

Ibn Battuta Primary Source Reading

Name: _____

IBN BATTUTA



Ibn Battuta was born in Tangier, North Africa in 1304. He was born into a wealthy Muslim family. For 27 years he travelled, visiting most of the Islamic countries in the world. During the 14th century, Islamic civilization in Southwest Asia and North Africa played a major role in bringing the Islamic world together for trade and cultural exchange. Their empire covered North and West Africa, Southern Europe into Spain and Portugal, the Middle East, and vast area of Southeast and Eastern Asia. Their reign created global exploration and a unique transformation of the world.

Years	Areas Travelled by Ibn Battuta
1325-1326	Travels from Tangiers to Egypt, Syria and Arabia
1326-1332	Travels from Mecca to Iraq, Persia, Arabia and East Africa
1332-1335	Travels to Anatolia (Turkey), the Black Sea area and the Asian steppes
1335-1345	Travels to India and Ceylon
1345-1346	Travels to Southeast Asia and maybe China (not conclusive by his diary)
1349-1354	Travels back to North Africa then down into Spain and Western Africa
1368	Ibn Battuta dies, probably in the city of Tangier

The following readings are edited from *"Ibn Battuta: A View of the Fourteenth-Century World"* by Joan Arno and Helen Grady, National Center for History in Schools, UCLA.

Instructions:

Read each document carefully then answer the questions that follow each section.

While reading, ask yourself could Ibn Battuta have had these adventures if he were not Islamic?

Note: Sufism is an orthodox form of Islam (the Truth) achieving by strict means the selfless experience of love and religious devotion (the tarikat) or the spiritual path or way towards full belief in God.

Ibn Battuta

At the age of 21 Ibn Battuta made his holy pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca. He left his home country of Tangier for Mecca, a 3,000 mile trip by land across the coastal plains, deserts and mountains of Mediterranean Africa. He set off alone but after three weeks he joined a caravan and spent nearly nine months reaching Egypt.

He crossed the Sinai Peninsular by way of Gaza and then went to Hebron and Jerusalem. Hebron was important to Muslims, Christians, and Jews alike because it was the burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, founders of the shared monotheistic tradition. Jerusalem was a small town, of about 10,000 people at the time. It was filled with shrines, which 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, for Muslims it was the Haram al-Sharif. Within the Haram were several holy sites, the most important being the Domes of the Rock where Muhammad, according to Muslim belief, was miraculously transported to the seventh Heaven of Paradise to stand in the presence of God. Upon his visit to Haram he received a cloak from a Sufi master.

He then moved on to Damascus which was the Mamluk capital of Southwest Asia. While there he became ill. After recovering he joined a pilgrimage caravan which numbered several thousand. Each member of the hajj party had to carry most of his or her own supplies across the Arabian Desert. The difficult journey from Damascus to Medina was about 820 miles and it took him nearly 50 days to reach his destination. At the outskirts of Mecca, the male pilgrims entered a state of spiritual readiness and ritual purity by shredding 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; the other covered the remainder of his torso. The women on the hajj dressed modestly, without jewelry and without their faces covered. Once they entered the state of sanctity there was to be no arguing, cutting of hair or nails, killing of animals or sexual intercourse.

Ibn Battuta arrived at Mecca before dawn and immediately went to the grand mosque called the Haram or sanctuary. He worshipped by performing the tawaf, that is walking seven times counter clockwise around the Ka'ba, the great stone cube that stands in the center of the mosque. The stone is covered by a black veil and inscribed with golden Arabic letters. The interior of the Ka'ba is simply furnished and contains a copy of the Qur'an and on the exterior of the eastern corner is the Black Stone, which Muhammad is said to have kissed. Many poor people lived in the mosque while they were in Mecca. They ate, slept, and prayed there, although cooking was not allowed. The mosque was busy day and night with worshippers.

1. What major cities did he visit on this leg of his journey?
2. Why is the Ka'ba in Mecca considered a holy site?
3. Why is the hajj an important experience for Muslims?

In 1326 Ibn Battuta left Mecca in another caravan. They marched day and night (with the aid of torches) and after 44 days reached Mesopotamia. He went to the city of Basra and hired a boat to explore the marshes of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In this region of Iraq and scattered throughout Persia he encountered settlements of Shi'a Muslims. The Shi'a make up a number of sects within Islam. They believe that a leader-messiah, a descendant of Ali (Muhammad's son-in-law) known as the Imam, will one day return. He will make the earth truthful and righteous until the time of the Last Judgment.

Ibn Battuta was a Sunni Muslim and was not very sympathetic toward the Shi'a; he believed they were in error in their beliefs. He was interested in Sufism, though sometimes Sufi practice was too excessive for him. Stopping to visit one of their shrines he had the chance to observe a Sufi ecstatic event in which devotees danced and twirled to the beat of drums. Some Sufi brethren danced barefoot on hot coals. Others took large snakes and bit off their heads. He later traveled to Baghdad where he found the city still 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 conquered the Mongols by converting them to Islam. He was then invited to travel with the Il-khan or Sultan of Persia and his huge entourage to the city of Tabriz in northwest Persia, a city of two or three thousand people. The town was the main intersection from the Mediterranean, Central Asia, and Indian Ocean trade routes.

