The Black Plague from the Perspective of Traveler Ibn Battuta Using GIS

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Project Background: The objective of this project was to map traveler Abu Abdallah Muhammad Ibn Battuta's interaction with the Black Plague during the 14th century. Ibn Battuta was an Islamic scholar and traveler from Tangier, Morocco whose travels took him from North Africa to East Africa, across the Middle East, and throughout Asia. This image focuses on two of Ibn Battuta's major journeys. His first journey was from Tangier, Morocco to Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The second journey seen here was from China to modern day Syria, where he encountered the Black Plague, and then his return back home to Morocco.

The Spread of the Plague: The two most probable ways the Black Plague spread throughout the known world in the 14th century were through land and sea merchants. One of the most likely land routes through which the plague spread was the Silk Road that stretched from China to the Middle East, then on to the Mediterranean, which was the gateway to Europe. The purple lines represents the ancient Silk Road and the black markers represent cities and towns through which the plague likely traveled with the flow of commerce to and from China.

The Middle East: As a Muslim, the Middle East was of great importance to Battuta because of locations such as Cairo, Medina, and Mecca. These locations were major hubs of political, economic and religious influence and Battuta visited them several times throughout his travels.

Plague Encounter: Battuta encountered the Black Plague on his way to Damascus in modern day Syria in 1348. The black markers are locations where the plague documented to have been. The blue circles indicate the places he visited on his first journey. The red circles indicate locations where Battuta visited on his return home to Morocco.

Pop-Ups: On the time slider map, you can access information about any location by left clicking on it. This is an example of the pop-up in each point on the map which contains a description of the location and its importance within Battuta's journey. Pop-ups will also contain source information and other research related data.

Places: These are the modern boundaries of the places Battuta visited during his 20+ years of travel.