

## IBN BATTUTA

### Travels, 1354

Ibn Battuta (1304–1369), a Muslim Berber from Tangier Morocco left to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at the age of twenty-one, a journey of sixteen months. He did not return for another twenty-four years. Instead he joined a caravan of returning pilgrims to Iraq and continued on over the years to Persia, Afghanistan, India, and China. Including later travels to sub-Saharan Africa, he covered about 75,000 miles, probably more than anyone else had ever done before the age of steam.

In this selection from his account of his travels, the *Rihla* or *Journey*, he describes his entry into India and some of his experiences in the city of Delhi (here rendered as Dilhi) under the Muslim ruler, Muhammad bin Tughluq in 1334. What does this selection tell you about travel in India at the time? What does it tell you about Ibn Battuta? In what ways has travel changed? In what ways is it similar?

#### THINKING HISTORICALLY

This selection from the *Rihla* was chosen because of what it tells us about travel, usually classified as a sub-category of social history. Even this selection, however, could be read for information about political, economic, or cultural history. Explain how.

### North-Western India

Banj Ab is one of the greatest rivers on earth. It rises in flood in the hot season, and the inhabitants of that country sow at the time of its flood, just as the people of Egypt do during the Nile flood. This river is the frontier of the territories of the exalted Sultan Muhammad Shah, king of Hind and Sind.

When we reached this river the officials of the intelligence service came to us and wrote a report about us. From the province of Sind to the sultan's capital, the city of Dihli, it is fifty days' journey, but when the intelligence officers write to the sultan from Sind the letter reaches him in five days by the postal service.

Source: *The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, abridged, introduced, and annotated by Tim Mackintosh-Smith (New York: Picador, 2002), 149–51, 155–57, 187–90, 199; translated by Sir Hamilton Gibb and C. F. Beckinham (Hakluyt Society, 1958, 2000).

*Description of the Barid<sup>1</sup>*

The service of couriers on foot has within the space of each mile three relays. The manner of its organization is as follows. At every third of a mile there is an inhabited village, outside which there are three pavilions. In these sit men girded up ready to move off, each of whom has a rod two cubits long with copper bells at the top. When a courier leaves the town he takes the letter in the fingers of one hand and the rod with the bells in the other, and runs with all his might. The men in the pavilions, on hearing the sound of the bells, get ready to meet him and when he reaches them one of them takes the letter in his hand and passes on, running with all his might and shaking his rod until he reaches the next relay, and so they continue until the letter reaches its destination. This post is quicker than the mounted post, and they often use it to transport fruits from Khurasan which are regarded as great luxuries in India; the couriers put them on woven baskets like plates and carry them with great speed to the sultan. In the same way they transport the principal criminals; they place each man on a stretcher and run carrying the stretcher on their heads. Likewise they bring the sultan's drinking water when he resides at Dawlat Abad, carrying it from the river Gang [Ganges], to which the Hindus go on pilgrimage and which is at a distance of forty days' journey from there.

When the intelligence officials write to the sultan informing him of those who arrive in his country, the letter is written with the utmost precision and fulness of description. They report to him that a certain man has arrived of such-and-such appearance and dress, and note the number of his party, slaves and servants and beasts, his behaviour both on the move and at rest, and all his doings, omitting no details relating to all of these. When the newcomer reaches the town of Multan, which is the capital of Sind, he stays there until the sultan's order is received regarding his entry and the degree of hospitality to be extended to him. A man is honoured in that country only according to what may be seen of his actions, conduct, and zeal, since no one there knows anything of his family or parentage. The king of India, the Sultan Abu'l-Mujahid Muhammad Shah, makes a practice of honouring strangers and showing affection to them and singling them out for governorships or high dignities of state. The majority of his courtiers, palace officials, ministers of state, judges, and relatives by marriage are foreigners, and he has issued a decree that foreigners are to be called in his country by the title of Aziz [Honourable], so that this has become a proper name for them.

Every person proceeding to the court of this king must needs have a gift ready to present to him in person, in order to gain his favour. The sultan requites him for it by a gift many times its value. We shall have

<sup>1</sup>Postal service. [Ed.]

much to tell later on about the presents made to him by foreigners. When people became familiar with this habit of his, the merchants in Sind and India began to furnish each person who came to visit the sultan with thousands of dinars as a loan, and to supply him with whatever he might desire to offer as a gift or for his own use, such as riding animals, camels and goods. They place both their money and their persons at his service, and stand before him like attendants. When he reaches the sultan, he receives a magnificent gift from him and pays off his debts and his dues to them in full. So they ran a flourishing trade and made vast profits, and it became an established usage amongst them. On reaching Sind I followed this practice and bought horses, camels, white slaves and other goods from the merchants. I had already bought in Ghaznah from an Iraqi merchant about thirty horses and a camel with a load of arrows, for this is one of the things presented to the sultan. This merchant went off to Khurasan and on returning later to India received his money from me. He made an enormous profit through me and became one of the principal merchants. I met him many years later, in the city of Aleppo, when the infidels had robbed me of everything I possessed, but I received no kindness from him. . . .

