The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, a Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century Study Guide

The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, a Muslim Traveler of the Fourteenth Century by Ross E. Dunn

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

"The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century" is historian Ross Dunn's account of the world of Islam in the 1400s as based on the contemporaneous book written about the journeys of Ibn Battuta, an educated legal scholar from Tangier in Morocco whose travels extend from Sub-Saharan Africa across Northern Africa to the Middle East, Persia, Palestine, India and China.

Ibn Battuta, with the aid of a writer commissioned by the Sultan of Morocco, produces a traditional "Rihla" describing his journeys. Dunn uses the Rihla as a starting point to describe the vast extent of the Dar al-Islam, or the "kingdom" of Islam, which includes all the kingdoms and regions where the leaders practice and enforce Islamic law. The reach of Islam is so great, Dunn argues, that even thought Ibn Battuta travels more widely than most other people of his day, he is rarely unable to find practicing Muslims to show him hospitality and help him on his way. He eventually receives a position as a judge serving the Sultan of Delhi in India, which brings him considerable wealth, but ends in disaster. Along the way, Ibn Battuta meets most of the Islamic kings in power, receiving gifts and hospitality from all of them. He finally returns home after over 40 years to live his final days in Fez, in the service of the Moroccan Sultan.

Dunn's book follows the path of Ibn Battuta's journey from his first pilgrimage to Mecca as an observant Muslim and beyond. He surrounds Ibn Battuta's sometimes sparse descriptions of regions and rulers with historical background taken from other sources to provide a fuller picture of the political and religious climate in which Ibn Battuta moves from place to place. He outlines the importance of trade in the spread of Islam to distant reaches of the globe, and uses excerpts from the Rihla to illustrate his points. He also uses episodes from the Rihla to paint a portrait of Ibn Battuta himself, a pious and enthusiastic, if sometimes opportunistic, young man with a decidedly restless streak.

Dunn's book is illustrated with photographs and maps showing Ibn Battuta's probable routes, which are sometimes in doubt. Dunn explains where Ibn Battuta's account, based entirely on his own memory several years after the events he describes, seem to be doubtful or perhaps where he combines several events into one. The absolute truth of Ibn Battuta's recollections are not central to Dunn's intention, however, of describing the interconnected nature of the expanding Islamic culture and religion during this time period, as evidenced by the wide ranging journey of this young Moroccan.

Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

Dunn introduces the book with a brief synopsis of the14th-century travels of Abu 'Abdallah ibn Battuta, a young Muslim scholar from Tangier in Morocco in Northern Africa. Born into a family of legal scholars, Ibn Battuta is a privileged and educated man by the standards of his day. He leaves Tangier in 1325 to make the annual religious pilgrimage to Mecca, called the hajj. After completing his pilgrimage, he continues traveling, visiting the Middle East, the east coast of Africa, India, Asia, Afghanistan and Turkey, sometimes serving in important official positions. After returning home, the ruler of Morrocco hires a writer to work with Ibn Battuta to prepare an account of his travels. This genre of literature is called a "rihla."

Ibn Battuta's rihla was mostly lost to Western scholars for centuries until it was rediscovered and translated in the 19th century, Dunn explains. He is often compared to Marco Polo, Dunn notes, but Ibn Battuta was not an intrepid explorer of unknown lands as Polo was, he adds. Islam in the 14th century spans from the south of Spain and North Africa eastward to India and Southeast Asia in what is called the Dar al-Islam, an extended "nation" of Islamic peoples. Nearly everywhere Ibn Battuta travels he is greeted by people of his own class and religion.

Ibn Battuta's travels take place during what Dunn calls the Islamic Middle Period, extending from roughly the years 1000 to 1500. This is a time of great expansion of the Muslim faith, and is what allows Ibn Battuta to travel so widely but always find some familiarity among the local peoples based on their common religion and religious customs. The Muslim world is highly interconnected at this time, Dunn argues, a fact he intends to demonstrate over the course of his book.

Tangier

Tangier Summary and Analysis

Tangier is located near the Strait of Gibralter, which connects the Mediterranean Sea with the Atlantic, one of five major cities located in the region, including Ceuta, also on the African coast, and Tarifa, Algeciras and Gibralter, located on the Iberian Peninsula. It is an important area strategically, and over the centuries is the location of several struggles for power.

At the time of Ibn Battuta's birth in Tangier, Morocco is under the rule of a group of Musilms known as the Marinids. It is not as important a port as those cities that lie along the Mediterranean, Dunn explains, but begins to grow in importance as Mediterranean trade begins to extend into the Atlantic. It is something of a "frontier town," he writes (p. 18).

Ibn Battuta does not write much about his early life in Tangier, Dunn explains, and only some general details can be learned about him from his rihla. He is descended from a tribe of people known as Berbers. He is educated in law, which at this time means an education in religious law that focuses heavily on memorizing religious texts, Dunn writes. He acquires the polite customs of an educated man, as is demonstrated by his actions throughout the rihla. It is also likely that he is exposed to Sufism, Dunn conjectures, a mystical movement within Islam that is active in Morocco at this time.

Tangier, being somewhat isolated, is not a major center of learning, Dunn explains, although prominent scholars do visit. Any man with aspirations to higher learning will naturally look eastward to the larger Muslim centers of learning and culture such as Damascus and Cairo. Dunn speculates that Ibn Battuta probably had such aspirations.

The Maghrib

The Maghrib Summary and Analysis

Islamic law requires all observers to travel to the city of Mecca at least once in their lifetime to perform a series of ceremonies, Dunn explains at the beginning of the chapter, and as an observant Muslim, Ibn Battuta set out on this pilgrimage, called the hajj. From Tangier, pilgrims have the option of traveling by sea or by land, and Ibn Battuta sets out eastward by land, along the North African coast and through the region known as the Maghrib.

While regular caravans of pilgrims set out each year toward Mecca, Ibn Battuta does not join one, Dunn notes, as he leaves Tangier in June, 1325. The pilgrimage is a dangerous one, Dunn explains, not only because of the physical dangers of travel, but also because of unstable political conditions. At this time, the Maghrib region is in a relatively stable period, Dunn notes, making it an auspicious time for Ibn Battuta to travel. He is eager to make the pilgrimage, but is also somewhat sad at the thought of leaving his parents behind, as Dunn illustrates with a passage from the Rihla.

Ibn Battuta makes his way south out of Tangier and turns east toward the city of Tlemcen. From there he continues on to Milana and Algiers. Algiers is later to become an important city, but at this time is unremarkable, Dunn explains, and Ibn Battuta has very little to say about it. He is traveling with a small group of merchants which he has met along the way. They camp at Algiers for several days before heading out toward Bijaya.

At Bijaya, Ibn Battuta falls sick with a fever and his companions urge him to stay there to recover. He is eager to continue on, however, and the party makes it safely to the city of Constantine, despite the dangerous route which was probably endangered by Arab robbers, Dunn explains. They do not stay at Constantine long, but Ibn Battuta does have the opportunity to meet the son of the governor of the city, who presents him with a gift of money and a woolen mantle. It is an Islamic duty, Dunn explains, to be generous to strangers, especially travelers. Ibn Battuta is to be the recipient of many such kindnesses from important people throughout his journeys, Dunn writes.

