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



PENGUIN CLASSICS

IBN FADLĀN

Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness
Arab Travellers in the Far North



Synopsis

In 922 AD, an Arab envoy from Baghdad named Ibn Fadlan encountered a party of Viking traders on the upper reaches of the Volga River. In his subsequent report on his mission he gave a meticulous and astonishingly objective description of Viking customs, dress, table manners, religion and sexual practices, as well as the only eyewitness account ever written of a Viking ship cremation. Between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, Arab travellers such as Ibn Fadlan journeyed widely and frequently into the far north, crossing territories that now include Russia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Their fascinating accounts describe how the numerous tribes and peoples they encountered traded furs, paid tribute and waged wars. This accessible new translation offers an illuminating insight into the world of the Arab geographers, and the medieval lands of the far north.

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Customer Reviews

Most people with any interest in the Vikings have heard of Ibn Fadlan, the Arab traveler who famously witnessed the funeral of a Rus chieftain during a Diplomatic visit to the Bulgars. This short but evocative (and provocative) account was repeated in Michael Crichton's rather silly novel "Eaters of the Dead", and then again (in more fanciful form) in the even sillier film 13th Warrior. Some are

also familiar with some other fragments, such as a more sympathetic account of some Vikings in the trading town of Hedeby. Well, it turns out there are quite a few of these little fragments, almost all of which are collected in this book "Ibn Fadlan and the Land of Darkness", along with other equally interesting accounts of travels by Muslim merchants and diplomats in Northern Europe and Western Central-Asia, among such interesting characters as the Slavs, the mysterious and evocative Khazars (the Worlds only ever Empire of Jewish Turks), the Bulgars, the Magyars, Norsemen and Saxons. Among other things I found interesting it includes the first ever (early 10th Century) account of Prague at a time when I think it was still pagan, (described as a prosperous stone city with very cheap provisions and good quality trade goods) a 10th Century description of Mainz (in which they mention the markets included cloves and ginger from the East Indies) and a first hand account of the then Danish town of Schleswig in which the locals are described as wearing eye-make-up, as well as trips into the far north (the land of darkness) and descriptions of ice skating and dog sleds and other exotica. Maybe the most gripping part was a short but by far the most epic account of a (Rus) Viking raid that I've ever read.

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