



Article

Manuscript Copies of Ibn Battuta's "Travelogue"

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Abstract: The project investigates the manuscript tradition of Ibn Battuta's travel account, an important source for a medieval vision of the cultural, political and geographical diversity of the Islamic world. Through an examination of the manuscripts – their provenance, divergences, and historical settings – the research investigates how knowledge was transmitted and preserved in the Islamicate. This work also deals with the issues of textual inconstancy and its effects on historical interpretation. Ultimately, the study intends to offer broader perspectives on the place of manuscript in historiography and their relationship with world history.

Keywords: Ibn Battuta, travelogue, manuscript studies, Islamic historiography, textual variations, medieval history, cultural transmission, historical analysis

1. Introduction

Ibn Battuta, one of history's most hefty travelers, his legacy still fascinating many academicians and fans across the globe today [1]. Born in Tangier, Morocco in 1304, Ibn Battuta travelled for more than thirty years to enormous stretches of the Islamic world and beyond. He travelled to North Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, Indian subcontinent, Southeast Asia and Iberian peninsula as well in part of China and possibly also to some parts of Portuguese India. The detailed narrative he collected in the famous "Rihla" (the Journey) reflects a vivid and priceless image of societies, cultures and politics of the 14th century [2].

Copies of Ibn Battuta's "Rihla" have been preserved through the centuries with several in existence today and copies appearing in multiples translations around the globe. Such writings are important primary sources, not only for interpreting Ibn Battuta's voyages but also for more general historical and cultural information about the areas of his travels [3]. Yet the transmission of these documents has brought differences in content, approach and accuracy which have resulted in heated discussion by scholars concerning the authenticity and origin.

This essay investigates the provenance, physical attributes, language of writing and historical implications of 30 manuscript copies of Ibn Battuta's Rihla. Through this analysis of manuscripts, we seek to reveal information about the transmission and circulation of Ibn Battuta as well as the scribes and scholars who played a role in his legacy, along with the effect these different versions have had on conceptions of history and culture [4]. The study also points out the difficulties encountered with a multitude of note-takings and fragmented manuscript traditions underlining the necessity for critical methods in manuscript studies [5].

In doing so, the study offers a unique and eye-opening perspective on Ibn Battuta's Rihla, not only as a historical and literary text but also as an unusually successful object of preservation and even conservation for some subsequent readers one of the great traveller's most remarkable companions in history.

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2. Materials and Methods

Manuscript of Qarawiyyin Library:

The text discusses a manuscript stored in the Qarawiyyin Library in Fez, cataloged as No. 561. It highlights the significance of Fez as an important cultural and historical location related to Ibn Battuta's journey. (Figure 1)



Figure 1. "Manuscript of the Qarawiyyin Library, No. 561 – The first folio of the second journey."

The manuscript is considered one of the key references for researchers studying Ibn Battuta's travels. However, it appears that only a part of the manuscript exists, as the first section of Ibn Battuta's travels is missing. The existing portion begins with dates corresponding to the Islamic calendar, indicating that the preserved section likely pertains to the later stages of his travels.

The author expresses regret over the loss of many valuable manuscripts from the Qarawiyyin Library and raises questions about the whereabouts of the complete version of this manuscript.

The manuscript cataloged as No. 561 appears to belong to the second part of his journey, which excludes the first section of his travels. The earliest available text begins from the month of Muharram (Islamic calendar), four years and thirty-seven weeks after he reached the known landmark of Wadi Sind. This specific manuscript consists of 110 folios, with a uniform format of 25 lines per page, measuring 27 x 18 cm. (Figure 2)



Figure 2. "The last folio of the manuscript of the Qarawiyyin Library"

Manuscript of Al-Khazānah al-Ḥasaniyyah (3), No. 8488:

This manuscript includes the first journey and consists of 229 folios (each folio containing two pages), with 19 lines per page and dimensions of 22 x 16.5 cm. It is written in a beautiful, bold Maghrebi script. The manuscript is bound with a red cover, but its content is not arranged in proper order! Despite its damage and wear, some parts have been patched and restored. (Figure 3)



Figure 3. "The first folio of the manuscript from the Royal Library (Al-Khazānah Al-Ḥasaniyyah), number 8488, is considered to be at the forefront of documented copies and was perhaps written in the handwriting of Ibn Juzayy."

