

Marco Polo (1254-1324) was the son of a Venetian merchant family.

Between 1260 and 1269, Marco's father and uncle made a trip as merchants to visit the emperor of China, Kublai Khan. Kublai Khan was the grandson of Genghis Khan, conqueror of the largest land empire in world history, which stretched from Korea to Eastern Europe; from Mongolia to Vietnam and into the Middle East. They returned to Europe with a request from Kublai Khan for missionaries to explain Latin Christianity.

In 1271, the Polos set out again, this time taking with them the teenaged Marco and two Dominican friars (who turned back partway through the journey).

It took them over three years, but in 1274 or 1275, they arrived in Kublai's court. On the journey, Marco had learned Persian, which was used as the diplomatic language throughout the Mongol Empire, and he became a government official for the emperor and travelled throughout Eastern Asia for nearly twenty years.

He and his father and uncle finally returned to Venice in 1295.

In 1298, he was captured in a war between Genoa and Venice, and in a Genoan jail he related the stories of his journeys to a famed writer of romances named Rusticello. Rusticello reworked the story to make it more exciting and wondrous. The book was hugely successful: Rusticello's version of Marco Polo's travels—the only version that we have today—became a hugely popular sensation throughout Europe, influencing European attitudes towards the East and fueling their imaginations about the mysteries of Asia for years to come. Christopher Columbus, for one, was an avid reader of Marco Polo's travels, and his expeditions to the new world were in part inspired by Marco's stories of the riches he would find once he got there.

Scholars have debated how reliable Marco Polo's account is. Although there are certainly some "tall-tale" passages, Marco Polo appears to be on the whole accurate; there are several cases where new evidence has confirmed something Marco Polo claimed. It is not a step-by-step account of a journey, but rather a systematic geographical and cultural description of many different places; the introduction to the text admits that Marco Polo has not been everywhere he describes.¹

Ibn Battutah (1304-1369) was born in Tangier, Morocco. He was from a family of the scholarly elite (ulema) and studied Islamic law.

Around 1325, at 21 years old, he undertook the pilgrimage, or Haj, to Mecca that is required of Muslims. He loved the travel across North Africa so much that he decided to devote himself to travelling the world. He said he had two rules: only to travel to Muslim countries, and never to travel the same road twice. (He did not quite follow either rule.) He travelled across Arabia and to Iraq and Iran.

In 1330, he sailed down the Red Sea, along the eastern coast of Africa, and into the Indian Ocean.

In 1332, he went across southern Russia and Afghanistan to India, where he became a qadi, or judge for the Sultan of Delhi.

In 1337, he travelled to China, Burma and Sumatra (present-day Indonesia).

He returned to Tangier and left again in 1349 on a trip across the Sahara Desert to the kingdom of Mali in West Africa.

