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Review of *The Odyssey of Ibn Battuta: Uncommon tales of a Medieval Adventurer*, by David Waines.

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Since Herodotus, many travellers have produced travel narratives. Some of these earned a place as ethnographic documents, foundational texts of the modern sciences that study lands and peoples. The old texts now receive a lot of attention from current generations of historians. Most noteworthy is the comparative study of Roxanne L. Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (2006). Euben is particularly skilled in tackling problems of representation.

Waines provides an excellent introduction to the big work of Ibn Battuta (1304-1377) *A Gift to Those who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Travels* (2004). In 1325, the young man left his birthplace in Tangiers for the pilgrimage to Mecca, travelling with merchants. He journeyed, first with circuits in the Near East, up the Nile and down the East Coast of Africa, then on to Anatolia, North of the Caspian Sea to Samarkand, and then through Afghanistan, to the Delhi Sultanate. He thus had to familiarize himself with Turkish and Persian language and culture. He served in Delhi as a religious judge for nearly a decade and was sent by the Sultan in embassy to the Emperor of China. His expedition, loaded with rich gifts, ran into trouble at sea and on land, and lost all its goods. He still managed to get to Canton. At this point, he headed back toward Morocco. However, he quickly continued on to Andalusia and Western Africa (Mali), all the way to the Niger. Throughout his journeys, he proved himself a scholar of religion and the variety of its rules of practice. Widespread custom of hospitality enabled him to keep going. He found everywhere endowed hospices. He attended madrassas and consulted with all manner of holy men. Soon, he became clearly a pious scholar and was received as such by very generous hosts. At one time, he considered settling into the life of the ascetic and sedentary scholar (or "renouncer").

Waines analyses what Ibn Battuta tells us in three chapters. "Tales of Food and Hospitality" provides further information on the diversity of diets and differences in manner experienced by Ibn Battuta. The readers get references to many medieval cookbooks. The chapter "Tales of Sacred Places, Saints, Miracles and Marvels" gives references to medieval visitor guides to burial places of holy men. Ibn Battuta was the recipient of blessings in many such places. The chapter "Tales of the Other" shows our traveler's interest in women and their ways. He documents a very wide range of usages on the issue of "modesty." He speaks of the ten wives he married consecutively during his journeys; he also enjoyed the company of slave girls given to him. He observes the divergences in prayer ritual and the different evaluations of the alcoholic content of some drinks made with a basis of fermented milk. While himself of the Maliki school of law, Ibn Battuta informs us of the geographic distribution of the other three schools. He learned to make adjustments for his days among Africans or Turks. He documents the complex modes of coexistence between Muslim rulers and the Hindu majority in India, and realizes that the frontiers of Islam differ by geographic location.

Books In Review

The title, while catchy, is too modest. True, Ibn Battuta, like other authors of travel books, belongs to an old tradition of narrators of wonders. However, he dictated his text to an assistant, and both drew from older accounts. Waines clarifies (as much as possible) the manner of the text's production. He also quotes a Sufi saying, "Travel reveals the character of the traveler." Ibn Battuta moves in search of signs and blessings. Faith tells him that the whole world is God's and that God is sufficient for those who travel, as well as for those who stay at home. Waines' book is therefore a contribution to the history of human curiosity and of the attempts to convey knowledge of the human condition.

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