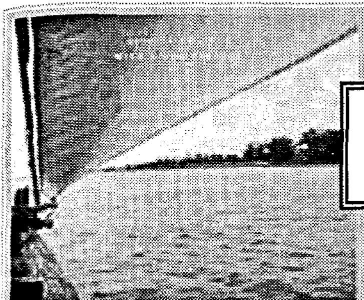

Ross E. Dunn, *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta: A Muslim Traveler of the 14th Century*. Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Dagmar Riedel
Columbia University

The appeal of travel remains that travelers see with their own eyes and have first-hand experiences, even though it has become virtually impossible to be the first to view an unknown landscape and its indigenous population or to break a travel record. But our postmodern perception of travel as an educational experience does not necessarily facilitate our understanding of travel writing in another civilization, because similarities and differences are not always obvious. Guidebooks, despite their focus on data, are never self-explanatory since attitudes toward travel change from society to society and over time.

The Moroccan jurist and Sufi Ibn Baṭṭūṭa (1304–1369) spent twenty-nine years on the road logging about 75,000 miles while crisscrossing Eurasia and Africa. He is often compared with Marco Polo (1254–1324), the Venetian merchant whose family pursued trade with the Mongols and who between 1271 and 1295 lived for seventeen years in China. Both men dictated their experiences to an amanuensis, and both books are regarded as classics of travel-writing.[1] Yet Marco Polo is usually considered a man of the future whose eye-witness report of Asia foreshadowed the Age of Discovery (p. 6), while Ibn Baṭṭūṭa is perceived as a man of the past who stayed on the path of tradition and did not venture beyond the borders of the already cracking *dār al-Islām* (p. 7).

Ross Dunn, professor emeritus of history at San Diego State University, has sifted through Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travelogue (*riḥla*) with meticulous attention to detail. He is, however, careful to point out that his aim is to present his "interpretation of Ibn Battuta's life and times and not a picture of the fourteenth century 'through his eyes' ... not a commentary on his encyclopedic observations, not ... a book about his book" (p. xv). The *riḥla*'s wide sweep allowed an examination of cultural unity between Muslim societies, while Marco Polo served as a European counterexample for exploring differences and similarities between Venetian and North-African attitudes to travel. Dunn has accomplished an enormous task, and yet wears his learning lightly; his book is both readable and informative. Since he writes for a general audience, he provides an introduction to the social and cultural history of fourteenth-century Muslim societies. The book is divided into fifteen chapters: an introduction and the fourteen stations of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's journey are accompanied by twelve maps and multiple black-white photos.[2] The reader is prepared for departure by a preface (p. xiii–xvi) explaining the use of the Arabic source and the modern translations, as well as notes on the Muslim calendar (p. xviii) and money (p. xix)[3]. A glossary (p. 321–323), bibliography (p. 325–343), and index (p. 345–359) allow the armchair traveler to revisit particular locations and find reference to further reading. The first edition was published in 1986, and translated into Italian (1993), Indonesian (1995), and Turkish (2004).[4] This revised edition, for which Dunn wrote a new preface (p. ix–xi), was issued to commemorate Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's 700th birthday in 2004.

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[1] The travelogue (*riḥla*) illustrates how a work's reception in Europe and the Near East has been intertwined (p. 4 and 317). To date there is no research of the work's manuscript circulation between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries, and thus it is impossible to gauge its impact. Only a few manuscripts were known to Carl Brockelmann (GALII, p. 332–333 and GAL S II, p. 365– 366), though in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries European scholars could buy *riḥla* manuscripts in the Near East. In the bequest of the Swiss traveler John Lewis Burckhardt (1784–1817) were three abridgments that he had purchased in Cairo. The Oriental Translation Fund published an English translation by Samuel Lee (1783–1852), then professor of Arabic at Cambridge, in 1829. But already in 1818 and 1819 the Universität Jena (Thuringia) had accepted theses about Ibn Baṭṭūṭa by Johann Heinrich Ludwig Kosegarten (1792–1860) and Johann Heinrich Apetz (1794–1857). The critical edition of the Arabic text (ed. C. Defrémery and B. R. Sanguinetti, 4 vols., Paris, 1853–1859) is based on the five manuscripts that were among the booty brought to Paris after the 1830 occupation of Algiers. Ever since, translations in the major European languages, as well as in Turkish, have been in print, while the work also made it on the lists of early Arabic imprints and lithographed books. Today webpages about Ibn Baṭṭūṭa range from a learning tool for US Middle-School students (Nick Bartel,*The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, available at: http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww/sch618/Ibn_Battuta/Ibn_Battuta_Rihla.html; accessed 16 May 2005) to a Muslim polemics about the western neglect of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's contribution to the science of geography (A.S. Chugtai, *Ibn Battuta: The Great Traveller*, available at: http://www.ummah.net/history/scholars/ibn_battuta/; accessed 8April 2005).