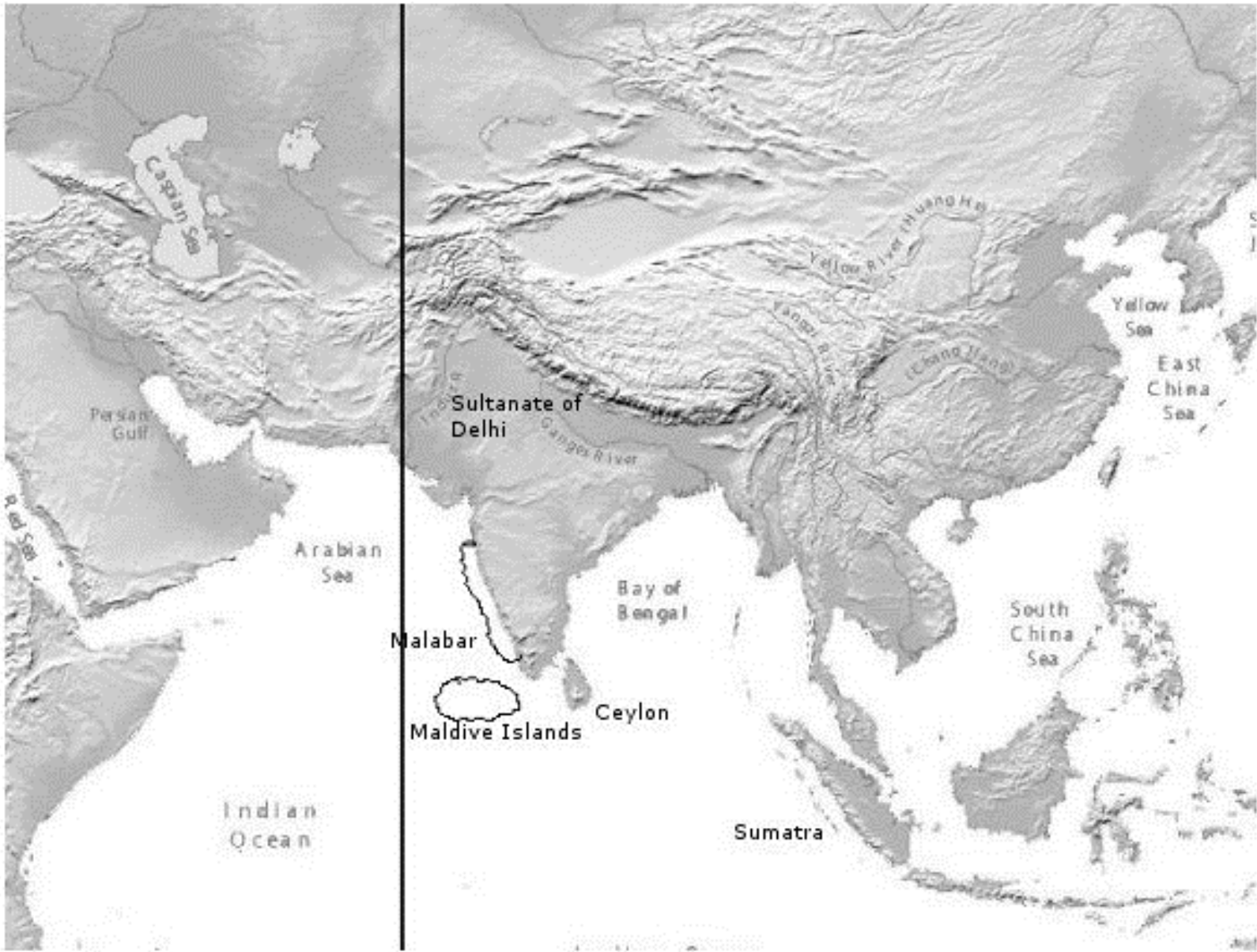
After returning home, he was an honored guest of Sultan Abu Inan of Morocco, where he finished dictating the story of his travels to Ibn Juzayy. According to the introduction of the book, the Sultan asked him to "dictate an account of the cities which he had seen in his travel, and of the interesting events which had clung to his memory, and that he should speak of those whom he had met of the rulers of countries, of their distinguished men of learning, and of their pious saints." Ibn Battuta's book was also written for entertainment, but this quotation shows that he had a specific goal in choosing what to tell.

For many of the lands he visited, his is the only written description we have for his time period. His account seems accurate on the whole.²

The excerpts in this packet describe some of the same places, such as Malabar, which is the southwest coast of India, and the island of Ceylon, off the southeast coast of India. Marco Polo describes Sumatra and Ibn Battutah describes the Maldives, which are different sets of islands.

¹ Intro adapted from Thomas Sanders et al., *Encounters in World History: Sources and Themes from the Global Past, Vol. 1* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006), 199-200.

² Adapted from Thomas Sanders et al., *Encounters in World History: Sources and Themes from the Global Past, Vol. 1* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2006), 428-429.



Marco Polo, *Travels*³

BOOK 3, CHAPTER X: *Of the island of Java Minor*

Upon leaving the island of Pentan, and steering in the direction of south-east for about one hundred miles, you reach the island of Java the Lesser.⁴ Small, however, as it may be termed by comparison, it is not less than two thousand miles in circuit. In this island there are eight kingdoms, governed by so many kings, and each kingdom has its own proper language, distinct from those of all the others. The people are idolaters. It contains abundance of riches, and all sorts of spices, lignum-aloes, sappan-wood for dyeing, and various other kinds of drugs, which, on account of the length of the voyage and the danger of the navigation, are not imported into our country, but which find their way to the provinces of Manji and Cathay.

We shall now treat separately of what relates to the inhabitants of each of these kingdoms; but in the first place it is proper to observe that the island lies so far to the southward as to render the north star invisible. Six of the eight kingdoms were visited by Marco Polo; and these he will describe, omitting the other two, which he had not an opportunity of seeing.

CHAPTER XI: *Of the kingdom of Felech, on Java Minor.*

We shall begin with the kingdom of Felech, which is one of the eight. Its inhabitants are for the most part idolaters, but many of those who dwell in the seaport towns have been converted to the religion of

Mahomet, by the Saracen merchants who constantly frequent them. Those who inhabit the mountains live in a beastly manner; they eat human flesh, and indiscriminately all other sorts of flesh, clean and unclean. Their worship is directed to a variety of objects, for each individual adores throughout the day the first thing that presents itself to his sight when he rises in the morning.

CHAPTER XII: *Of the second kingdom, named Basman.*

Upon leaving the last-mentioned kingdom, you enter that of Basman, which is independent of the others, and has its peculiar language. The people profess obedience to the grand khan, but pay him no tribute, and their distance is so great that his troops cannot be sent to these parts. The whole island, indeed, is nominally subject to him, and when ships pass that way the opportunity is taken of sending him rare and curious articles, and especially a particular sort of falcon...

