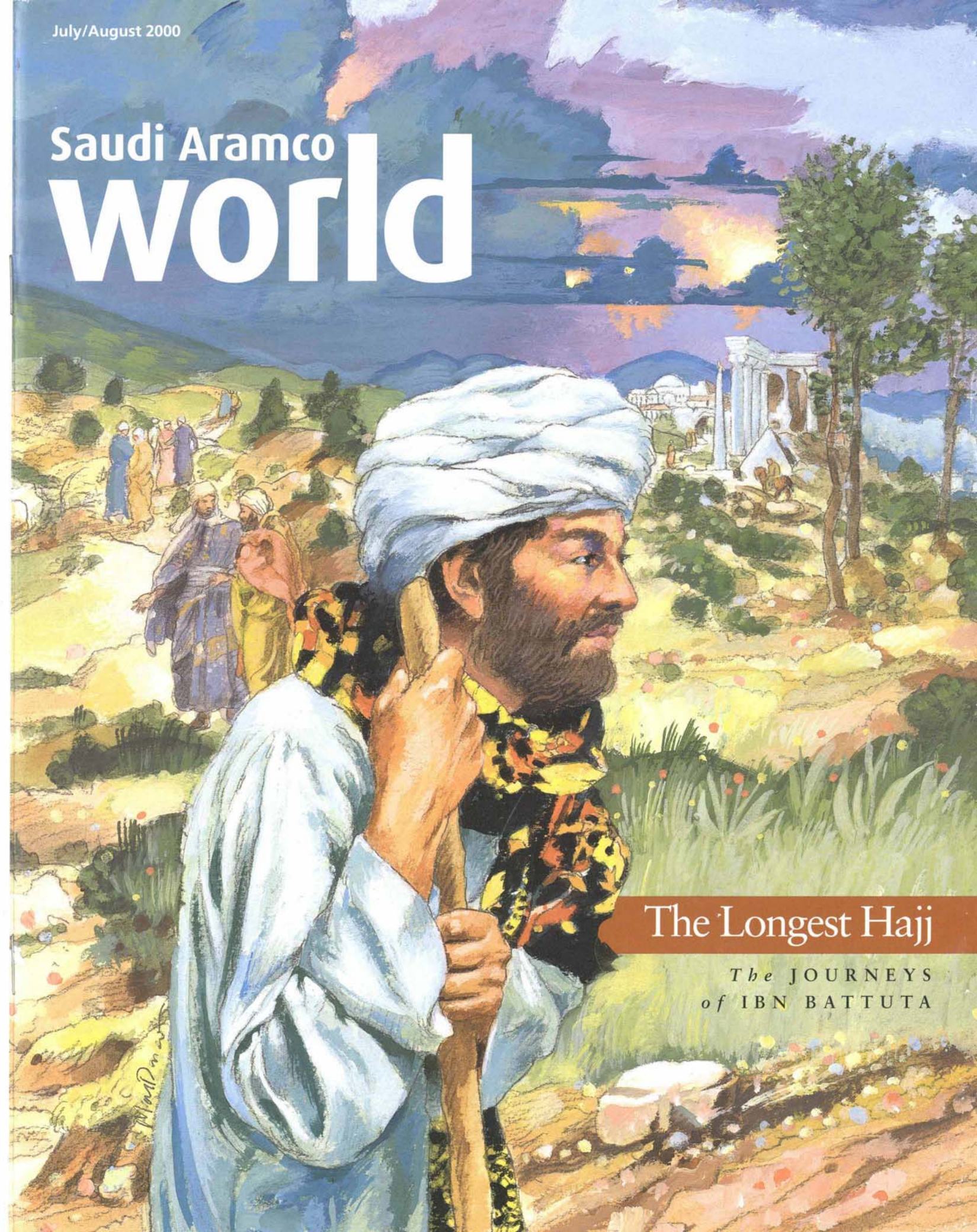




July/August 2000

Saudi Aramco **world**



The Longest Hajj

*The JOURNEYS
of IBN BATTUTA*

The Longest Hajj: The Journeys of Ibn Battuta

By Douglas Bullis

In the early 14th century, a well-educated young man set out from Tangier, on the western edge of the Islamic world, to make the pilgrimage to Makkah. But unlike most pilgrims, he went on from there, beginning some 30 years of travel that took him as far as China, on the Islamic world's other edge. As he roamed three continents he earned his living, and a growing reputation, as a judge, advisor and diplomat in the service of local rulers; survived piracy, shipwreck and royal disfavor; and saw more of the world than anyone else in his time. When he finally returned to Morocco, the memoirs he dictated became a turning point in Arab literature.

Part One From Pilgrim to Traveler: Tangier to Makkah

In 1325, Ibn Battuta was an aspiring Moroccan jurist who set out for Makkah along the North African coast, passing through Cairo and Damascus. But when the rites of the Hajj ended, he didn't go home: He continued east.



Part Two From Riches to Rags: Makkah to India

From Arabia by the least direct route to the Volga, and across the Mongol-ruled steppe to the Hindu Kush: Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi in 1334, where the sultan made him a judge and an ambassador, and the sea made him a pauper.



Part Three From Traveler to Memoirist: China, Mali and Home

After intrigues in the Maldives, he sojourned in Bengal and Sumatra before reaching China. Plague cast its pall over his return to Morocco; from there he visited Andalusia and Mali. In 1354, the Sultan of Fez commissioned the recording of his tales. Today, the *Rihla* of the indefatigable Ibn Battuta is the most detailed and fascinating travelogue of the Islamic middle ages.

Cover:



No portraits of Ibn Battuta have come down to us, though sketches of him appeared in the bazaars of several Chinese cities when he traveled there. Indeed, almost nothing is known of him personally, and he ended his days, according to a late-14th-century biographical dictionary, as "qadi in some town or other." Yet his accounts of all he saw, heard and experienced in his travels across what today are more than 40 countries give us valuable, often unique, pictures of the world of Islam in his time.

Back Cover:

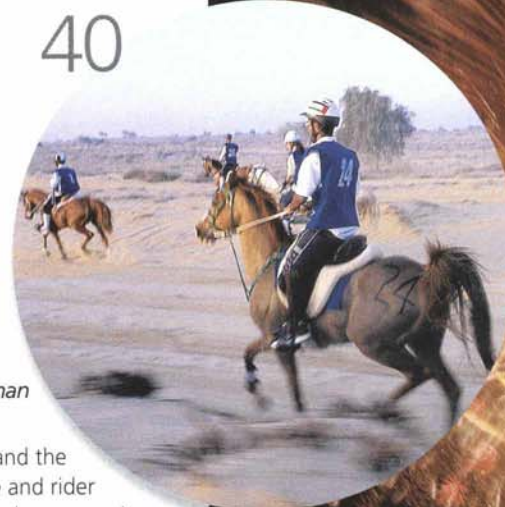


Though Ibn Battuta traveled some 120,000 kilometers and dealt with princes and pirates, he was by training and profession a scholar of Islamic law. As he moved from place to place, he missed few opportunities to discuss fine points of law with colleagues and study in local libraries. Indeed, it was Ibn Battuta's credentials as an 'alim, an educated man, that earned him positions and respect wherever he traveled, for in his time the Muslim world and the "civilized world" were largely the same. Cover illustrations by Norman MacDonald.

Duel In The Desert: Endurance Racing in Dubai

By Carol Flake Chapman

Heart and hardship and the bond between horse and rider are the essence of endurance racing, a sport that has found a warm welcome in the United Arab Emirates.

