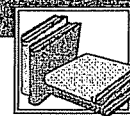


**Chapter 12 Biography Activity**

Most of the contemporary accounts of medieval Africa were written by Arab Muslim travelers, many of them from North Africa. One of the most entertaining of these travel writers was Ibn Battuta, who in the mid-1300s visited both Mali and the trading states of East Africa (textbook page 290). ♦ *As you read, think about what traveling was like in the Middle Ages. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, answer the questions that follow.*

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**Ibn Battuta (1304–1368/69)**

The writer whom we know as Ibn Battuta was one of the most widely traveled of all the Muslim writers of the Middle Ages, covering some 75,000 miles. He was born in 1304 into a Berber family in Tangier, in North Africa (modern Morocco). His full name was Muhammad ibn Abdullah ibn Battuta.

Ibn Battuta began traveling in his twenties, going to Egypt and Syria and living for a time in the Muslim holy cities of Mecca and Medina. By 1331 he was visiting Kilwa and Mombasa in East Africa. His report begins, "Then I set off by sea from the town of Mogadishu for the land of the Swahili and the town of Kilwa, which is in the land of the Zanj. . . . Kilwa is one of the most beautiful and well-constructed towns in the world. The roofs are built with mangrove poles. There is very much rain."

Typically, Ibn Battuta's travel writings are full of fascinating details about people, their clothing and jewelry, the houses and gardens of the cities, and local customs. Traveling by small ship or by caravan through deserts and wild mountain country, Ibn Battuta traveled through much of Africa and around the Mediterranean. He then went eastward

to India, Ceylon, and China. He served as a judge in the Delhi sultanate. Later he went to Spain, which was then part of the Muslim world.

Some twenty years after he visited East Africa, Ibn Battuta began a journey to the great empire of Mali in West Africa. Again, he made the journey by the difficult and dangerous caravan route across the

western Sahara, which he described as "a desert haunted by demons." Making many long stopovers, he traveled on to the capital of Mali on the Niger River, where he met (and described) its sultan.

In his other travels, Ibn Battuta also managed to meet many of the other famous kings and conquerors of the time, including the khan of the Golden Horde. He left a colorful record of local peoples and customs throughout the Muslim world and beyond. In his late fifties he dictated

his memoirs to Ibn Juzayy, who made a book of them.

Coming from the sophisticated Muslim culture of North Africa, Ibn Battuta was always aware and curious about the way people lived in the distant places he visited. His outlook makes him still entertaining to read today. Ibn Battuta died in Marrakesh, in North Africa.

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**Questions to Think About**

1. What was Ibn Battuta's background and birthplace?
2. What were some of the places that Ibn Battuta visited and described?
3. **Drawing Conclusions** From what you know about Ibn Battuta and his travels, do you think he would have been a good traveling companion? Why or why not?