The party makes its way past Constantine to the city of Tunis, which is a flourishing port at this point in history, as well as an important location of Islamic culture. Ibn Battuta stays in Tunis for about two months, Dunn determines, from early September through early November, 1325. It is common for educated travelers like Ibn Battuta to stay at colleges along their pilgrimage, Dunn writes, and while he does not mention much about his stay in Tunis, it is likely that Ibn Battuta attended some lectures and spent most of his time with other educated men.

Ibn Battuta joins a caravan of pilgrims to travel beyond Tunis, and has the honor of being named the "qadi" for the caravan. Each caravan has a leader, Dunn explains,

called the "amir," and a judge who handles any disputes between members of the caravan, called the "qadi." It is the first of many similar important positions Ibn Battuta will hold, Dunn remarks.

While on the road to Tripoli, Ibn Battuta enters into an agreement to marry the daughter of one of the other pilgrims, an official from Tunis. In Tripoli he meets his new wife who joins the group. He later has a dispute with her father and returns her to him, however. He is soon married again and throws a wedding feast for the entire caravan. Dunn notes that very little is ever mentioned of these wives of Ibn Battuta's. He will be married several times, Dunn notes, but only mentions his wives in passing and gives no personal details about them. Muslim women at this time live mostly in seclusion, Dunn explains, and a man's personal relationships would not have been a suitable subject to write about. Dunn remarks that it is unfortunate that what was probably a large part of Ibn Battuta's life experience is left out of his narrative.

After eight or nine months, Ibn Battuta reaches the Nile Delta and Alexandria, one of the most impressive cities of the period. He has traveled over 2,000 miles and made good time, Dunn explains. He might have kept on moving toward Mecca, but instead lingers to spend time in Alexandria and then Cairo, which is at this time the most important city in the Muslim world.

The Mamluks

The Mamluks Summary and Analysis

Alexandria is a major port city that greatly impresses Ibn Battuta. It is linked to the Nile River by a canal, in an important region of Egypt that is ruled at this time by the Turkish-speaking Mamluks. The Mamluks are a warrior caste of people who have successfully repelled the marauding Mongol fighters that have overrun other parts of the Middle East. The Mamluks have established a solid government and it is a mostly peaceful time in this important cultural and commercial area.

Ibn Battuta spends several weeks in Alexandria, and describes in the Rihla the several important figures he meets there. At one point, Dunn explains, he visits a Sufi mystic who foretells his future. The mystic tells Ibn Battuta that he is destined to travel widely. Rather than go straight to Cairo, the most important city in the region, Ibn Battuta spends a few weeks exploring the towns of the Nile Valley. In an excerpt from the Rihla, he explains that a traveller need not take any provisions with him while traveling on the Nile, because the banks are lined with towns and merchants and one need only come ashore anywhere to find everything one needs for sale.

Dunn turns to an extensive description of the great city of Cairo in the early 14th century. It is a densely-packed city of perhaps half a million people, with a central walled city. It is the capital of the Mamluk sultanate and home to the Turkish ruling class. It is also located at a crucial intersection of trade routes. Dunn writes that the political stability established by the Mamluks along with the fact that they have held off the advancing Mongols have greatly contributed to the overall wealth of the city.

The Mamluks are a ruling minority who come to power in the 13th century. Originally brought from Turkey as slaves to serve in the military of the Abbayid dynasty, they take over in a coup d' etat in 1250. While sometimes barbaric in their treatment of the native population, as Dunn describes them, they nonetheless establish a stable political climate with a reliable system of taxation. The Mamluks rely on the native religious leaders, employing them in the government, and Cairo becomes a major center for Islamic culture and learning.

Ibn Battuta stays in Cairo for about a month. He is amazed at the beautiful architecture and monuments. He visits a large hospital called the Maristan which provides comfortable treatment for anyone who needs it, rich or poor. The Maristan is a civilized oasis in the crowded city, with a library, lecture rooms and even music played for the patients.

While other pilgrims might easily have stayed longer at Cairo awaiting the formation of the large annual hajj caravan to Mecca, Dunn notes that Ibn Battuta chooses to keep moving. He departs from Cairo and makes his way down the Nile to the Sinai Peninsula.

Dunn chooses an episode from the Rihla that occurs as Ibn Battuta is leaving Cairo to demonstrate his character. Visiting a bath house, Ibn Battuta is shocked to find men bathing completely nude, without the loin covering required by religious propriety. He turns the men in to the authorities and is called as a witness by the local governor, who fines the bathers. Dunn concludes that Ibn Battuta has an indignant streak and is sometimes prone to meddling.

Ibn Battuta makes his way across the peninsula and reaches Gaza, in Palestine. He is traveling with a group that presumably includes his wives, Dunn writes, but Ibn Battuta gives no particulars except that he is with a group. This region is an important pilgrimage destination for Jews and Christians as well as Muslims. Ibn Battuta goes to Hebron, the supposed burial place of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and moves on to Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is relatively small city that relies heavily on the steady stream of pilgrims for its support. Jews come to Jerusalem to visit the ruins of the Temple at the wailing wall. Christians visit the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the supposed tomb of Jesus. For Muslims like Ibn Battuta, Jerusalem holds the Dome of the Rock, a shrine surrounding the rock from which Muhammad is supposed to have ascended into heaven. In Jerusalem, Ibn Battuta visits with several religious scholars before moving on to Damascus.

Damascus is like a second capital of the Mamluk sultanate, and it is here Ibn Battuta stops to await the formation of a hajj caravan. During his time in Damascus, he undertakes some formal education, Dunn writes, receiving several certificates awarded him for his knowledge of Islamic texts and law. Dunn speculates that Ibn Battuta's account of how many of these certificates he received may be exaggerated, as he is only in Damascus for just over three weeks and says he receives fourteen certificates. It would not have been possible for him to learn fourteen new texts in such a short time, Dunn believes. He proposes that Ibn Battuta may have received the certificates at a later visit to Damascus. Still, Dunn writes, it is likely that he did spend much of his time in Damascus studying and visiting with religious leaders.

Mecca

Mecca Summary and Analysis

The annual official hajj caravan from Damascus to Mecca varies in size each year, Dunn explains, but is sometimes very large with possibly up to 20,000 travelers. Ibn Battuta sets out to Mecca from Damascus with the official caravan in September of 1326.

The journey is about 820 miles by the regular route, Dunn explains, and is usually covered in 45 to 50 days. It is an arduous journey, made on foot by most pilgrims or by camel litter by those able to afford to hire one. The terrain is rugged at times and water is sometimes scarce. Several pilgrims die along the way each year.

The first major stop along the pilgrimage is the town of Medina, which contains the Mosque of the Prophet, where the Prophet Muhammad once preached and the location of his tomb. The caravan camps outside the town, and Ibn Battuta visits the holy mosque, which is part of the required duties of the pilgrims.