It should be known that what is reported respecting the dried bodies of diminutive human creatures, or pigmies, brought from India, is an idle tale, such pretended men being manufactured in this island in the following manner. The country produces a species of monkey, of a tolerable size, and having a countenance resembling that of a man. Those persons who make it their business to catch them, shave off the hair, leaving it only about the chin, and those other parts where it naturally grows on the human body. They then dry and preserve them with camphor and other drugs; and having prepared them in such a mode that they have exactly the appearance of little men, they put them into

³ Marco Polo, *The Travels (Description of the World)*, transl. William Marsden (1818), revised by Thomas Wright (1854) (Könemann, 1996), 249-273.

⁴ Java Minor: Sumatra

wooden boxes, and sell them to trading people, who carry them to all parts of the world...

CHAPTER XIII: *Of the third kingdom, named Samara.*

Leaving Basman, you enter the kingdom of Samara, being another of those into which the island is divided. In this Marco Polo resided five months, during which, exceedingly against his inclination, he was detained by contrary winds. The north star is not visible here, nor even the stars that are in the wain.⁵ The people are idolaters; they are governed by a powerful prince, who professes himself the vassal of the grand khan.

As it was necessary to continue for so long a time at this island, Marco Polo established himself on shore, with a party of about 2,000 men; and in order to guard against mischief from the savage natives, who seek for opportunities of seizing stragglers, putting them to death, and eating them, he caused a large and deep ditch to be dug around him on the land side, in such manner that each of its extremities terminated in the port, where the shipping lay. This ditch he strengthened by erecting several blockhouses or redoubts of wood, the country affording an abundant supply of that material; and being defended by this kind of fortification, he kept the party in complete security during the five months of their residence. Such was the confidence inspired amongst the natives, that they furnished supplies of victuals and other necessary articles according to an agreement made with them...

CHAPTER XV: *Of the fifth kingdom, named Lambri.*

⁵ wain: or "wagon"; the medieval name for the constellation the Big Dipper.

Lambri, in like manner, has its own king and its peculiar language: the people also worship idols, and call themselves vassals of the grand khan. The country produces verzino (brezil or sappan wood) in great abundance, and also camphor, with a variety of other drugs... In this kingdom are found men with tails, a span in length, like those of the dog, but not covered with hair. The greater number of them are formed in this manner, but they dwell in the mountains, and do not inhabit towns. The rhinoceros is a common inhabitant of the woods, and there is abundance of all sorts of game, both beasts and birds.

...CHAPTER XIX: *Of the island of Zeilan.*

Taking a departure from the island of Angaman, and steering a course something to the southward of west, for a thousand miles, the island of Zeilan⁶ presents itself. This, for its actual size, is better circumstanced than any other island in the world. It is in circuit two thousand four hundred miles, but in ancient times it was still larger, its circumference then measuring full three thousand six hundred miles, as the Mappa Mundi⁷ says. But the northern gales, which blow with prodigious violence, have in a manner corroded the mountains, so that they have in some parts fallen and sunk in the sea, and the island, from that cause, no longer retains its original size. It is governed by a king whose name is Sender-naz. The people worship idols, and are independent of every other state. Both men and women go nearly in a state of nudity, only wrapping a cloth round the middle part of their bodies. They have no grain besides rice and sesame, of which latter they

⁶ Zeilan: Ceylon.

⁷ Mappa Mundi: medieval European maps of the world

make oil. Their food is milk, rice, and flesh, and they drink the wine drawn from trees, which has already been described... The island produces more beautiful and valuable rubies than are found in any other part of the world, and likewise sapphires, topazes, amethysts, garnets, and many other precious and costly stones. The king is reported to possess the grandest ruby that ever was seen, being a span in length, and the thickness of a man's arm, brilliant beyond description, and without a single flaw...

CHAPTER XXIII: *Of Zeilan.*

In this island there is a very high mountain, so rocky and precipitous that the ascent to the top is impracticable, as it is said, excepting by the assistance of iron chains employed for that purpose. By means of these some persons attain the summit, where the tomb of Adam, our first parent, is reported to be found. Such is the account given by the Saracens. But the idolaters assert that it contains the body of Sogomonbarchan, the founder of their religion...

CHAPTER XX: *Of the province of Malabar.*

1. Leaving the island of Zeilan, and sailing in a westerly direction sixty miles, you reach the great province of Malabar,⁸ which is not an island, but a part of the continent of the greater India, as it is termed, being the noblest and richest country in the world. It is governed by four kings, of whom the principal is named Sender-bandi. Within his dominions is a fishery for pearls, in the gulf of a bay that lies between Malabar and the island of Zeilan, where the water is not more than from

ten to twelve fathoms in depth, and in some places not more than two fathoms...