[2] There is a list of maps that does not inform about their sources (p. viii), while a list of the included photographs is altogether missing.

[3] The note on money is confusing because Dunn does not mention that the term *dīnār* designated an actual gold coin as well as a monetary unit (money of account). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's consistent use of *dīnār* suggests that he converted all references to local denominations into money of account to provide his readers with immediately comparable values. Salient is that the note on money documents Dunn's efforts to attain as much precision as possible to match the travelogue with historical reality. Throughout the text Dunn tries to determine as exactly as possible dates, routes, and time needed for passage to prove over and over again that Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was, in principle, a reliable eye witness. Unfortunately, Dunn does not confront the question whether the Moroccan's criteria of documenting his truthfulness were different from ours, although Dunn mentioned that some contemporaries were not fully convinced of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's stories (p. 315–316).

[4] Ross E. Dunn, *Ibn Battuta'nin dünyasi*, tr. Yesim Sezdirmez, Istanbul: Klasik, 2004; the bibliographical details of the Italian and Indonesian translations are listed in Dunn's bibliography (p. 342–343).

There are, however, some minor caveats. The text would have benefited from more careful proofreading, copyediting, and better design. Aside from typos,[5] there are spelling inconsistencies and odd word-choices. The alternate vocabulary is confusing when Dunn first explains the formal "al-Hajj" (p. 76) as the pilgrim's honorific, and two pages later uses "*hajjis*" (p. 78), the Persian variant with an English plural suffix, for pilgrims. Chinggis and Genghis occur on the same page (p. 83), yet the spelling variants are not cross-referenced in the index (p. 347 and 349). Dunn marks some common-era dates as A.D. (p. 68), and still uses *pagan* in connection with pre-Islamic Arabia. Since Turkic-speaking Tatars dominated the armies with which the Mongols moved westwards (p. 83–84), Dunn employs *Tatars* and *Mongols* as synonyms (p. 354 and 358), a language use that harks back to pre-modern Christian perceptions of the Muslim invaders of Russia and Hungary. A simplified transliteration system for Arabic is very sensible for a general-audience book, though Dunn keeps, which in the imprint's font is open to the left and not to the right, for *ᶜain*. This system produces *Abbasid* and *Aden* yet *'Ali* and *'Abd*. Otherwise, *amirate* and *Turcoman* are used instead of the well-established *emirate* and *Turkmen*, and the rare *sharifian* serves as the anglicized form of *sharīfī*.

Dunn convincingly argues for the cultural unity of pre-modern Muslim societies, at least among their educated elites, though he does not examine Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's conception of this unity. Since the *riḥla* was a well-established literary genre, what was the incentive of Abu ᶜInān (r. 1349–1358), Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's Marinid patron, for financing the compilation of this travel report if its major result was to confirm the essentially Muslim nature of contemporary Muslim societies? Dunn admits that from our western perspective Ibn Baṭṭūṭa might seem "excessively eager to tell about the lives and pious accomplishments of religious savants and Sufi mystics" (p. 5). In other words, too much micro-history in close-ups, and not enough world politics in panoramic shoots. But Dunn gives short shrift to the question of what counted as the strange and new information for which Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was paid by his patron. Perhaps the explanation of that which is Muslim in these diverse societies had to take center stage because Dunn approached the *riḥla* as a guidebook for non-Muslims.

