



EBN BAṬṬŪṬA

EBN BAṬṬŪṬA, ŠAMS-AL-DĪN ABŪ ‘ABD-ALLĀH MOḤAMMAD (b. Tangier, 17 Rajab 703 /25 February 1304; d. Morocco, 770/1368-9), the most famous Muslim traveler. A Berber from Tangier, he claims to have traveled extensively in Africa, the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, and China. His *Toḥfat al-nozzār fi ḡarā’eb al-amṣār wa ‘ajā’eb al-asfār*, known as the *Reḥla* (Journey), professes to be a chronological narrative of his journeys from his departure from Tangier as a pilgrim in Rajab 725/June 1324 to his arrival in Fez, Morocco, after a journey to Mali in Ḍu’l-qa’da 754/December 1353. At the command of the local ruler, Ebn Baṭṭūṭa dictated an account of his journeys to the scholar Ebn Jozayy. His account of places typically consists of brief descriptions of the place and his adventures there, supplemented as needed by accounts of local shrines and holy men and of the local rulers.

The *Reḥla* is obviously not a completely reliable record of his travels. Dates are often inconsistent. His alleged movements in Bolḡār, Yemen, Oman, and eastern Anatolia are not credible. In Bengal, Southeast Asia, and China he names few places in relation to the distances covered. There are no satisfactory identifications for several countries. Literary sources, rather than Ebn Baṭṭūṭa’s own observations, were often used (II, pp. 399-400, tr. Gibb, pp. 490-501). As history, it is very unreliable; for example, Moḡammed K̄vārazmšāh is confused with his son Jalāl-al-Dīn, and often Ebn Baṭṭūṭa recorded under his first visit to a place events of a later visit. He was a careless observer of architecture, once claiming that an elephant would be able to climb the Qoṭb Menār in Delhi. Some sections of the *Reḥla*—those on East



Africa, Anatolia, south India, the Maldives, and Mali—are important because there are few other sources, but for Iranian lands it is of little value.

We know little about him apart from his book. His preoccupation was acquiring blessings (*barakāt*) from saintly men and their tombs, and he records many lively anecdotes about them, but he shows no evidence of profound learning. He disliked Shi'ites, was ambitious, married often, and was much interested in food. He expected the patronage of rulers and commented on any lack of generosity on their part (IV, pp. 400-01). Ebn Ḳaldūn refers to the scepticism with which his stories were heard at court (*The Muqaddima*, tr. F. Rosenthal, Princeton, 1958, I, pp. 369-71). Ebn al-Ḳaṭīb (III, p. 273) says that his learning was modest and that he traveled as a Sufi. Ebn Ḥajar, citing Ebn Marzūq, says he died as judge of 'some town or other' (III, pp. 480-81).

Ebn Baṭṭūṭa visited Iranian lands four times: a tour of southern and western Persia that included the Shi'ite shrine sites of Iraq in 726-27/1326-27; a journey from Hormoz to Sirāf in 732/1332; a journey through Ḳvārazm, Transoxiana, Khorasan, and Afghanistan on his way from Anatolia and the lands of the Golden Horde to India in 733/1333; and a journey through southern Persia on his way home to Morocco in 748/1347.

First visit. Iraq and Persia, 726-27/1326-27. Leaving Mecca with the Iraq caravan after the pilgrimage of 726/1326, Ebn Baṭṭūṭa visited Najaf, where he observed the rituals connected with the tomb of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb and found a Persian Shi'ite, the Naqīb-al-Aṣrāf, ruling as the representative of the government (I, pp. 414-21, tr. Gibb, pp. 255-59). From there he went to 'Abbādān (Ābādān), Mācūl (Bandar Ma'sūr), Rāmez, Tostar (Šuštar), Īdaj (Mālamīr), the capital of the Atābaks of Greater Loreṣtān, where the funeral customs shocked him (II, pp. 30-42, tr. Gibb, pp. 287-94), and Oṣtorḳān. In Isfahan, damaged by fighting between Sunnis and Shi'ites, he stayed in a Sohrawardī *kānaqāh* and remarked on the excellence of the fruits (II, pp. 43-50, tr. Gibb, pp. 294-98). Passing through Yazdkvāst and Māyīn, he reached Shiraz, where he enumerates, but does not describe, the shrines, including Sa'dī's, and admires the piety of the women (II, pp. 52-89, tr. Gibb, pp. 299-319). He then returned to Iraq via Kāzerūn, Zaydān, and Ḥowayza. In Kūfa he describes the mosque of 'Alī (II, pp. 93-96, tr. Gibb, pp. 322-24). He found Ḥella and Karbalā' riven by warring factions of Imamīs (II, pp. 93-100, tr. Gibb, pp. 320-26). He traveled partway from Baghdad to Tabrīz with the camp (*maḥalla*) of the Il-khan Abū Sa'īd, whom he calls "the most beautiful of God's creatures in features"; he is the only authority to state that the Il-khan was poisoned by his



queen Baġdād Kātūn, jealous of a younger rival (II, pp. 114-128, tr. Gibb, pp. 335-44). In Tabrīz he was impressed by the *bāzār* but scandalized by the behavior of the Turkish noblewomen shopping in the jewelry market (II, pp. 129-31, tr. Gibb, pp. 344-45).

