
United Nations
Group of Experts on
Geographical Names

Working Paper
No. 42

Eighteenth Session
Geneva, 12-23 August 1996

Item 13
of the Provisional Agenda

MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON
PUBLICITY AND FUNDING

WORKING GROUP ON PUBLICITY AND FUNDING

Submitted by H A G Lewis

WORKING GROUP ON PUBLICITY AND FUNDING

At the Seventeenth Session of UNGEGN I was charged with the preparation of a work on the famous Ibn Battuta and other famous persons in history who have contributed to the world's stock of geographical names. I have read thoroughly Ibn Battuta and also works on the Omani navigators. In this connection, I have read "Ibn Majid and the Portuguese" by the distinguished Dr. Abdul Hadi Al-Tazi, a work which is in Arabic only.

The standard book on the subject of Ibn Battuta is the four-volume work of a predecessor of mine as Chairman of the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names: Professor H.A.R. Gibb. I think I may have found one or two possible, useful and constructive comments on his scholarly work but I do not think it can be much improved upon.

There is great doubt in my mind about Ibn Battuta's reputed journey to China. Some writers believe he never visited China at all, but then some scholars have recently challenged Marco Polo's account of his long sojourn in that country. There is more to disbelieve in parts of Marco Polo than there is in Ibn Battuta. I have verified independently most of the places which Ibn Battuta visited. I cannot say the same about Marco Polo. There is great uncertainty about the identity of many of them. As to the Omani (or Arab) navigators, there is little of real substance of relevance to geographical names and there is, moreover, a certain amount of dispute about the location of some of the places mentioned.