

AN AGE OF ADVENTURE

INTRODUCTION



BIG HISTORY PROJECT



AN AGE OF ADVENTURE

INTRODUCTION

By Cynthia Stokes Brown

Do you think that
long-distance travel
is a modern invention?
Do you suppose that
everyone stayed home
until airlines started
scheduling flights
around the world?

If so, think again. By the early 1300s, Afro-Eurasia (Northern Africa, Europe, and Asia) had become a world zone in motion. People were traveling everywhere, usually in groups — by foot, donkey, horse, camel, and boat. Merchants moved goods; kings, sultans, and popes moved armies. Diplomats and envoys carried messages; missionaries sought souls. Pilgrims and scholars searched for enlightenment. People looked for work, and whole groups of people migrated for varying reasons. Captains, caravan leaders, travel guides, and transport experts provided the ways and means to keep the multitudes moving.

This long-distance travel became easier in the late 1200s and early 1300s largely for three reasons. First, nomads of Central Asia (the Mongols and their Turkish-speaking allies) conquered Russia, China, and most of the Middle East, creating the largest territorial empire the world had ever seen. Their rulers imposed order and security to the trade routes along the Silk Roads. Second, the stability of Islamic rule across North Africa, the Middle East, Persia, and Southeast Asia provided a common civilization for travelers. Third, improvements in sailing technologies increased sea travel in the Indian Ocean.

Considering the great numbers of travelers moving across Afro-Eurasia, very few individuals left written accounts of their journeys. We're left to believe that those who did record their travels must also represent the unknown adventurers who left no accounts.

Fortunately, two prodigious travelers, Marco Polo, of Venice, Italy, and Abu Ibn Battuta, of Tangier, Morocco, did leave engaging records of their journeys. They each told their stories from memory, and perhaps some written notes, to others who copied it down. Enough copies were made that some have survived through the centuries. A third traveler featured here, Zheng He, from Yunnan, China, is remembered because he served powerful Chinese emperors. He left brief accounts of his voyages carved in granite, and two officers and a translator who sailed with him left longer memoirs.

These three adventurers all traveled within a 162-year time period. Marco Polo started his journey in 1271; Ibn Battuta started his in 1325, just after Polo died. Zheng He made his seven voyages starting in 1403, 37 years after Ibn Battuta died. The extent of these three journeys defies our imagination, even

today in the age of jet travel around the world. Marco Polo spent 24 years away from home, traveling most of the time. Ibn Battuta spent 29 years away, visiting the lands of more than 40 modern countries, and covering 73,000 miles (117,000 kilometers). Zheng He was away about 14 years spaced over three decades, making his way around the Indian Ocean and along the eastern coast of Africa.

Adventurer comparison chart

Use this chart to help compare the three adventurers. Name some of the places they visited and some of the reasons they traveled.

	Marco Polo	Ibn Battuta	Zheng He
Home	Italy (Europe)	Morocco (Africa)	China (Asia)
Years of travel	1271-1295	1325-1354	1405-1433
Age while traveling	17-41	21-50	34-62
Route			
Purpose			