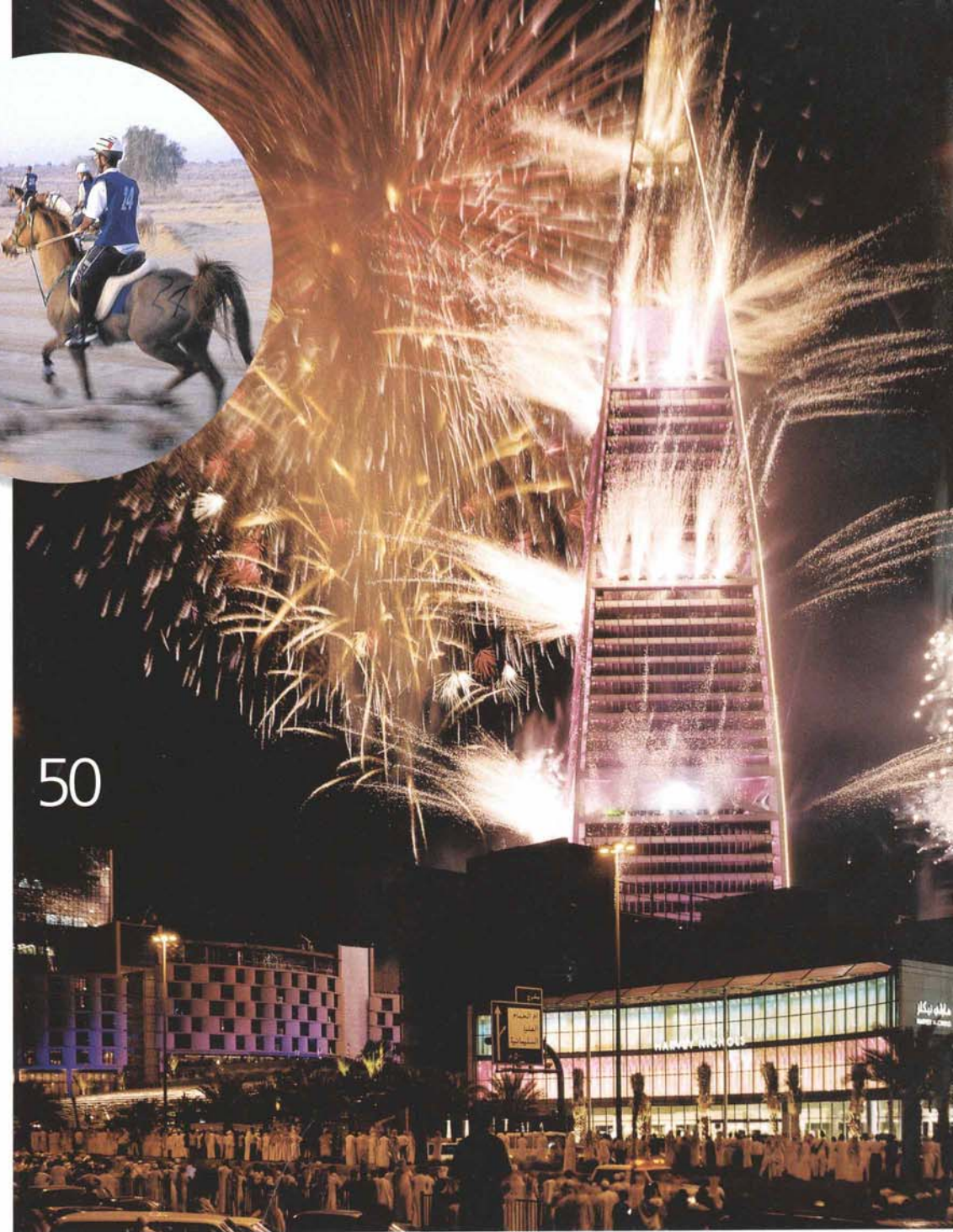


Riyadh: Arab Cultural Capital 2000

By Peter Harrigan

Literature, poetry and history are flourishing in Riyadh, and new books, new buildings and new enterprises demonstrate growing public interest in the intellectual past and future of the city. "We are conservative, but open to experimentation," says a city planner.

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The Longest Hajj

The JOURNEYS of IBN BATTUTA

Written by Douglas Bullis
Illustrated by Norman MacDonald



At age 21, Ibn Battuta "set out alone, having neither fellow-traveler in whose companionship I might find cheer, nor caravan whose party I might join, but swayed by an overmastering impulse within me, and a desire long-cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries [of Makkah and Madinah]. So I braced my resolution to quit all my dear ones...and forsook my home as birds forsake their nests. My parents being yet in the bonds of life, it weighed sorely upon me to part from them, and both they and I were afflicted with sorrow at this separation." He did not return to Tangier until 1349, some 24 years later.



Despite his travels and his book, Ibn Battuta was not a travel writer in the modern sense. Four things can help us today understand what we read about his experiences between 1325 and 1354.

First, though the book is commonly referred to as "the *Rihla*," that is not its title, properly speaking, but its genre. (The title is *Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa-'Aja'ib al-Asfar*, or *A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling*.) The Prophet Muhammad's traditional injunction to "seek knowledge, even as far as China" had the effect of legitimating travel, or even wanderlust, and, in the Islamic middle ages, gave rise to the concept of *al-rihla fi talab al-'ilm*, travel in search of knowledge. In Islamic North Africa in the 12th to 14th centuries, as paper became increasingly widely available, educated men began to pen and circulate first-hand descriptions of their pilgrimages to the Holy Cities of Makkah and Madinah. Such an account was called a *rihla*, or "travelogue," and it combined geographical and social information about the route with the writer's description of and emotional responses to the religious experience of the Hajj. The *rihla* is

thus a category of Arab literature which Ibn Jubayr and, almost a century later, Ibn Battuta brought to its finest flowering.

Though Ibn Battuta's *Rihla* is, at its roots, a work of devotion, its distinction from other works in the category lies in the vast sweep of the writer's secular accounts: He embraces geography, politics, personalities, natural history, local customs and his own exploits, all mostly very far afield from the Holy Cities and the established routes of pilgrimage. Ibn Battuta enlarged the scope of the *rihla* genre.

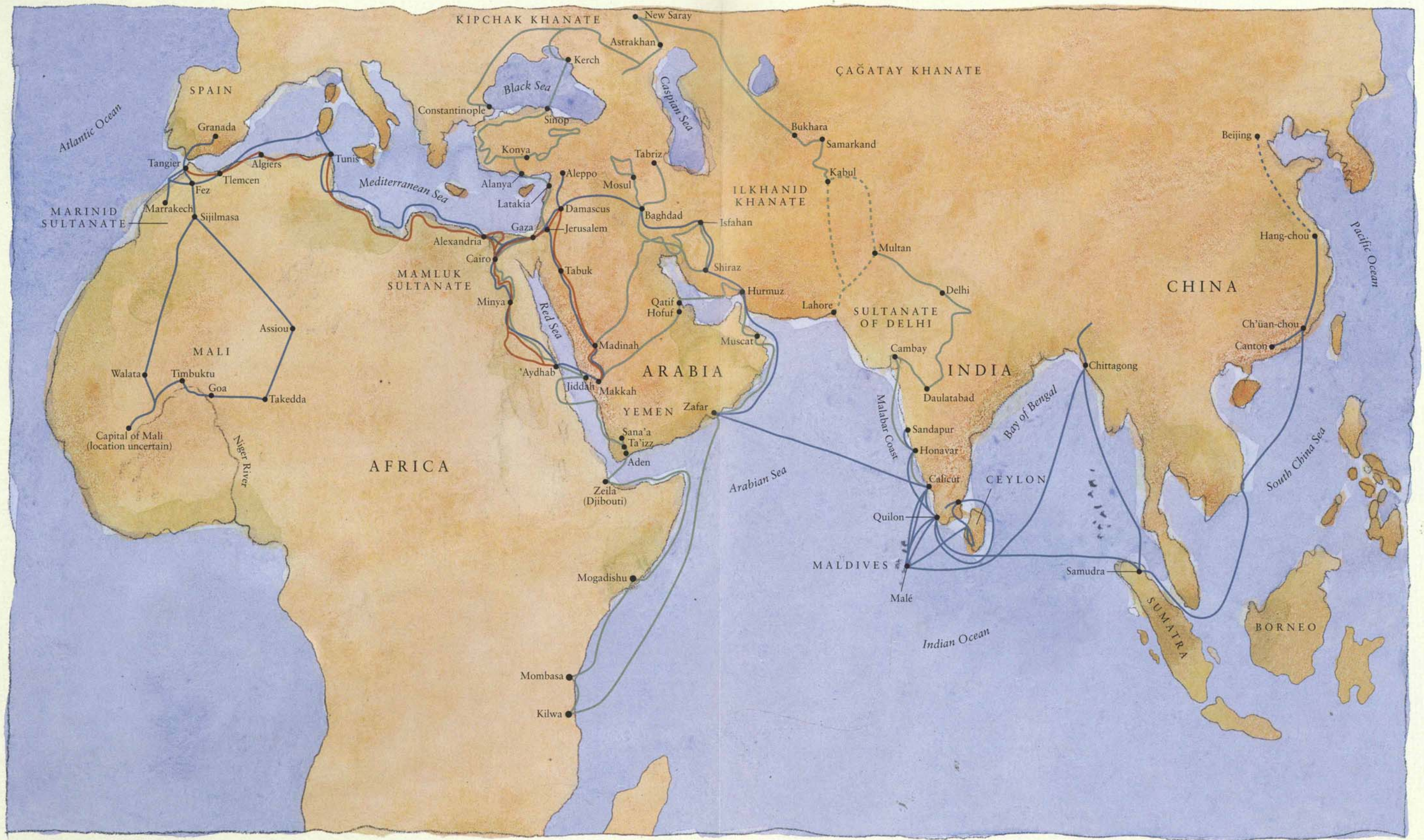
Second, the *Rihla* is a memoir. There is no evidence that Ibn Battuta took any notes that survived his peregrinations. Indeed, writing the *Rihla* was not even the traveler's own idea: It was the brainchild of the Marinid sultan of Fez, who saw reason to record what Ibn Battuta had experienced—or, at least, what Ibn Battuta was able and willing to recall of his experiences. Given this fact, and the duration and complexity of Ibn Battuta's sojourns, his many gaps, inconsistencies and self-regarding embellishments are more understandable.