2. The natives of this part of the country always go naked, excepting that they cover with a piece of cloth those parts of the body which modesty dictates. The king is no more clothed than the rest, except that he has a piece of richer cloth but is honourably distinguished by various kinds of ornaments, such as a collar set with jewels, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies of immense value. He also wears, suspended from the neck and reaching to the breast, a fine silken string containing one hundred and four large and handsome pearls and rubies. The reason for this particular number is that he is required by the rules of his religion to repeat a prayer or invocation so many times, daily, in honour of his gods; and this his ancestors never failed to perform. The daily prayer consists of these words, *pacauca, pacauca, pacauca*, which they repeat one hundred and four times. On each arm he wears three gold bracelets, adorned with pearls and jewels; on three different parts of the leg, golden bands ornamented in the same manner; and on the toes of his feet, as well as on his fingers, rings of inestimable value. To this king it is indeed a matter of facility to display such splendid regalia, as the precious stones and the pearls are all the produce of his own dominions.

He has at the least one thousand wives and concubines; and when he sees a woman whose beauty pleases him, he immediately signifies his desire to possess her. In this manner he appropriated the wife of his brother, who being a discreet and sensible man, was prevailed upon not to make it the subject of a brawl...

⁸ Malabar: the southwest coast of India.

No horses being bred in this country, the king and his three royal brothers expend large sums of money annually in the purchase of them from merchants of Ormus, Diufar, Pecher, and Adem, who carry them thither for sale, and become rich by the traffic, as they import to the number of five thousand, and for each of them obtain five hundred saggi of gold, being equal to one hundred marks of silver. At the end of the year, in consequence, as it is supposed, of their not having persons properly qualified to take care of them or to administer the requisite medicines, perhaps not three hundred of these remain alive, and thus the necessity is occasioned for replacing them annually. But it is my opinion that the climate of the province is unfavourable to the race of horses, and that from hence arises the difficulty in breeding or preserving them. For food they give them flesh dressed with rice, and other prepared meats, the country not producing any grain besides rice. A mare, although of a large size, and covered by a handsome horse, produces only a small ill-made colt with distorted legs, and unfit to be trained for riding...

3. The greater part of the idolatrous inhabitants of this kingdom show particular reverence to the ox; and none will from any consideration be induced to eat the flesh of oxen. But there is a particular class of men termed gauai, who although they may eat of the flesh, yet dare not to kill the animal; but when they find a carcass, whether it has died a natural death or otherwise, the gauai eat of it; and all descriptions of people daub their houses with cow-dung. Their mode of sitting is upon carpets on the ground; and when asked why they sit in that manner, they reply that a seat on the earth is honourable; that as we are sprung from the earth, so

we shall again return to it; that none can do it sufficient honour, and much less should any despise the earth. These gauai and all their tribe are the descendants of those who slew Saint Thomas the Apostle, and on this account no individual of them can possibly enter the building where the body of the blessed apostle rests, even were the strength of ten men employed to convey him to the spot, being repelled by the supernatural power of the holy corpse.

The country produces no other grain than rice and sesame. The people go to battle with lances and shields, but without clothing, and are a despicable unwarlike race. They do not kill cattle nor any kind of animals for food, but when desirous of eating the flesh of sheep or other beasts, or of birds, they procure the Saracens, who are not under the influence of the same laws and customs, to perform the office.

Both men and women wash their whole bodies in water twice every day, that is, in the morning and the evening. Until this ablution has taken place they neither eat nor drink; and the person who should neglect this observance, would be regarded as a heretic. It ought to be noticed, that in eating they make use of the right hand only, nor do they ever touch their food with the left. For every cleanly and delicate work they employ the former, and reserve the latter for the base uses of personal abstersion,⁹ and other offices connected with the animal functions. They drink out of a particular kind of vessel, and each individual from his own, never making use of the drinking pot of another person. When they drink they do not apply the vessel to the mouth, but hold it above the head, and pour

⁹ abstersion: wiping.

the liquor into the mouth, not suffering the vessel on any account to touch the lips. In giving drink to a stranger, they do not hand their vessel to him, but, if he is not provided with one of his own, pour the wine or other liquor into his hands, from which he drinks it, as from a cup...

Offences in this country are punished with strict and exemplary justice... These people abstain from drinking wine made from grapes; and should a person be detected in the practice, so disreputable would it be held, that his evidence would not be received in court. A similar prejudice exists against persons frequenting the sea, who, they observe, can only be people of desperate fortunes, and whose testimony, as such, ought not to be admitted. They do not hold fornication to be a crime...

...When an infant is born, be it a boy or a girl, the father or the mother makes a memorandum in writing of the day of the week on which the birth took place; also of the age of the moon, the name of the month, and the hour. This is done because every future act of their lives is regulated by astrology.

