

Early Afro-Eurasian Explorers Activity

Zheng He

Around 1381 Ming Chinese armies invaded Yunnan (north of present-day Laos) and captured Zheng He. Castrated at the age of thirteen (making him a eunuch), he became a servant to the Chinese emperor.

First Expedition.

In 1402, Zheng He was appointed an admiral. In 1404 received command of the "Treasure Ships." With 317 ships and 30,000 sailors, Zheng He embarked on a voyage to ports in Southeast Asia, India, Arabia, and East Africa. The Ming emperor wanted to assert his power by claiming tributary states (states that send regular tokens [tribute] of submission to a more powerful state) as well as to develop commercial/trade networks. The ruler of Malacca greeted the Chinese and paid them tribute. Zheng He crossed the eastern Indian Ocean to the major port of Calicut in southern India. In 1407 it returned to China.

Second Expedition.

Zheng He began the second expedition in 1407. Calicut (in India) gave tribute to the Ming court. This gesture established the pattern for Chinese dealings with many other native states in the following years. The fleet returned home with copper, timber, and spices, and the profits they gained more than justified the trip.

Third Expedition and Fourth Expedition.

His third journey (1409-1411) Zheng He sailed to Siam, Malacca, the Malabar Coast, and Ceylon. On the fourth expedition (1413-1415) Zheng He reached Hormuz at the entrance to the Persian Gulf. Part of the fleet raveled as far as the eastern coast of Africa. He negotiated with great diplomatic skill and eventually 19 countries sent tribute payments to the Ming Empire. The emperor was so delighted that he gave rewards to all of those who participated.

Other Expeditions.

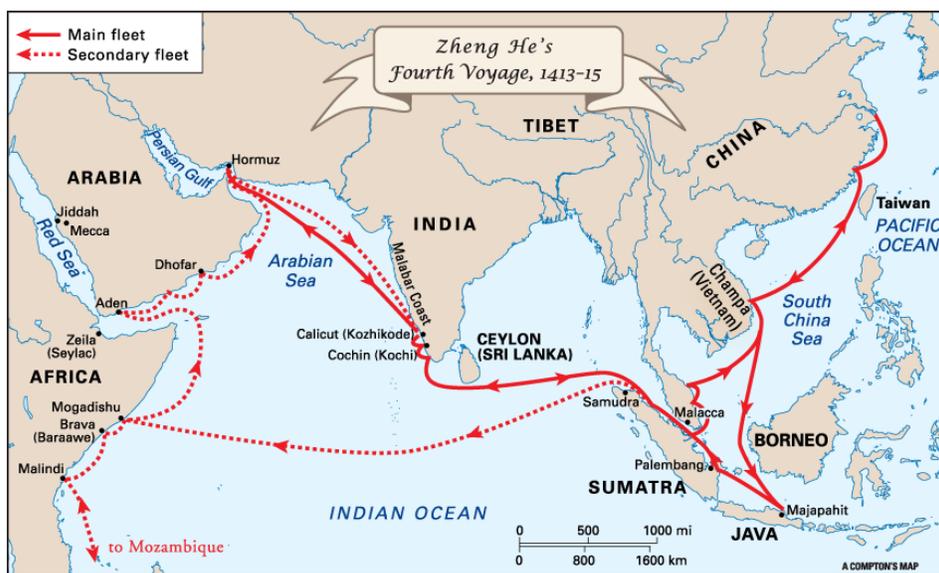
Zheng He went on 3 other expeditions traveling as far as southeastern Africa.

Withdrawal.

After his death, the Ming no longer sent expeditions overseas for several reasons. First, these voyages did not create enough profit to justify them. Second, the government officials did not support the voyages anymore. Finally, the Mongol attacks of 1438-1449 forced the Ming government to send troops to the frontier and to use more resources in the fight.

Significance.

These expeditions helped China to earn a reputation as a powerful empire. Overseas trade in the form of tribute from various kingdoms increased. Zheng He's expeditions strengthened trade. Finally, many geographical writings and maps were published, which helped the Chinese identify oceans and faraway lands more accurately.



