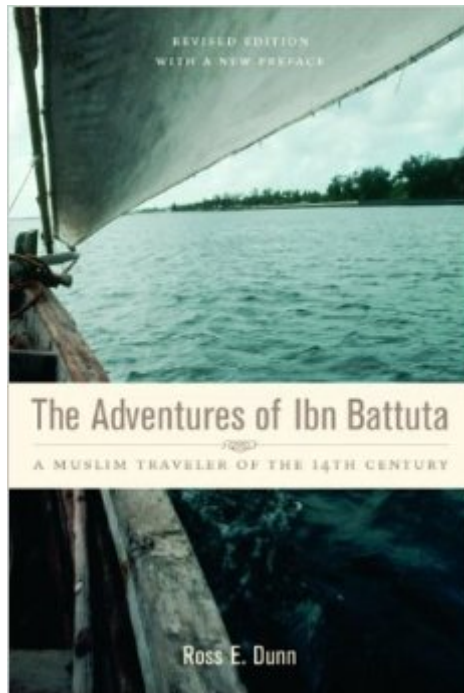


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The Adventures Of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler Of The Fourteenth Century



Synopsis

Known as the greatest traveler of premodern times, Abu Abdallah ibn Battuta was born in Morocco in 1304 and educated in Islamic law. At the age of twenty-one, he left home to make the holy pilgrimage to Mecca. This was only the first of a series of extraordinary journeys that spanned nearly three decades and took him not only eastward to India and China but also north to the Volga River valley and south to Tanzania. The narrative of these travels has been known to specialists in Islamic and medieval history for years. Ross E. Dunn's 1986 retelling of these tales, however, was the first work of scholarship to make the legendary traveler's story accessible to a general audience. Now updated with revisions, a new preface, and an updated bibliography, Dunn's classic interprets Ibn Battuta's adventures and places them within the rich, trans-hemispheric cultural setting of medieval Islam.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is incredible to think that back in the 1300's one person could have traveled from Morocco through North and East Africa, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, the Crimea, India, Ceylon, Indonesia and China. I get tired just writing about it! But this is what Ibn Battuta did. When you think of how difficult (and dangerous!) it was to travel back in those days, it is just amazing. What makes this book especially fascinating is the look it provides into Muslim society. Here was a man who journeyed thousands of miles over many, many years but who only very rarely felt himself to be a stranger in a strange land. In some places Islam was in the majority and in some places it was the minority but Ibn Battuta was always able to find educated Moslems similar to himself who could provide a place to live, food to eat, clothes to wear and money to spend. Very importantly also, they could provide spiritual support

to a person very far from home. This book is best when it settles down in one place for an extended period, such as when Ibn Battuta journeyed to Medina and Mecca. This is the most important trip a Moslem takes during an entire lifetime and it is expected, health and finances permitting, that a believer will make the trip at least once in a lifetime. Medina is where the tomb of The Prophet is and Mecca was His birthplace. Mr. Dunn provides a physical description of the landscape of both places so that you can almost feel you are there and he also gives a fascinating description of the logistics of the journey as this is a trip that thousands of people would take each year and a solid support system was needed to provide transportation and food and water, etc. The religious ceremonies that a person was required to go through once in the Holy Cities is also given in great detail. The book is also very good when Ibn Battuta settles down in India for awhile and gets a nice, cushy government job working for a despot who sounds as though he was probably psychotic! You could be in his favor one minute but apparently if you looked at him the wrong way he might decide on the spur of the moment to have you executed. He would also come up with grandiose ideas to rearrange the entire society which would usually wind up making everyone miserable, if not dead. Kind of sounds pretty familiar, doesn't it? I guess some things don't change over the centuries..... Anyway, the only drawback to this book is that Mr. Dunn is trying to cram a lot of travel into a 300 page book so that some of the time you feel as though you are being given the "bum's rush" on one of those modern package trips where they shuttle you through 14 cities in 14 days. After awhile some of the itinerary starts to become one, big blur. It makes you wish that Mr. Dunn would have decided to write a longer book where things could have proceeded at a more leisurely pace. But this book is a good starting point and it gave me a glimpse into a world I knew very little about but would like to learn more of.

Centuries-old travelogues tend to have this archaic, dusty sort of air about them. We can't identify with the people who wrote them because the language in no way resembles ours. This is of course the fault of those who translate those documents. Then too, travellers of medieval times or earlier tended to write about things not so much of interest today. In *THE ADVENTURES OF IBN BATTUTA*, Ross E. Dunn has successfully avoided these problems by writing ABOUT the 14th century North African traveller, Ibn Battuta, not just translating his book. Ibn Battuta (1304-1368) travelled around the civilized world of his day. Surprisingly enough for Eurocentric folks, the term "civilized" only included Spain at that time. It did, however, include most of the Islamic regions on earth, plus India and China. Dunn includes chapters on Tangier, North Africa, Egypt-Syria-Palestine, Mecca, Persia and Iraq, Yemen, Oman, and East Africa, Constantinople, Anatolia, Central Asia,

India and the Maldives, China, Spain, and Mali---across the Sahara in West Africa. In each, he gives a picture of the times in that particular place, what Ibn Battuta said he saw and what he must have seen or experienced but didn't mention. Dunn recounts many of the Moroccan's interesting adventures, from being jailed in Delhi to trying as a judge to forbid Maldivian women going topless in public. Dunn also places Ibn Battuta in a framework of a hemisphere-wide Islamic civilization and as an ambitious semi-scholar who was perhaps not so well studied as he wanted people to believe. So, not only is this book a record of Ibn Battuta's life and voyages, it is a very interesting commentary on a large part of the world in the 14th century and the life story of a particular individual. If you like history, if you are interested in what was happening in the world beyond Europe in the days when "knights were bold" [and illiterate], read this book. It comes with good maps and some black and white photographs of places that might still look a bit like what they did in Ibn Battuta's time.

In 1325 the young Moroccan Ibn Battuta left his home to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. On the way, he became enamoured with travel and travelled half the world, from North Africa to China, before returning to his home in 1349. His record of his journeys, the *Rihla*, is difficult to read and chaotically organised, leading historian Ross E. Dunn to present Ibn Battuta's story in a more accessible format. *THE ADVENTURES OF IBN BATTUTA* is an extremely interesting book, and I recommend it highly to anyone interested in world history. Battuta's memoirs often lack detail, so Dunn has put his travels in context by bringing in outside information. Thus, before covering Battuta's travels over the steppe of Northern Asia, he explains how the Mongols came to acquire so much territory and then convert to Islam. Another interesting part of Battuta's story is how Europeans and inhabitants of the Middle East interacted in the 14th century. Battuta gives an anecdote about a stay in a Muslim town in the Crimean where Italian traders had an outpost. Hearing the Italian's churchbells, which sounded to him like a diabolic cacophony, he and his friends immediately ran to the roof and began to make the muezzin call to prayer. Luckily, there was no violent conflict from this culture clash. Dunn's background information also gives interesting details of European activity in Asia during the late Middle Ages. I didn't know that Venetian and Genoese merchants travelled and resided as far east as Tabriz (in modern-day Iran) until I read *THE ADVENTURES OF IBN BATTUTA*.

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