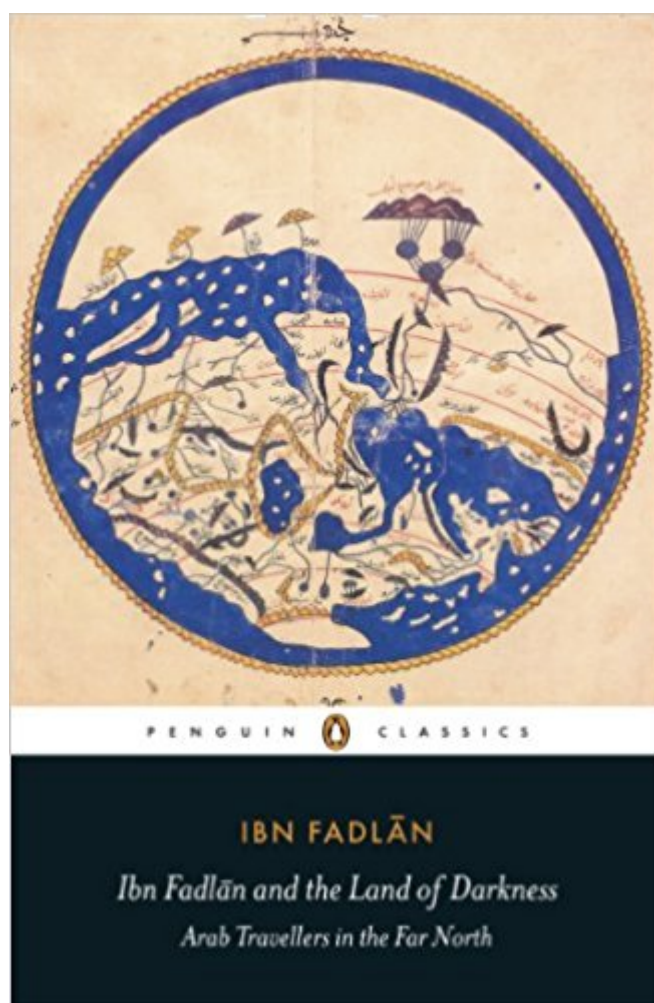


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# Ibn Fadlan And The Land Of Darkness: Arab Travellers In The Far North (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

A fascinating collection of medieval Arabic travel writing in an important new translation. Between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, Arab explorers journeyed widely and frequently into the far north, crossing territories that now include Russia, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. Ibn Fadla-n's chronicles of his travels are one of the most important documents from the period, and this illuminating new translation offers insight into the world of the Arab geographers and the medieval lands of the far north. Based on an expedition to the upper Volga River in 922 AD, *Ibn Fadla-n and the Land of Darkness* provides a rare and valuable glimpse of Viking customs, dress, table manners, religion, and sexual practices, including the only eyewitness account ever written of a Viking ship cremation. For more than seventy years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,700 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[An] exceptional little anthology. . . . It is a fascinating book, with a nugget of curious information on each page, adding up to a picture that turns preconceptions on their head. . . . These are not just interesting books: they go a long way towards undermining the stereotypes about Islam that have become such a toxic part of our current discourse." — *The Scotsman*

Ibn Fadlan was a tenth-century diplomat who, in 922 AD, was sent on a mission from Baghdad to the far north by the caliph Muqtadir. His subsequent account of his travels and the peoples he encountered is one of the most important documents from the period. Paul Lunde studied at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies and specializes in Islamic history and literature. He is the author of *Islam: Culture, Faith, and History* and is working on an Internet project to map pre-modern Eurasian cultural and intellectual exchanges. Caroline Stone has edited and written numerous books and articles, principally on textile history, medieval history and literature, Islamic culture and literature, and the cultural and economic relations between Europe and the Orient in the pre-modern era. With Paul Stone, she is translating a collection of the writings by the Arab geographer Mas'udi for Penguin Classics.

As someone who has always had an interest in the middle ages but never read any books on the subject, or done any research on it, this was very enjoyable and readable. I had previously assumed that Vikings and Arabs never ranged anywhere near each other, but in truth both of their trading routes extended throughout Europe at this time. The book even details a few Viking raids on settlements within the Muslim empire. Of especial interest to me was the Arab accounts of the mythical "Alexander's Wall", according to Muslim myth built somewhere in the far north in ancient times to keep Gog and Magog at bay--these being tribes of giants and savages that would one day break through the wall and destroy all civilization, bringing about the apocalypse. I can't help but notice that this myth seems to have inspired George R.R. Martin's *Song of Fire and Ice* series. Some of the descriptions of northern cultures in this book are so gruesome, however, that they make Martin's *Game of Thrones* look like a fairytale for children-- I'm referring of course to the eyewitness account of a Viking ship cremation funeral which seems to be one of the main advertising points for this book. The Viking ship cremation is portrayed so often in modern media as a glorification of the Viking culture, but what they conveniently leave out in these depictions is the sexual orgies and subsequent sacrifice of slave girls, and the butchering of horses, chickens, etc., the meat of which is all piled high on top of the deceased noble so that they can serve him in the afterlife. The author goes into great detail about this whole process, objectively reporting it without any emotional input. If you're like me you'll struggle with the Muslim names and terms, but keeping track of all the individuals in the book is not needed in order to enjoy it. Another con is that later in the book some of the accounts become repetitive, talking excessively about some of the more uninteresting aspects of furs and trading, etc., but after wading through a few pages of that you'll surely find

something new of interest.

It is always interesting to read the first person accounts of historical situations. It is often much more enlightening than later "interpretations of history. This was no exception. Very readable.

If you've ever seen "The Thirteenth Warrior" with Antonio Banderas (an adult muslim man with out a beard?!?!) This real historical origin for the Michael Crichton book "Eaters of the Dead" will give you a whole new respect for both Arabic and Viking history. This book contains the ONLY known eye witness account of a Viking funeral. Fascinating and horrific all at the same time. A History lovers delight.

Really enjoyable and astonishing in that Arab traders and diplomats ranged so far north, east and west, and had harrowing experiences that they survived.

Great little book you get first off, a really nice cover and the short histories of trips by Ibn Fadlan really get you into those people and places. Great narrative.

some of the earliest recorded history of the first contacts with viking traders on the Volga, Don, and Dnieper rivers in the near east and what would become western Russia.fast service as usual.

It is a work of history not fiction. A plot description seems odd. It is an account by a traveler and what he witnessed.

Good history reveal and interesting to see events from different eyes and culture. A must read if you want to learn about our beginnings of culture.

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