"Zheng He." *World Eras*, edited by Guangqiu Xu, vol. 7: Imperial China, 617-1644, Gale, 2002. *Gale In Context: Biography*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1646700040/BIC?u=eng188921&sid=BIC&xid=8d418e30>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2020.

Marco Polo

Travels to the East.

Marco Polo, an Italian traveling with his merchant father and uncle, is credited as being the first European to have spent a lengthy time in China. The 7,500-mile journey took about three and half years before they reached Beijing, the khan's (Mongol leader) winter residence. The subsequent twenty-four-year journey is recounted in the book called *Description of the World*. It became the key account for future European travelers and explorers.

Personal Experience.

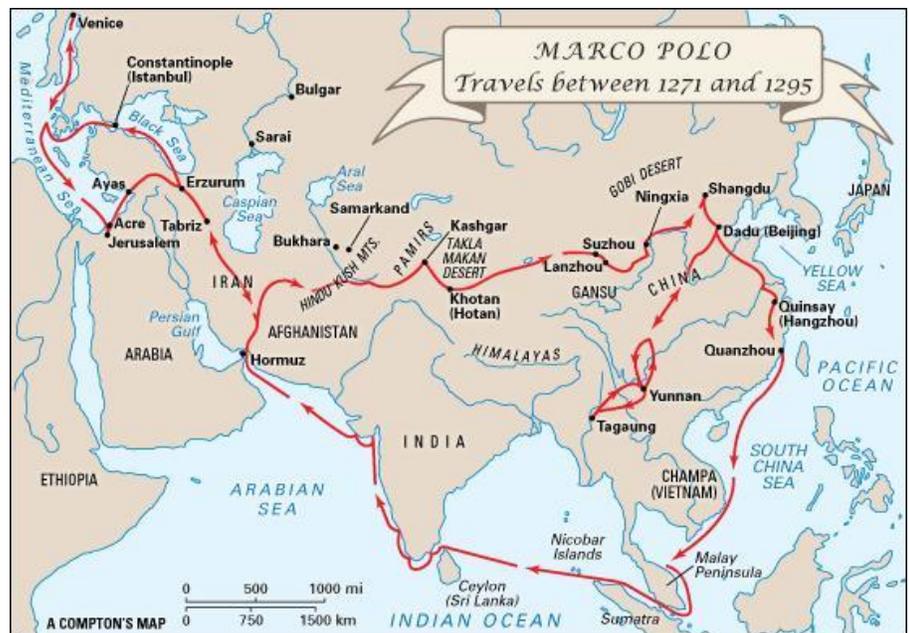
Marco Polo had been introduced to Kublai Khan (the Mongol leader of China and ultimately served him as a regional ambassador. Prior to becoming a favored bureaucrat, Marco distinguished himself as a messenger to the khan. During most of the period the khan ruled China Polo served as his trusted set of eyes and ears. He went on an expedition from the Yellow River to the Indian border in northwestern China.

Eyewitness Account.

On the journey from Europe, they traveled for more than three years. Marco learned how to diminish his foreignness in part by learning four Eastern languages and acquiring great respect for what must initially have been a strange environment for him. Once within the khan's domain, over the course of twenty years, Marco saw all of the land in northern and southern China conquered by the Mongols. After having held for seventeen years of working for the Mongol government, Polo considered himself an adoptive son of this new country.

Significance.

Marco Polo opened the world of readers to the Mongols and the culture of. The phrase "It's a Marco Polo" still bears, however, the connotation of an overly embellished account. The literary account of the adventures of Marco Polo acquired the nickname "one who exaggerates a thousands of times over." Marco Polo's travels to the East have played a crucial step in European understanding of Eastern buildings, races, languages, governments, manufactured products, plants, animals, minerals, and the terrain itself.



"Marco Polo." *World Eras*, edited by Jeremiah Hackett, vol. 4: Medieval Europe, 814-1350, Gale, 2002. *Gale In Context: Biography*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1646400029/BIC?u=eng188921&sid=BIC&xid=05841f45>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2020.