Third, the *Rihla* is what we would today call an oral history, and Ibn Battuta is not so much its author as its source. He dictated it over the course of two years to the sultan's court poet, who claims, in an introduction, to have approached his assignment with due humility. However, most scholars agree that Ibn Juzayy would have guided and edited Ibn Battuta's recollections, and that, in addition to his own insertions, he took interpretive liberties with some of Ibn Battuta's accounts, in all likelihood to bring them up to stylistic standards of the time and to make them more meaningful to his audience: the sultan in particular and educated gentlemen in general.

Finally, the *Rihla* comprises nearly 1000 pages in the four volumes of its leading English translation, and the present writer and editors have necessarily omitted more than they have included when selecting highlights from this vast text. For example, the present article describes mostly urban, secular experiences, albeit viewed through the eyes of a specialist in Islamic law; however, the *Rihla* abounds in accounts of holy places and revered people that we have largely omitted. Similarly, Ibn Battuta's near-encounter with what he and his shipmates unquestioningly regarded as the legendary *rakhh*, or roc—the bird as big as a mountain that haunted the southern Indian Ocean—is also omitted from the present account.

Thus our world traveler's adventures have been filtered several times—through his own memory, through his scribe's literary preferences, through the modern editors of the Arabic text, through a translator, and through a writer and editors—to become the account you now hold in your hands. Nonetheless, we hope the result makes this astute, often delightfully idiosyncratic traveling companion more understandable than ever, for Ibn Battuta offers the clearest and broadest glimpse available to us of the daily workings of a civilization that was arguably as successful in its worldwide reach 700 years ago as ours is today. He lets us gaze closely at unfamiliar people who, like us, were confident in their civilizational purpose. With Ibn Battuta we can vicariously travel the world during the age when Islam was the very definition of global civilization.

—The Editors



The Journeys of Ibn Battuta

1325-1354

Part 1 — Part 2 — Part 3 —

From Pilgrim to World Traveler

TANGIER *to* MAKKAH

At a time when the greatest speed humans could reach was astride a galloping horse, to travel 120,000 kilometers, or 75,000 miles, in 30 years was a remarkable feat. At a steady pace, it would have worked out to a bit under 11 kilometers (7 mi) a day for almost 11,000 days.

The man who traveled that distance was, according to his chronicler, “the traveler of the age.” He was not the Venetian Marco Polo, but Ibn Battuta of Tangier, who set out eastward in 1325, the year after Polo died. Ibn Battuta’s wanderings stretched from Fez to Beijing, and although he resolved not to travel the same path more than once, he made four Hajj pilgrimages to Makkah, in addition to crossing what, on a modern map, would be more than 40 countries. He met some 60 heads of state—and served as advisor to two dozen of them. His travel memoir, known as the *Rihla*, written after his journeys were complete, names more than 2000 people whom he met or whose tombs he visited. His descriptions of life in Turkey, Central Asia, East and West Africa, the Maldives, the Malay Peninsula and parts of India are a leading source of contemporary knowledge about those areas, and in some cases they are the only source. His word-portraits of sovereigns, ministers and other powerful men are often uniquely astute, and are all the more intimate for being colored by his personal experiences and opinions.

Ibn Battuta was born in the port town of Tangier, then an important debarkation point for travelers to Gibraltar, beyond which lay al-Andalus, Arab Spain, by then reduced from its former extent to include only the brilliant but beleaguered kingdom of Granada.

At age 21, Ibn Battuta set forth at a propitious time in history. The concept of the ‘*umma*, the brotherhood of all



Ibn Battuta does not describe his early life in the *Rihla* nor, for that matter, much of his personal life at all—such matters would have been inappropriate for the literary memoir he was dictating. We know he was trained as a *qadi*, or judge, in the Maliki tradition of jurisprudence, which is one of the four major schools of Islamic legal thought that codified, interpreted and adjudicated *shar'ia*, or Islamic law. He would have studied in mosques and in the homes of his teachers, and at an early age he would have memorized the Qur'an.

believers that transcends tribe and race, had spiritually unified the Muslim world, which stretched from the Atlantic eastward to the Pacific. Islam was the world's most sophisticated civilization during the entire millennium following the fall of Rome. Its finest period was the 800 years between Islam's great first expansion in the seventh and eighth centuries and the advent of European transoceanic mercantilism in the 15th century. During that time, Islam had breathed new life into the sciences, commerce, the arts, literature, law and governance.

Thus the early 14th century, an era remarkable in Europe for gore and misery, was a magnificent time in Dar al-Islam, the Muslim world. A dozen or more varied forms of Islamic culture existed, all sharing the core values taught in the Qur'an, all influencing each other through the constant traffic of scholars, doctors, artists, craftsmen, traders and proselytizing mystics. It was an era of superb buildings, both secular and sacred, a time of intellect and scholarship, of the stability of a single faith and law regulating everyday behavior, of powerful economic inventions such as joint ventures, checks and letters of credit. Ibn Battuta became the first and perhaps the only man to see this world nearly in its entirety.

In Tangier, Shams al-Din Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Muhammad ibn Ibrahim ibn Yusuf al-Lawati al-Tanji Ibn Battuta was born into a well-established family of *qadis* (judges) on February 25, 1304, the year 723 of the Muslim calendar. Beyond the names of his father and grandfathers that are part of his own name, we know little about his family or his biography, for the *Rihla* is virtually our sole source of knowledge of him, and it rarely mentions family matters, which would have been considered private. But we can surmise that, like most children of his time, Ibn Battuta would have started school at the age of six, and his literate life would have begun with the Qur'an. His class—held in a mosque or at a teacher's home—would in all likelihood have been funded by a *waqf*, a religious philanthropic trust or foundation, into which the pious could channel their obligatory charitable giving (*zakat*). Ibn Battuta's parents would have paid his teachers an additional modest sum, in installments due when the boy achieved certain well-defined milestones.

The curriculum of a 14th-century classroom would, in some ways, look remarkably up to date today. Learning, in the first instance, meant the Qur'an, but for urban children especially it did not stop there. Elementary arithmetic was obligatory, for everyone needed to be able to carry on everyday transactions. Secondary education transmitted the bulk of what are now termed vocational skills, including the more complex calculations needed for such practical purposes as the division of an estate among heirs, the surveying of land, or the distribution of profits from a commercial venture. Tertiary or higher education, however, was as much about character development as the subjects taught. Foremost were the refinements of Arabic grammar, since Arabic was not only the language of the Qur'an but also the language of all

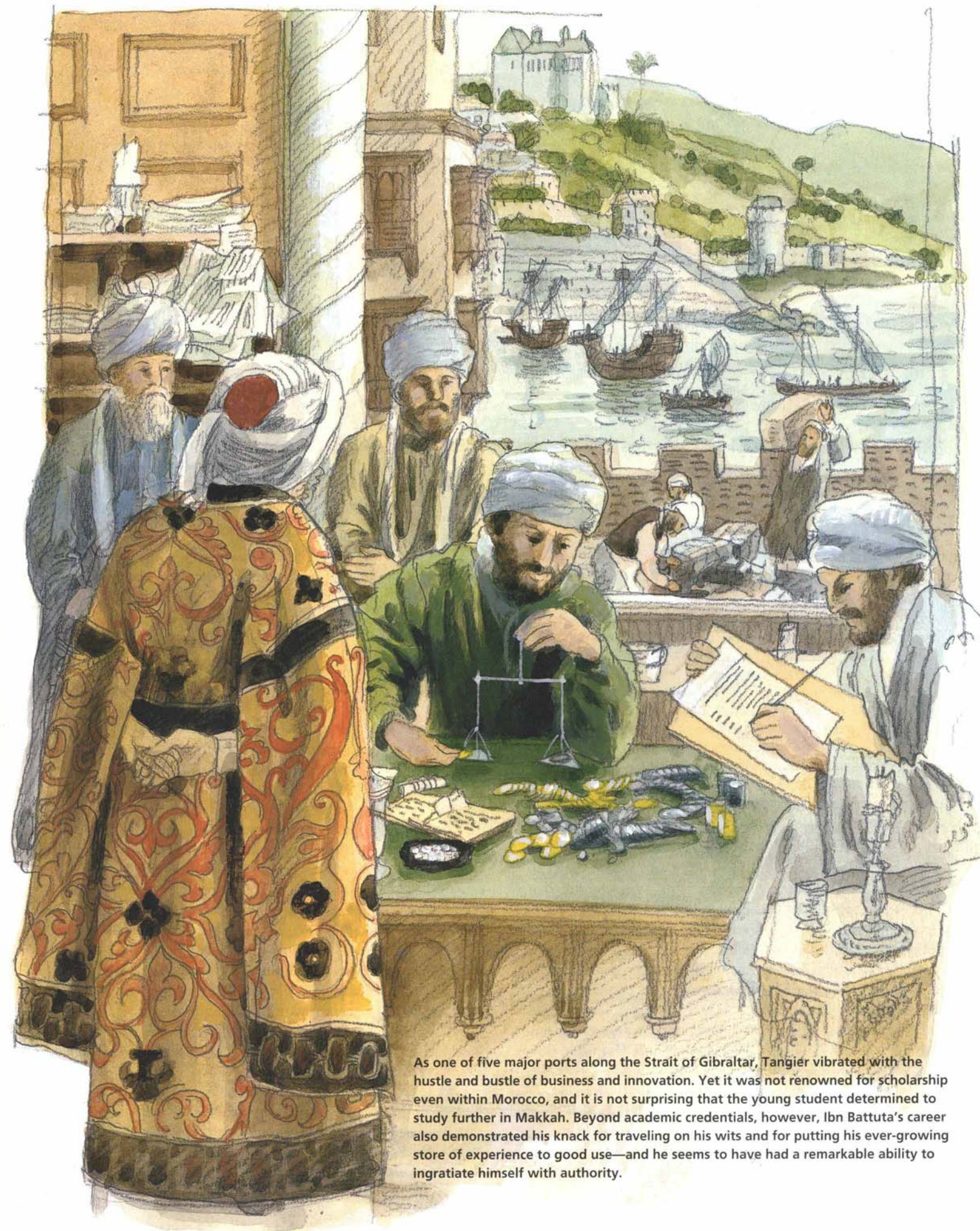
Ibn Battuta lived during a rekindling of Islamic civilization variously called the Post-Mongol Renaissance or the Pax Mongolica. It began in the late 1200's following nearly a century of Mongol invasion, depredation and ensuing economic depression in China, Central Asia, Russia, Persia and the Middle East. By the early 14th century, much of this territory was part of the largest unified empire in history—but one in which the rulers, formerly pagan, had embraced Islam. For the most part, they had turned from conquest to trade, and this led to the restoration of Persia and the Silk Roads cities of Central Asia to their hemispherically central roles. Thus at the time Ibn Battuta set out from Tangier for Makkah, the exchange, even over great distances, of scholars, jurists and other members of the educated Islamic elite was at a historic peak. Travelers like Ibn Battuta could expect to meet other educated gentlemen, with like manners and common values, from all corners of the known world. News would travel with fleets and caravans from the Atlantic in the west to the Pacific in the East—the only boundaries of Dar al-Islam.

