

## KINGDOMS AND TRADING STATES OF AFRICA

**Traveler's Tales**

A Moroccan *qadi*, or judge, Ibn Battuta (about 1304–1368) was born in Tangier to a Berber family of the Muslim faith. After he completed his education at age 21, Battuta decided to make the hajj, or Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. What started as a reasonably challenging trek for the period became one of the great journeys of medieval times. During nearly 30 years of travel, Battuta visited much of Southwest Asia, West Africa, southern Russia, India, and China. In this excerpt from his book, the *Rihlah*, or *Travels*, Battuta describes parts of his journey. ♦ *As you read, note Battuta's descriptions of the places he visits. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

**Ibn Battuta's Journey**

On leaving Zayla we sailed for fifteen days and came to Maqdasha [Mogadishu], which is an enormous town. Its inhabitants are merchants and have many camels, of which they slaughter hundreds every day [for food]. When a vessel reaches the port, it is met by *sumbuqs*, which are small boats, in each of which are a number of young men, each carrying a covered dish containing food. He presents this to one of the merchants on the ship saying "This is my guest," and all the others do the same. Each merchant on disembarking goes only to the house of the young man who is his host. . . . The host then sells his goods for him and buys for him, and if anyone buys anything from him at too low a price, or sells to him in the absence of his host, the sale is regarded by them as invalid. . . .

At Sijilmasa [at the edge of the desert] I bought camels and a four months' supply of forage for them. Thereupon I set out . . . with a caravan including, amongst others, a number of the merchants of Sijilmasa.

After twenty-five days we reached Taghaza, an unattractive village, with the curious feature that its houses and mosques

are built of blocks of salt, roofed with camel skins. There are no trees there, nothing but sand. In the sand is a salt mine; they dig for the salt, and find it in thick slabs, lying one on top of the other, as though they had been tool-squared and laid under the surface of the earth. . . .

We passed ten days of discomfort there, because the water is brackish and the place is plagued with flies. . . .

We came next to Tisarahla, a place of subterranean water-beds [lakes], where the caravans halt. They stay there three days to rest, mend their waterskins, fill them with water, and sew on them covers of sackcloth as a precaution against the wind. . . .

Thus we reached the town of Iwalatan [Walata] after a journey from Sijilmasa of two months to a day. . . . I was shown honour and entertained by its inhabitants. It is an excessively hot place, and boasts a few small date-palms, in the shade of which they sow watermelons. . . .

Source: *Travels in Asia and Africa 1325–1354*, by Ibn Battuta, trans. and ed. H. A. R. Gibb (London: Broadway House, 1929).

**Questions to Think About**

1. What are some of the memorable features of Taghaza for Ibn Battuta?
2. Besides Taghaza, what other places does Ibn Battuta visit?
3. **Analyze Credibility** Do you think Ibn Battuta's descriptions of the places he visits are accurate? Explain why or why not, using examples or phrases from the excerpt.
4. **Activity** Use an outline map of Africa and additional research to trace Ibn Battuta's route as it is described in this excerpt.