 1350, about one third of all Europeans were dead. Muslims in North Africa and Southwest Asia suffered just as much. People blamed the disease on polluted winds from the steppes and were urged to live in fresh air, sprinkle their homes with rose water and vinegar, sit motionless, or eat pickled onions and fresh fruit. The disease was treated by applying egg yolks to the sores, spreading fresh flowers on the sickbed, and above all, by prayer. Ibn Battuta escaped the Black Death. After making the hajj one more time, he decided to return to Tangier. On the way home, he learned his mother had died of the plague several months earlier.

Ibn Battuta visited the royal capital of Fez in Morocco, stopped briefly in Tangier, then made his way to Ceuta where people from Spain were coming to flee the plague. After recovering from malaria, he joined volunteers who were defending Gibraltar against Christian attack. He visited the mountainous Muslim sultanate of Grenada in Spain where he met Ibn Juzayy, a young literary scholar who would later record his adventures.

After returning to Morocco, Ibn Battuta crossed the High Atlas Mountains and joined a trans-Saharan caravan at the commercial city of Sijilmasa on the northern edge of the desert. After 25 days, the caravan reached the settlement of Taghaza, a salt mining center. It was a grim place where salt slabs were exchanged for gold. Slaves dug the salt and loaded it onto the camels. All the food had to be imported. Ibn Battuta slept in a house made completely of salt except for the camel-skinned roof. Loaded with salt slabs, the caravan left Taghaza and crossed five hundred miles of desert.

After several weeks, Ibn Battuta arrived in the capital of Mali. He ate yams or some other root that had not been cooked long enough to remove its natural poison and was sick for two months. When he finally recovered, he attended a memorial ceremony for a sultan at the palace. The sultan entered the pavilion, preceded by three hundred slaves, two saddled and bridled horses, and two rams as defense against the evil eye. However, when Ibn Battuta was introduced to the ruler, he received to his dismay a gift of only three loaves of bread, a piece of beef, and a gourd filled with yogurt. In February 1353, Ibn Battuta went by camel to Timbuktu, which was just then developing as a trade center. Moving on to Gao, a source of copper, he became ill again and was cared for by a Moroccan. Shortly after this, he received a request from the sultan of Morocco to return home.



Mud mosques of Djenne en route to Timbuktu
<http://www.journeys-intl.com/images/trips/photos/459.jpg>

When he arrived in Fez, the sultan commanded him to set down an account of his travels. He did this with the assistance of Ibn Juzayy, the young scholar he had met in Granada. After dictating his story, Ibn Battuta probably remained in Morocco leading a quiet life. He died in 1368 or 1369.

Questions

1. How serious was the Black Death in Europe and in the Islamic world?
2. Why did Ibn Battuta travel to Gibraltar and Spain?
3. What were conditions like on Sahara Desert caravans?
4. Why was Ibn Battuta unhappy in Mali?
5. What evidence did Ibn Battuta report of global interaction?
6. In your opinion, what would have been the most surprising discovery on this trip for Ibn Battuta?
Why?