educated, let alone scholarly, discourse, and the Muslim *lingua franca* from Timbuktu to Canton. Other subjects taught would have included history, ethics, law, geography and at least some of the military arts.

There were differences from today's practices, too. Young Ibn Battuta's most important goal, as for most young students of his time, was to learn the Qur'an by heart: He refers many times in the *Rihla* to reciting the entire Qur'an aloud in one day while traveling—and a few times, when he felt he needed moral stiffening, twice. Knowledge of the Qur'an took precedence over all other intellectual pursuits, and students whose means permitted traveled from one end of Dar al-Islam to the other to learn its subtleties and its interpretation from the wisest men of the day. Every provincial scholar who desired distinction at home aspired to study in Makkah, Madinah, Baghdad, Damascus, and Cairo—a kind of scholarly Grand Tour. Wandering scholars were given modest free meals and a place to stay in the *madrasas* that dotted the Muslim world, or if no better accommodation were available they slept on mosque floors. No institutional degrees existed; instead the student received a certificate from his teachers. The highest accolade was *adab*, meaning "one who is adept" at manners, taste, wit, grace, gentility, and above all, "knowledge carried lightly."

Ibn Battuta's knowledge of the subtleties of Arabic identified him anywhere as an educated gentleman, but Tangier was not one of the great centers of learning. The knowledge of *fiqh*, or religious law, that he acquired there might perhaps be described as B-level work at a B-list school. So, armed with his earnest but hardly world-tested knowledge, Ibn Battuta set out eastward from Tangier to make his first Hajj, or pilgrimage, to Makkah. In the words he dictated to his scribe three decades later, one can still detect both youthful excitement and youthful misgiving:

"I set out alone, having neither fellow-traveler in whose companionship I might find cheer, nor caravan whose party I might join, but swayed by an overmastering impulse within



As one of five major ports along the Strait of Gibraltar, Tangier vibrated with the hustle and bustle of business and innovation. Yet it was not renowned for scholarship even within Morocco, and it is not surprising that the young student determined to study further in Makkah. Beyond academic credentials, however, Ibn Battuta's career also demonstrated his knack for traveling on his wits and for putting his ever-growing store of experience to good use—and he seems to have had a remarkable ability to ingratiate himself with authority.

me, and a desire long-cherished in my bosom to visit these illustrious sanctuaries [of Makkah and Madinah]. So I braced my resolution to quit all my dear ones...and forsook my home as birds forsake their nests. My parents being yet in the bonds of life, it weighed sorely upon me to part from them, and both they and I were afflicted with sorrow at this separation."

Thirty years were to pass before Ibn Battuta hung up his sandals for good. He set out a pilgrim, probably planning to return to Tangier, but along the way he grew into one of the rarest kinds of travelers: one who voyaged for the sake of voyaging. In the coming years, he would change his itinerary almost on impulse, at the merest hint of the chance to see some new part of Dar al-Islam, to visit a scholar, a revered teacher, or a sultan.

Time after time he set out for a destination in a roundabout, or even an entirely opposite, direction. Once, a mere 40 days by sail from India but facing a months-long wait for favorable winds, he instead set out on a land route that took him there by way of Turkey, a Central Asia and the Hindu Kush, a journey of more than a year.

Ibn Battuta turned his own education and the further knowledge and experience that he gathered on his travels into a respectable and comfortable livelihood. In the early years of his wanderings he found a ready reception as a *qadi*, or judge, and a legal scholar. In that occupation he served municipal governors and lesser dignitaries when asked, or when he needed the work. Later, his fame as a traveler became itself an asset, and he found himself advising caliphs, sultans, and viziers, who compensated him with emoluments that today's travel writers can only dream of.

Hints of the persistence that marked his life appear early on. From Tangier he proceeded east across Mediterranean Morocco and Ifriqiyyah (now Algeria) to Tunis. On the way, two fellow travelers fell ill with a fever. One died; from the other, unscrupulous government agents confiscated his entire estate, which he was carrying, in gold, to his needy heirs. Ibn Battuta himself was so ill that he strapped himself to the saddle of his mule. Yet fare forward he did, determined that "if God decrees my death, it shall be on the road with my face set towards the land of the Hijaz" and Makkah.

He also learned early the manners and courtesies of the road:

At last we came to the town of Tunis.... Townsfolk came forward on all sides with greetings and questions to one another. But not a soul said a word of greeting to me, since there was none of them that I knew. I felt so sad at heart on account of my loneliness that I could not restrain the tears that started to my eyes, and wept bitterly. But one of the

The first *madrasas* were founded at Samarkand and at Khar-gird in northeastern Iran in the ninth century. Within each were a small mosque, lecture rooms, and quarters for students and teachers. Generally the *madrasas* were devoted to the teaching one of what by then had evolved into the four schools of Muslim jurisprudence: the Hanafi, Hanbali and Shafi'i, and Ibn Battuta's own Maliki school. The name of the College of the Booksellers that sheltered Ibn Battuta in Tunis probably indicates that it was supported by the charity of the local booksellers' guild.

pilgrims, realizing the cause of my distress, came up to me with a greeting and friendly welcome, and continued to comfort me with friendly talk until I entered the city, where I lodged in the College of the Booksellers.

It was Ibn Battuta's first and last recorded bout of homesickness. The pilgrim's kindness and the hospitality of the College of the Booksellers made for what was literally a rite of passage. His home was now the fraternity of the 'umma, warmed by the company of the educated men, the 'ulama, whom he would meet in palace courts and *madrasas* wherever he traveled in Dar al-Islam.