About five miles from Medina is a settlement called Dhu l-Hulaifa, where the pilgrims undertake a ceremonial bathing and put on white robes called ihram, which they wear for the rest of their pilgrimage.

Mecca is a cosmopolitan city, Dunn explains, but its diversity is only because of the pilgrims who visit from all over the Islamic world. It does not have a permanent kind of diversity like Damascus and Cairo. Outside of the pilgrimage season, it is a sleepy place with little to offer, Dunn explains.

Ibn Battuta arrives in Mecca in mid-October. He is 22 years old and has now been away from home for a year and a half. The pilgrims enter the city and proceed directly to the center, where the grand mosque called the Haram is located. In the center of the Haram is a large square shrine called the Ka'ba. As part of the ritual, the pilgrims enter the large courtyard area surrounding the Ka'ba and circle it seven times, walking counterclockwise. They stop and kiss a stone where the prophet is supposed to have once stood, and perform other ceremonial prayers. Dunn notes that the ritual still followed today is much the same as Ibn Battuta describes it, although the Haram and the Ka'ba have undergone many renovations and changes over the centuries.

Ibn Battuta stays at Mecca and takes part in the full ceremonies of the pilgrimage. Another part of the ritual is to walk out of the city to the plain of 'Arafat to pray at the Mount of Mercy before racing back to the city for a "feast of sacrifice."

Dunn remarks that the majority of the pilgrims, having completed their duties, return to their normal lives. Ibn Battuta does not return home like the others, however. The initial goal of his travel now completed, it is here that Dunn says Ibn Battuta's "globetrotting career" really begins (p. 79).

The Arabian Sea

The Arabian Sea Summary and Analysis

Ibn Battuta stays in Mecca for some time. Dunn explains that the exact length of time is in doubt. Ibn Battuta writes that he stays there for the next three years, but Dunn says it is difficult to reconcile this with the timing of other events in the Rihla, and speculates that he may only have lived in Mecca for one year.

Ibn Battuta does not write much about his residence in Mecca, and Dunn attempts to recreate what his time there would have been like based on what is know about the learned culture of that time. Outside of the pilgrimage season, Mecca is a fairly quiet city, and the large courtyard surrounding the Ka'ba is used for holding lectures. The lecturer sits inside the covered area around the outside of the courtyard facing the Ka'ba, and his audience sits in a circle around him. These lectures include reading and discussing texts and last about two hours, Dunn explains. He might have attended two or three of these in a single day, while also taking part in the regular daily prayers required by his faith.

Ibn Battuta decides to leave Mecca to visit Yemen, the area at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. He travels by sea, Dunn explains, a method he is not entirely comfortable with. The strong monsoon winds that blow back and forth across the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean can create treacherous conditions, and the shores of northern Africa and Arabia are often peopled by troops of robbers looking to victimize shipwreck survivors. Dunn goes into some detail at this point in the book about the methods of shipbuilding and sailing routes of the time.

Ibn Battuta sails from Jidda, the port near Mecca, to the Yemeni city of Zabid, making his way by land to Aden where he is the guest of a wealthy merchant. Aden is a cosmopolitan place, Dunn explains, because of its role as an important international port.

From Aden, Ibn Battuta sails across the Red Sea to Zeila, on the African coast, a city he finds dirty and disgusting. From there, he sails around the horn of Africa and south along the coast to Mogadishu, where he is greeted by a party of educated residents who learn he has arrived. He is taken to meet the shaykh, who presents him with gifts. For the first time, Dunn explains, Ibn Battuta is in a part of the world where the ruling Arabic speaking Muslims are in a minority of the population.

From Mogadishu, Ibn Battuta continues south to Kilwa, where he embarks on a long sea voyage back to the Arabian peninsula, landing at Zafar, a major port. From there, he apparently takes a smaller local vessel northeasterly along the coast and around into the Persian Gulf to the town of Sur. From here, Ibn Battuta decides to go by foot to the larger town of Qahat, taking a bundle of clothes with him and hiring a sailor to show him and a fellow traveler the way. En route, he determines that the sailor intends to kill him

and his friend to steal his clothes. They spend the night in the open, with Ibn Battuta staying up all night holding a spear and protecting himself while the sailor and his friend sleep. The next morning they make their way to Qahat, where they are greeted by the governor and given lodging. Ibn Battuta's feet are greatly swollen and sore, he writes, and he takes several days to recuperate before setting out to explore the town.

At some point, Dunn writes, Ibn Battuta decides to return again to Mecca, but his account of crossing the peninsula from Qahat to Mecca is confused and unreliable. He does return to Mecca, probably some time in the winter of 1330 or 1332, Dunn postulates.

Anatolia

Anatolia Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 opens in 1330 or 1332, when Ibn Battuta has decided to seek his fortune in India. The Muslim Sultan of Delhi is widely known to welcome foreign scholars and legal experts and to provide them with lucrative appointments. Still, Ibn Battuta needs to find a Persian-speaking guide familiar with India to help him. He does not find one in Mecca or nearby Jidda, Dunn explains, and so sets out traveling again toward the region of Anatolia in the hope of meeting someone who can help him.

Ibn Battuta first returns briefly to Cairo and Palestine before sailing from Syria to Anatolia in a European boat. Anatolia is the region between the Mediterranean and the Black Seas, the location of modern Turkey. At the time of Ibn Battuta's visit, Dunn explains, the region is still in a period of transformation between being largely populated by Greek and Armenian Christians to being peopled by Muslim Turks.

In the Anatolian sea town of Antalya, Ibn Battuta is invited by a group of craftsman to be their guest at a large feast. He is reluctant at first, owing to the somewhat disheveled appearance of the man who offers the invitation, but is greatly surprised at the tremendous generosity offered by the group. The organization is called a "fityan" and is a traditional association of craftsmen and merchants with the purpose of providing generous hospitality to strangers. Ibn Battuta will be the guest of several of these fityans during his journey, Dunn explains.

Ibn Battuta's northward journey through Anatolia is difficult to reconstruct, Dunn explains, because of inconsistencies in the timeline of the Rihla. He proposes a possible itinerary that includes all of the town Ibn Battuta claims to have visited, but there are still large gaps.

Ibn Battuta makes his way to the city of Bursa, where he meets Orkhan, the son of Osman, a Turkish king. The Osmanian Kingdom is at this time poised to increase its rapid expansion, Dunn writes, into Anatolia and toward Greece. Ibn Battuta is greatly impressed with the ruler and what he sees of the kingdom. He is now becoming accustomed to meeting with important people, Dunn writes, and is beginning to enjoy some of the advantages of his rising status.

