

MARCO POLO

While much of Asia was taken over by the Mongols, almost the whole length of the Silk Routes came under one power. Above all this meant that there was relative peace along the routes. It was at this time that the famous journey of Marco Polo took place in 1271. He set out with his father and uncle from Venice, in northern Italy in search of trade. They reached China three years later and were well received by the Kublai Khan in Shang-du. For the next 17 years they worked for Kublai Khan who finally allowed them to return. They sailed around India and the Persian Gulf, finally arriving in Venice in 1295. During an imprisonment by Venice's rival trading city of Genoa, Marco Polo dictated an account of his travels to the East.

IBN BATTUTA

Muhammad Ibn Mattuta travelled from his native Tangier in Morocco to China between 1325 and 1354. His main reason for the journey was to make a pilgrimage to Mecca (the hajj) but he travelled across north Africa and Eurasia as well as China.

Although his interest was mainly Muslim holy men and places, his accounts and descriptions of places are a valuable source of evidence. He dictated his account in Tangier between 1354 and 1357.

BENEDIKT GOES

In 1594 the Portuguese Jesuit Benedict Goës joined a mission to the Mughal Emperor Akbar, where he was chosen to join an exploratory mission to China via Kashgar. He died before reaching Beijing. In 1615 his notes and letters and some oral accounts were combined by the Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci into his travel journal. The account is a unique record by a European of the difficulties and dangers of travel on the overland trade routes in central Asia at the beginning of the 17th century. His route took him across the Amu Darya long the southern Silk Routes close to Bactra (later called Balkh).



A trading caravan of merchants and camels from a Spanish 14th-century map - the Catalan Atlas.