Dunn is a specialist of Moroccan colonial history[6] with a longstanding interest in world history.[7] His approach to fourteenth-century Muslim societies is based on the concept of hemispheric history that Marshall Hogdson (d. 1968) proposed as the framework of world history (p. xiii and 7–8). Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's travels across Eurasia and Africa allow Dunn to survey the societies of the *dār al-Islām* that comprised the intercommunicating zone of the Mediterranean rim, the Near East, India, and China. Within this geopolitical context, Dunn identifies merchants and nomads as the decisive social forces because of their high mobility (p. 9–11). Merchants established trading posts at or beyond the margins of the Islamic world, indirectly promoting the spread of Islam while depending for their business on the open borders within the *dār al-Islām*. Nomads, especially Turkish-speaking tribes in the tailwind of the Mongols, formed the military force that in the thirteenth century overran the Near East, leading to the reorganization of the political order in Syria, Iraq, and Iran. While hemispheric history allows Dunn to avoid the Weberian dichotomy of center and margins that obscures the coexistence of diverse Muslim societies, the old dichotomy between nomads and townspeople draws on the concept of societal progress from nomadic hunter-gatherers to sedentary citizens.

The enormity of the Mongol conquest illustrates the didactic challenge of how to explain Islamic history to the non-specialist within the context of world history. Dunn compares the Mongols with the Nazis, but he implicitly distinguishes between war of aggression and genocide since he explicitly stresses that the Mongols did not perpetrate a Holocaust (pp. 83, 85, 87, and 176).[8] While specialists might object that medieval and modern wars of aggression originated in different socioeconomic contexts that should be considered separately in any discussion of their otherwise comparable outcomes in human suffering, this comparison is highly effective as a descriptive explanation.[9] Dunn's other strategy for capturing his audience's interest is exploring ways of identifying with the Moroccan traveler. Dunn imagines Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's thoughts in an effort to reveal his humanity.[10] Unfortunately, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa provided only scant personal information, mentioning for example just in passing the women whom he married during his long journey (p. 44, 62, 207, and 233). Dunn continually voices his frustration that the travelogue does not reveal much about the author's emotional life. These difficulties illustrate the limits of such a strategy of identification since they undermine the premise of similarity and highlight the differences between the Moroccan traveler and Dunn's twenty-first-century audience.

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[5] For example, *Skhra* for *Sakhra* (p. 57), *intestate* for *interstate* (p. 66), *histile* for *hostile* (p. 68), or *700* for *770* as Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's *hijri* death date (p. 318).

[6] Ross E. Dunn, *Resistance in the Desert: Moroccan Responses to French Imperialism 1881-1912*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977; originally, PhD diss., University of Madison–Wisconsin, 1969.
Idem, "The Bakka'i Shaykhs of the Kunta: A Study of the Saint Cult in Political Life," MA thesis, University of Madison–Wisconsin, 1966.

[7] Ross E. Dunn, *The New World History: A Teacher's Companion*, Boston: Bedford & St. Martin's, 2000.
Idem, *A World History: Links Across Time and Place*, Evanston, Ill.: McDougal & Littell, 1988.

[8] Finding fitting references and making apt comparisons are the bread and butter of teaching comparative history, and Dunn is very good at doing either. For example, he refers to the early twentieth-century Hijaz Railway in connection with Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's route from Damascus to Medina (p. 67), and compares the Mongol capital Sulṭāniyya with the twentieth-century foundation of Brasilia (p. 101).

[9] In contrast, Dunn avoids dealing with slavery. He mentions Muslim involvement in the African slave trade (p. 122), and repeatedly lists male and female slaves who were gifted to Ibn Baṭṭūṭa. But he uses the euphemism *bonded servant* (p. 154), and exclusively defines the term *mamlūk* as military slave (p. 322, 353, and 357).

[10] For example, after the description of a prayer ritual (*dhikr*) of Rifāᶜī Sufis, Dunn reflects that "Ibn Baṭṭūṭa was too much the sober urban scholar to go in for that sort of religious frenzy" (p. 91).