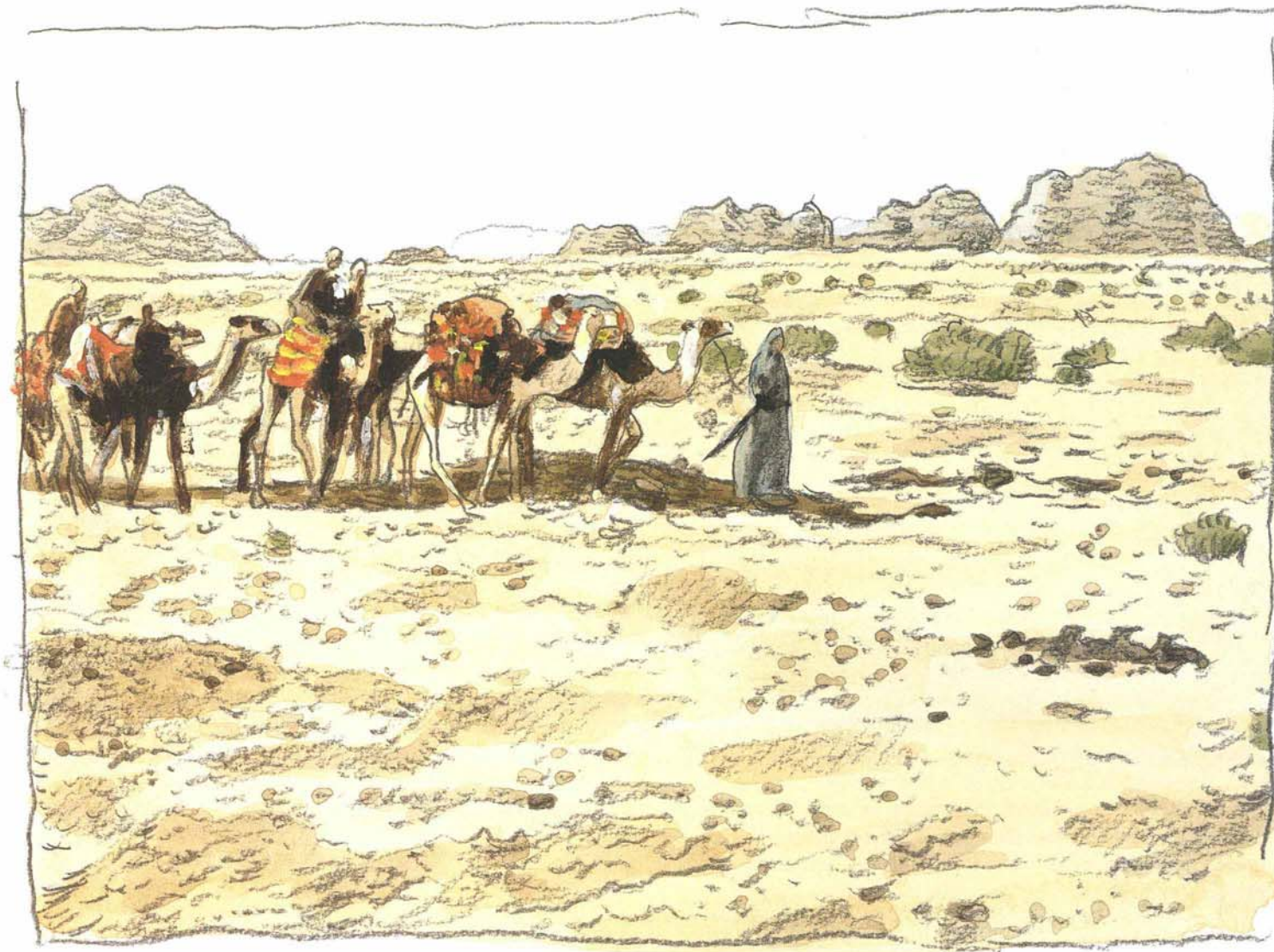
In Tunis, Ibn Battuta joined a caravan headed for Alexandria. There, two things happened to him that, as he relates it, set his sights forever on the travels he eventually undertook. In the first,

I met the pious ascetic Burhan al-Din,...whose hospitality I enjoyed for three days. One day he said to me, "I see that you are fond of traveling through foreign lands." I replied, "Yes, I am" (though as yet I had no thoughts of going to such distant lands as India or China). Then he said, "You must certainly visit my brother Farid al-Din in India, and my brother Rukn al-Din in Sind [Pakistan], and my brother Burhan al-Din in China. When you find them, give them greetings from me." I was amazed at his prediction, but the idea of going to these countries once cast into my mind, my journey never ceased until I had met these three and conveyed his greeting to them.

A few days later, while the guest of the pious Shaykh al-Murshidi, Ibn Battuta had a dream:

I was on the wing of a great bird which was flying me toward Makkah, then to Yemen, then eastward, and thereafter going south, then flying far eastward, and finally landing in a dark, green country, where it left me.... Next morning, the Shaykh interpreted it to me, "You will make the Hajj and visit the Tomb [of the Prophet], and you will travel through Yemen, Iraq, the country of the Turks, and India. You will stay there a long time and meet my brother Dilshad the Indian, who will rescue you from a danger into which you will fall." Never since I departed from him have I received aught but good fortune.

The life-saving Dilshad did indeed arrive to rescue Ibn Battuta from danger in India, and the last sentence quoted above must imply that one breathtaking brush with death after another was in fact "good fortune" when compared to the more catastrophic alternative.



Cairo was Ibn Battuta's first taste of Muslim civilization on a grand scale. He entered Egypt at a time when a far-sighted ruler, a good administrative bureaucracy and a strong economy reinforced each other and together encouraged peace, prosperity, and prestige. Egypt held a virtual monopoly on trade with Asia, which did much to enrich the Mamluk regime, swell the sails of middle-class prosperity, and drive forward the ship of state. To the young man from Tangier, it was nothing short of wonderful:

It is said that in Cairo there are 12,000 water carriers who transport water on camels, 30,000 hirers of mules and donkeys, and on the Nile 36,000 boats belonging to the sultan and his subjects, which sail upstream to Upper Egypt and downstream to Alexandria and Damietta laden with goods and profitable merchandise of all kinds. On the banks of the Nile opposite Cairo is a place known as The Garden, which is a pleasure park and promenade containing many beautiful gardens, for the people of Cairo are given to pleasure and amusements.... The madrasas cannot be counted for multitude.... The Maristan hospital has no description adequate to its beauties....

Ibn Battuta does not hint at the size of the annual pilgrimage caravan by which he traveled from Damascus to the Holy Cities of Madinah and Makkah, except at one point to refer to it as "huge." He describes how it replenished its water supplies in what is now northwestern Saudi Arabia: "Each amir or person of rank has a [private] tank from which his camels and those of his retinue are watered, and their waterbags filled; the rest of the people arrange with the watercarriers [of the oasis] to water the camel and fill the waterskin of each person for a fixed sum of money. The caravan then sets out from Tabuk and pushes on speedily night and day, for fear of this wilderness."

But Makkah was still Ibn Battuta's goal. He sailed up the Nile and caravanned east to 'Aydhah on the Red Sea coast, a transit town "brackish of water and flaming of air." Unfortunately, he arrived at a moment when the ruling clan was in revolt against their Mamluk sovereign in Cairo. So, making the best out of the worst—something he became quite adept at—Ibn Battuta returned to Cairo and crossed the Sinai by camel, sojourning in the *khans* and cities of Palestine and Syria till he reached Damascus, where he could join the annual Hajj caravan to Makkah. The fact that another caravan also left annually from Cairo tells us something of Ibn

Ibn Battuta didn't travel at a steady pace. A ship could make 150 kilometers (93 mi) of progress, or even more, in a day's travel with a following wind, but expectations dropped drastically under less favorable conditions. For reasons of security, most overland travel was conducted in caravans, which on the flat could make 65 kilometers (40 mi) a day, but far less in difficult terrain. Thus "a day's travel" was a relative notion, but in its time it was the most useful measure. Ibn Battuta usually gave distances in "miles," probably meaning the Arab mile, which was 1.9 kilometers, or 1.19 of today's land miles. Yet his narrative abounds with varied local measures, such as Egyptian *farsakhs* (5763 m, 3.5 mi), which were divided into 12,000 *ells*.

One of the only places where he mentions mileposts is in India: "Dihar [today's Dhar] is 24 days' journey from Delhi. All along the road are pillars, on which are carved the number of miles from each pillar to the next. When the traveler desires to know how many miles he has gone or how far it is to the next halting place, he reads the inscriptions on the pillars."

Battuta's temperament: Rather than endure a brief residence in Cairo, he chose to extend his travels.

In Damascus, one of his first stops was the great mosque, which stands today. He reflected on its pragmatic adaptiveness:

The Friday Mosque, known as the Umayyad Mosque, is the most magnificent in the world, the finest in construction, and the noblest in beauty, grace, and perfection.... The site of the mosque was a [Greek Orthodox] church. When the Muslims captured Damascus, one of their commanders entered from one side by the sword and reached as far as the middle of the church. The other entered peaceably from the eastern side and reached the middle also. So the Muslims made the half of the church which they had entered by force into a mosque, and the half which they had entered by peaceful agreement remained a church.

Later, the Umayyad rulers offered to buy the Christians out, but they refused to sell. The Umayyads then confiscated the building, but quickly made up for this lapse of civility by raising a huge sum of money that was given to the Christians to build a new cathedral.

