

THE MONGOLS AND GLOBAL HISTORY

A NORTON DOCUMENTS READER

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The Travels of Ibn Battuta

Like Marco Polo and Rabban Sauma, Ibn Battuta (1304–1368/69) spanned two continents in his travels. Unlike the other two voyagers, he journeyed to Asia and Africa, not Asia and Europe. His initial travels mirrored those of Rabban Sauma because he too started on a religious pilgrimage. Trained in the law in his native city of Tangier, he set forth in 1325 on a hajj to the city of Mecca. During this voyage, he also visited other sites in North Africa and the Middle East. His delightful experiences on this journey prompted a thirty-year career of travels, which led him to the Byzantine empire, India, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Tanzania, Mali, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Grenada, and perhaps China. Traveling principally in the Islamic world, he earned his living, in part, as a qadi or judge. The relative ease of his travels, with a notable lack of banditry or other impediments along the Silk Roads, attests to the Pax Mongolica's impact on the flow of people, products, ideas, and technologies across Eurasia. On his return to his homeland in the mid-1350s, the sultan of Morocco commanded Ibn Juzayy to write the Rihla, which documented Ibn Battuta's travels and observations. Like Marco Polo's and Rabban Sauma's accounts, errors and inconsistencies in the work may be due to their amanuensis's misunderstandings.

Ibn Battuta's descriptions of the Islamic world are more accurate than his accounts of the non-Islamic populations. His portraits of Sufi thinkers, mosques, education, Mecca, Muslim merchants' trade via the Persian Gulf, and vibrant cities tally with historical records. However, his depiction of China is vague and imprecise, prompting questions about whether he actually reached East Asia. Because he dealt mostly with the elites, he scarcely comments on the lives and customs of ordinary people. Nonetheless, his text yields considerable information about the conduct of official affairs as well as banquets and ceremonies in various Islamic states. His visit to the Golden Horde's Khan Özbek, who had converted to Islam, is particularly instructive. He reveals that the capital at

Sarai had at least twelve mosques, indicating a growing Turkic and Mongol attraction to Islam. He is also impressed with the power of the khatuns, the khan's wives, an observation that conforms with other accounts of elite Mongol women. He may have obtained the information in this selection during his stay with the Golden Horde.

Narrative of the Origin of the Tatars and of Their Devastation of Bukhārā and Other Cities

Tankiz Khan was a blacksmith in the land of al-Khata, and he was a man of generous soul, and strength, and well-developed body. He used to assemble the people and supply them with food. After a while a company [of warriors] gathered around him and appointed him as their commander. He gained the mastery in his own country, grew in strength and power of attack and became a formidable figure. He subdued the king of al-Khata and then the king of China, his armies became immense in size, and he conquered the lands of al-Khutan, Kashkhar, and Almaliq.¹ Jalal al-Din Sanjar, son of Khwarizm Shah, the king of Khwarizm, Khurasan, and Transoxiana, [however], possessed great power and military strength, so Tankiz stood in awe of him, kept out of his [territories], and avoided any conflict with him.

It happened that Tankiz sent a party of merchants with the wares of China and al-Khata, such as silk fabrics etc., to the town of Utrar, which was the last place in the government of Jalal al-Din. His governor in the town sent a message to him, informing him of this event, and enquiring of him what action he should take in regard to them. Jalal al-Din wrote to him, commanding him to seize their goods, mutilate them, cut off their limbs and send them back to their country— [displaying thereby], because of what God Most High willed to inflict of distress and suffering for their faith upon

¹ Khata or Khitay ("Cathay") was the name given to the northern and northwestern provinces of China, which constituted a separate kingdom under the Khitan or Liao dynasty (see E. Bretschneider, *Mediaeval Researches from Eastern Asiatic Sources*, London, 1910, I, 208–9). Peking, the capital of the Chin dynasty in China proper, was captured in 1215. Kashghar and Khotan (both in Sinkiang) and Almaliq (in Semirychye) were occupied in 1218.

the peoples of the Eastern lands, weak judgement and a bad and ill-omened management of affairs. So, when he carried out this action, Tankiz made ready to set out in person with an army of uncountable numbers to invade the lands of Islām. When the governor of Utrar heard of his advance he sent spies to bring back a report about him, and the story goes that one of them went into the *mahalla* of one of the amīrs of Tankiz, disguised as a beggar. He found nobody to give him food, and took up a position beside one of their men, but he neither saw any provisions with him nor did the man give him anything to eat. In the evening the man brought out some dry intestines that he had with him, moistened them with water, opened a vein of his horse, filled the intestines with its blood, tied them up and cooked them on a fire; this was his food. So the spy returned to Utrar, reported on them to the governor, and told him that no one had the power to fight against them. The governor then asked his king, Jalal al-Din, for reinforcements, and the latter sent him a force of sixty thousand men, over and above the troops who were already with him. When the battle was joined, Tankiz defeated them, forced his way into the city of Utrar by the sword, killed the men, and enslaved the children. Jalal al-Din [then] came out in person to engage him, and there took place between them battles such as were never known in the history of Islām.

The final result of the matter was that Tankiz gained possession of Transoxiana, laid waste Bukhara, Samarqand and Tirmidh, crossed the River [i.e. the river of Jaihun] to the city of Balkh and captured it, then [advanced] to al-Bamiyan, conquered it, and penetrated far into the lands of Khurāsān and 'Irāq al-'Ajam. The Muslims in Balkh and Transoxiana then revolted against him, so he turned back to deal with them, entered Balkh by the sword and left it 'fallen down upon its roofs'. He went on to do the same at Tirmidh; it was laid waste and never afterwards repopulated, but a [new] city was built two miles distant from it, which is nowadays called Tirmidh. He slew the population of al-Bamiyan and destroyed it completely, except for the minaret of its mosque. He pardoned the inhabitants of Bukhara and Samarqand, and returned thereafter to al-'Iraq. The advance of the Tatars continued to the point that finally they entered Baghdad, the capital of Islām and seat of the

Caliphate, by the sword and slaughtered the Caliph al-Musta‘sim billāh, the ‘Abbasid (God’s mercy on him).

Ibn Battuta, *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, translated by H. A. R. Gibb (Cambridge: The Hakluyt Society, 3 vols., 1958–71), 551–53.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

1. What does Ibn Battuta’s account, written a century later, reveal about the knowledge and lasting legacy of Chinggis and the Mongols?

Rashid al-Din, Compendium of Chronicles

Rashid al-Din and other Persian historians describe, in great detail, the damage and massacres wrought by the Mongols. Some of these descriptions appear to be exaggerated. This selection narrates the reputed razing of Samarkand, one of the most renowned cities in Central Asia, which is currently located in the country of Uzbekistan.

See the headnote on p. 59 for additional information on this text.

Genghis Khan Heads for Samarkand and Takes It with His World-conquering Army

At the end of spring in the Moghai Yil mentioned above, which began in Dhu’l-Hijja 617 [January 1221] but most of which was in 618, Genghis Khan set out for Samarkand. Sultan Muhammad Khwarazmshah had entrusted Samarkand to 110,000 men, 60,000 of whom were Turks, with sixty demon-shaped elephants. There was such a huge throng of common people and elite alike that they could not be numbered. In addition he had fortified the walls of the fortress and constructed several outer walls around the perimeter and connected the moat to water.

When Genghis Khan arrived in Otrar he heard reports of the enormity of the army in Samarkand and the strength of its fortress