

LEVELED Book • V

# World Traveler Ibn Battuta



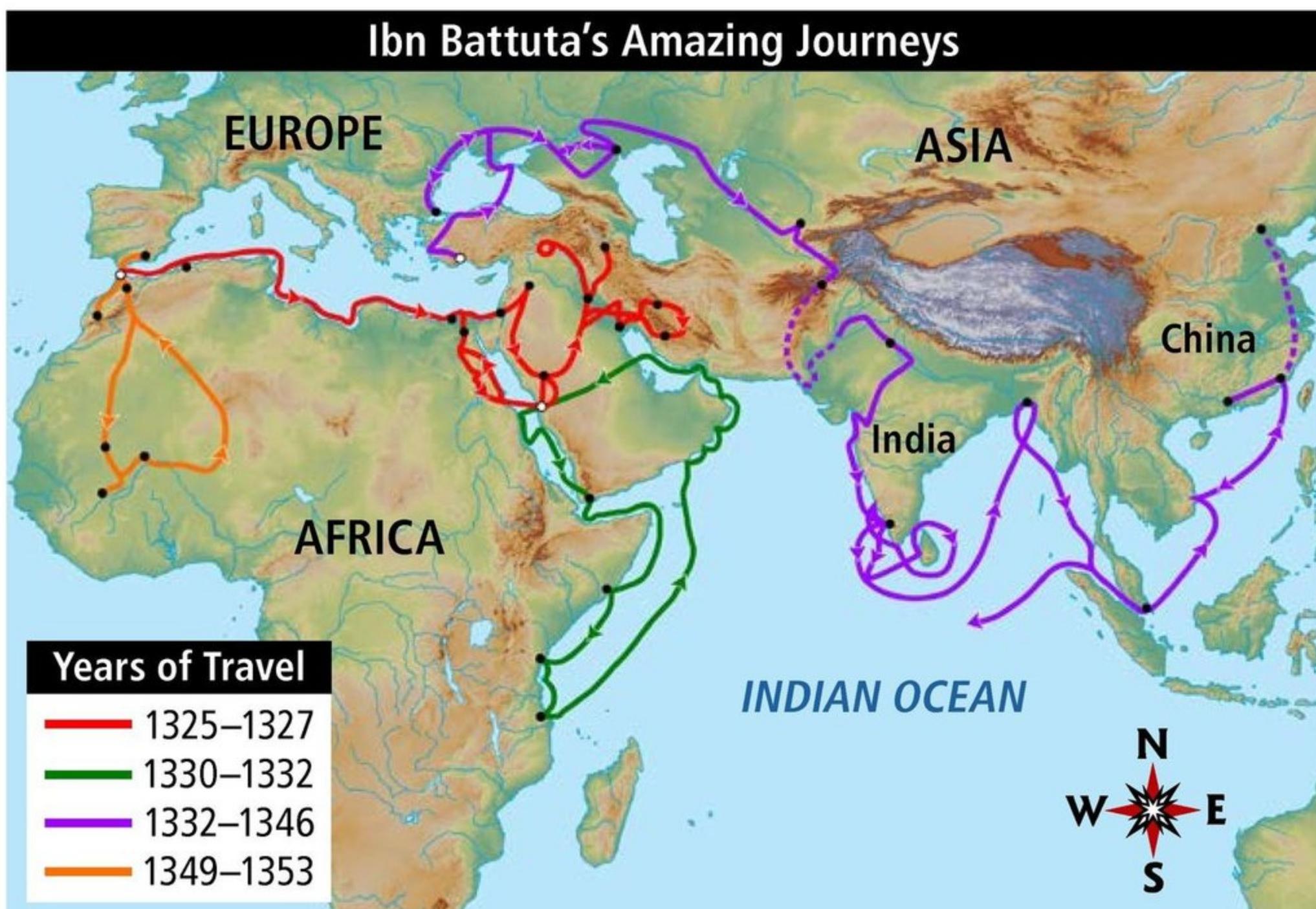
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Written by David L. Dreier  
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# World Traveler

## Ibn Battuta



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### Focus Question

Who was Ibn Battuta, and why was he important?

## Words to Know

ambassador  
caravans  
empire  
explorer  
Hindu  
mosques

Muslim  
pilgrimage  
scholar  
synagogues  
traitor  
traveler

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### Correlation

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## **Table of Contents**

A Traveler Like None Before .....	4
The Journeys Begin .....	5
Beyond Mecca .....	7
In Trouble in India .....	9
Attacks, a Shipwreck, and—Finally—China .....	10
The Journey Home .....	12
Final Trips .....	13
Telling the Story .....	15
Conclusion .....	15
Glossary .....	16



## A Traveler Like None Before

Many people have heard of Marco Polo, an Italian merchant who set out to visit China in 1271. Far fewer people have heard of Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta. Born just fifty years after Marco Polo, Ibn Battuta was the greatest **traveler** of the Middle Ages (AD 476–1500).

