

Two Great Adventurers, Battuta and Polo, Affect the Medieval World

When you take a trip, how do you record what you did? Do you take pictures, and maybe post some of them on a social media site? Or you do send postcards or emails to your family and friends about your travels? Do you keep a journal to record events as they happen?

Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo traveled in a time around the 13th and 14th centuries when recording events was not as easy as it is today. Upon their return to their homes, both Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo wrote about their adventures. Their stories were very influential in stimulating trade and travel in the regions they visited.

Ibn Battuta's desire to see the lands where his fellow Muslims lived led him across Asia, Africa, and Europe and the seas. His nearly thirty years of travel began when he was twenty-one when he set off for a pilgrimage to Mecca. After that, he traveled over 75,000 miles. Ibn Battuta traveled by joining trading caravans. Caravans were bands of travelers who journeyed together for security and mutual aid. He told of his adventures when he returned home to Morocco, and those who heard his stories thought they should be written down. The sultan of Morocco commissioned a young court secretary named Ibn Juzayy to listen to Ibn Battuta's stories and record them. It took two years to write everything down, and when they were finished, the result was the Rihla, a story of travels centered on a pilgrimage. The Rihla was an inspiration to other Muslims to make a hajj, or pilgrimage, to Mecca. Battuta's stories also taught Muslims about places, cultural practices, and religious events in the 14th century Islamic world.



The Rihla not only helped people in Ibn Battuta's time to know the world better, but today it is still giving us insights into the world of Africa, Asia, and Europe in the 1300's. Geographers consider Ibn Battuta one of the earliest geographers.

Unlike Ibn Battuta who left home for religious reasons, the Italian Marco Polo left home seeking trade opportunities. His father and uncle were jewel merchants and had spent time at the court of Kublai Khan, the Mongol ruler of China. They took the young Marco with them on a return trip. Khan immediately liked Marco and sent him on diplomatic missions throughout his empire. Marco spent 17 years in Khan's service and traveling all over China. In this time, he acquired a great wealth in jewels and gold.

Much like Ibn Battuta, upon his return after twenty-four years away from home, Marco Polo began telling stories of his adventures. A young writer named Rustichello recorded Marco's travels in a book called The Travels of Marco Polo, considered to be one of the most famous travel books in history.

Some scholars doubt whether Marco's accounts happened. These scholars think he got his information from traders he met. It does not matter, though, because Marco's biggest achievement is the affect his book had on European readers. His travelogue was the most influential one written about the Silk Road. His system of measuring distances was remarkably accurate, and map makers and explorers looked to this book for information about Asian

regions. Merchants used his book for planning commercial ventures. Sailors studied it to seek a route to India in the 15th century. One important sailor, Christopher Columbus, relied heavily on Polo's geography when he planned his voyage to sail west from Europe to reach Asian markets.



On his death bed, Marco said that he had “only told half of what I saw, because no one would have believed me.” For Ibn Battuta, traveling “leaves you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller.”

These two Medieval travelers, the Moroccan Ibn Battuta, and the Italian Marco Polo, although leaving their homes for different reasons, both greatly influenced travel and trade of the people who heard and read their stories.

Name _____

Practice with Miles & Kilometers

Convert the following distances.

1 mile = 1.61 kilometers

1. Ibn Battuta traveled between Mecca and Kilwa. The shortest distance was 3,000 miles. How many kilometers is this?

- a. 4,828 kilometers b. 3,866 kilometers c. 1,111 kilometers d. 530 kilometers

2. Marco Polo traveled between Constantinople and Tabriz. The distance was 1,500 kilometers. How many miles is this?

- a. 2,041 miles b. 1,513 miles c. 1,004 miles d. 932 miles

Use the appropriate map to answer the following questions.

3. What is the shortest distance Battuta traveled between Marrakech and Timbuktu?

- a. 2,500 miles b. 2,000 miles c. 1,700 miles d. 1,000 miles

4. Approximately how far did Polo travel between Sumatra and Yanzhou?

- a. 7,000 kilometers b. 4,500 kilometers c. 2,500 kilometers d. 2,000 kilometers

5. Marco Polo went from Venice to Jerusalem; Ibn Battuta went from Constantinople to Delhi. Which traveler went the greater distance? _____

6. Ibn Battuta went from Bakhura to Calicut. Marco Polo traveled from Venice to Acre. Who traveled the greater distance? _____

7. Measure the distance Marco Polo traveled from Layas to Tabriz. Approximately how many miles is that distance? _____

8. Measure the distance Ibn Battuta traveled from Mecca to Baghdad. Approximately how many kilometers is that distance? _____

Answer Key Practice with Miles & Kilometers

1. a
2. d
3. c
4. a
5. Ibn Battuta went further; he traveled approximately 3,500 miles while Marco Polo traveled approximately 4,000 km.
6. Ibn Battuta went further; he went approximately 2,500 miles and Marco Polo traveled approximately 2,750 km.
7. The distance is approximately 750 km, or approximately 466 miles.
8. The distance is approximately 1,100 miles, or approximately 1770 km.

Answer Key for Assessment

1. He wanted to go on a holy pilgrimage to Mecca.
2. He wanted to get valuable silks and jewels from Asia.
3. Any of these answers: influenced other Muslims to make a hajj, helped the Islamic world understand other places and culture, or helped map the regions of Africa, Asia, and Europe
4. Any of these answers: was the most influential one written about the Silk Road, tells about Mongol and Chinese society, helped trading merchants plan their ventures

Assessment

Name _____

1. Ibn Battuta left his home in Morocco and kept traveling for the next 29 years. What was his original purpose in leaving his home?
2. Marco Polo left his home in Venice, Italy and was away from his home for 24 years. What was Polo's purpose in leaving his home?
3. What was one result of people reading Ibn Battuta's story, the Rihla?
4. What was one result of people reading Marco Polo's story?