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Global Politics

Analysis of Ibn Battuta’s Experience

Ibn Battuta was an intellectual of the Islamic faith that had a concentration in law. He devoted his life to spreading knowledge and experiencing and learning new things.

Ibn Battuta’s was born in Tangier, Morocco early 12th century. Having extended family being Muslim legal scholars focused on law and the education system strictly teaching spiritual truths, moral values, and social rules from the past, Islamic law had a big impact on Battuta’s beliefs and actions (Dunn, 20). The governmental system of Tangier shaped Battuta into an individual who wanted to strive intellectually and spiritually. Additionally, he mastered the qualities expected of a scholar and gentleman (21). Battuta participated in politics by devoting the time to learn and master them. Ibn Battuta had a “large intellectual appetite and personal ambition to match” (25) which were the factors responsible for his yearn to travel with the other scholars to Mecca.

The hajj was an opportunity to study at mosques in the heartland, acquire books and diplomas, increase knowledge of theology and law, and also to be in the presence of educated and civilized men (30). Ibn Battuta’s love for learning influenced his decision to go on the hajj to Mecca. In Eastern Maghrib, Battuta had the pleasure to meet the governor who gave him gifts (35) and also lodged in a college in Tunis for two months (37). During his travels, Battuta meets new people of high class in the political system and is granted many opportunities to converse with educated people. He finally left Tunis to continue on his expedition when he is appointed qadi of the caravan group (38). Battuta was chosen to be the leader of a group which is a great accomplishment especially because he was young. This is a sign of how he was well respected and deserving of the leadership role which proves his astuteness as a politician.

Battuta was “fraternizing with the men of letters in the mosques and colleges” about their achievements (43). A turning point in Battuta’s life was when a fortune teller told him his destiny of travel (43-44). The political institutions made Battuta realize that his purpose in life is to gain and spread wisdom. This caused him to decide not to go straight to Cairo, but to explore other regions. “Along the way he sought out and lodged in the houses of numerous judges savants, and Sufi shaykhs…” The wayfarer befriended the Mamluk governor of Damietta who gave him coins (44). Usually, the relationships that Battuta made from lodging or receiving gifts included interactions with political powerhouses. Battuta noticed that the Mamluk political system was military centered which is different from what he was used to in Tangier (47). A good politician can recognize trends and differences in a political system. Time in mosque proven by 14 ijazas allowed Battuta to teach others his knowledge (61). A politician’s job is to influence people and spread their beliefs.

Political and economic conditions were a factor in the safety of the journey (65). If the status of the political institution is not good, then the route might have to be changed. This factor may have not affected Battuta, however, his poor financial status and health prevented him from traveling that year. Instead, a Maliki jurist cared for him until he recovered (65). Battuta’s sickness allowed him to form a relationship with a person connected to the judicial side of a political institution. He left with Damascus and Cairo caravans that included officials, a qadi, an imam, and a muezzin (66). These were important intellectuals that Battuta probably gained and gave information to along the way. Battuta learned that he won the title of Al Hajj a year and a half later (79). This is a great accomplishment that signifies relentlessness which is portrayed in a good politician.

The current amir al-hajj took interest in Battuta because of his scholarly abilities and his neediness (89). This political figure taught Battuta his ways which led to Battuta becoming the next al hajj. Battuta went on an overnight excursion and had the pleasure to meet a Shaykh descendant and learn about their way of life (91). Instead of trading like his caravan group, Battuta decided to explore foreign territory. Political people venture to new areas to observe other groups culture which they either support or try to understand. Battuta wanted to go to Shiraz because it was a city where “most of the people strive after good works, and in piety and obedience to the Almighty have attained a high degree of godliness” (95). Politicians want to immerse themselves with people with the same ideals and beliefs.

Anatolia was a mostly Turkish land which had the tendency to shock visitors unfamiliar to their culture (140). Battuta did not have a lot of experience with Turkish Muslims, so this political institution enlightened him about a new culture. Ibn Battuta lodged in a college his first night in Antalya and accepted a dinner invitation from the shaykh (145). As Battuta traveled, he found places to stay and study. While Battuta was in Anatolia, various cities offered high class hospitality (146). This shows that Battuta received worship which is a quality that respectable politicians have.

The Catholic Churches started to ring their bells which offended Battuta and his group, so they protested which resulted in an altercation with the qadi (164). The political institution and Battuta were in disagreement which caused him to leave Kaffa within a day or two. “In Ibn Battuta’s time the towns of the western steppe were firmly linked to the international network of judges, teachers, and scribes along which he always endeavored to travel” (162). The people Battuta associated with during his expedition were always related to law or education. The development of the conversion of the countryside was not important to Battuta, but the establishment of Islam was (162). A good politician does not completely assimilate a group of people and make them disregard their personal beliefs.

The only way someone could continue to Delhi looking for a job was if they planned to stay permanently (194). This caused Battuta to commit to residing in India for a long period of time. “Ibn Battuta presented himself before the governor, then took lodgings in a Suhrawardi khanga just outside the town” (193). When traveling to another area, the political figure typically goes out of their way to ensure Battuta’s well-being. A group of Hindu bandits attacked Battuta’s group severely outnumbering them (195). The ability to lead an army to victory is impressive, especially when they were outnumbered by about 60 people.

Adam’s Peak was a pilgrimage that Battuta had interest in doing (241). This proves that the political institution had influence on Battuta’s actions because he devoted himself to the Islamic beliefs and traditions. After the shipwreck, Battuta reunited with the remaining of his group and were cared for by Tamil country folk (244). This was not an ideal situation, however, because of Battuta’s status and being well known, others do not hesitate to help him. The Battuta completed the hike with Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims (243). Acceptance of other religions is a quality that is necessary for a politician to have.

Battuta’s journey was not planned out. After his pilgrimage to Mecca he realized that his purpose was to travel and experience the world. The political institutions mainly influenced him by educating him about religion, law, and morals. These three factors shaped Battuta into an Islamic scholar that wanted to learn and teach others. While traveling, he met people along the way that provided him shelter, food, and gifts to assist him in his journey. These people did this for travelers; however, Battuta was a renowned and accomplished person, so he depended on those people during the expedition. Battuta showed great qualities of a politician such as being accepting of others’ differences, noticing social structures of different cities, and having leadership skills. He had contributed a lot to society, hence the Rihla and traveling more than Marco Polo and other discoverers.