Ibn Battuta heads toward the Black Sea across the Pontic Mountains. He travels by horse, and for the first time, Dunn writes, he mentions that he is traveling with slaves that have been given to him or that he has purchased. This small party sets out into the mountains, but encounters heavy snow. They hire a guide to lead them through a pass in the snow, but after leading them on for some time, the guide demands more money and then disappears when they relent. Faced with freezing temperatures and growing darkness, Ibn Battuta decides to leave the party and search for help. Almost miraculously, Dunn explains, he comes upon a lodge occupied by a Sufi acquaintance

of his. Help is sent to the snowbound party and they are brought in safely. Understanding that he needs a reliable interpreter, Ibn Battuta hires a local educated man who speaks Arabic to guide them the rest of the way out of the mountains. He turns out to be a thief, but they endure his larceny since he is able to show them the way. They make their way to Kastamonu, where Ibn Battuta is the guest of the local "amir," or prince.

The Steppe

The Steppe Summary and Analysis

The most likely route from the northern coast of Anatolia to India, Dun writes, would have been over land along the southern coast of the Black Sea to Tabriz and from there on to Hurmuz and to India by sea. Ibn Battuta instead chooses to cross the Black Sea to the Mongol city of al-Qiram and approach by way of the steppe of Central Asia. Dunn speculates that Ibn Battuta may be following a determination he mentions earlier in the Rihla never to take the same road twice, and since he had already been to Tabriz he chooses the longer, more difficult route. There is also the likelihood, Dunn writes, that he intends to meet more of the great leaders of his day by making his way through the territory of Ozbeg Khan toward his capital on the Volga River at New Saray. Ozbeg's kingdom had only recently become officially Muslim, Dunn explains.

After a dangerous sea journey on the Black Sea, Ibn Battuta gets as far as Kaffa, where he hires horses and wagons to reach al-Qiram, a departure point for caravans. In al-Qiram he meets the Turkish governor Tuluktemur and receives gifts from him. He learns that the governor plans soon to travel to New Saray to meet Ozbeg. Ibn Battuta arranges to travel with his party. He purchases three wagons with draft animals, a method of travel new to him, Dunn writes. He buys one large wagon, in which he travels with one of his slave girls, a smaller wagon for a companion named Tuzari who is to become a longtime friend, and a third large wagon for the rest of his servants and supplies. The wagons are covered with felt yurts, and Ibn Battuta finds it a very comfortable way to travel.

The train of some 150 wagons makes its way to New Saray, but find that the khan is on the move and camped near Azak, near the Caucasus Mountains. Ibn Battuta finally catches up with Ozbeg's large encampment near al-Machar. He is presented to the khan and is greatly impressed by his court. Ibn Battuta is astonished that the Mongol leaders sit on their throne with their wives and daughters openly beside them, unlike other Muslim leaders who follow the tradition of keeping women hidden away and separate from their affairs.

Ibn Battuta meets with Princess Bayalun, one of the wives of Ozbeg, and tells her the story of his journey far from home. She is moved to tears by his story, as it reminds her of her own homesickness. She is the daughter of Andronicus III, the Christian emperor of Byzantium, and has been married to Ozbeg for political reasons. She is pregnant, and receives permission from Ozbeg to travel to her father in Constantinople for the birth of the child. Ibn Battuta is allowed to travel with her party.

The princess's enormous traveling party takes 52 days to reach a fortress called Mahtuli, probably located in what is modern day Bulgaria, Dunn writes. They move on to Constantinople, where as the guest of the princess, Ibn Battuta is provided with gifts

and a guide to show him around the great city. He meets with Andronicus III, the emperor.

While Constantinople retains the appearance of the thriving capital of a great empire, Dunn writes, Andronicus' empire is actually crumbling at this point in history. It is losing seafaring trade to the Italians and its Asian territories have been taken over by Turks, who within 120 years will be in control of Constantinople itself.

In 1332 or 1334, Ibn Battuta returns to Ozbeg's camp along with the princess's guides while she stays behind with her father. He regains his wagons and soon finds himself in bitter cold, having to wear so many layers of clothes he can barely mount his horse. He finds the khan in New Saray, which he reaches some time in November. In December, he sets out to the south toward India, reaching the Indus River in September of 1333, according to the Rihla.

Dunn draws a line of distinction at this point in Ibn Battuta's journeys. He has now become a man of some importance and is confident moving among the highest circles of Muslim society. He has up until this point still just been a traveler, having had no real official position before. He is about to seek a career in India, confident, Dunn believes, that he is the kind of educated and experienced person the Sultan of Delhi is seeking.

Delhi

Delhi Summary and Analysis

Dunn opens the ninth chapter with a description of the checkered history of North India prior to the point of Ibn Battuta's arrival. Traditionally Hindu in religion, Turkish Muslim warriors began invading the region in the 11th century, capturing Delhi and setting up a Muslim state in 1193 under Qutb al-Din Aybek. Succeeding sultans expanded their influence farther south into the Indian subcontinent, Dunn explains, but the greater need for strength was to the north, where they successfully held off Mongol invaders. This made Delhi a prestigious capital of the Muslim world, Dunn writes, and a popular destination for Islamic scholars from all over the world, who were welcomed openly by the sultans and given lucrative official positions.

The Sultan of Delhi at the time of Ibn Battuta's arrival at the Indus River is Muhammad Tughluq, a somewhat eccentric ruler with brilliant military skills but not much political acumen, Dunn explains. Tughluq is an intelligent student of Islamic law, but raises controversy by also inviting leaders from other religions to his court to discuss their laws with him. He is capricious and sometimes brutal, sometimes bestowing outlandish rewards on his court and his people, but also punishing any disloyalty or criticism with torture, dismemberment or death.

Ibn Battuta crosses into India with the intention of securing a position with Tughluq. He waits in the town of Multan until word reaches the Sultan that an educated legal scholar has arrived in the kingdom. The Sultan sends a representative to interview Ibn Battuta to learn his intentions and to get his promise that if he is given a position he will stay permanently. Ibn Battuta agrees, and prepares a large gift for the Sultan, expecting that the Sultan will return a gift to him of much greater value.

Ibn Battuta sets out for Delhi, dodging an attack by robbers on the road there. Ibn Battuta is almost immediately offered an annual stipend of 5,000 dinars to be taken from the revenue of two and a half villages. He is later named a Chief Judge and given an additional 7,000 dinars annually, plus an advance of 12,000. It is not as much as others with higher appointments are paid, Dunn, explains, but it does make Ibn Battuta quite rich in comparison to the average resident of Delhi. His job is mostly ceremonial. Persian is the legal language, and he does not speak it very well. He is given two assistants who do much of the actual work for him.

Tughluq's kingdom is beginning to crumble, especially in the southern areas, Dunn explains, where some governors revolt. Ibn Battuta is caught up in palace politics, as he has married the daughter of one of these rebel governors. He fears that Tughluq will have him executed as disloyal, but while he is temporarily arrested, he is released. Still fearing for his life, he decides to leave Delhi, using a pilgrimage to Mecca for the opportunity to get away.

Instead, Tughluq appoints Ibn Battuta to lead a diplomatic mission to the Mongol Yuan court of China, accompanying some Chinese diplomats who had recently come to India. Ibn Battuta agrees, and sets out with a large party, a military escort, and lavish gifts for the Yuan emperor. Once again he is off on a journey to a far off land.