Ibn Battuta was born in 1304 in Tangier, Morocco. Continuing a family tradition, he studied law.

The young **scholar** was drawn to the city of Mecca on the Arabian Peninsula. Mecca is where the **Muslim** religion was founded in the AD 600s. Muslims were (and still are) required to make a *hajj* (HAJ), or **pilgrimage**, to Mecca at least once if they can.



## The Journeys Begin

In 1325, at the age of twenty-one, Ibn Battuta set out on his hajj. After a sixteen-month journey across northern Africa, he reached Mecca. During the trip, he wed the first of many wives he would marry—and then leave behind—on his journeys.

Having made the hajj, Ibn Battuta decided to travel throughout the entire Muslim world. He had a strong desire to see new things, and there was much to see. Since the 600s, the armies of Islam had conquered a large part of the Middle East and Africa. Muslims could move freely within this world, though bandits were often a threat.

Ibn Battuta was helped along the way by the generosity of other Muslims, who often gave money and gifts to travelers. Because Ibn Battuta was a scholar and eventually a famed traveler, he received many gifts and honors.

Ibn Battuta journeyed mostly by camel with large **caravans**. Traveling with many other people provided safety from bandits. The caravans often traveled in the cool of the night, lighting the way with torches. As Ibn Battuta rode away from Mecca, he saw the desert “gleaming with light and the darkness turned into radiant day.”