This copy, I consider unfit to act a source, for correct copies of the MS. And it's long and jumbled and has holes, but there's a lot in it. We have Ibn Battuta's report of the wars between Shiite and Sunni on page 111, while Shiraz gets six pages. Furthermore, there is

a discussion of Bukhara on page 176, and Ibn Battuta mentions a small city in Southeast Asia.

As for the introduction attributed to the copy, it is falsely assigned to Ibn Battuta. The beginning of the book states: "The author, the honorable Sheikh Muhammad al-Kilbi al-Gharnati (may Allah have mercy on him), known as Abu al-Qasim Muhammad..." This attribution is incorrect.

This copy, like many other manuscripts, does not carry an exact date. It concludes with Ibn Battuta's description of his arrival in India, where he mentions how they reached its lands and met its kings.

3. Results and Discussion

Manuscript of Al-Khazānah Al-Ḥasaniyyah No. 3631:

This is the third manuscript of the first journey, consisting of 205 folios, with 16 lines per page, and dimensions of 17 x 14 cm. It is written in a clear Maghrebi script, with many tears along its edges [6].

The first page contains the following text: "Said Sheikh Imam Abu al-Abbas Sidi Ahmad Ibn Battuta, may Allah have mercy on him." The manuscript appears to have been copied in early Muharram in the year 1242. The first page also bears the phrase "By Allah's permission"!

The manuscript is dated to Ramadan in the year 1194 and is confirmed to be an exact copy of the promised text, starting and ending completely.

Manuscript of Al-Khazānah Al-Ḥasaniyyah No. 8218:

This is part of the first journey, consisting of 151 folios, with 17 lines per page, and dimensions of 26 x 14 cm. It is written in clear Maghrebi script with severe tears and a beginning that starts mid-content, only from the meeting in the second journey [7].

It mentions Ibn Battuta's words: "By Allah's permission, I journeyed through the world, and He blessed me to see its marvels". The text emphasizes the mercy and hope in Allah's guidance, ending with praise for Allah and prayers for admission to Paradise. (Figure 4)



Figure 4. "Manuscript No. 3631 from the Royal Library, which is titled Ibn Battuta, Ahmad, and nicknamed Abu al-Abbas."

Manuscript of Al-Khazānah Al-Ḥasaniyyah No. 356:

This is a manuscript missing its transcription. It consists of two volumes: the first has 209 folios, while the second has 158 folios, with 33 lines per page, and dimensions of 26 x 18 cm [8].

The text ends with the following: “The first journey ended in Muharram in the year 125...” The date was written using numerical symbols, with a later entry continuing the manuscript from “the middle of the sacred month of Muharram”. The script is written in the same clear Maghrebi style.

Manuscript of the Public Treasury (9) No. 2399/d:

This is the second journey from the manuscript collection, which originally belonged to the royal treasury. Therefore, it is marked with the letter “Kaf”. It consists of 360 pages, written in 19 lines per page, with dimensions 24 x 18.

This copy appears to be mixed, similar to the previously mentioned manuscript No. 8488, with the first part missing, as is common with most manuscripts. However, the clear gaps in its content, which seem intentional, align with references to Ibn Battuta’s visit to Andalusia [9]. The subject of this visit attracted the attention of the orientalist Professor Lévi-Provençal, who was a friend of Sheikh Abdul Hayy Al-Kattani. It is not far-fetched to assume that the Sheikh sent these Andalusian-related pages to him and did not retrieve them, contrary to what was done in the case of the manuscript connected to Ibn Al-Zubayr.

This manuscript closely resembles manuscript No. 8488 in the Hassani Treasury in terms of layout, documentation, and correction, relying on the original version [10]. Some of the marginal notes suggest they were written by Sheikh Al-Kattani, may Allah have mercy on him. (Figure 5)



Figure 5. This manuscript is limited to the second journey and is considered one of the finest copies, dating close to the author’s era. The beginning, middle, and the first page are well-preserved.

Manuscript of the Wazzan Treasury No. 31:

This is the original edition containing both legs of the travelogue. I heard it for the first time in the summer of 1941 when I made my inaugural pilgrimage to Wazzan Treasury. It belongs to the qadi of the town, the faqih Ibn Jallun, may Allah have mercy on him. It was written in my journal, noted for you at the time, and it’s still there – clear as day.