Malabar and the Maldives

Malabar and the Maldives Summary and Analysis

Ibn Battuta sets out in 1341 with an entire caravan load of opulent gifts he is to deliver to Toghon Temur, the emperor of the Yuan dynasty of China. They travel by land to the coast city of Cambay, where they board four ships. The caravan is attacked on the way, but is successfully defended by its military escort. Ibn Battuta, however, is captured and robbed and nearly killed before being released. He makes his way back to the caravan and proceeds with his mission.

They sail to Calicut, where they wait for three months for the shipping season and arrange for their cargo to be carried on a Chinese ship called a "junk." As the time to depart nears, the gifts, slaves, and most of Ibn Battuta's traveling companions are boarded on a junk and one smaller ship in Calicut harbor. Ibn Battuta stays ashore to observe Friday prayers. A storm comes up suddenly, and the rigid ships run aground, breaking apart and sinking. Many of his companions die, and he loses everything but what he has with him.

Ibn Battuta is torn about what to do. He fears that if he returns to the Sultan he will be prosecuted for losing the gifts, which he was charged with protecting with his life. He decides not to return and to try to visit China on his own.

After a brief time in the service of a local governor, Ibn Battuta makes his way to the Maldives, a series of islands in the Indian Ocean on a major trade route. The Maldives have a female ruler, unusual in the Muslim world. The islands are actually overseen by her husband, Jamal al-Din, the grand vizier. When Jamal al-Din learns that a legal scholar who formerly served the Sultan of Delhi has come to the Maldives, he brings Ibn Battuta before him and gains his promise to stay there and serve as a chief judge. Ibn Battuta is reluctant, but agrees on the condition that the tradition that only the vizier be allowed to travel by horseback be lifted in his case. Dunn sees this demand of Ibn Battuta's as a sign that he sees himself as an increasingly important figure.

Ibn Battuta stays until 1344. According to the Rihla, he marries into the noble family and grows quite powerful as the chief judge, but Dunn interjects that he may be exaggerating his role. He eventually falls victim to intrigue among the nobles, writing that others succeed in turning the vizier against him. He renounces his position and leaves for Ceylon.

China

China Summary and Analysis

In Ceylon, Ibn Battuta makes a pilgrimage to the top of Adam's Peak, a high point on the island supposed to be the location of Adam's descent to Earth. He returns to the southwest coast of India, moving from seacoast city to city and surviving an attack by pirates before returning once again, briefly, to the Maldives when he learns that his former wife there has given birth to a son. He considers claiming his son, but relents to his former wife and allows the boy to stay with her. Dunn explains that Islam allows a man to have up to four wives at once, and divorcing them is not a difficult procedure. Ibn Battuta rarely mentions his associations with women, but Dunn assumes that he has left several wives and children behind in his travels.

From the Maldives, Ibn Battuta sails around the tip of Ceylon into Southeast Asia, where the influence of Islam is still growing along the trade routes. He sails to Chittagong and then to Samudra, on the island of Sumatra, where he waits for the favorable sailing season north to China.

Ibn Battuta's account of his journeys in China are confused and often doubtful, Dunn writes. Some scholars, he explains, doubt that Ibn Battuta ever even visited China at all. His descriptions are often cursory and very few identifiable place names are mentioned. Dunn explains that he gives Ibn Battuta the benefit of the doubt concerning his visit to China.

China at this time is one of the four large "khanates" of the Mongol empire, and the only one which is not officially Muslim. It is ruled by a Mongol emperor, Toghon Temur, who, like other leaders of the time, welcomes foreign scholars and artists to his service and cultivates links with the Muslim world because of its strong associations with international trade.

Ibn Battuta finds China strange and distasteful, as its inhabitants behave in ways that are contrary to his strict sensibilities. He goes to Quanzhou and has word sent to the court of the emperor that he is a diplomat from the Sultan of Delhi. Dunn finds this surprising, as Ibn Battuta had apparently abandoned that mission when he lost the Sultan's gifts at sea. He is given permission to go to Hangzhou, the capital, as a guest of the emperor.

He makes his way to Hangzhou, which Dunn mentions is possibly the largest city in the world at this time. Here he finds a thriving Muslim community and even meets a fellow Moroccan. He claims to have continued on to Beijing, but Dunn explains that this part of the journey is probably not true. In 1346, Ibn Battuta leaves China and although he does not know it, Dunn writes, he is on his way home.

Home

Home Summary and Analysis

Ibn Battuta briefly considers returning to the Sultan of Delhi, but decides against it. This is probably just as well, Dunn, explains, for that Sultan's kingdom, already crumbling when Ibn Battuta was there previously, is nearing collapse. He hurries across Persia and makes his way to Damascus, where he learns that a son of his born to a former wife has died, and also learns of his father's death about 15 years before. He also learns of the terrible bubonic plague that is sweeping through the region from Central Europe, wiping out great numbers of people. Ibn Battuta is fortunate not to contract the disease as he travels on to Cairo and again to Mecca.

Ibn Battuta sails along the coast of North Africa to Tunis, where he meets with the Moroccan Sultan Abu l'Hasan, and then to Tenes, then overland to Fez, which has in his absence become an important city for Muslim scholars and the political center for Abu 'Inan, the son of the Moroccan Sultan Abu l'Hasan, who is challenging his father for power. On his way, he learns that a few months previously his mother had died from the plague in Tangier. Staying briefly in Fez, Ibn Battuta meets with Abu 'Inan and proceeds to Tangier, where he visits his mother's grave. The Rihla does not mention any joyous homecoming to Tangier, Dunn explains, although he imagines a pleasant time spent seeing his old acquaintances again.

Ibn Battuta does not stay in Tangier long before he is traveling again, this time across the Strait of Gibralter to southern Spain, to the Muslim territory ruled by Yusef. He visits several of the coastal cities, and returns to travel through northern Morocco before returning to Fez. In the meantime, Abu 'Inan has seized control of the sultanate from his father. It would have been a good time for Ibn Battuta to settle down in Fez in the Sultan's service, Dunn speculates, but Ibn Battuta is still restless. He makes plans to visit the Emperor of Mali, one of the few Muslim kings he has not yet met.

Mali

Mali Summary and Analysis

Ibn Battuta sets out for Mali across the Sahara Desert in 1351. After a dangerous crossing, he arrives in Walata and meets the local governor, who does not impress him with the kind of generosity he has received from other similar figures. From there, he continues on to the Malian capital, the exact location of which is not known, Dunn explains, but may be near a town known as Niani. Here he meets Mansa Sulayman after recovering from a long illness. Again, he is not impressed with the small gifts offered him by the Malian leader.

Ibn Battuta has mixed opinions of the Malians. On one hand they raise their children according to strict Muslim law, but they also mix their observances with some obviously non-Muslim traditions. He leaves the Malian capital in 1353 and moves on to Timbuktu and Takadda before receiving word from Abu 'Inan that he is to return to Fez at once.

