



Mission to the Volga (Library of Arabic Literature)

Ahmad Ibn Fadlan

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“A compelling account which is, among other things, the earliest first-hand description of travel from the Muslim world.”

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Mission to the Volga is the earliest surviving instance of sustained first-person travel narrative in Arabic—a pioneering text of peerless historical and literary value. In its pages, we move north on a diplomatic mission from Baghdad to the upper reaches of the Volga River in what is now central Russia.

In this colorful documentary from the tenth century, the enigmatic Ibn Faʿlan relates his experiences as part of an embassy sent by Caliph al-Muqtadir to deliver political and religious instruction to the recently-converted King of the Bulgars. During eleven months of grueling travel, Ibn Faʿlan records the marvels he witnesses on his journey, including an aurora borealis and the white nights of the North. Crucially, he offers a description of the Viking Rus, including their customs, clothing, body painting, and a striking account of a ship funeral. Together, these anecdotes illuminate a vibrant world of diversity during the heyday of the Abbasid Empire, narrated with as much curiosity and zeal as they were perceived by its observant beholder.

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