As soon as a son attains the age of thirteen years, they set him at liberty, and no longer suffer him to be an inmate in his father's house; giving him to the amount, in their money, of twenty to twenty-four groats. Thus provided, they consider him capable of gaining his own livelihood by engaging in some kind of trade and thence deriving a profit. These boys never cease to run about in all directions during the whole course of the day, buying an article in one place, and selling it in another. At the season when the pearl fishery is going on, they frequent the beach, and make purchases from the fishermen or others, of five, six,

or more (small) pearls, according to their means, carrying them afterwards to the merchants, who, on account of the heat of the sun, remain sitting in their houses, and to whom they say: "These pearls have cost us so much; pray allow such a profit on them as you may judge reasonable." The merchants then give something beyond the price at which they had been obtained. In this way likewise they deal in many other articles, and become excellent and most acute traders. When business is over for the day, they carry to their mothers the provisions necessary for their dinners, which they prepare and dress for them; but these never eat anything at their fathers' expense.

4. Not only in this kingdom, but throughout India in general, all the beasts and birds are unlike those of our own country, excepting the quails, which perfectly resemble ours; the others are all different. There are bats as large as vultures, and vultures as black as crows, and much larger than ours. Their flight is rapid, and they do not fail to seize their bird.

...In this province of Malabar is the body of the glorious martyr, Saint Thomas the Apostle, who there suffered martyrdom. It rests in a small city, not frequented by many merchants, because unsuited to the purposes of their commerce; but, from devout motives, a vast number both of Christians and Saracens resort thither. The latter regard him as a great prophet, and name him Ananias, signifying a holy personage. The Christians who perform this pilgrimage collect earth from the spot where he was slain, which is of a red colour, and reverentially carry it away with them, often employing it afterwards in the performance of miracles,

and giving it, when diluted with water, to the sick, by which many disorders are cured. In the year of our Lord 1288, a powerful prince of the country, who at the time of gathering the harvest had accumulated (as his proportion) a very great quantity of rice, and had not granaries sufficient wherein to deposit it all, thought to make use of the religious house belonging to the church of Saint Thomas for that purpose. This being against the will of those who had the guardianship of it, they beseeched him not to occupy in this manner a building appropriated to the accommodation of pilgrims who came to visit the body of this glorious saint. He, notwithstanding, obstinately persisted. On the following night the holy apostle appeared to him in a vision, holding in his hand a small lance, which he pointed at the throat of the king, saying to him: "If thou dost not immediately evacuate my house which thou hast occupied, I shall put thee to a miserable death." Awaking in a violent alarm, the prince instantly gave orders for doing what was required of him, declaring publicly that he had seen the apostle in a vision. A variety of miracles are daily performed there, through the interposition of the blessed saint. The Christians who have the care of the church possess groves of those trees which produce the Indian nuts, and from thence derive their means of subsistence, paying, as a tax to one of the royal brothers, a groat monthly for each tree...

CHAPTER XXVIII: *Of Malabar.*

Malabar is an extensive kingdom of the Greater India, situated towards the west; concerning which I must not omit to relate some particulars. The people are governed by their own king, who is

independent of every other state, and they have their proper language. In this country the north star is seen about two fathoms above the horizon. As well here as in the kingdom of Guzzerat,¹⁰ which is not far distant, there are numerous pirates, who yearly scour these seas with more than one hundred small vessels, seizing and plundering all the merchant ships that pass that way. They take with them to sea their wives and children of all ages, who continue to accompany them during the whole of the summer's cruise. In order that no ships may escape them, they anchor their vessels at the distance of five miles from each other, twenty ships thereby occupying a space of a hundred miles. Upon a trader's appearing in sight of one of them, a signal is made by fire or by smoke; when they all draw closer together, and capture the vessel as she attempts to pass. No injury is done to the persons of the crew; but as soon as they have made prize of the ship, they turn them on shore, recommending to them to provide themselves with another cargo, which, in case of their passing that way again, may be the means of enriching their captors a second time. In this kingdom there is vast abundance of pepper, ginger, cubebs, and Indian nuts...

¹⁰ probably Gujarat.

Ibn Battutah, *Precious Gift of Lookers into the Marvels of Cities and Wonders of Travel* [a.k.a. *Travels*]¹¹

[Ibn Battutah had entered the service of the Muslim sultan of Delhi, who had received a diplomatic gift from the king of China. The sultan appointed Ibn Battutah as one of the delegation to accompany a return gift to China. It was a massive expedition: the gift consisted of a hundred horses, two hundred slaves, robes, tents, gold and silver vessels, and other things, and it was accompanied by nearly twenty diplomatic envoys. The expedition made its way south through India toward Malabar to sail to China.]