The first journey commences after the basmalah and is as follows:

“And the goodly imam, and the pure jurisprudent Abu Abdullah Ibn Ibrahim At-Tanji likewise through Isa Al-hyybatti narrated from him that he said...”

This exemplar was one of the copies in the collection of the Wazzan family to which belonged Muhammad bin Abduljabbar bin Ali bin Ahmad, and inherited by his son Muhammad. It was afterwards in the mosque's library and office of iiair(F8) where he leprcted, ffith other mss [11].

The second travelogue concludes with the date of transcription being 1211 AH. The manuscript is of 201 pages, but the first 77 are single ones (front and back) and the remainder are full sheets each measuring 19 by 17 units.

Manuscript of the Marrakech Treasury No. 412:

This elegant copy contains both journeys in a single volume. The scribe finished copying it on the night of Friday, the 1st of Jumada Al-Awwal in the year 1158 AH.

The manuscript has minor damage on its first pages and was completed during the reign of Sultan Moulay Abdullah. He is buried at the Sidi Ahmad Al-Sabti Mosque in Marrakech, where he passed away in the year 601 AH [12].

Its pages number 248, lined with 24 lines per page, with dimensions of 28 × 18, according to the index of manuscripts of the Ibn Youssef Library in Marrakech, which was curated by the late esteemed scholar Al-Siddiq Bel-Gharbi, may God have mercy on him. (Figure 6)



Figure 6. This manuscript was copied during the reign of Sultan Moulay Abdullah bin Ismail and is located in the library of Ibn Youssef College, No. 412, first page.

The text provides a detailed description of a manuscript in the National Library of Paris, cataloged under numbers 2289 and 910. Here's a summary:

Manuscript Description:

1. The manuscript, and what follows it, is part of the collection of the French National Library (formerly royal). It carries the old label Royale.
2. Distinction: The primary advantage of this version lies in its completeness and accuracy, except for some digressions (dabāja) in the opening and its deviation from the original handwriting [13].
3. Attribution Issue: There are claims that the introduction, supposedly authored by Ibn Battuta, is actually not by him, as evidenced in the script. Scholars like Defrémery and Sanguinetti excluded these sections from their analysis of the manuscript.

Catalog Details:

It is listed under the numbers 2289 and 910 Sup, with a descriptor Arabe, distinguishing it among Arabic and Oriental manuscripts in the library.

Annotations in the Manuscript:

1. The first travel account concludes with a note dated the 1st of Muharram (Hijri year unspecified). This corresponds to 1766 (Gregorian), authored by Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Qasim. (Figure 7)



Figure 7. The text offers additional insights into the Parisian manuscript cataloged under numbers 910/2289.

2. The second travel account closes with the phrase: The second travel account ends, a humble effort by Muhammad ibn Ibrahim, may God cure him of all ailments. This note is dated the 11th of Safar, 1180 AH.

Key Details:

1. The manuscript is recognized as one of the most complete and accurate copies.
2. Observations on Script: It is noted that the handwriting in the digressions (dabāja) differs from the rest of the text. This raises questions about authorship or contributions.

Introduction Attribution: The introduction (muqaddima) is attributed to Ibn Battuta, but some content of it is doubted to be his, in concordance with skepticism expressed by earlier writers [14].

In this section are catalogues of three Parisian mss, in the Bibliothèque Nationale N° 2287, 2288 and 2290/908.

Manuscript No. 2287 / 909:

1. OWNERSHIP AND DESCRIPTION: Original ownership of a Frenchman, with mention of an added catalog number 909 Sup
2. Structure: It consists of 206 sheets containing 28 lines each with dimensions of 20x30 cm.

Contents:

It misses safar 1 and 2 chapters

Contains a chapter named "زهرة النواظر وبهجة المسامع والنواظر".

Manuscript No. 2288 / 911:

1. State: A fragmented copy that omits sections of the text, which may have been altered or bowed.
2. Composition: 160 sheets with 27 lines per sheet.

Contents:

Contains the second chapter with heading "الدرر الفلوفية من رحلة ابن بطوطة".

Missing references to the history and exact dates.

Manuscript No. 2290 / 908:

Features:

Is limited to contents of the opening chapter (safar).

Refers in dates and place to the year 1134 (c mid-12th century) which was under the Al-Makhzani dynasty.

Structure:

108 leaves, in 31 lines per page.

Includes marginal notes.