THREE ADVENTURERS IN AFRO-EURASIA

1271 TO 1433

Ibn Battuta

Marco Polo

Zheng He

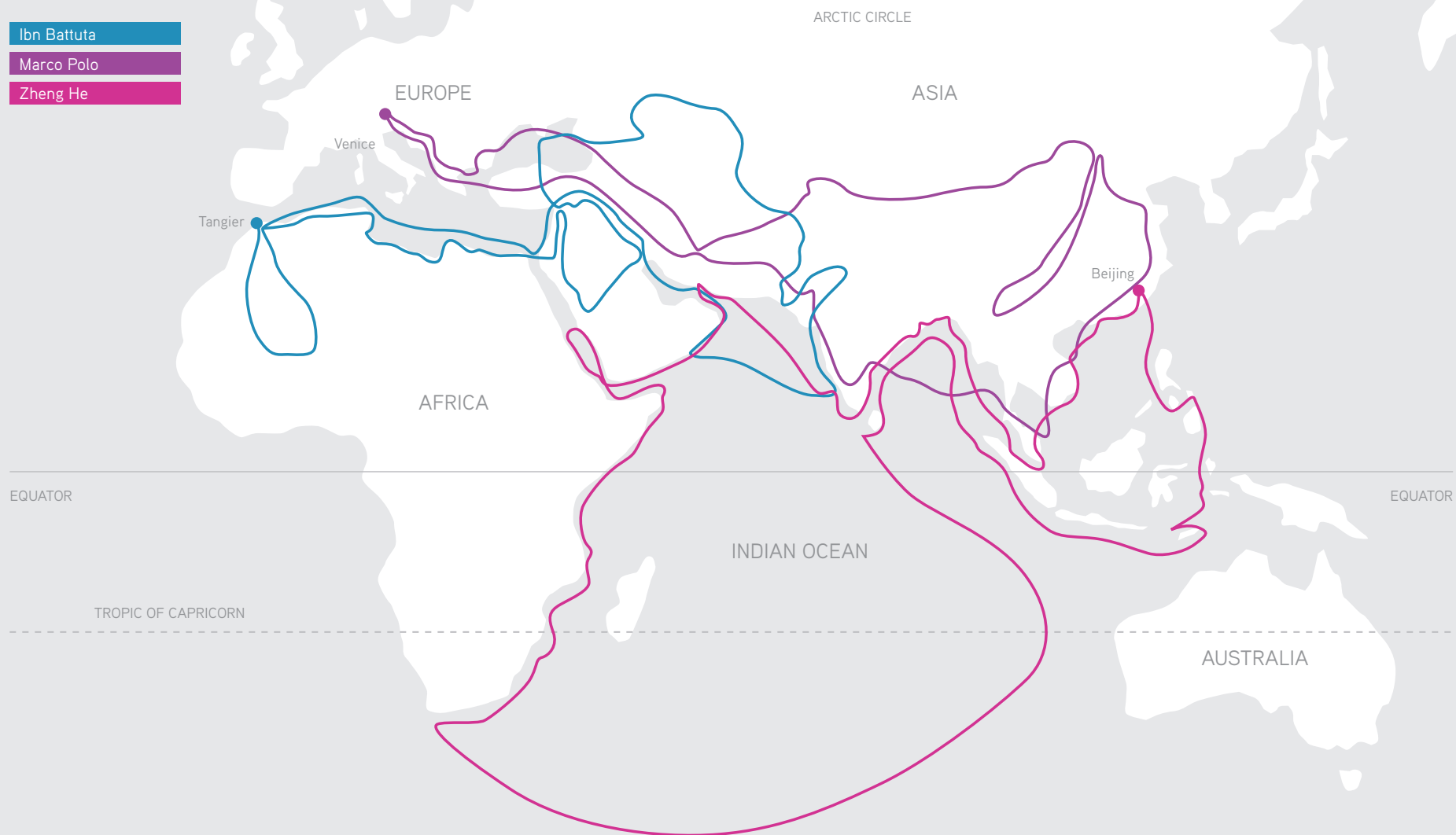


Image credits

A drawing of Marco Polo

© Bettmann/CORBIS

A monument to Zheng He at the Stadthuys Museum in Malaysia,
photograph by Hassan Saeed

A 1605 painting of a young holy man

© Stapleton Collection/CORBIS

NEWSELA

Articles leveled by Newsela have been adjusted along several dimensions of text complexity including sentence structure, vocabulary and organization. The number followed by L indicates the Lexile measure of the article. For more information on Lexile measures and how they correspond to grade levels: <http://www.lexile.com/about-lexile/lexile-overview/>

To learn more about Newsela, visit www.newsela.com/about.



The Lexile® Framework for Reading

The Lexile® Framework for Reading evaluates reading ability and text complexity on the same developmental scale. Unlike other measurement systems, the Lexile Framework determines reading ability based on actual assessments, rather than generalized age or grade levels. Recognized as the standard for matching readers with texts, tens of millions of students worldwide receive a Lexile measure that helps them find targeted readings from the more than 100 million articles, books and websites that have been measured. Lexile measures connect learners of all ages with resources at the right level of challenge and monitors their progress toward state and national proficiency standards. More information about the Lexile® Framework can be found at www.Lexile.com.