

Ibn Battuta critical analysis

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According to Mian (2008), “ The great American playwright Tennessee Williams once remarked, “ Attempt voyages. There is nothing else” (P. 41). Although Ibn Battuta (full name being Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta alias Shams ad -Din) was born centuries before Tennessee Williams made this remark, it seems his life was guided by the same principle. Born on the 24th day of February 1304 A. D in the town of Tangier, Morocco, little is known about the early life of Ibn Battuta.

According to Shafi (2007), “ What is known is that he hailed from a family of legal scholars and followed the Sunni Malki School of law, one of the four schools of thought in the Sunni fiqh” (P. 7). According to Irfan (1992), “ The real deal then starts with his journey to Makkah at the age of 21 when he left his hometown, starting on the 14th of June 1325 C. E. , a journey hardly 16 months, but one that would last 24 years”(P. 7). Battuta traveled from Tangiers to Algiers, the modern day capital of Algeria.

Following the Mediterranean strip, he passed through modern day states of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, thus covering the whole of North Africa. Crossing the Sinai into Palestine (modern day Israel), he traveled northwards towards Syria and then followed the traditional trade route from Damascus southwards to the holy city of Makkah. Having performed the Hajj, Battuta decided against returning to his native Tangiers and instead traveled east and visited modern day Iraq, going as far as the Iranian town of Shiraz. Venturing back to Makkah, he performed another Hajj and settled down in the Holy city.

However, his yearning to see places was strong enough to compel him to leave the City of God. He traveled to Jeddah on the Red Sea and set sail for

the Yemeni port city of Aden. From thereon, Battuta traveled by sea southwards to East Africa, visiting the modern day Kenyan city of Mombasa. He penetrated further south but soon the city of Makkah pulled him back and he landed in Oman, to begin a new Hajj journey, through the straits of Hormuz and the Gulf sea, making stop over visits at notable places like the Iranian city of Hormuz and modern day Bahrain.

After the performance of pilgrimage, Battuta set out for Jeddah and traveled across the Red Sea by ship to visit Cairo. From Cairo, he made repeat visits to Palestine and Syria, finding himself soon in lands that today comprise the state of Turkey. Traveling northwards, he crossed the Black sea and made a round trip through modern day Ukraine to land back in Istanbul.

The restless Battuta then continued on an eastward note, entering Northern Persia (modern day Iran), venturing into Uzbek lands and visiting Bukhara before heading southwards into Afghanistan proper and visiting the ancient city of Balkh and the city of Herat near the modern day Iran-Afghan border. The mountainous terrain that separates Afghanistan from the Indian subcontinent was no impediment for Battuta as he crossed the Hindu Kush Mountains, visiting Kabul along the way to the modern day North West Frontier Province in Pakistan.

Heading south towards modern day Karachi and visiting famous cities such as Lahore and Multan, Battuta arrived at the court of Muhammad Shah Tughlaq and hence began an era of settlement in the restless life of Battuta. However, this settlement at the court of the Tughlaqs was short lived, and soon Battuta was on the road again, traveling through Central India and frequenting the Indian ports on the Indian Ocean including Goa. He sailed as

south as the Maldives, back into modern day Sri Lanka, northwards to Dhaka and the Bay of Bengal and then into Indo China (Cambodia), which allowed him entry into China proper.

Battuta continued northwards, traveling as far modern day Beijing. Then began the long trip back home, as Battuta traveled back to Muscat (Oman) through sea, visiting the lands of Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Egypt while making another pilgrimage to Makkah along the way, arriving in Tangiers after 24 years. Later on, he visited Spain under Muslim control and traveled across the vast Sahara desert. The result of his voyages was the *Rihala* meaning voyage.

This book is not only a documentation of his travels but also an adequate social, economic and political commentary of his time, providing much needed insight for historians today. According to Parks (1956) “ the distinction between a traveler and a tourist is that the tourist has an expectation of what to see, while a traveler lets the unexpected reveal itself” (P. 95). It is this spirit that guides the *Rihala*’s compilation, a journey unparalleled in history until the advent of the steam engine and covering the Atlantic at one end and almost touching the Pacific on the other.

While Battuta died in the year 1369 A. D, his contribution to recording history and exploring world geography is enormous and surpasses the contributions made by Marco Polo or Alexander the Great. References: Mian, Z. (2008). *Travelers & Tourists*. London: Independent Publishing. Shafi, Z. (2007). *Great Muslims of The Past*. Lahore: Ferozpur. Irfan, S. (1992). *Denying Boundaries: Great Muslims of The Past*. Lahore: Ferozpur. Shafi, Z. (2007). *Great Muslims*

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