Second visit. Hormoz to Sīrāf, 732/1332. Returning from Africa and southern Arabia five years later, Ebn Baṭṭūṭa called at Hormoz Island, at that time a thriving port for the India trade, where he visited the nearby shrine of Keẓr and gave an account of Sultan Qoṭb-al-Dīn Tahamtan (II, pp. 231-37, tr. Gibb, pp. 400-04). He then crossed to the mainland and passed through Kūzestān, Lār, Konj, Fāl, and Sīrāf, which he confuses with Qays, all very briefly described, before crossing back to Arabia.

Third visit. K̄vārazm, Transoxiana, Khorasan, and Afghanistan, 733/1333. After extensive travels in Anatolia, Ebn Baṭṭūṭa sailed to the Crimea and entered the territories of the Golden Horde, visiting the camp of Sultan Moḥammad Uzbek Khan on the way to the capital, Sarā, north of Astrakhan (II, pp. 379-98, tr. Gibb, 481-90). From there he traveled to the crowded city of K̄vārazm, where the prevalent doctrine was Mu'tazilism, though not openly professed (III, pp. 3-16, tr. Gibb, pp. 541-47), and from there to Kāt and Bukhara, where he visited the tombs of Bākarzī and Boḳārī (qq.v.) but found the chief public buildings in ruins (III, pp. 21-28, tr. Gibb, pp. 550-54). Near Naḳšab he found the camp of the Chaghatay khan Tarmašīrīn, of whose subsequent adventures in India he gives an account (III, pp. 29-51, tr. Gibb, pp. 555-67). He found Samarkand also mostly in ruins and describes the riverside pleasure gardens and the tomb of Qoṭam b. 'Abbās, which, he says, had been venerated by the Mongols even when they were still pagans (III, pp. 51-55, tr. Gibb, pp. 567-69). After passing through Keš, which he confuses with Nasaf, and Termed, rebuilt on a new site after its destruction by the Mongols, he crossed the Oxus and entered Khorasan. He visited Balk, "completely dilapidated and uninhabited" but with many buildings intact (III, pp. 58-63, tr. Gibb, pp. 571-73).

Ebn Baṭṭūṭa describes an excursion into western Khorasan, but gives few personal details and the trip is chronologically difficult (tr. Gibb, pp. 533-34). It includes Herat, of which he says little, except to give a confused account of the Sarbadārs (III, pp. 63-74, tr. Gibb, pp. 574-80), Jām, Ṭūs, Mašhad, where he describes the sanctuary of 'Alī al-Rezā (III, pp. 77-79, tr. Gibb, pp. 582-83), Saraḳs, Zāva, Nīšāpūr, Beštām, and Hendūkā (*Andkūy*). Picking up the route from Balk to India, he mentions Qondūz, Baġlān, Panjšīr, which had not recovered from the Mongols' devastations; Parvān, Čārīkār, Kabul, described



as formerly a great city, but “now a village inhabited by a tribe of Persians called al-Afġān” (III, p. 89, tr. Gibb, p. 590), and Ġazna, implausibly placed before Kabul. He made his way by an unknown route to the Indus. Crossing on 1 Moḥarram 734/12 September 1333, he made his way to Delhi, where he spent eight years in the service of Moḥammad b. Toġloq, about whom he gives extensive information in the third volume of his *Travels*.

Fourth visit. Through southern Persia, 748/1347. Returning from alleged travels in China and Southeast Asia fourteen years later, Ebn Baṭṭūṭa came by sea to the Persian Gulf, retracing his former path from Hormoz to Ḳonj and whence to Shiraz, Isfahan, and Šūštar. He gives no further information, referring the reader to the earlier volume. On the other hand, he relates an interesting observation made during this pretended visit to China. A very high Chinese official (whom Ebn Baṭṭūṭa calls *Amīr-al-Omarāʾ* of China) invited him and his companions to a banquet lasting three days; thereafter, they were entertained by musicians at the service of his son; they sang in Chinese, Arabic, and Persian. The son was very fond of Persian songs. Ebn Baṭṭūṭa memorized one that was sung on his order several times. The lyrics of the music recorded by Ebn Baṭṭūṭa have been identified by the late ‘Abbās Eqbāl as a distich by Saʿdī, who had died about fifty years previously.

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