Mosques were community centers as well as houses of worship. The first ones had been sheltered spaces where the community could come together not only for prayer, but also to discuss public issues. Friday, or congregational, mosques, where the faithful of a whole city or quarter came together to pray, occupied prime locations, and made those locations the most prestigious parts of the city. Near a Friday mosque and its *madrasas* one could find both the finest wares and the intellectual professionals. Ibn Battuta's description of the Umayyad mosque continues:

The eastern door, called the Jayrun door, is the largest of the doors of the mosque. It has a large passage, leading out to an extensive colonnade, which is entered through a quintuple gateway between six tall columns. Along both sides of this passage are pillars supporting circular galleries, where the cloth merchants, among others, have their shops. Above these are long galleries in which are the shops of the jewelers

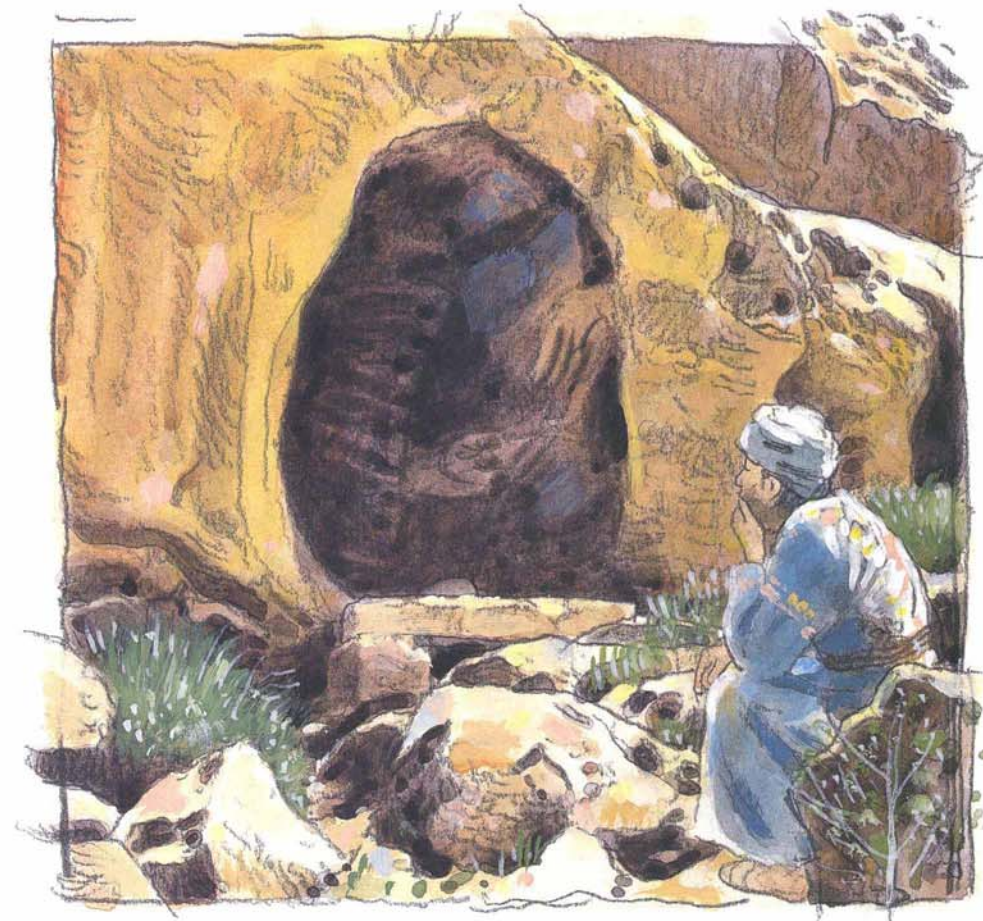
and booksellers and makers of admirable glassware. In the square adjoining the first door are the stalls of the principal notaries, in each of which there may be five or six witnesses in attendance and a person authorized by the qadi to perform marriage ceremonies. Near these bazaars are the stalls of the stationers who sell paper, pens, and ink.... To the right as one comes out of the Jayrun door, which is also called "The Door of the Hours," is an upper gallery shaped like a large arch, within which are small open arches furnished with doors, to the number of the hours of the day. These doors are painted green on the inside and yellow on the outside. As each hour of the day passes the green inner side of the door is turned to the outside. There is a person inside the room responsible for turning them by hand....

Several points are notable about Ibn Battuta's descriptive accuracy. First, he appears to have regarded reportage in terms of information that might prove useful to others: The Door of the Hours served as a timekeeper for commerce. Second, he had a sense of significant detail: The number of public witnesses in the notaries' stalls testifies to a society in which bonded word and accurate memory are almost one and the same. When Ibn Battuta memorized the Qur'an, he embraced the collective assumption of the time that the mind can be relied on for accuracy just as our era relies on writing and microchips. Thus, in his descriptions, he was doing for his world something like what satellite television does for ours. And finally, it is striking not only that we can almost

Between the lines of Ibn Battuta's brief descriptions, a careful reader will notice that his admiration for good examples of physical and administrative infrastructure expresses his belief that it is not merely the strength of the ruler that undergirds the stability and prosperity of the state, but also the extent to which the state's infrastructure is developed. This is apparent not only in Ibn Battuta's frequent notes of the state of roads, water, sanitation and hospitals, but also in his observation of what might be called "moral infrastructure": the relationship of the local 'ulama and the rich with society at large; the willingness of the local scholarly class to work with the government to achieve political stability. He comments on the governments' encouragement of professionals, be they plasterers or goldsmiths or itinerant *qadis* like Ibn Battuta, to take their skills where they would; on the seemingly endless spirit of charity he found in the giving of alms and the support of *waqfs* and free *madrasas* and hospitals for all classes. All this moral infrastructure drew from a single well: the concept of 'umma.

smell the cooking fires and hear the mongrels he describes whining at the braised-meat stalls, but also that he appears to have so clearly understood how the common moments of daily life link us all, no matter in what place or time we live. In reading the *Rihla* in its full extent, we gain a humbling yet embracing sense of our own place within civilization's long endurance. Seven centuries lie between Ibn Battuta and us, yet his words collapse them until we can feel many of the same things that he does.

In the tradition of earlier writers, whose descriptions of the Holy Cities had given rise to the literary genre of the *rihla*, Ibn Battuta systematically described Makkah's sacred sites and his fulfillment of the rites of the Hajj—so systematically, in fact, that scholars believe parts of his descriptions of the Holy Cities to be based on or plagiarized from previous writers. Thus it is not certain exactly which sites he visited in 1326 during his first pilgrimage and which later, during his subsequent three pilgrimages, and at times he writes with such dry detachment that the reader cannot tell whether he personally visited a particular site at all. One of Makkah's most famous sites, which he describes—and presumably did visit—is the cave on Mount Hira (*Jabal Hira*), "soaring into the air and high-summitted," where the Prophet Muhammad "used frequently to devote himself to religious exercises...before his prophetic call, and it was here that the truth came to him from his Lord and the divine revelations began." Those revelations became the Qur'an.



In Damascus, Ibn Battuta also had quite a bit to say about the *waqfs*:

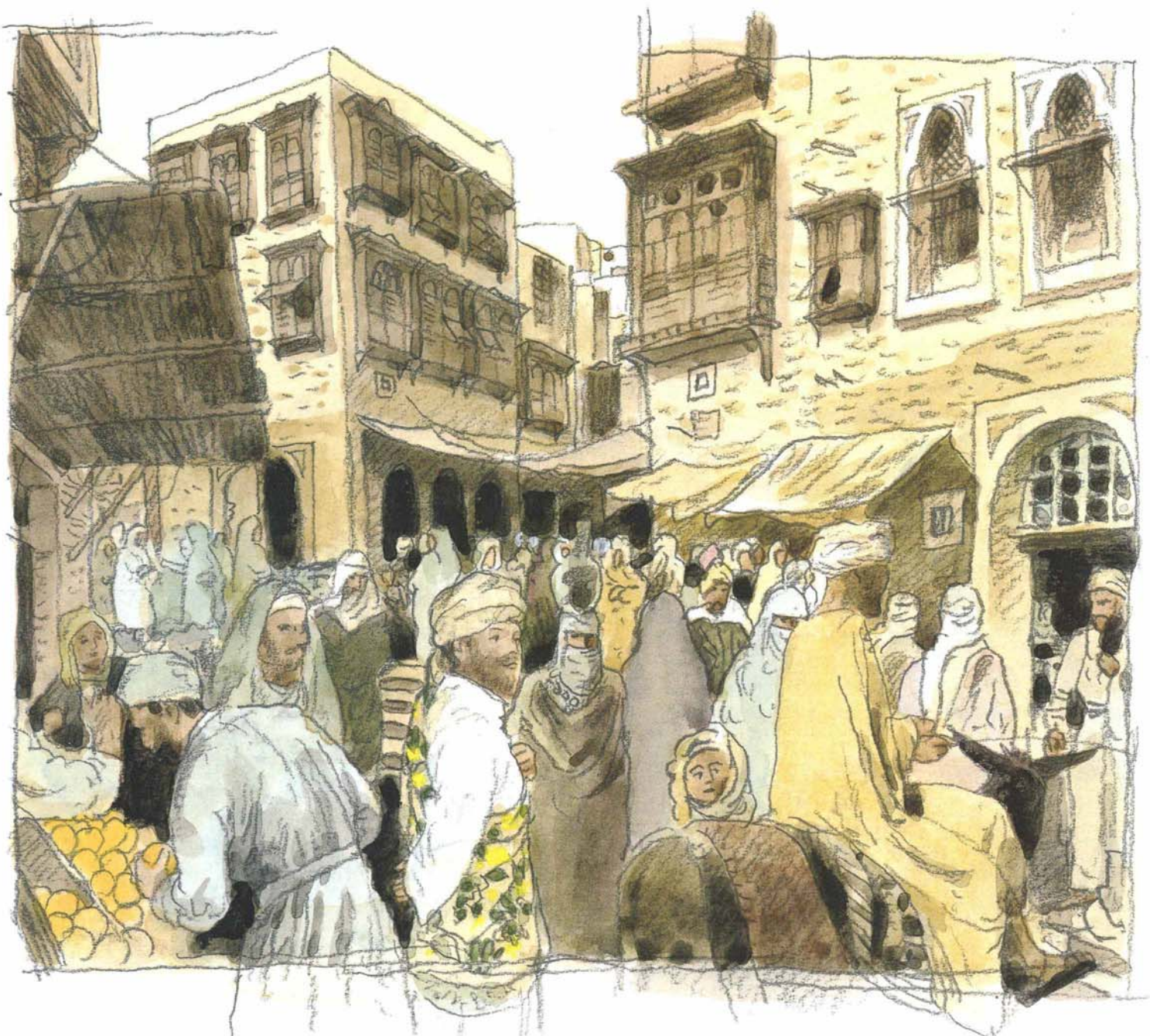
The variety and expenditure of the religious endowments of Damascus are beyond computation. There are endowments for the aid of persons who cannot undertake the Hajj [such as the aged and the physically disabled], out of which are paid the expenses of those who go in their stead. There are endowments to dower poor women for marriage. There are others to free prisoners [of war]. There are endowments in aid of travelers, out of the revenues of which they are given food, clothing, and the expenses of conveyance to their countries. There are civic endowments for the improvement and paving of the streets, because all the lanes in Damascus have sidewalks on either side, on which foot passengers walk, while those who ride the roadway use the center. One day I passed a young servant who had dropped a Chinese porcelain dish, which was broken to bits. A number of people collected around him and suggested, "Gather up the pieces and take them to the custodian of the endowment for utensils." He did so, and when the endowment custodian saw the broken pieces he gave the boy money to buy a new plate. This benefaction is indeed a mender of hearts.

