

Chapter 11 Primary Source Activity

The founder of the Mughal empire in India (textbook pages 274–275) was Babur (1483–1530), a many-talented leader and statesman. Besides being a strong soldier who led a successful Muslim invasion of India, Babur was also a skilled poet and the author of a diary of his adventurous life, called the *Babur-nama*. In this excerpt, Babur tells how he and his soldiers crossed a snowy mountain pass near Kabul (present-day Afghanistan) in the winter of 1506–07. ♦ *As you read, try to get an impression of Babur as a leader. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

Babur's Army Crosses the Mountains

We went on for nearly a week, trampling down the snow and not getting forward more than two or three miles a day. I was one of the snow-stampers, with 10 or 15 of my household. . . . These mentioned used to go forward for 7 or 8 yards, stamping the snow down and at each step sinking to the waist or the breast. After a few steps the leading man would stand still, exhausted by the labor, and another would go forward. By the time 10, 15, 20 men had stamped the snow down, it became so that a horse might be led over it. . . .

That night the snow fell in such an amazing blizzard of cutting wind that every man feared for his life. The storm had become extremely violent by the time we reached the *khawal*, as people in those parts call a mountain-cave or hollow. We dismounted at its mouth. Deep snow! a one-man road! and even on that stamped-down and trampled road, pitfalls for horses! the days at their shortest! The first arrivals reached the cave by daylight; others kept coming in from the Evening Prayer till the Bed-time one. . . .

. . . I did not go into the cave though people kept saying, "Come inside," because this was in my mind,

"Some of my men in snow and storm, I in the comfort of a warm house! the whole horde outside in misery and pain, I inside sleeping at ease! That would be far from a man's act, quite another matter than comradeship. Whatever hardship and wretchedness there is, I will face; what strong men stand, I will stand. . . ."

Till the Bed-time Prayer, I sat through that blizzard of snow and wind in the dugout, the snowfall being such that my head, back, and ears were overlaid four hands thick. The cold of that night affected my ears. At the Bed-time Prayer someone, looking more carefully at the cave, shouted out, "It is a very roomy cave with place for everybody." On hearing this I shook off my roofing of snow and, asking the braves near to come also, went inside. There was room for 50 or 60! People brought out their rations, cold meat, parched grain, whatever they had. From such cold and tumult to a place so warm, cosy, and quiet!

Next day the snow and wind having ceased, we made an early start and we got to the pass by again stamping down a road in the snow.

Source: The *Babur-nama* in English, trans. Annette S. Beveridge (Luzac & Co., 1922).



ILLUSTRATION/PHOTO CREDIT: VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM.

Questions to Think About

1. What did Babur and his men have to do to make their way through the snow? What other hardships faced them on this journey?
2. What pillar of Islam does Babur mention as part of their daily routine?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** What do you think of Babur as a leader? What evidence can you find in his account to show the kind of leader he was?
4. **Activity** Have you ever been in a challenging situation like those that Babur and his soldiers faced—such as being lost in the woods or having to walk in a blizzard? Write a paragraph or journal entry about your adventure.