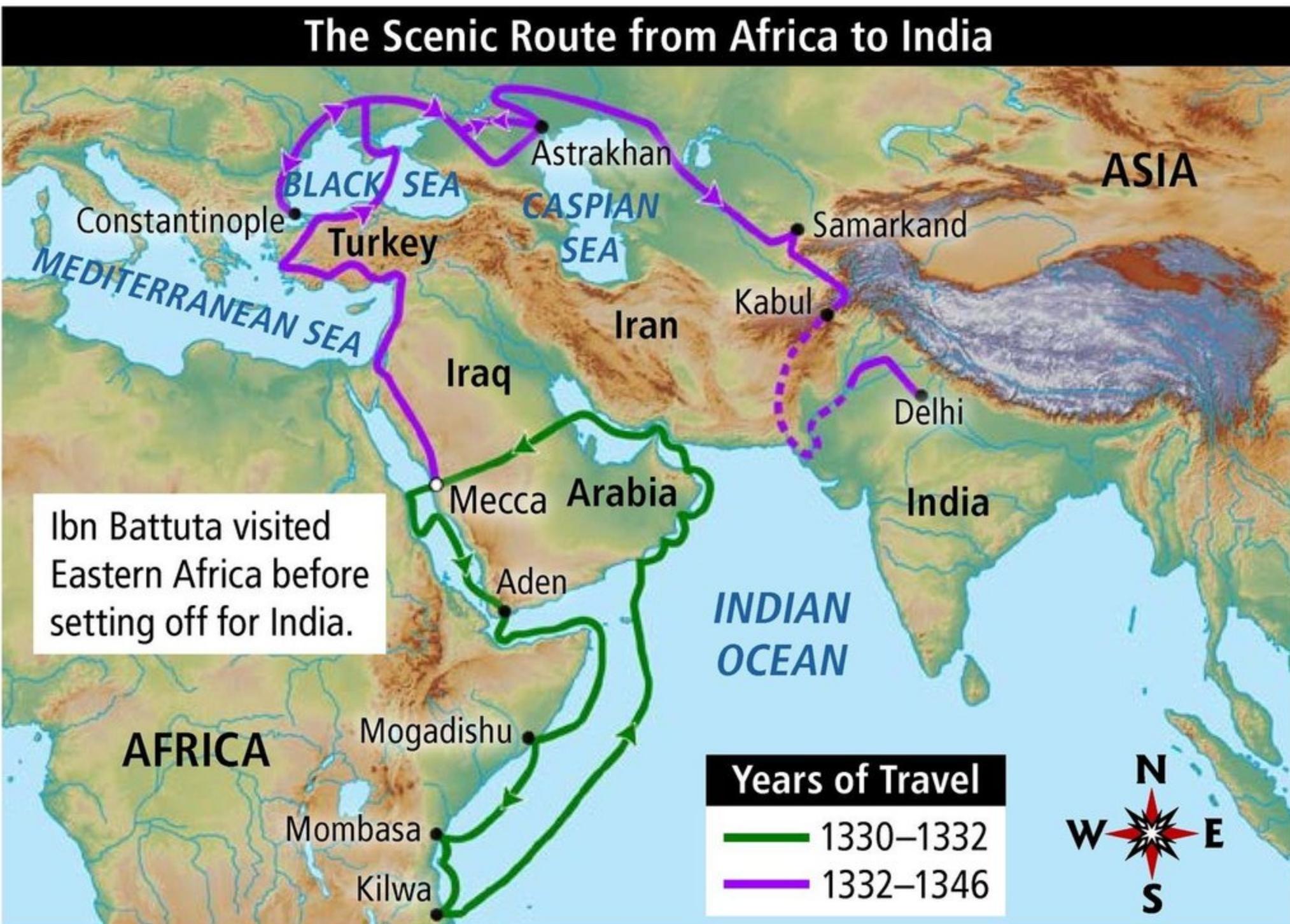


This university, built in AD 1227, was still standing when Ibn Battuta visited Baghdad, in present-day Iraq.

## Beyond Mecca

Ibn Battuta's next destination was present-day Iraq and Iran. These areas, onetime flowers of the Islamic world, were still recovering from attacks by invading Mongols, nomadic warriors from Asia.

Touring Baghdad, Ibn Battuta saw how the Mongols had destroyed the once-beautiful city. "Nothing remains of her but the name," he wrote. Ibn Battuta was exaggerating a bit, however. Many of the city's buildings had been spared or rebuilt.



On a visit to Eastern Africa in 1332, Ibn Battuta heard tales about the sultan of India, Muhammad ibn Tughluq (TOOG-luk). Sultan Muhammad was famous for granting favors to Islamic scholars. The sultan, however, could also be cruel and unpredictable. Ignoring the possible dangers, Ibn Battuta set off for India.

His path took him through the “land of the Turks” (present-day Turkey) and the Russian steppe (grasslands). He visited the Christian city of Constantinople, the capital of the declining Byzantine Empire. During his one-month stay, Ibn Battuta toured the famed city and met the emperor, Andronicus III. He then continued his journey to India.

## In Trouble in India

In 1334, Ibn Battuta crossed the mountains of Afghanistan into northern India. He presented himself at the sultan's court in Delhi.

Sultan Muhammad lived up to his reputation for generosity. He showered Ibn Battuta with honors and gifts, and later appointed him a judge of Islamic law. Things looked promising for Ibn Battuta.

That changed when Ibn Battuta married a woman whose father was a suspected **traitor**. A cloud of suspicion fell upon Ibn Battuta. Under guard and fearful of execution, he “fasted five days on end, reciting the Quran [Islam’s holy book] cover to cover each day.”



Eventually, the sultan forgave Ibn Battuta. Around 1342, the sultan named him **ambassador** to China. By this time, Ibn Battuta had been in India for eight years. He was glad to leave before his fortunes took another turn for the worse.



## Attacks, a Shipwreck, and—Finally—China

Unfortunately, Ibn Battuta's troubles were far from over. Outside Delhi, carrying gifts from the sultan for the Chinese emperor, his large group had to fight off attacks by **Hindu** rebels. During one of the attacks, Ibn Battuta became separated from his companions.