Such an esoteric endowment as one to replace broken utensils bespeaks a broad definition of charity and implies broad support for it. Indeed, of Damascus's 171 *waqfs*, Ibn Battuta reports, ten were endowed by the sultan, 11 by court officials, 25 by merchants, 43 by members of the 'ulama, and

82 by military officials. Ibn Battuta sheltered at *waqfs* during hardship periods and in outlying towns and cities—although he much preferred the better-appointed courts of local rulers.

With the new moon of the month of Shawwal, it was from Damascus toward Madinah, and thence to Makkah, that Ibn Battuta turned.

The 1350-kilometer (820-mi), 45- to 50-day camel caravan plod took an inland route along the west coast of the Arabian Peninsula, through the region known as the Hijaz, where the semi-desert littoral of the Red Sea rises abruptly inland to the high plateau of the Arabian Desert. The peaks topping 3700 meters (12,000') were the highest Ibn Battuta had seen since the Atlas Mountains of his native Morocco. Sprinkled lightly here and there were oases, and the caravan was strategically routed to pass through them, sometimes pausing overnight, sometimes remaining for several days. Ibn Battuta recalled the sequence of oases vividly: Dwellers in one, he said, named "The Bottom of Marr," luxuriated in "a fertile valley with numerous palms and a spring supplying a stream from which the district is irrigated, whose fruits and vegetables are transported to Makkah." There was not enough soil or water for grains, so the oasis dwellers cultivated dates, peaches, apricots, pomegranates, lemons, oranges, and figs.



Some of these dried well in the piercing sun and air “as clear as sparkling water” and were staples of the desert diet.

Although the journey was arduous, there was little fear of getting lost: The way was visibly worn by the sandals of all the moveable world of that age: traders, pilgrims, servants, poets, camel-tenders, menders, soldiers, singers, ambassadors, clerks, physicians, coiners, architects, stable-sweepers, scullery boys, waiters, legalists, minstrels, jugglers, beekeepers, artisans, peddlers, shopkeepers, weavers, smiths, carters, hawkers, beggars, slaves and the occasional cutpurse and thief. Under way for six to seven weeks, the Hajj caravan was a small city on the hoof, with its own kind of cruise-ship economy, which always included several *qadis* for the resolution of disputes; *imams* to lead prayers; a *muezzin* to call people to prayer and a recorder of the property of pilgrims who died en route. That year, Ibn Battuta’s caravan was protected from bandits by Syrian tribesmen, and he was befriended by a colleague, another Maliki *qadi*, in the genial and collegial fraternity of the road.

Nowhere in the 14th-century world was the mix of people more diverse than in the busy streets of Makkah, for pilgrims often financed their journeys by trade in the city’s markets before and after the days of the annual Hajj. Ibn Battuta found a convivial civic spirit: “The citizens of Makkah are given to well-doing, of consummate generosity and good disposition, liberal to the poor...and kindly toward strangers.... When anyone has his bread baked [at a public oven] and takes it away to his house, the destitute follow him and he gives each one of them whatever he assigns to him, sending none away disappointed.... The Makkans are elegant and clean in their dress, and as they mostly wear white their garments always appear spotless and snowy. They use perfume freely, paint their eyes with *kohl*, and are constantly picking their teeth with slips of green *arak*-wood.”

Ibn Battuta’s account of Madinah fills 12 pages. Much of it is a detailed history and description of the Prophet’s Mosque and other sites; the rest consists of anecdotes he heard from those he met, which give us vivid impressions of life in the desert. According to one of these, a certain Shaykh

Abu Mahdi lost his way amid the tangle of hills surrounding Makkah. He was rescued when “God put it into the head of a Bedouin upon a camel to go that way, until he came upon him...and conducted him to Makkah. The skin peeled off his blistered feet and he was unable to stand on them for a month.” Other tales are set in places from Suez to Delhi, and it was in settings like this that the 22-year-old Ibn Battuta’s imagination was surely stimulated.

Our stay in Madinah the Illustrious on this journey lasted four days. We spent each night in the Holy Mosque, where everyone engaged in pious exercises. Some formed circles in the court and lit a quantity of candles. Volumes of the Holy Qur’an were placed on book-rests in their midst. Some were reciting from it; some were intoning hymns of praise to God; others were contemplating the Immaculate Tomb [of Muhammad]; while on every side were singers chanting the eulogy of the Apostle [Muhammad], may God bless him and give him peace.

At Dhu al-Hulaifa, just outside Madinah, the *hajjis* changed from their weather-worn caravan clothes into the *ihram*, the two-piece white garment which symbolically consecrated their entry into the Holy City of Makkah. Once in the *ihram*, the Muslim’s behavior was expected to be a model of piety, and the spiritual aura of Makkah reinforced that expectation.

I entered the pilgrim state under obligation to carry out the rites of the Greater Pilgrimage...and [in my enthusiasm] I did not cease crying, “Labbaik, Allahumma” [“At Thy service, O God!”] through every valley and hill and rise and descent until I came to the Pass of ‘Ali (upon him be peace), where I halted for the night.

Had Ibn Battuta been a lone voice in that unwatered wilderness, his words would have been lost on the wind. But he wasn’t. Although he never mentions how many may have been with him in the caravan, it was likely to have been several thousand, for the pilgrimage must be performed in one specific 10-day period, and the sense of culmination and community pilgrims feel is part of what gives the Hajj its unique power.

Ibn Battuta described the Great Mosque:

We saw before our eyes the illustrious Ka’ba (may God increase it in veneration), like a bride displayed on the bridal chair of majesty and the proud mantles of beauty.... We made the seven-fold circuit of arrival and kissed the Holy Stone. We performed the prayer of two bowings at the Maqam Ibrahim and clung to the curtains of the Ka’ba between the door and the Black Stone, where prayer is answered. We drank of the water of the well of Zamzam which, if you drink it seeking restoration from illness, God restoreth thee; if you drink it for satiation from hunger, God satisfieth thee; if you drink it to quench thy thirst, God quencheth it.... Praise be to God Who hath honored us by visitation to this Holy House.

Ibn Battuta allots some 58 pages to description of the Ka’ba, the *Haram*, or sacred enclosure, around it, the city of Makkah itself, its surroundings, the details of the Hajj prayers and ceremonies, the character of the people and the traditions in the hearts of Muslims from all over Dar al-Islam. So important is Makkah that it seems that no detail, be it the interior of the Ka’ba or the provisioning of the

bazaars or the forms of worship in the *Haram*, seems lost on him. Although his account has the tone of something partly received and partly felt, few documents have ever painted such a multicolored canvas of Makkah.

Even so, there was the rest of the world and a lifetime of footsteps ahead. Makkah’s feast of harsh natural scenery, global trade patterns, sharp mercantile acumen and abiding religious faith—all spiced with languages and dialects from Sudanese to Sindhi—no doubt whetted the young jurist’s appetite for more. But unlike most pilgrims, who returned from their Hajj to their home cities and villages, Ibn Battuta did not set out westward for Tangier. He does not say why. Perhaps it was a spirit of youthful adventure; perhaps it was the memory of Burhan Al-Din’s prognostication, back in Alexandria, that he would one day travel to India and China; perhaps it was word from others that jurists like himself might find work in remote places that were eager to receive scholars with more than local credentials.

Scholar Ross E. Dunn describes this significant juncture in Ibn Battuta’s career in his 1986 book *The Adventures of Ibn Battuta*: “When he left Tangier his only purpose had been to reach the Holy House,...[but] when he set off for Baghdad with the Iraqi pilgrims on 20 Dhu al-Hijja, one fact was apparent. He was no longer traveling to fulfill a religious mission or even to reach a particular destination. He was going to Iraq simply for the adventure of it.”