The Rihla

The Rihla Summary and Analysis

The final chapter discusses the Rihla itself. It is commissioned by Abu 'Inan, who appoints a writer named Ibn Juzayy to work with Ibn Battuta and prepare a book describing all he has seen. The writing takes at least two years, and seems to be based in part on notes given to Ibn Juzayy by Ibn Battuta, although there is no evidence, Dunn explains, that Ibn Battuta kept a journal or any notes while traveling. It is also clear that following the tradition of the time, large sections of the Rihla are based on previous books that describe the regions where Ibn Battuta had traveled.

Dunn explains that in his lifetime Ibn Battuta was suspected of being a liar because of the outlandish nature of many of the stories he tells. Some scholars do come to his defense, however. The Rihla is briefly popular, but then disappears for centuries, only being "rediscovered" in the 19th century when it is translated and brought to the west.

Characters

Ibn Battuta

Ibn Battuta is the central figure of the book. Little biographical information is known about him except what is stated or implied in the Rihla, the written account of his wide travels created upon his return and based entirely on his own memory.

Ibn Battuta in born in Tangier in 1304 and leaves on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1325 at the age of 20. He is descended from a tribe of North African people called Berbers. He belongs to a comfortable class of educated people, and is presumably raised with the manners and sensibilities of polite society. He is educated in the Maliki tradition of Islamic law, which involves the memorization and analysis of legal and sacred texts.

He is a compulsive traveler, only rarely settling in one place for more than a year or two. In his travels, he visits nearly every part of the Islamic world of his day, and even goes beyond it to the Mongol empire of China, according to his own account. He is an observant Muslim, and demonstrates in various episodes his strict adherence to and interpretation of Islamic law. He marries several times, although his wives are only mentioned in passing in the RIhla, and is known to have children.

Ibn Battuta makes his way to India, where he receives a lucrative appointment by the Sultan of Delhi and grows wealthy. He loses almost everything at once in a shipwreck, however. He is something of an opportunist and is adept at ingratiating himself to Muslim leaders, who provide him with money, food, lodging and other gifts wherever he goes.

Ibn Battuta returns to Tangier after over 25 years of travel. He settles in Fez in the service of the Moroccan Sultan, where he dictates the story of his travels to a writer commissioned by the Sultan to create a book for posterity.

Muhammad Tughluq, Sultan of Delhi

Muhammad Tughluq is the Muslim leader of India. He is an extravagant ruler known for his brutality as well as his generosity. Anyone presenting the Sultan with gifts can count on receiving gifts in return of far greater value, however anyone criticizing the Sultan or showing him disloyalty may be horribly tortured or executed.

The Sultan has a practice of openly inviting foreign Muslim scholars and writers to serve at his court. These foreigners are offered lucrative positions and in return are expected to remain loyal to the Sultan and to serve in their positions permanently. He gains broad prestige for this practice. Ibn Battuta finds his way to India at the prospect of obtaining such a position, and is appointed a judge even though, as Dunn explains, he is not really well qualified.

The Sultan rules over a series of smaller regions in India which are mostly Hindu in culture and religion. He is an adept military commander, but not as good at maintaining political alliances with his governors, who eventually revolt and reduce the size and influence of his empire. Ibn Battuta witnesses the beginnings of this unrest during his service to the Sultan, and is nearly killed at one point by rebels.

Ibn Battuta runs afoul of the Sultan, owing to being affiliated by marriage with a rebellious governor. The Sultan has Ibn Battuta arrested at one point, but sets him free and sends him on a mission to China to present a caravan of gifts to the Yuan Emperor. Ibn Battuta fails in his mission and out of fear of being executed by the Sultan, leaves India and does not return to Delhi.

Abu 'Inan

The son of Abu l'Hasan who successfully challenges his father for the seat of power in Morocco shortly after Ibn Battuta returns from his travels. Abu 'Inan constructs a fortified city next to the old city of Fez, where he encourages the propagation of Islamic scholarship. Abu 'Inan commissions Ibn Juzayy to write down the recollections of Ibn Battuta's journeys and is thus responsible for the publication of the book.

Ibn Juzayy

A writer appointed by Abu 'Inan to work with Ibn Battuta to write the Rihla. Ibn Juzayy presumedly interviews Ibn Battuta about his travels and works from notes given to him by Ibn Battuta. The composition takes two years.

Abu l'Hasan

The Sultan of Morocco who precedes his son, Abu 'Inan. Abu l'Hasan attempts to expand his rule to the city of Tunis, but only takes tenuous control of it. Ibn Battuta finds him in Tunis on his way back to Morocco, where he meets with him and expresses his loyalty to the Sultan. Shortly afterwards, Abu l'Hasan is driven from his throne by his son.

Ozbeg Khan

The Khan of Kipchak, the leader of the people later called by the Europeans the "Golden Horde." Ibn Battuta meets with Ozbeg and travels with his large court to the region of the Volga River in Central Asia.

Princess Bayalun

A Christian wife of the Mongol Ozbeg Khan. Bayalun is the daughter of Andronicus III, ruler of Constantinople. Ibn Battuta travels with Bayalun from Central Asia to Constantinople as she returns to her father to give birth to a child.

Grand Vizier Jamal al-Din

The husband of Queen Khadija, Sultana of the Maldive Islands, and the de facto ruler of the sultanate. Ibn Battuta serves as a judge to the Maldive court, marries into the royal family, and rises to some prominence before a falling out with Jamal al-Din causes him to leave for Ceylon.

Toghon Temur

The Emperor of the Yuan Dynasty in China, and the only of the four khans of the Mongol Empire not to convert to Islam. Ibn Battuta is sent by the Sultan of Delhi as an emissary to Toghon Temur, but his mission ends in a shipwreck. He later claims to travel on his own to China, meeting the emperor in Quanzhou.

Ibn Al-Faran al-Tuzari

An Egyptian legal scholar and traveling companion of Ibn Battuta. The men apparently meet in Cairo and part only when Ibn Battuta leaves India.

Objects/Places

Dar al-Islam

The "Abode of Islam," as Dunn defines it. The term used to refer to the larger community of Muslims.

Tangier

A city on the Atlantic coast of Morocco in North Africa. The birthplace of Ibn Battuta

Fez

A Moroccan city to the south of Tangier and the capital of the region under Abu 'Inan. Ibn Battuta returns to Fez at the end of his journey.

Cairo

One of the largest cities in the world at this time, Cairo is located on the Nile River in Egypt. It is ruled by a group of Turkish leaders called Mamluks.

Mecca

The holiest city of Islam. Mecca is the destination for hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year who come to observe a period of ritual prayer and ceremony. Ibn Battuta returns to Mecca several times in his journeys.

Damascus

The capital city of the Syrian region and one of the major cities of the world during this period. Damascus is a prestigious center of Islamic learning.

Delhi

A city in northern India and the capital of the region. Delhi is the seat of the Sultan of Delhi, who is a major benefactor of Ibn Battuta, appointing him a chief judge. Ibn Battuta lives in Delhi for several years in the service of the Sultan, building a house and a small mosque there.

The Maldive Islands

A series of islands off the southwestern coast of India. Ibn Battuta visits the islands on his way to Ceylon and ends up staying there in the service of the Sultana as a judge for several years.