From Ujah I travelled to the city Multan, the capital of the land of Sind and residence of its ruling amir. On the road to Multan and ten miles distant from it is the river called Khusru Abad, a large river that cannot be crossed except by boat. At this point the goods of all who pass are subjected to a rigorous examination and their baggage searched. Their practice at the time of our arrival was to take a quarter of everything brought in by the merchants, and to exact a duty of seven dinars for every horse. When we set about the crossing of this river and the baggage was examined, the idea of having my baggage searched was very disagreeable to me, for though there was nothing much in it, it seemed a great deal in the eyes of the people, and I did not like having it looked into. By the grace of God Most High there arrived on the scene one of the principal officers on behalf of Qutb al-Mulk, the governor of Multan, who gave orders that I should not be subjected to examination or search. And so it happened, and I gave thanks to God for the mercies which He had vouchsafed me. We spent that night on the bank of the river and next morning were visited by the postmaster. I was introduced to him and went in his company to visit the governor of Multan.

#### *The Governor of Multan and the Ordering of Affairs at His Court*

The Governor of Multan is Qutb al-Mulk, one of the greatest and most excellent of the amirs. When I entered his presence, he rose to greet me, shook my hand, and bade me sit beside him. I presented him with a white slave, a horse, and some raisins and almonds. These are among the

greatest gifts that can be made to them, since they do not grow in the land but are imported from Khurasan. This governor in his public audience sat on a large carpeted dais, having the qadi and the preacher beside him. To right and left of him were ranged the commanders of the troops and armed men stood at his back, while the troops were passed in review before him. They had a number of bows there, and when anyone comes desiring to be enrolled in the army as an archer he is given one of the bows to draw. They differ in stiffness and his pay is graduated according to the strength he shows in drawing them. For anyone desiring to be enrolled as a trooper there is a target set up; he puts his horse into a run and tries to hit it with his lance. There is a ring there too, suspended to a low wall; the candidate puts his horse into a run until he comes level with the ring, and if he lifts it off with his lance he is accounted among them a good horseman. For those wishing to be enrolled as mounted archers there is a ball placed on the ground; each man gallops towards it and shoots at it, and his pay is proportioned to his accuracy in hitting it.

Two months after we reached Multan two of the sultan's chamberlains arrived in the town. They had instructions to arrange for the journey to Dihli of all those who had come on one mission or another. They came to me together and asked me why I had come to India. I told them that I had come to enter permanently the service of Khund Alam ['Master of the World'], namely the sultan, this being how he is called in his dominions. He had given orders that no one coming from Khurasan should be allowed to enter India unless he came with the intention of staying there. So when I told them that I had come to stay they summoned the qadi and notaries and drew up a contract binding me and those of my company who wished to remain in India, but some of them refused to take this engagement.

We then set out on the journey to the capital, which is forty days' march from Multan through continuously inhabited country. The first town we entered was the city of Abuhar, which is the first of these lands of Hind, a small but pretty place with a large population, and with flowing streams and trees. . . .

We continued our journey from the city of Abuhar across open country extending for a day's journey. On its borders are formidable mountains, inhabited by Hindu infidels who frequently hold up parties of travellers. Of the inhabitants of India the majority are infidels. Some of them are subjects under Muslim rule; others of them are rebels and warriors, who maintain themselves in the fastness of the mountains and plunder travelers. . . .