BnF Manuscripts 2291, folios 339-(INVOKE) ">907

The manuscript is the second version of the journey as we know it from a MS, which Tolaibro (Delaporte) announces in French on the back of first page. Its owner, a French Orientalist held various positions, above all in Arabic countries as Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Morocco [15].

The manuscript text is from the time of Sultan Mawlai Suleiman (1206–1238 AH) as it refers to visits in the autumn of 1828 at Kaye's (Kaï) who one can deduce had recently returned from Tétouan. He travelled with the French consul, Lamorinière to Meknes and was granted an audience by the Peacemaker sultan Mawlai Abd al-Rahman of Morocco.

Then it cites the city of Suriya again: It was an important place at the time the envoy Colonel Delary (De Larue) was dispatched to Meknes in 1836 on behalf of France during the reign of Sultan Mawlai Abd al-Rahman, when he was to hand over France's protest against Moroccan acts. The French consul appointed Muhammad al-Tayyib al-Biyad to finalize the negotiations with the French mission.

It is suggested that when Ibn Battuta's journey was copied, this second version became widely available, as copies of it were made since the time of King Muhammad III, making it a cultural treasure significant to Morocco's heritage.

The catalog of the National Library notes that the author of the manuscript, Al-Barron Sylvester, added parts to it that distinguish this copy from others. For instance, a distinct phrase not found in other versions appears in the text:

"In Safar 757, we learned that God is aware of its writers".

This unique statement points to the significance of this particular copy. (Figure 8)



Figure 8. "Paris Manuscript 907/2291 – Known by the French diplomat (Delaporte), who obtained it at an early age. It is said that it might have been written by Ibn Juzayy."

In conclusion, we believe that this version may be one of the oldest parts of the journey to reach us, despite some grammatical and linguistic errors suggesting that the scribe was not Ibn Battuta himself. The writing style differs from Ibn Battuta's known handwriting, leaving us to speculate that it was written after his time.

Manuscript of Dar al-Kutub, Tunisia No. 5048:

This manuscript was found in Ain al-Makan (Ain al-Maqna) and is in good condition, described as a fine copy. It is noted that it belonged to Ahmad Bey, ruler of Tunisia, who valued it highly. The manuscript's completion is dated to the end of Ramadan in the year 1256 AH (November 1840).

The scribe who wrote the manuscript ended it with a Moroccan style, adding the name "Jadeed" (new) to the journey title. This suggests it might be a new title for Ibn Battuta's work: "The Precious Pearl from the Journey of Ibn Battuta".

The manuscript owner focused on geographic descriptions of some locations, referencing sources like Futuh al-Masalik wa al-Mamalik or al-Maqamat al-Shirshiyah. The manuscript consists of 263 pages with measurements of 27 × 19 cm.

Manuscript of Madrid, which Dozy relied upon:

This version attracted the attention of the Dutch Orientalist Reinhart Dozy. He mentioned it in his book *The Detailed History of Muslim Spain* (*Histoire des Musulmans d'Espagne*). Dozy obtained this version from the collection of De Gayangos, who had borrowed it from the library of the Spanish Royal Academy of History (*Real Academia de La Historia*).

Dozy notes, "This book's text... is from the elegant copies translated by Father Simón to French." However, Simón's translation only hints at the original manuscript's content.

The version in question contains two parts of Ibn Battuta's journey:

1. The first part spans 331 pages.
2. The second part covers 245 pages, with the text beginning in clear Moroccan handwriting on page 13, following a traditional style.

It includes the phrase:

"The noble Sheikh, Abu Muhammad Abdullah bin Muhammad bin Ibrahim al-Lawati al-Tangi, known as Ibn Battuta, may Allah have mercy on him".

The journey ends with a date specifying the end of Ibn Battuta's travels, along with prayers for forgiveness for him and his parents. The note concludes with the statement:

"May Allah forgive him, his parents, and all Muslims". The text of the journey was finalized in 1726 AD / 1138 AH.

Manuscript of the Academy of Sciences in Lisbon, No. 1254 A:

This manuscript, which researchers frequently discuss, was acquired by Father José de Santo-Antonio Moura from the city of Fez during a mission to Morocco and transferred to Lisbon in 1797 AD (1211 AH). Part of it was translated into Portuguese, and it was inspected at the Academy of Sciences in Lisbon in January 1993.