Ibn Battuta

Early Life

Muhammad ibn Battuta was born in Morocco in northern Africa. He received the traditional juristic and literary education in his native town of Tangier.

In 1325, he started his travels by undertaking the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca. At first his purpose was to fulfill that religious duty and to broaden his education by studying under famous scholars in Egypt and Syria.

His Travels

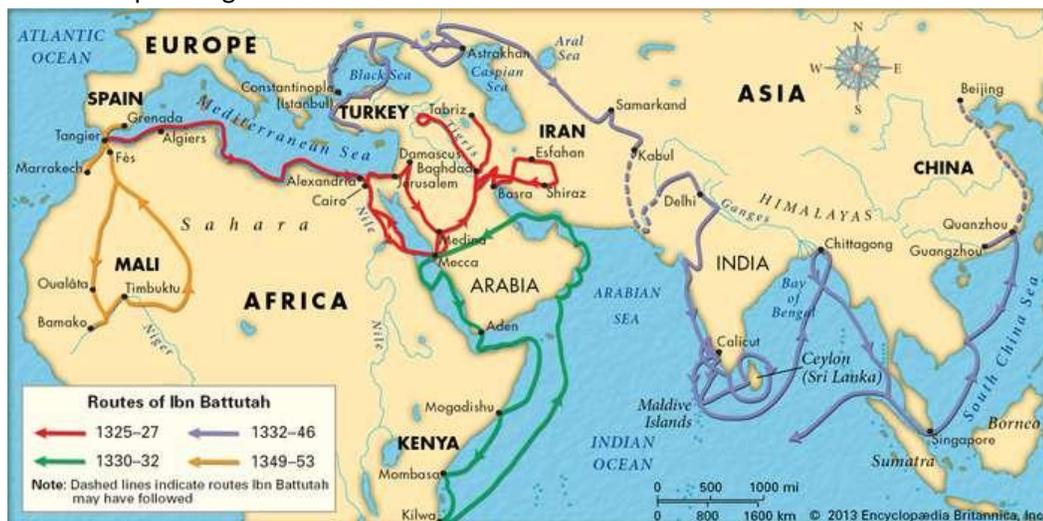
He reached Mecca in 1326. This journey aroused in him the passion to see the world. From Mecca he made a trip to Iraq and western Persia and in 1327 returned via Baghdad to Mecca, where he spent the next 3 years.

Ibn Battuta then traveled by ship along the Red Sea shores to East African trading ports. Next he passed through Egypt and Syria then he visited Turkish rulers and religious brotherhoods. He crossed the Black Sea to the Golden Horde (Mongol controlled Russia).

From 1333 to 1342 Ibn Battuta stayed at Delhi, India, where he was given a position as judge. His next trip took him to Southeast Asia then he landed in China. He revisited Baghdad, Syria, Egypt, and Mecca, traveled by ship to northern Africa. He travelled through India and the Middle East during the time of the Black Death. After a visit to the Muslim kingdom of Granada (Spain), he made a final trip through the Sahara in Africa.

His Writings

After completing his journey Ibn Battuta spent two writing about them. Ibn Battuta's account of his journeys is a narrative of travels through three continents, 80,000 miles and included, ceremonies at the courts of sultans, the burning of widows in India, and African cannibals. Ibn Battuta's travels represent the longest journey overland before the invention of the steam engine.



Bro, Thyge C. "Ibn Battuta." *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, edited by Richard C. Martin, Macmillan Reference USA, 2004. *Gale In Context: Biography*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/K3403500207/BIC?u=eng188921&sid=BIC&xid=7c47d414>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2020.

"Muhammad ibn Battuta." *Encyclopedia of World Biography Online*, Gale, 1998. *Gale In Context: Biography*, <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/K1631003239/BIC?u=eng188921&sid=BIC&xid=c8bf21ef>. Accessed 9 Oct. 2020.