Big Idea

Ibn Battuta Travels the Islamic World

Essential Question

What do Ibn Battuta’s travels reveal about the Islamic world in the 1300s?
Words To Know

Hajj – an Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca; a religious duty that must be carried out at least once a lifetime by all adult Muslims who are capable of making the journey.

Mecca – a city in Saudi Arabia that Muslims consider to be a holy city; the birthplace of the prophet Muhammad.

Pilgrimage – a religious journey.

Let’s Set The Stage...

Ibn Battuta was born in Tangier, part of modern-day Morocco, on February 25, 1304. He was raised by his family with a focus on education. As a result, Ibn Battuta’s urge to travel was spurred by interest in finding the best teachers and the best libraries in the world. Ibn Battuta was a Muslim student who studied law. He wanted to make the pilgrimage to Mecca, called the “hajj,” as soon as possible, out of eagerness and devotion to his Islamic faith.
Ibn Battuta traveled for thirty years, mostly through lands where Islam was the predominate (main) religion and where people spoke Arabic because of the spread of the religion. When he returned from his travels, he wrote a book to reflect on his experiences throughout the Islamic world.

On June 14, 1325, at the age of 21, Ibn Battuta rode out of Tangier on a donkey, the start of his journey to Mecca.
Ibn Battuta stayed at a madrasas (Islamic college) as he made his way to Tunis. By the time he left Tunis he was serving as a paid judge for a caravan of pilgrims who needed their disputes settled by a well-educated man.

Ibn Battuta entered Mecca in mid-October 1326, a year and four months after leaving home. He stayed a month, taking part in all the ritual experiences and talking with diverse (different) people from every Islamic land.
After Ibn Battuta studied for a while in Mecca, he left to make his way down the Red Sea. He boarded a trading ship and sailed halfway down the east coast of Africa. Muslim merchants had established trading ports in East Africa, mainly to trade for African gold.

In Alexandria, Ibn Battuta spent three days as a guest of a well respected religious leader. This holy man saw that Ibn Battuta had a passion for travel and suggested that he should travel to India and China.
In Damascus, Ibn Battuta stayed in one of the three madrasas there (Islamic colleges). During his 24-day stay he settled down into some formal studies. Damascus had the best religious teachers in the Arab-speaking world.

In Damascus, they taught reading and writing. Students were tested on their knowledge and were issued certificates when passed their tests.
Ibn Battuta spent eight years in Delhi, India as a judge.

The king of India then agreed to send him as an ambassador to China, and made him responsible for taking shiploads of goods to the Yuan emperor, in return for the emperor’s previous gifts of 100 slaves and cartloads of cloth and swords.
Ibn Battuta led a complete life while traveling. He studied and prayed; he practiced his legal profession; he had astonishing outdoor adventures; he married at least 10 times and left children growing up all over Afro-Eurasia (Africa, Europe and Asia).

Upon reflecting on his travels he reported to have experienced culture shock in some of the regions he visited. The local customs (culture) of recently converted people (to Islam) did not fit his Muslim background.
In some places, Ibn Battuta was surprised how women behaved. They were allowed freedom of speech and their dresses were too revealing. The travels of Ibn Battuta resulted in an increased interest in different cultures.

Essential Question Answered

What do Ibn Battuta’s travels and his account of those travels reveal about the Islamic world in the 1300s?

Ibn Battuta’s writings show how vast (big) the Muslim world was at the time.

Islamic civilization had spread through much of the known world. It stretched from West Africa across northern Africa into the Middle East. It went even further east to India and Southeast Asia. Muslims saw it as a space where they could practice their religion freely.
What do Ibn Battuta’s travels and his account of those travels reveal about the Islamic world in the 1300s?

Ibn Battuta is considered the greatest Muslim explorer of all time, traveling 75,000 miles. His accounts gave the world a better understanding of the Islamic world.

Ibn Battuta is the only person to have visited the lands of every Muslim ruler of his time.

His book remains an important historical record of the social, cultural and political history of the Muslim world and has even helped historians determine when Islam spread in West Africa.