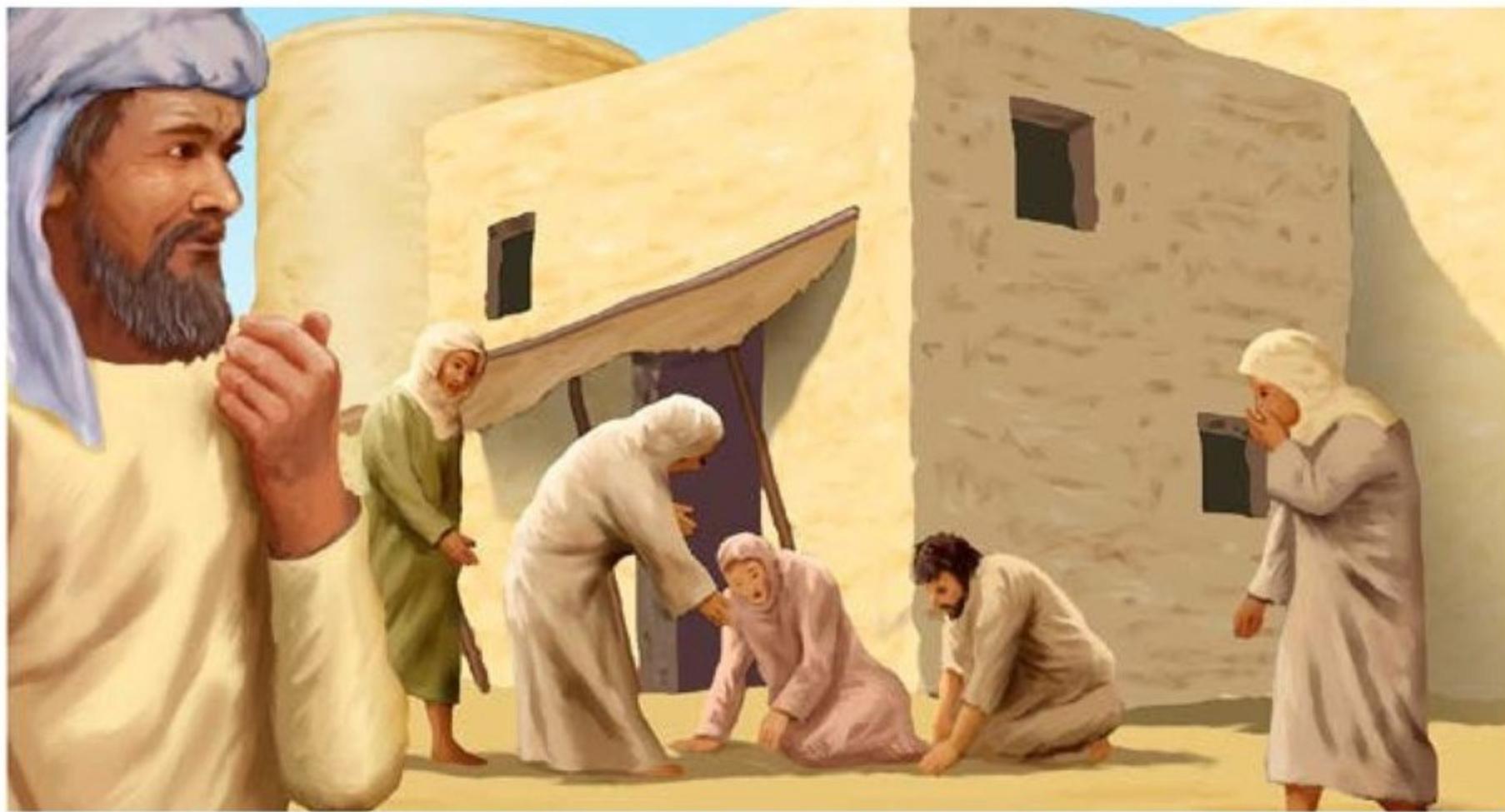
Carefully avoiding the rebels, Ibn Battuta was finally able to rejoin his party. At the coast, they boarded four ships and sailed to the Indian port city of Calicut. There they met three Chinese vessels charged with taking them to China. Before they could leave, however, a terrible storm blew in. Two of the ships were wrecked, and all the treasure was lost. The other ship sailed off without Ibn Battuta.

## India, the Maldives, and China



Fearing the anger of the sultan for his failure, Ibn Battuta stayed for nearly two years in the Maldives Islands, south of India. Later he went to the island of Sumatra, in what is now the nation of Indonesia. He got his chance to visit China when the Muslim ruler of Sumatra gave him a ship.

Ibn Battuta reached China in 1346. He was impressed with what he saw in China, a region that was still ruled by the Mongols. He was amazed to learn that silk, a very expensive material in most parts of the world, was “used for clothing even by poor monks and beggars.”



## The Journey Home

After less than a year, Ibn Battuta was ready to move on—this time back home to Morocco. On his journey, he entered Syria in 1348. There, he first encountered the Black Death, or bubonic plague. This terrible disease had spread from Europe and northern Africa. In Damascus, some two thousand people were dying from the disease every day. The city's **mosques**, churches, and **synagogues** were filled with people praying for an end to the plague.

Ibn Battuta found the plague in other places along his homeward route. In Cairo, Egypt, the disease was raging, but Ibn Battuta never became infected himself. In 1349, he finally arrived back in Morocco. By this time, both of his parents were dead. His father had died sixteen years earlier, but his mother's death occurred just a few months before his return.

## The Final Journey to Timbuktu



### Final Trips

Ibn Battuta had been gone for twenty-four years and was now forty-five years old. Nonetheless, he still had some traveling to do. There were two more Islamic lands to see. One was Granada, a part of Spain still under Muslim control. The other was the Empire of Mali in West Africa.