#### *Account of the Sultan's Arrival and Our Meeting with Him*

On the fourth of Shawwal [8th June 1334] the sultan alighted at a castle called Tilbat, seven miles from the capital, and the vizier ordered us to

go out to him. We set out, each man with his present of horses, camels, fruits of Khurasan, Egyptian swords, mamluks, and sheep brought from the land of the Turks, and came to the gate of the castle where all the newcomers were assembled. They were then introduced before the sultan in order of precedence and were given robes of linen, embroidered in gold. When my turn came I entered and found the sultan seated on a chair. At first I took him to be one of the chamberlains until I saw him with the chief of the royal intimates, whom I had come to know during the sultan's absence. The chamberlain made obeisance and I did so too. After this the chief of the intimate courtiers said to me, '*Bismillah*, Mawlana Badr al-Din,' for in India they used to call me Badr al-Din, and *maulana* [Our Master] is a title given to all scholars. I approached the sultan, who took my hand and shook it, and continuing to hold it addressed me most affably, saying in Persian, 'This is a blessing; your arrival is blessed; be at ease, I shall be compassionate to you and give you such favours that your fellow-countrymen will hear of it and come to join you.' Then he asked me where I came from and I said to him, 'From the land of the Maghrib.' He said to me, 'The land of Abd al-Mu'min?' and I said, 'Yes.' Every time he said any encouraging word to me I kissed his hand, until I had kissed it seven times, and after he had given me a robe of honour I withdrew.

#### *Account of the Sultan's Entry into His Capital*

On the day following that on which we went out to the sultan each one of us was given a horse from the sultan's stables, with a richly ornamented saddle and bridle, and when the sultan mounted for the entry into his capital we rode in the front part of the procession together with the Grand Qadi Sadr al-Jahan. The elephants were decorated and paraded in front of the sultan, with standards fixed on them and sixteen parasols, some of them gilded and some set with precious stones. Over the sultan's head there was displayed a parasol of the same kind and in front of him was carried the *ghashiyah*, which is a saddle-cloth studded with gems. On some of the elephants there were mounted small military catapults, and when the sultan came near the city parcels of gold and silver coins mixed together were thrown from these machines. The men on foot in front of the sultan and the other persons present scrambled for the money, and they kept on scattering it until the procession reached the palace. There marched before him thousands of foot-soldiers, and wooden pavilions covered with silk fabrics were constructed with singing girls in them, as we have already related.

After his entry into the city the sultan used to summon us to eat in his presence and would enquire how we fared and address us most affably. He said to us one day, 'You have honoured as by your coming

and we cannot sufficiently reward you. The elder amongst you is in the place of my father, the man of mature age is my brother, and the young man like my son. There is in my kingdom nothing greater than this city of mine and I give it to you,' whereupon we thanked him and invoked blessings upon him.

One day he sent two of his high officers to us to say, 'The Master of the World says to you, "Whoever amongst you is capable of undertaking the function of vizier or secretary or commander or judge or professor or shaikh, I shall appoint to that office."' Everyone was silent at first, for what they were wanting was to gain riches and return to their countries. Then one of the officers said to me in Arabic, 'What do you say, *ya sayyidi*?' (The people of that country never address an Arab except by the title of sayyid, and it is by this title that the sultan himself addresses him, out of respect for the Arabs.) I replied, 'Vizierships and secretaryships are not my business, but as to qadis and shaikhs, that is my occupation, and the occupation of my fathers before me. And as for military commands, you know that the non-Arabs were converted to Islam only at the point of the sword of the Arabs.' The sultan was pleased when he heard what I said.

He was at the time in the Thousand Columns eating a meal, and he sent for us and we are in his presence as he was eating. We then withdrew to the outside of the Thousand Columns and my companions sat down, while I retired on account of a boil which prevented me from sitting. When the sultan summoned us a second time my companions presented themselves and made excuses to him on my behalf. I came back after the afternoon prayer and I performed the sunset and night prayers in the audience hall. The chamberlain then came out and summoned us. I went in and found the sultan of the terrace of the palace with his back leaning on the royal couch, the Vizier Khwajah Jahan before him, and the 'great king' Qabulah standing there upright. When I saluted him the 'great king' said to me, 'Do homage, for the Master of the World has appointed you qadi of the royal city of Dihli and has fixed your stipend at 12,000 dinars a year, and assigned to you village to that amount, and commanded for you 12,000 dinars in cash, which you shall draw from the treasury tomorrow (if God will), and has given you a horse with its saddle and bridle and has ordered you to be invested with a *maharibi* robe of honour,' that is, a robe which has on its breast and on its back the figure of a *mihrab*. So I did homage and when he had taken me by the hand and presented me before the sultan, the sultan said to me, 'Do not think that the office of qadi of Dihli is one of the minor functions; it is the highest of functions in our estimation.' I understood what he said though I could not speak in Persian fluently, but the sultan understood Arabic although he could not speak it fluently, so I said to him, 'O Master, I belong to the school of Malik and these people are Hanafis, and I do not know the language.' He replied, 'I have appointed two substitutes for you; they will be guided by your advice and you will be the one who signs all the documents, for you are in the