In 1330 Ibn Battuta went to the Red Sea port of Jidda and boarded a ship called a dhow. They had wooden hull made of planks tied together with fiber cords and their sails were triangular shaped. He soon became seasick and was put ashore. He then went to Aden, the great commercial port at the junction of the Red and Arabian Seas. Trade was important to the Arabs and other Muslims because of the location of Southwest Asia as a hub connecting Africa, Asia and Europe. Thanks to the monsoon winds he reached the port of Mogadishu in Somalia in 15 days. Ships coming to this city imported porcelain, silk, glassware, books, paper and tools. These items were traded for goods from the interior of Africa: ivory, gold, frankincense, myrrh, animal skins, rice, mangrove poles and slaves. In Mogadishu he was treated to a meal of stew with chicken, fish and vegetables served over rice and cooked in ghee (unclarified butter). He also ate unripe bananas in milk and a dish of sour milk with green ginger, mangoes, pickled lemons and chilies.

1. How did Ibn Battuta travel to the Red Sea?
2. What evidence do you have of the importance of trade in the 14th century Muslim world?
3. What evidence did Ibn Battuta report of global interaction?

Anatolia, known in ancient times as Asia Minor and today as Turkey, was the next land Ibn Battuta visited. He called it one of the finest regions of the world. The area was also in a state of political and cultural transition. Muslim Turkish warriors were in the process of defeating the Byzantine Empire and already looking to invade southeastern Europe. 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. That result was Pax Mongolica (Mongol peace).

The people were cleanly dressed, the food delicious, and the men handsome. Anatolia was a center of far-ranging trade for metal wares, leather, silk, woolens, grain, fur, timber and slaves. Ibn Battuta was well received, hosted by Turkish princes and welcomed into fraternal societies of young men who fought one another just for the privilege of entertaining him. One ruler, Sultan Orkhan, asked him to write down the traditions of the Prophet, which were then translated into Turkish and put on display.

After traveling through Anatolia he arrived at the Black Sea. He then took a ship bound for the peninsula of Crimea. Three nights out a storm arose and after several days of near catastrophe, the ship and its passengers came to land. 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, he considered bells to be one of the more devilish forms of sacrilege practiced by Christians. Determined to counteract this thunderous noise, he bounded up the stairs of a mosque, to the top of the minaret, and began loudly chanting the Qur'an and the call to prayer. The local qadi rushed to the mosque with sword in hand, fearing the visitors might provoke hostility with the Europeans. Fortunately Ibn Battuta did not create a major incident between the Muslims and Christians.

The Moroccan traveler then continued to Al-Quram, the provincial capital of the Kipchak territory, the kingdom known as the Golden Horde. It was a staging area for the Trans Asian caravans. Here he purchased three wagons equipped with round tents called yurts. These wagons were perfect for the broad rolling steppes. The caravan he joined was like a small town, vast numbers of carts moving slowly across the plain. When the caravan came upon Ozbeg Khan, the Mongol ruler of Kipchak, he was seated in a huge golden yurt on a silver throne surrounded by his four wives (khatuns). Ibn Battuta notices by the equality Turkish and Mongol women enjoyed with the men. He was taken aback by the unveiled women who even accompanied their husbands to the local bazaars. The khatuns owned lands of their own. Each khatun had three hundred wagons which carried chests, money, food, robes and furnishings. An additional one hundred wagons carried four servant girls each. 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. The 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.

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He wrote that the caravan consisted of 5,000 horsemen, 500 troops, 200 slave girls, 20 Greek and Indian pages, 400 wagons, 2,000 horses, 500 oxen and camels. To their detriment, the local peasants had to supply food to the entire entourage.

As soon as the khatuns entered Byzantine territory, she changed her behavior. She left behind the Islamic prayers, drank wine and ate pork (forbidden in the Qur'an). When he reached Constantinople, Ibn Battuta visited all of the sights of the city, including the Hagia Sophia, which he did not enter because he would have to prostrate himself before the cross. He then toured the nearby Genoese colony of Galata. Leaving behind the princess he returned to the steppes as winter set in. He wore three fur coats, two pairs of trousers, two pairs of socks, and boots lined with bear skin. His beard froze when he washed his face. He had to be helped on to his horse because he had on so many clothes. He led a caravan across the Hindu Kush Mountains where the snow was so deep that felt cloths had to be spread in front of the camels so they could walk. When he descended into the Indus Valley it was the year 1333.

- 1. Why is this period in Anatolia called Pax Mongolica?**
- 2. What does Ibn Battuta believe about church bells?**
- 3. In your opinion, what would have been the most surprising discovery on this trip for Ibn Battuta? Why?**