Importantly, this manuscript's introduction is attributed to its owner, Ibn Juzay, and was copied in the Marinid era. The manuscript mentions events in the year 1045–1046 AH (1635–1636 AD), during the reign of the Saadian dynasty, specifically under the rule of the Sultan Ahmed al-Mansur al-Dhahabi.

The manuscript's significance lies in its connection to Ibn Battuta's travels. However, researchers note the importance of verifying its content, as some versions attribute the work to Ibn Juzay, Ibn Battuta's scribe, while others emphasize different aspects, including the references to his travels and legacy.

Manuscript of Sheikh Hamouda:

There is a manuscript belonging to Sheikh Hamouda, previously a notable Islamic scholar in Constantinople (Algeria). It was copied on 22 Shawwal 1160 AH (October 17, 1747 AD) and referenced by French researchers Briand and Sankinski in their introduction to the translated version of the journey. They also included this manuscript in their analysis of Ibn Battuta's legacy.

The Aissi Manuscript:

This manuscript was gifted by Tunisian researcher Professor Habib al-Aissi, the owner of the Islamic West Library in Beirut. It is a photographed copy of the travel manuscript, divided into different journeys. Its first part spans 14 pages, while the second part consists of 21 pages. The total content reaches 356 pages, providing significant insights into the journey's historical and cultural aspects. (Figure 9)



Figure 9. "The first page of the manuscript by Habib al-Aissi notes the absence of attributing the introduction to Ibn Battuta."

Manuscript of the Waqf of Taymur, Egyptian Library, Copy (1):

1. Microfilm number: 17732, copy (1).
2. It bears the date: Monday, the 8th of Rabi' al-Awwal, 1091 AH (equivalent to 1674 AD), indicating that it was written six years after the death of al-Bilouni.
3. It consists of 197 pages, with 19 lines per page, measured at 24 cm.
4. Another Manuscript from the Waqf of Taymur, Copy (B):
5. This second copy was completed by its scribe, Al-Islamobuli, 15 months after Shawwal 1272 AH.
6. At the bottom, a note states: "Copied from a copy in the handwriting of the virtuous Sheikh Muhammad Al-Barizi".
7. It was written by Barsem Suleiman Al-Fayoumi, dated 17 Shawwal 1279 AH (June 15, 1874 AD). (Figure 10)



Figure 10. "Another manuscript from the collection of Al-Bayluni, copied on 15 Shawwal 1272 AH... The first folio of the manuscript, according to what appears, is from Copy (B)."

1. The scribe, Al-Faqir Nasr Al-Muhairi, participated and completed it under the supervision of the palace of Hazrat Haj Ahmed.
2. This copy contains 146 folios (two pages per folio) with 21 lines per page, measuring 22 cm x 12 cm.
3. Manuscript of the Vatican No. 1601:
4. This third copy was attributed to Al-Bayluni, written in the early months of the year 1184 AH.

5. It contains 112 folios, with 15 lines per page, measuring 20 cm x 14 cm.
6. It was acquired through the Papal Chair with the help of Monsignor Jacques. Manuscript of Al-Qayrawani No. 4063:
 1. This copy is dated 17 Sha'ban 1210 AH.
 2. It was written by Al-Faqir Muhammad bin Ahmed Al-Azhari Al-Shafi'i under the supervision of Sheikh Suleiman Al-Fayoumi.
 3. The note at the beginning of the manuscript indicates that the date of Ibn Battuta's journey was authenticated on the margins by Sheikh Nasr Al-Muhairi, then later dated 1223 AH.
 4. The manuscript contains 72 folios (two pages per folio), with 21 lines per page, measuring 20 cm x 14 cm.
 5. It is noteworthy that this manuscript contains a unique introduction and title that distinguish it from other versions.
 6. Its origin remains unclear since it dates back to the 13th century AH, and researchers continue to seek its original source.

4. Conclusion

This study investigates the manuscript copies of Ibn Battuta's travelogue, which document his extensive travels across Africa, Asia, and Europe during the 14th century. By scrutinizing these manuscripts, the research reveals significant insights into the cultural and intellectual currents of the medieval Islamic world. It highlights the role of travel literature in transmitting knowledge and preserving history. Moreover, the study emphasizes the challenges of textual inconsistencies and the necessity for careful historiographical interpretation. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Ibn Battuta's legacy and the manuscripts' relevance to both historical and modern contexts.

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