Quanzhao

The capital city of the Yuan Dynasty in China and home to the Emperor. Ibn Battuta claims to visit Quanzhao and meet the Emperor, but Dunn points out that some scholars doubt he actually made the journey to China.

Constantinople

The Christian capital of the Byzantine Empire, ruled at the time of Ibn Battuta's visit by Andronicus III.

The Hajj

The annual pilgrimage to Mecca that is a duty of all able-bodied Muslims. Ibn Battuta first leaves Tangier to undertake the hajj, which he performs several more times during his life.

Quadi

An Islamic judge. Ibn Battuta is first appointed the quadi of a hajj caravan in North Africa and later becomes a chief judge for the Sultan of Delhi

Maliki

One of the four schools of Islamic legal scholarship, and the one in which Ibn Battuta is educated. It is most prominent in North Africa

Sufism

A form of Islamic mysticism. Ibn Battuta visits several Sufi leaders in his travels.

Sunni

The majority sect of Islam. The other major sect is called Shi'i

Ramadan

An annual period of fasting and prayer observed by Muslims.

Themes

The Expansion of Dar al-Islam

The "Dar al-Islam," or "Abode of Islam" as Dunn interprets it in the introduction to The Adventures of Ibn Battuta, refers to the overall region of the world where Islamic law is the official law of the land. Within the Dar al-Islam are numerous independent areas which sometimes war with one another, but they all still fall under the umbrella of the larger concept of an Islamic world.

At the time of Ibn Battuta's travels, the Dar al-Islam extends from the sub-Saharan region of Mali through North Africa and into southern Spain, across the Arabian peninsula and north through Palestine and Anatolia into what is modern day Turkey and part of Greece, through Central Asia and India into Southeast Asia. It is an enormous area, and allows Ibn Battuta to travel easily from place to place, always finding educated and observant Muslims similar to himself.

The Dar al-Islam is in a period of expansion at the time period covered in Dunn's book, owing to several factors. One factor is a kind of reverse conquest of the Mongol Empire, which raids and destroys several Islamic towns, such as Baghdad. The Empire is divided into four large kingdoms called khanates, three of which officially adopt Islam as they rebuild the cities they destroy. The initial Mongol attacks also serve to drive Muslim refugees to cities like Cairo and Tabriz, which become major centers of Islamic culture and learning as a result, Dunn explains.

Dunn is careful to explain that the "official" conversion to Islam does not equate to a cultural conversion. As Ibn Battuta discovers in his travels, Islam is observed less conservatively in the outlying regions of Dar al-Islam and is often mixed with local traditional ceremonies and practices. In some areas, such as India and along parts of the east coast of Africa, a Muslim elite rules over a non-Muslim population.

Islamic culture is also expanding at this time, however, Dunn explains, carried along by the engine of trade.

The Role of Trade in the Expansion of Islam

While Islam expands "officially" through conquest and the conversion of world leaders, Dunn explains, Islamic culture expands in other ways as well. One of the primary modes of expansion is through trade.

Many important trade cities are under control of Muslim leaders at this point in history, Dunn explains. Muslims control Morocco and the south of Spain at the Strait of Gibraltar, an increasingly important trade route as Atlantic trade increases. The enormous city of Cairo is at the juncture of important trade routes linking Africa with the Middle East and Mediterranean. The ports along the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean are

mostly under the control of Muslim leaders. The trade routes through Central Asia linking the region with China run through the Mongol Empire, which has converted to Islam.

While many of these trade areas are "officially" Muslim, many are ruled by an elite minority and do not share the Islamic culture. Islamic law governs international trade, however, and, as a result, groups of Muslim merchants are the ones handling the daily affairs of trade. Non-Muslims wishing to participate in trade find it advantageous to convert, Dunn explains. In this way, the culture of Islam begins to pervade the local culture beyond the ruling class of people.

The observance of Islamic law in trade and other areas also drives the practice of Muslim leaders to invite scholars and other educated Muslims to join their courts as judges and ambassadors. Ibn Battuta takes advantage of this practice several times in his career, notably as a judge for the Sultan of Delhi in India, a predominantly Hindu area ruled by a Muslim king.

A Biography of Ibn Battuta

Ibn Battuta tells very little about himself in the Rihla he helps produce about his journeys, and Dunn takes the opportunity where available to draw from episodes in the Rihla and other events any hint of the man's personal traits, behaviors and opinions.

The bare facts of Ibn Battuta's life are the year of his birth in Tangier in 1304, and the fact that his parents are alive when he leaves on his great journey in 1325. He is a descendent of a tribe called the Berbers, but this tells us little about what his physical appearance might have been, Dunn explains.

The portrait Dunn paints of Ibn Battuta is an earnest and intelligent man who seems to be a nearly compulsive traveler. While he sometimes sets out with a specific destination in mind, such as the pilgrimage to Mecca for the ritual observation of the hajj, Dunn portrays Battuta as often heading out in the "wrong" direction, or seemingly choosing his routes at whim. He does mention Ibn Battuta's statement in the Rihla at one point that he tries never to take the same road twice.

Ibn Battuta is an observant Muslim, Dunn infers from the Rihla, and is often sanctimonious about his religion. In an early episode, Ibn Battuta calls out several men in a bath house he visits who are bathing completely nude, a violation of Islamic law. Ibn Battuta indignantly turns the men in to the authorities and sees they are punished. He is also critical of several Muslim leaders who profess Islam but are less than perfect in their observance.

Ibn Battuta mentions several times that he becomes married, but very little is ever mentioned about the women in his life, a fact which seems to frustrate Dunn at times. He tries where possible to recreate the series of marriages and divorces that Ibn Battuta undertakes in his travels, and mentions that it is likely he had several children. It is also implied that he had the company of other women on his travels as slaves and servants.

With few exceptions, Ibn Battuta reveals very little about his friends or traveling companions according to Dunn.

Dunn also includes some biographical information about Ibn Battuta drawn from third parties. This information comes mainly from contemporary writers who express their own opinions of the man and the Rihla. From these sources it is learned that, in his day, many considered Ibn Battuta to be an outright liar regarding his wide travels.

Style

Perspective

Dunn is a scholarly writer with the perspective of a historian attempting to recreate a period in time from documented original sources and informed speculation.

Dunn's primary source document is the Rihla of Ibn Battuta, the written account of his travels. Dunn approaches this text with the critical perspective of academic skepticism. He acknowledges that the version of the text that has survived may not be complete and may have been added to or abridged in the six centuries since it first appeared. He also does not treat the Rihla as an authoritative original source on the people and events it describes, but recognizes where the author may have been exaggerating or speculating or borrowing from other texts. Dunn spends much of the book providing evidence from other sources that support the events in the book, or that suggest where Ibn Battuta may have been misrepresenting or misremembering events. Dunn applies this critical perspective to his own accounts as well, noting to the reader where he cannot be certain of the fine details of an event or location and providing information about how he has drawn his conclusions.

