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Topic One

The Adventure Around the World

Traveling is an adventure that brings changes to old thinking and brings new changes to life. For Ibn Battuta, traveling was a fun and exciting adventure. It allows him to encounter new experiences that combats his way of thinking. While on his journey, he experiences many of same Islamic civilizations and cultures that he is used to, however he also partakes in new experiences that tested his beliefs. In this paper I will assess what Ibn Battuta found universal while traveling the world and his reaction to the aspects that were foreign to him.

Ibn Battuta’s journey starts in his home town of Tangier. Like most people, he did not stay in Tangier his whole life. He left home to broaden his horizons and learn as much as it could. Even though he did not write much about his time in Tangier it does not mean it was not important. His childhood home and his early life with his family was where he learned the ins and outs about society and his religion. This was where he learned what was normal and what was not. What was right and wrong. This was where he grew up and went to school and made friends (19). His law training was based on what he was taught and how he was taught it (21). If he had grown up anywhere else, he could have learned a different education and religious teachings in a different way (22).

What Battuta had learned growing up and the influences that he was taught what is the norm is what Ibn Battuta judges the places that he goes to throughout his travels. He left home to find something more than his hometown(30). As Ibn Battuta traveled to new cities, that ones that were the most similar to the way of life as Tangier were that cities and cultures that he was the most cosmopolitan to. The cities that had foreign customs to Battuta, he wasn’t so nice and to a point that he almost disrespected their culture. As a very educated man, could afford to act like this. This was the theme for the rest of Ibn Battuta’s journey (31).

During Ibn Battuta’s early travels, the cities in which he traveled to were most often similar to Tangier. They had the same practices and way of society that Ibn Battuta was familiar with. When Ibn Battuta visited the city of Constantine in Eastern Maghrib, he was fortunate to be accepted to a meeting with the governor to celebrate an importance component of the Islamic religion, Almsgiving. “Almsgiving was one of the five sacred pillars of Islam (35).” Ibn Battuta was very familiar with this practice because of his upbringing with Islam and his education. This caused him to fully participate in Almsgiving. This started a pattern with Ibn Battuta of how education made him favorable with government officials, people of power, and scholars (35).

Ibn Battuta’s time in Maghrib was also one of the first instances of him being in a foreign land. The town was celebrating and event that he was not accustomed to. Ibn Battuta did not know anyone in the town and he soon felt isolated to the point where he “could not restrain the tears that started in [his] eyes, and wept bitterly (36).” His response to a new cultural event was very undiplomatic for such a well-educated person. It wasn’t until someone else came to his rescue that he was able to feel at ease and enter the city (37).

Later on in his travels, Ibn Battuta arrived in Mecca. Mecca was one of the most familiar places that Ibn Battuta traveled to. Since Mecca is the holy place for the Islamic religion, all of the teaching and learning that Ibn Battuta practiced growing up was to prepare him for what he would experience in Mecca. Throughout the city, Ibn Battuta prayed at serval different mosques. Most in which followed the same practices that the mosques did that he was accustomed to (68-69). One of the mosques, however had a fixed order of prayer that Ibn Battuta did not like. He then in a condescending way made fun of the practice by saying that people would not pay attention during the prayer and of the way in which they were praying (71).

When Ibn Battuta traveled to Mecca, he fulfilled a scarfed part of the Islamic religion of pilgrimage to Mecca (75). While this maybe wasn’t his starting out goal, the beginning of this travels leads him to Mecca and to fulfil this important journey. After doing so, Ibn Battuta was able to travel for the sake of traveling. Before his visit to Mecca, most of the culture that he experienced were pretty familiar since all of the cities that he traveled to were all Muslim and relatively close to his hometown. It is once he leaves Mecca and travels eastward to in a sense culturally “foreign” lands that things started to become unfamiliar to Ibn Battuta (79).

Ibn Battuta later visited India. India was unlike any other country that Ibn Battuta had visited before. The two main religions of the land, Hinduism and Islam, had started intertwining to form a new culture of Indo-Muslims. The combination of Muslims and Hindu traditions caused many of the new practices that he experienced in India to be unknown to Ibn Battuta (188). Whenever Ibn Battuta would arrive to a new place, he would always find or be brought to a person with high status. Then because of his education, he would be accepted into their house with gifts flowing. If this didn’t happen, then Ibn Battuta would go to a place with scholars, usually a college or library of sorts that would have well educated people around. This was no exception with India. When Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi, he was given a meeting with the emperor to confess his intentions of staying in India (194). When meeting with the emperor, it is traditional to bring gifts to him as well for the emperor to give even better gifts. When a custom benefited Ibn Battuta in any way, education, status, money, politics, he would do anything in his power to abide by it and follow its rules. He was “always quick to grasp the local custom (195).” Whenever Ibn Battuta demeaned a tradition or person not to benefit him, he would often look down upon them from his seniority status and sometimes not participate. This was evident when Ibn Battuta visited the city of Daultabad. He spoke of the city as if no one important was there so it was empty, while in reality it was a city with a sizable population of lower-class people (196).

When Ibn Battuta arrived in Ma’bar, as he did in India, he turned to someone in power to help strengthen his status. He proposed a deal with the sultan of Ma’bar to overtake the kingdom and the queen. Ibn Battuta way in full support of the plan up until the point that he no longer liked the sultan when his troops started partaking in raids and kills that were forbidden for Muslims (244-245). Once Ibn Battuta realized that this plan went against his morals and would not benefit him in any way, he left and continued his travels to a new place (245). As he traveled farther east, his motives for being in each city changed. It starts with going for religious reasons and going for education then it changes to status, wealth, and riches. He is traveling to where his native religion is somewhat warped to fit the culture or not in the city at all. This is when he starts changing to riches. This was how he was able to fit in to foreign lands. His luck of fitting into a culture ran out when he arrived in China (258).

China was the hardest place for Battuta. The Islamic followers were slim to none in the area and Chinese culture dominated the country. Ibn Battuta describes the culture as being everything and an extreme culture shock. His response to this is to find an escape and stay indoors like a crowed. He then explains that whenever he would see any Muslim person, it would be like seeing his family or a home coming. This could be a foreshadow as to an end of Ibn Battuta’s travels as he missed home, his family, and his culture after traveling for so long (258). Not only did Ibn Battuta hated the culture, he also hated the people. Their “paganism” was unlike his own religion and was worst than other hated religions to Battuta. Not only did Ibn Battuta not like the Confucian scholars, but the Confucian scholars also did not like Ibn Battuta’s ideas and they would not even discuss his views. This was the first time that Ibn Battuta’s education did not help benefit in any way to fit into the culture. Ibn Battuta would once again move on to another city to find someone that would (258-259).

Ibn Battuta’s travels show what Islamic civilization was like for him around the world. He discovered that places like Maghrib and Mecca had similar practices to the customs that he learned growing up in Tangier. He also discovered that other countries like Delhi, India and China have very different customs, some of which he did not agree with. When faced with foreign customs, Ibn Battuta used his education and status to become as accustomed to the city and its practices as possible.

Works Cited

Dunn, Ross E. The Adventures of Ibn Battuta a Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.