... We set out again immediately and on the next day reached the town of Hinawr, which is on a large inlet into which large ships enter.¹² The town itself is half a mile from the sea. During the *bushkal*, which is the rainy season, this bay is so stormy and boisterous that for four months it is impossible for anyone to sail on it except for fishing.

... The people of the city of Hinawr are Shafi'ites in doctrine, upright, religious, engaged in warfare on the sea, and mighty. The women of this town and of all these coastal districts wear no sewn garments but only unsewn lengths of cloth, one end of which they gird round their waists, and drape the rest over their head and chest. They are beautiful and virtuous, and each wears a gold ring in her nose. One peculiarity amongst them is that they all know the Qur'an by heart. I saw in the town thirteen schools for girls and twenty-three for boys, a thing which I have never seen elsewhere. Its inhabitants live by maritime commerce, and have no cultivated land...

Three days later we reached the land of **Mulaibar [Malabar]**, which is the pepper country. It extends for two months' journey along the coast from Sandabur to Kawlam [Quilon]. The road over the whole distance runs beneath the shade of trees, and at every half mile there is a wooden shed with benches on which travellers of every kind, whether Muslims or infidels, may sit. At each shed there is a well for drinking and an infidel who is in charge of it. If the traveller is an infidel he gives him water in vessels; if he is a Muslim he pours the water into his hands. It is the custom of the infidels in the Mulaibar lands that no Muslim may enter their houses or eat from their vessels; if he does so they break the vessels or give them to the Muslims. If a Muslim goes into a place there in which there is no house belonging to Muslims, they cook food for him, putting it on banana leaves, and put the condiments over it, and birds eat what is left. At all the halting-places on this road there are houses belonging to Muslims, at which Muslim travellers alight, and where they buy all that they need, and food is cooked for them. Were it not for these Muslims, no Muslim would travel by this road.

On this road, which, as we have said, extends for a two months' march, there is not a span of ground or more but is cultivated. Every man has his own separate orchard, with his house in the middle and a wooden palisade all round it. The road runs through the orchards, and when it comes to a palisade there are wooden steps to go up by and another flight of steps down into the next orchard. So it goes on for two months. No one travels on an animal in that country, and only the sultan possesses horses. The principal vehicle of the inhabitants is a *dulah* carried on the

¹¹ Ibn Battutah, *The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, ed. Tim Mackintosh-Smith (Picador, 2002), 215-241.

¹² Hinawr: Honavar, on the Karnataka coast.

shoulders of slaves or hired porters; those who do not travel in a dulah go on foot, be they who they may. If a man has baggage or merchandise or anything of the kind, it is transported by hired carriers on their backs, and you may see a single merchant with a hundred such or less or more carrying his goods...

I have never seen a safer road than this, for they put to death anyone who steals a single nut, and if any fruit falls no one picks it up but the owner. I was told that some Hindus travelled by this road, and one of them picked up a nut. When the governor was informed of this, he ordered a stake to be fixed in the ground; its upper end was sharpened and inserted into a wooden spar so that it protruded from it. The man was stretched on the spar, belly down wards, and transfixed on the stake until it came out of his back, and he was left like that as an example to the beholders. There are many such stakes on this road, so that people may see them and be warned. We sometimes met infidels during the night on this road, and when they saw us they stood aside to let us pass. Muslims are shown the highest consideration on it except that, as we have said, they do not eat with them nor allow them into their houses.

...Three days after leaving Fakanur we reached Manjarur [Mangalore], a large town on the largest inlet in the land of Mulaibar. This is the town at which most of the merchants from Fars and al-Yaman disembark, and pepper and ginger are exceedingly abundant there. The sultan of Manjarur is one of the principal rulers in that land, and his name is Rama Daw. There is a colony of about four thousand Muslims there, living in a suburb alongside the town. Warfare frequently breaks

out between them and the townspeople, but the sultan makes peace between them on account of his need of the merchants.

After staying with them for three days, we set sail for the town of Hili, which we reached two days later. It is large and well built, situated on a big bay which is navigable for large vessels. This is the farthest town reached by ships from China; they enter only this port, the port of Kawlam, and Qaliquat...I met in the mosque a pious jurist from Maqdashaw,¹³ called Sa'id, of fine figure and character. He used to fast continually, and I was told that he had studied at Mecca for fourteen years and for the same length of time at al-Madinah, and that he had travelled in India and China.

...From there we continued our journey to town of **Qaliquat** [**Calicut**], which is one of the chief ports in Mulaibar. It is visited by men from China, Jawah, Ceylon, the Maldives, al-Yaman and Fars, and in it gather merchants from all quarters. Its harbour is one of the largest in the world. We entered it in great pomp, the like of which I have never seen in those lands, but it was a joy to be followed by distress...we stayed there three months as the guests of the infidel sultan, awaiting the season of the voyage to China...