Dunn also sometimes takes on the perspective of a biographer, drawing from the sparse personal information provided by Ibn Battuta and others in an attempt to paint a picture of the world traveler. Here again he must temper his biographical conclusions with critical skepticism, as Ibn Battuta says very little about himself or his personal life, especially regarding women. Much of what Dunn is able to tell his readers is reconstructed from what is known about other men of the time of similar background.

Tone

The Adventures of Ibn Battuta is a scholarly work of history, and the author maintains a mostly academic, objective tone throughout the book. Many of the actions of the people described in the book, including Ibn Battuta himself, might be objectionable to the sensibilities of many modern readers, which Dunn acknowledges while attempting not to be judgmental. Instead, he tries to place the actions in the context of the time about which he is writing. For example, it is understood from the Rihla that Ibn Battuta married and then essentially abandoned several women in the course of his journeys, sometimes leaving them pregnant or with children. Dunn presents the very little that is known about these wives within the context of Islamic law, which allows a man up to four wives at once and where frequent divorces and remarriages are common.

Dunn sometimes assumes a mildly frustrated tone toward his subject. The Rihla is inconsistent in the level of detail it offers, and Dunn occasionally suggests that he wishes Ibn Battuta had provided more detail about a certain event or location. Dunn appears to be particularly interested in the nature of shipbuilding at this time, and seems

to find Ibn Battuta annoyingly silent on the details of the various craft on which he sailed.

Structure

The Adventures of Ibn Battuta is divided into fourteen chapters plus an introductory chapter. Chapters 1 through 13 are titled after regions through which Ibn Battuta traveled, and are arranged in the chronological order of his journey. The final chapter is entitled "The Rihla" and discusses the origin of the book in which Ibn Battuta's travels are first written out, how the book came to be written, and its reception among Ibn Battuta's contemporaries.

The book is illustrated with black and white photographs that depict modern views of some of the places mentioned in the text. Most chapters also include a full-page map of the region covered in that chapter, with the supposed routes Ibn Battuta took from place to place marked on them. Dunn also indicates by dotted lines routes that Ibn Battuta says he took but which Dunn or other scholars think are doubtful.

Dunn begins each chapter with a quotation that refers to some aspect of that chapter. The quotations are usually taken from sources other than Ibn Battuta, and provide some relevant background information. At the end of each chapter are placed extensive footnotes, in which Dunn elaborates on points in the text, provides outside sources, and points out where he and other scholars may differ in opinion or interpretation. The book contains a bibliography and index.

Quotes

"The numerous translations of the Rihla, together with the extensive corpus of encyclopedic articles, popular summaries, and critical commentaries on Ibn Battuta and his career that have accumulated since the eighteenth century, are a tribute to the extraordinary value of the narrative as a historical source on much of the inhabited Eastern Hemisphere in the second quarter of the fourteenth century." (Introduction, p. 5)

"Although we have no idea what Ibn Battuta's early experience with Sufism may have been, his behavior during his travels is itself evidence that he grew up in a social climate rich in mystical beliefs and that these ideas were tightly interwoven with his formal, scriptural education." (Chapter 1, p. 24)

"Islam obliged every Muslim who was not impoverished, enslaved, insane, or endangered by war or epidemic to go to Mecca at least once in his lifetime and to perform there the set of collective ceremonies prescribed by the shari'a. Each year hundreds and often thousands of North Africans fulfilled their duty, joining in a great ritual migration that brought together believers from the far corners of the Afro-Eurasian world." (Chapter 2, p. 27)

"While the Mongol horde ransacked its way through the Middle East, devastating Baghdad and plundering Damascus, Cairo offered a secure haven for scholars, craftsmen, and rich merchants who were nimble enough to escape across the Sinai Peninsula, taking with them the knowledge, artistic skills, and wealth that helped make Cairo the most cosmopolitan center of civilized culture anywhere in the Dar al-Islam." (Chapter 3, p. 49)

"The Syrian caravan of the year 1326 arrived at the western gate of Mecca sometime before dawn. Though probably exhausted from a night's march, Ibn Battuta and his companions made their way at once to the center of the city and entered the Haram by the gate called al-Salam." (Chapter 4, p. 74)

"Under the urging of an acquaintance from Basra, he contrived to get to Baghdad, not by turning around and heading back up the Tigris, but by making for the mountains of Persian Luristan, which was decidedly in the wrong direction." (Chapter 5, p. 93)

"Looking out upon the Arabian Sea, Ibn Battuta was about to enter a world region where the relationship of Islamic cosmopolitanism to society as a whole was significantly different from what he had hitherto experienced." (Chapter 6, p. 116)

"The weary caravaners must have been blessedly relieved to arrive at Kastmonu, capital of the principality of the Jandarids and an island of moderately civilized comfort in the snowy wilderness. Ibn Battuta once again received the sort of treatment to which he was accustomed, feasting with the local scholars, meeting the amir in his lofty citadel overlooking the city, and accepting the usual robes, horse, and money." (Chapter 7, p. 156)

"When Ibn Battuta visited Princess Bayalun, Ozbeg's third ranking wife, and told her of the great distance he had journeyed from his native land, he reports that 'she wept in pity and compassion and wiped her face with a handkerchief that lay before her.'" (Chapter 8, p. 169)

"Arriving at the western edge of the Indo-Gangetic plain, Ibn Battuta was entering a world region where his co-believers made up only a small minority of the population. They were, however, the minority that ruled the greater part of the subcontinent of India." (Chapter 9, p. 183)

"Alone on the Calicut shore, the lofty ambassador found himself suddenly reduced to the status of a penniless faqih. He had nothing to his name, save his prayer rug, the clothes on his back, and ten dinars an old yogi had given him. But for all that, he was fortunate to be alive. " (Chapter 10, p. 225)

"Ibn Battuta praises China as vast and bounteous, noting the quality of its silk and porcelain, the excellence of its plums and watermelons, the enormous size of its chickens, and the advantages of its paper money." (Chapter 11, p. 258)

"Arrived in his natal town some time during the fasting month of Ramadan, he tells us only that he visited his mother's grave." (Chapter 12, p. 280)

"In the autumn of 1351 the relentless traveler set out from Fez to visit Mali. He says nothing in the Rihla to explain why he felt impelled to cross the Sahara Desert. We may suppose he had the usual private plans to seek favor from yet another Muslim court." (Chapter 13, p. 295)

"As for the Rihla, very little is known of its history from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century. In contrast to Marco Polo's book, which was widely circulated and acclaimed in Europe in the later Middle Ages, the Rihla appears to have had a very modest impact on the Muslim world until modern times." (Chapter 14, p. 317)

Topics for Discussion

How does Dunn explain the concept of the Dar al-Islam? Does Ibn Battuta seem to share this concept?

How does Dunn treat the reliability of Ibn Battuta's accounts of his travels?

What role does trade play in the expansion of Islamic culture?

How does Dunn say the Mongol invasions actually strengthen Islamic culture?

What seems to motivate Ibn Battuta to travel so much?

How does Dunn mix history with biography? Is this an effective technique?

How does Dunn address Ibn Battuta's several marriages, divorces and abandoned children?