Preface to the Revised Edition

The year 2004 marks the seven hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abu 'Abdallah ibn Battuta, the Muslim lawyer who crisscrossed the Eastern Hemisphere in the second quarter of the fourteenth century and, with the help of a literary collaborator, wrote a lengthy account of what he saw and did. The world should take note of the septcentenary of this pious and educated Moroccan traveler. Not only did he give us a precious description of places, people, politics, and lifeways in nearly all the urbanized lands of Eurasia and Africa in the later medieval era, he also exposed the premodern roots of globalization. His tale reveals that by the fourteenth century the formation of dense networks of communication and exchange had linked in one way or another nearly everyone in the hemisphere with nearly everyone else. From Ibn Battuta's Rihla, or Book of Travels, we discover the webs of interconnection that stretched from Spain to China and from Kazakhstan to Tanzania, and we can see that already in the Moroccan's time an event occurring in one part of Eurasia or Africa might reverberate, in its effects, thousands of miles away.

Sailing the Arabian Sea in a two-masted dhow or leading his horse over a snow-covered pass in the Hindu Kush, Ibn Battuta could not have dreamed of the speed and intensity of human interchange today. Even since 1987, when the first edition of this book appeared, humankind has made astonishing advances in electronic technology and communication. One small irony of this "information revolution" is that Ibn Battuta himself has journeyed deeper into the popular imagination. He is today a more familiar historical figure among both Muslims and non-Muslims than he was twenty-five years ago. This has happened, I think, partly because of the increasing intensity of political and cultural relations between Muslim and Western countries and partly because of the broadening of international curriculums in schools and universities, notably in the United States, to embrace Asian and African societies, including famous men and women of the Muslim past.

In the United States, virtually all high school and college world history textbooks introduce Ibn Battuta, and in the past several
years I have had numerous invitations to talk about his adventures with middle and high school teachers and students. In 1994, the Hakluyt Society published the fourth and final volume of the English translation of the *Rihla*, bringing to conclusion a project that began in 1929! Other publications of recent years include a travel writer’s account of journeys tracing Ibn Battuta’s path across the Eastern Hemisphere, an abridged edition of the Hakluyt Society translation, a new edition of an English translation of the Moroccan’s East and West African trips, and an attractively illustrated commentary in Danish.

Several popular magazines have featured Ibn Battuta, including *National Geographic*. A Spanish-Moroccan production team made a documentary film about him in the mid-1990s, and currently at least two film projects are in the works. In 1993, Moroccan scholars organized an international conference on their native son in Tangier, his birthplace. In 1999, the Islamic Museum of Kuwait produced an enchanting one-man act and multimedia show called “The Travels of Ibn Battuta.” Several publications for young people have appeared in English, including a teaching unit for high school students, an issue of the world history magazine *Calliope*, and a fantasy of the “Indiana Jones” variety titled *Ibn Battuta in the Valley of Doom*. In San Francisco a middle school teacher has developed a detailed Ibn Battuta website. Finally, I must mention that in 1976, the International Astronomical Union honored the traveler by naming a lunar crater after him. It is eleven kilometers wide and on the near side of the moon.

I was pleased indeed when the University of California Press agreed to publish this new edition, a seven-hundredth-birthday present to Ibn Battuta. I have made limited changes. I have taken account of the scholarly literature in Western languages that has appeared since 1987, as well as the insights and corrections published in reviews of the first edition. With the exception of an essay by Amikam Elad, who demonstrates that much of Ibn Battuta’s description of Syria and Palestine is copied from the travel account of the thirteenth-century traveler Muhammad al-’Abdari, I have seen no new research that significantly alters what we know about the *Rihla* or Ibn Battuta’s life. Some new work, however, has offered insights on the *Rihla*’s chronology, itinerary, and reliability. My references to new work are mainly in the chapter endnotes.

The only change I have made to the bibliography is the addition of a new section, “Supplemental Sources for the 2004 Edition.” I
have also retained the same sources of translations from the *Rihla*, which mainly means that I have not quoted from volume four of the Hakluyt Society edition. I have made certain spelling changes—for example, "Qur'an" instead of "Koran"—and I have replaced the Wade-Giles with the pinyin system for romanizing Chinese place names.

I am indebted to reviewers who pointed out mistakes and interpretive flaws in the first edition, and I would like to thank Tim Macintosh-Smith for meticulously rereading the book and sending me valuable comments. I greatly appreciate the efforts of Mari Coates, my University of California Press editor, whose enthusiasm for the new edition helped me meet her timetable for revisions. Finally, I thank Laura Ryan for research assistance.

Ross E. Dunn
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Notes

1. See the bibliography for the complete citation. The Hakluyt Society has also published an index to the *Rihla* in a fifth volume. C. F. Beckingham intended to produce a sixth volume, an extended commentary on IB's itinerary and chronology. Sadly, Prof. Beckingham passed away in 1998.


6. Amikam Elad, "The Description of the Travels of Ibn Battuta in Palestine: Is It Original?,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1987), 256–272. Also, Dr. Abdelhadi Tazi, the leading Moroccan authority on IB, has found documentary evidence suggesting that he died in the town of Anfa, not Tangier, where his putative tomb is located.