The Chinese vessels are of three kinds: large ships called *junks*, middle sized ones called *zaws*, and small ones called *kakams*. The large ships have anything from twelve down to three sails, which are made of bamboo rods plaited like mats. They are never lowered, but they turn them according to the direction of the wind; at anchor they are left

¹³ Maqdashaw: Mogadishu, the capital of present-day Somalia in East Africa. Ibn Battutah also visited it in his travels.

floating in the wind...In the vessel they build four decks, and it has cabins, suites and salons for merchants; a set of rooms has several rooms and a latrine; it can be locked by its occupant, and he can take along with him slave girls and wives. Often a man will live in his suite unknown to any of the others on board until they meet on reaching some town. The sailors have their children living on board ship, and they cultivate green stuffs, vegetables and ginger in wooden tanks...

Our preparations for the voyage to China, and how it all ended

When the time came for the voyage to China, the Sultan of Qaliquit, who is called al-Samari,¹⁴ equipped for us one of the thirteen junks. ...Early on the Friday morning a slave boy I had named Hilal came to me and said that the set [of rooms] we had taken on the junk was small and unsuitable. When I spoke of this to the captain he said, 'It cannot be helped, but if you like to transfer to the *kakam* there are sets of rooms on it at your choice.' I agreed to this and gave orders accordingly to my companions, who transferred the slave girls and effects to the *kakam* and were settled in it before the hour of the Friday prayer.

Now it is usual for this sea to become stormy every day in the late afternoon, and no one can embark then...We spent the Friday night on the seashore, we unable to embark on the *kakam*, and those on board unable to disembark and join us...That night the sea struck the junk which carried the sultan's present, and all on board died.

In the morning we went to the scene of the disaster...I saw the infidel, the sultan of Qaliquit, wearing a large white cloth round his waist,

¹⁴ al-Samari: An Arabic version of the title of the king of Calicut, "Samari," meaning "Lord of the Sea" in Sanskrit.

folded over from his navel down to his knee, and with it a small turban on his head, bare-footed, with the parasol carried by a slave over his head and a fire lit in front of him on the beach; his police officers were beating the people to prevent them from plundering what the sea cast up. In all the lands of Mulaibar, except in this one land alone, it is the custom that whenever a ship is wrecked all that is taken from it belongs to the treasury. At Qaliquit, however, it is retained by its owners, and for that reason Qaliquit has become a flourishing and much frequented city.

When those on the *kakam* saw what had happened to the junk they spread their sails and went off, with all my goods and slave boys and slave girls on board, leaving me alone on the beach...I had nothing left with me at all except the ten dinars that the *jugi* had given me and the carpet I had used to spread out. As I was told that the *kakam* would have to put in at the port of Kawlam,¹⁵ I decided to travel thither, it being a ten days' journey either by land or by the river...

The Maldives

Ten days after embarking at Qaliquit we reached the islands of Dhibat al-Mahal [the Maldives]. These islands are one of the wonders of the world and number about two thousand in all. Each hundred or less of them form a circular cluster resembling a ring, this ring having one entrance like a gateway, and only through this entrance can ships reach the islands. When a vessel arrives at any one of them it must needs take one of the inhabitants to pilot it to the other islands...

¹⁵ Kawlam: Also spelled Quilon or Kollam.

All these products of the coco-palm and the fish which they live on have an amazing and unparalleled effect in sexual intercourse, and the people of these islands perform wonders in this respect. I had there myself four wives, and concubines as well, and I used to visit all of them every day and pass the night with the wife whose turn it was, and this I continued to do the whole year and a half that I was there.

Account of the people of these islands

The people of these islands are upright and pious, sound in belief, and sincere in purpose...Their bodies are weak, they are unused to fighting and warfare, and their armour is a prayer...In each island of theirs there are beautiful mosques, and most of their buildings are made of wood. They are very cleanly and avoid filth; most of them bathe twice a day to cleanse themselves, because of the extreme heat there and their profuse perspiration.

...From these islands there are exported by ship the fish we have mentioned, coconuts, cloths and cotton turbans, as well as brass utensils, of which they have a great many, cowrie shells and *qanbar*.¹⁶ This is the hairy integument of the coconut, which they tan in pits on the shore, and afterwards beat out with bars; the women then spin it and it is made into cords for sewing the planks of ships together...The inhabitants of these islands use cowrie shells as money.

Account of their women

Their womenfolk do not cover their heads, not even at one side. Most of them wear only one apron from the navel to the ground, the rest

of their bodies being uncovered. It is thus that they walk abroad in the bazaars and elsewhere. When I was qadi there, I tried to put an end to this practice and ordered them to wear clothes, but I met with no success. No woman was admitted to my presence in a lawsuit unless her body was covered, but apart from that I was unable to effect anything. ...The women's ornaments consist of bracelets, of which each woman wears so many on her forearm as to cover the arm from wrist to elbow. They are made of silver, and no one wears bracelets of gold except the sultan's wives and relatives. They wear anklets also, and necklaces of gold on their chests.