In Granada, Ibn Battuta met with Muslim leaders. He also met a young writer named Ibn Juzayy. They would meet again when Ibn Battuta's travels were finished.

Ibn Battuta was reluctant to make the long, difficult trip to Mali. However, the sultan of Morocco ordered him to. The sultan wanted to learn more about this fabled land, said to be wealthy beyond imagination.

Ibn Battuta spent eight months in Mali as the guest of its ruler, Sultan Mansa Sulayman. He was impressed by the richness of the sultan's court.

Ibn Battuta returned to Morocco in 1354—this time for good. He was now fifty years old.



## Telling the Story

In Morocco, Ibn Battuta hired Ibn Juzayy to write his memoirs. Ibn Juzayy “improved” the traveler’s straightforward narrative with flowery wording and poetry. The resulting chronicle was called the *Rihlah (Journey)*. The book provides a valuable glimpse into the Islamic realms and rulers of the 1300s.

In his final years, Ibn Battuta is thought to have served as an Islamic judge, but little is known of his later life. He died in Morocco in either 1368 or 1369.

Some historians have been critical of the *Rihlah*, saying that parts of it may have been made up. Others argue that the many minor inaccuracies are probably due more to Ibn Battuta’s faulty memory than an intention to deceive.

## Conclusion

During his lifetime, Ibn Battuta journeyed 75,000 miles (120,000 km)—more than five times as far as Marco Polo. That’s like going completely around the world three times! He visited and lived in dozens of countries. He was not an **explorer**. He visited no unknown lands. Nevertheless, he remains one of the greatest travelers in history.

## Glossary

<b>ambassador</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an official who travels to or resides in a new location to represent his or her country or population (p. 9)
<b>caravans</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	processions of people, often with vehicles or animals, traveling together (p. 6)
<b>empire</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a collection of nations or people ruled by one person or government (p. 8)
<b>explorer</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who visits and learns about new places (p. 15)
<b>Hindu</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to the major religion in India, which includes many gods and the belief in reincarnation (p. 10)
<b>mosques</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	places of worship in the Islamic faith (p. 12)
<b>Muslim</b> ( <i>adj.</i> )	of or relating to people who follow the religion of Islam (p. 4)
<b>pilgrimage</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a journey to a sacred or special place, such as a shrine (p. 4)
<b>scholar</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	an intelligent, well-educated person (p. 4)
<b>synagogues</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	Jewish places of worship (p. 12)
<b>traitor</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who betrays his or her own country or friends by supporting an enemy (p. 9)
<b>traveler</b> ( <i>n.</i> )	a person who journeys from one place to another (p. 4)

# World Traveler Ibn Battuta

A Reading A-Z Level V Leveled Book

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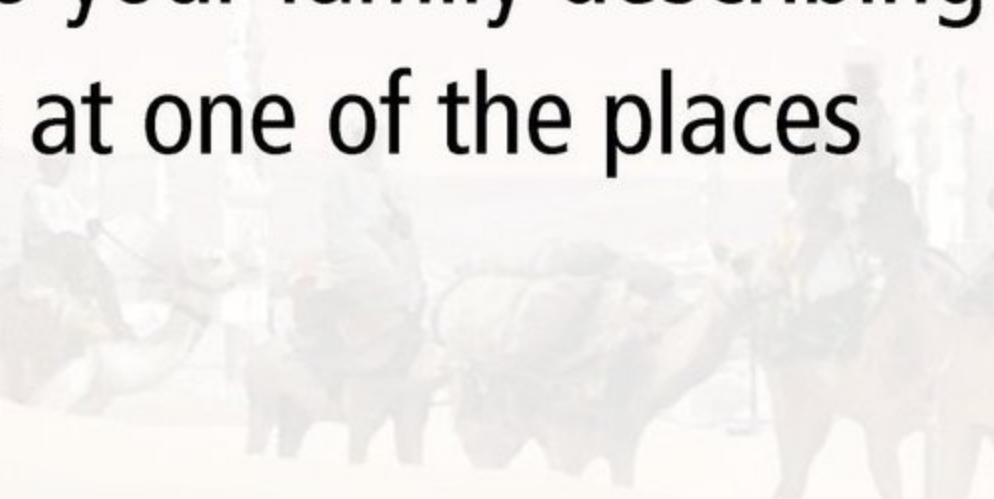
## Connections

### Writing and Art

Pretend you are Ibn Battuta. Write a postcard home to your family describing your experiences at one of the places you visited.

### Social Studies

Make a timeline of Ibn Battuta's travels, including at least five events and their locations. Compare your timeline with a partner's.



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