It is easy to get married in these islands on account of the smallness of the dowries and the pleasure of their women's society. When ships arrive the crews marry wives and when they want to sail they divorce them; it is really a sort of temporary marriage, and the women never leave their country. I have never found in the world any women more agreeable to consort with than they are...

[Ibn Battutah was appointed qadi of the island and married four women there. As qadi, he tried to keep divorced women from staying in their husbands' houses and to enforce attendance at Friday prayers. He eventually quarrelled with the natives, divorced his wives, and left, continuing his travels.]

Ceylon

We travelled for nine days, emerging on the ninth day at the island of Ceylon. We saw the mountain of Sarandib there, rising into the heavens like a column of smoke...

¹⁶ qanbar: called coir in English. Ibn Battutah describes it.

When I entered the presence of the infidel sultan, he rose to meet me, seated me beside him, and spoke most kindly to me. He said, 'Your companions may land in safety and will be my guests until they sail, for the sultan of Ma'bar and I are friends.' ...I replied, 'Since reaching this island I have but one desire, to visit the blessed Foot, the Foot of Adam.' (They call him Baba, and Eve they call Mama.) 'That is simple,' he answered. 'We shall send an escort with you to take you to it.' 'That is what I want,' said I...

The sultan then gave me a palanquin, which was carried by his slaves on their shoulders, and sent with me four jugis, whose custom it is to make an annual pilgrimage to the Foot, three Brahmans, ten other persons from his entourage, and fifteen porters. Our way lay through rugged and well-watered country....

...The marvellous rubies called bahraman [carbuncles] are found only in this town. Some are taken from the channel, and these are regarded by them as the most valuable, and some are obtained by digging. In the island of Ceylon rubies are found in all parts. The land is private property, and a man buys a parcel of it and digs for rubies. ...Their custom is that all rubies of the value of a hundred fanams belong to the sultan, who pays their price and takes them; those of less value belong to the finders. A hundred fanams equal in value six gold dinars.

There are in these mountains vast numbers of monkeys. They are black and have long tails, and their males are bearded like men... Shaikh Othman and his son and others as well told me that these monkeys have a chief, whom they obey as if he were a sultan. He fastens on his head a

fillet of leaves and leans upon a staff. On his right and his left are four monkeys carrying staves in their hands. When the chief monkey sits down the four monkeys stand behind him, and his female and young come and sit in front of him every day. ...After this each one brings a banana or an orange or some such fruit, and the monkey chief with his young and the four monkeys eat...

Description of the mountain of Sarandib

This is one of the highest mountains in the world. We saw it from the sea when we were nine days' journey away, and when we climbed it we saw the clouds below us, shutting out our view of its base. On it there are many evergreen trees and flowers of various colours, including a red rose as big as the palm of a hand. They maintain that on these roses there is writing, in which can be read the name of Allah and the name of His Apostle (peace be upon him). There are two tracks on the mountain leading to the Foot. one called the Baha track and the other the Mama track, meaning Adam and Eve (peace be upon them). The Mama track is easy and is the route by which the pilgrims return, but anyone who goes by that way is not considered by them to have made the pilgrimage at all. The Baba track is difficult and stiff climbing. Former generations cut a sort of stairway on the mountain, and fixed iron stanchions on it, to which they attached chains for climbers to hold on by.¹⁷ There are ten such chains, and the tenth is the 'Chain of the Profession of Faith', so called because when one reaches it and looks down to the foot of the hill, he is seized by apprehensions and recites the profession of faith for fear

¹⁷ These chains, sometimes attributed to Alexander the Great, still exist.

of falling. When you climb past this chain you find a badly kept track. From the tenth chain to the cave of al-Khidr is seven miles...At the cave of al-Khidr the pilgrims leave their belongings and ascend thence for two miles to the summit of the mountain where the Foot is.

Description of the Foot

The blessed Footprint, the Foot of our father Adam (God bless him and give him peace) is on a lofty black rock in a wide plateau. The blessed Foot sank into the rock far enough to leave its impression hollowed out. It is eleven spans long. In the rock where the Foot is there are nine holes cut out, in which the infidel pilgrims place offerings of gold, rubies and pearls. You can see the faqirs, after they reach the cave of al-Khidr, racing one another from there to take what there is in these holes. We, for our part, found nothing in them hut a few small stones and a little gold, which we gave to the guide. It is customary for the pilgrims to stay at the cave of al-Khidr for three days, visiting the Foot every morning and evening, and we followed this practice.