Setting a precedent he was to follow throughout his travels, however, Ibn Battuta did not take a direct route: Across the Arabian Peninsula’s deserts, he looped through southern Iran and ventured north to Tabriz in southern Azerbaijan. It was a new year, 1327, when he entered the great walled city on the Tigris now called Baghdad. ■

In reading the section devoted to Ibn Battuta’s first Hajj, some questions about authorship may arise in the mind of the careful reader of the *Rihla*. Parts of the descriptions of the Holy Cities differ distinctly in style and vocabulary from descriptions elsewhere in the work. (Similar questions arise about his later descriptions of Yemen and, most notably, China.) For example, Ibn Battuta begins his description of the *minbar* (pulpit) of the Prophet’s Mosque with a tale that a palm tree whimpered for the Prophet “as a she-camel whimpers for her calf” when he stopped leaning on it to go off and preach, whereupon Muhammad embraced the tree and it stopped its lamentation. Then he launches into an account of the construction of the *minbar* that reads like an art-historical dissertation. Scholars of the *Rihla* have shown with fair certainty that some of Ibn Battuta’s passages were—shall we say—creatively redistributed from a similar travel account penned by the Andalusian traveler Ibn Jubayr a century earlier. Yet this plagiarism, as we would regard it today, may well not have been Ibn Battuta’s doing, for the traveler’s scribe, Ibn Juzayy, trained as a court poet, would have felt a certain obligation to embellish Ibn Battuta’s recitations so the final product should be of a literary standard suitable for its royal patron, the Marinid sultan Abu ‘Inan of Fez. We have no way of knowing whether Ibn Battuta was aware of these improvements or not.

From Riches to Rags

MAKKAH to INDIA

As he traveled to Persia and Mesopotamia, Ibn Battuta was, for the first time, moving outward from the heart of Dar al-Islam, following its northeastward axis from Makkah.

Once he had crossed the Tigris near its mouth, he entered a land through which a tribe of fair-skinned conquerors, the Aryans, had passed so long ago that they were now remembered only by the name they left: Iran. What he saw and heard there—the faces, the languages, the style of the minarets, the governments, the arts—were all still Islamic, but this was a different cultural domain within Islamic culture: the land ruled by the Islamized Mongols known as the Ilkhans.

Since 1258, when the Mongols took the city, Baghdad—and much of Iraq to the west—had also been part of the Ilkhanid domains. In the middle of 1327 Ibn Battuta crossed the Tigris again and, via Kufa, arrived in the once-great city.

Fourteenth-century Baghdad was a city where the marketplace of ideas was as rich and as noisy as any other of the *suqs*. The devastation the Mongols had wrought 69 years earlier was catastrophic, but under Sultan Abu Sa'id Bahadur Khan, the last of "the kings of the Tatars [Mongols] who converted to Islam," Baghdad was attempting to revive the brilliance and prosperity that had characterized it during its Abbasid heyday, roughly from the eighth to the 11th century. That had been a time when, though China's palaces might have been richer and Córdoba's philosophers deeper, Baghdad was still the world's greatest confluence of intellect, commerce, art, trade and religion, the richest volume on history's bookshelf.

Much of Ibn Battuta's account of the city is elegiac, for in his time the western side of the city, where the caliph al-Ma'mun had built the great Bayt al-Hikma ("House of Wisdom") and other monuments, was largely "a vast edifice

of ruins." The mantle of greatness—and the caliphate itself—had shifted to Cairo, which the Mongols never reached. Still, for fame, allure and its aura of history, Baghdad was still the Queen of the Tigris, a name to conjure with—so much so that Ibn Juzayy, as he took down Ibn Battuta's account, was moved here to insert into the *Rihla* several pre-Mongol panegyrics the city had inspired, presumably to impress upon the reader its former glory. As for Ibn Battuta, in addition to describing visits to the mosques and *madrasas* supported by nobles or by the sultan himself, he faithfully and factually notes Baghdad's bridges, aqueducts, fountains, reservoirs, baths, fortresses, turrets, machicolated walls, palaces, workshops, factories, granaries, mills, caravansaries, hovels and "magnificent bazaars...splendidly laid out."

In the eastern city, where most settlement was concentrated in the early 14th century, the average workmen's houses were humble rectangles of sun-dried brick. Streets were wide enough for two loaded donkeys to pass—the same width in Baghdad as in Seville. Better homes had a courtyard, a water basin or pit well, a shade tree and ornamental plants. Then as now in much of the Islamic world, outward displays of wealth were avoided. From the outside, no door or window revealed or hinted at the status of the inhabitants within.

Inside, water splashed from fountains or was stored in unglazed urns. Everything that could be decorated, was. Brilliant colors were prized. The *qa'da*, or code of social behavior, that governed life in these homes was much the same in Baghdad as it was back in Ibn Battuta's Tangier, or virtually anywhere else in the Muslim world.



In Baghdad, Ibn Battuta determined to return to Makkah for his second Hajj, and again he took the long way. The sultan himself invited Ibn Battuta to accompany his caravan northward, and Ibn Battuta accepted. His motive can only have been curiosity.

For 10 days he traveled with the *mahalla*, or camp, of Abu Sa'id. His description of the journey's routines is unusually detailed, perhaps because of the impression the journey made on him, or because, in retrospect, the practices of the Ilkhans were of particular interest to the Moroccan sultan under whose patronage he recollected his travels:

It is their custom to set out with the rising of the dawn and to encamp in the late forenoon. Their ceremonial is as follows: Each of the amirs comes up with his troops, his drums and his standards, and halts in a position that has been assigned to him, not a step further, either on the

The Mongol sack of Baghdad lay almost seven decades in the past when Ibn Battuta first visited the city, and he noted that large sections of it were still "for the most part in ruins," and most of its *madrasas* closed. In the city once famed for the globe-spanning inventory of the Bayt al-Hikma, or "House of Wisdom," there were few libraries left for Ibn Battuta to visit. Yet he also recorded that "there still remain of [Baghdad] 13 quarters, each quarter like a city in itself, with two or three bath-houses, and in eight of them there are congregational mosques."

Starting about 1260—a generation before Ibn Battuta's birth—a great rebuilding of Mongol-devastated Persia began. By the time Ibn Battuta arrived there, the city of Tabriz could count at least one truly great son: Rashid al-Din, statesman, administrative reformer and historian. He was of such great political shrewdness that he survived being co-vizier to no fewer than three Ilkhanid sultans. One of them, worried that the Mongols, as they settled in Persia as Muslims, might forget their origins, commissioned him to write a history of the Mongols. That sultan's successor ordered him to expand it to cover all peoples with whom the Mongols had come in contact. Rashid thus produced what has been called the first true world history, titled *Jami' al-Tawarikh* (Collection of Histories). It covered the entirety of Dar al-Islam, plus China, Tibet, Turkey, Byzantium, and non-Muslim Western Europe, as well as Adam and the Patriarchs, and it remains the most important historical source on the Mongol Empire as a whole. As source material Rashid used all the available histories, but also, and more importantly, interviewed the merchants, mendicants, builders, and physicians fresh off the roads from China and India. They were seeking employment and sinecures; Rashid was seeking everything they could tell him.

right wing or the left wing. When they have all taken up their positions and their ranks are set in perfect order, the king mounts, and the drums, trumpets and fifes are sounded for the departure. Each of the amirs advances, salutes the king, and returns to his place; then the chamberlains and the marshals move forward ahead of the king, ...followed by the musicians. These number about a hundred men.... Ahead of the musicians there are 10 horsemen, with 10 drums.... On the sultan's right and left during his march are the great amirs, who number about 50.... Each amir has his own standards, drums and trumpets.... Then [come] the sultan's baggage and baggage-animals...and finally the rest of the army.

After parting from the *mahalla*, Ibn Battuta's itinerary took him, among other places, to the cities of Shiraz and Isfahan, and to Tabriz, which had become a major center of Islamic Mongol influence and power. In the latter city he regretted being able to remain only one night, "without having met any of the scholars," although his haste was due to the arrival of an order for his escort to rejoin Sultan Abu Sa'id's *mahalla*. At that time Ibn Battuta received his first audience with the sultan and a promise of provisions for his intended second Hajj.

All through the *Rihla* Ibn Battuta's personal character comes out in hints and fragments. Today he might be regarded as a bit of a fussbudget or a meddler, evidenced by the rather too generous outrage he expresses at minor lapses in others' behavior. In Basra, for example, he became so exasperated at grammatical errors in a Friday sermon that he complained to the local *qadi*, who commiserated. In Minya, Egypt he was livid that men at a public bath did not wear a towel around their waist. His complaint to local authorities resulted in a towel-rule being enforced "with the greatest severity." On the other hand, in the course of his travels he saw a great deal of blood spilled by royalty—as often as not, his patrons—without recording any scruples he may have

felt. To us today this may seem a rather selective morality. We also know that he had few hesitations about fulsome flattery during audiences with potential benefactors. If Ibn Battuta was not quite a court poet, he was certainly one smooth jurist. Such was his character and his world.

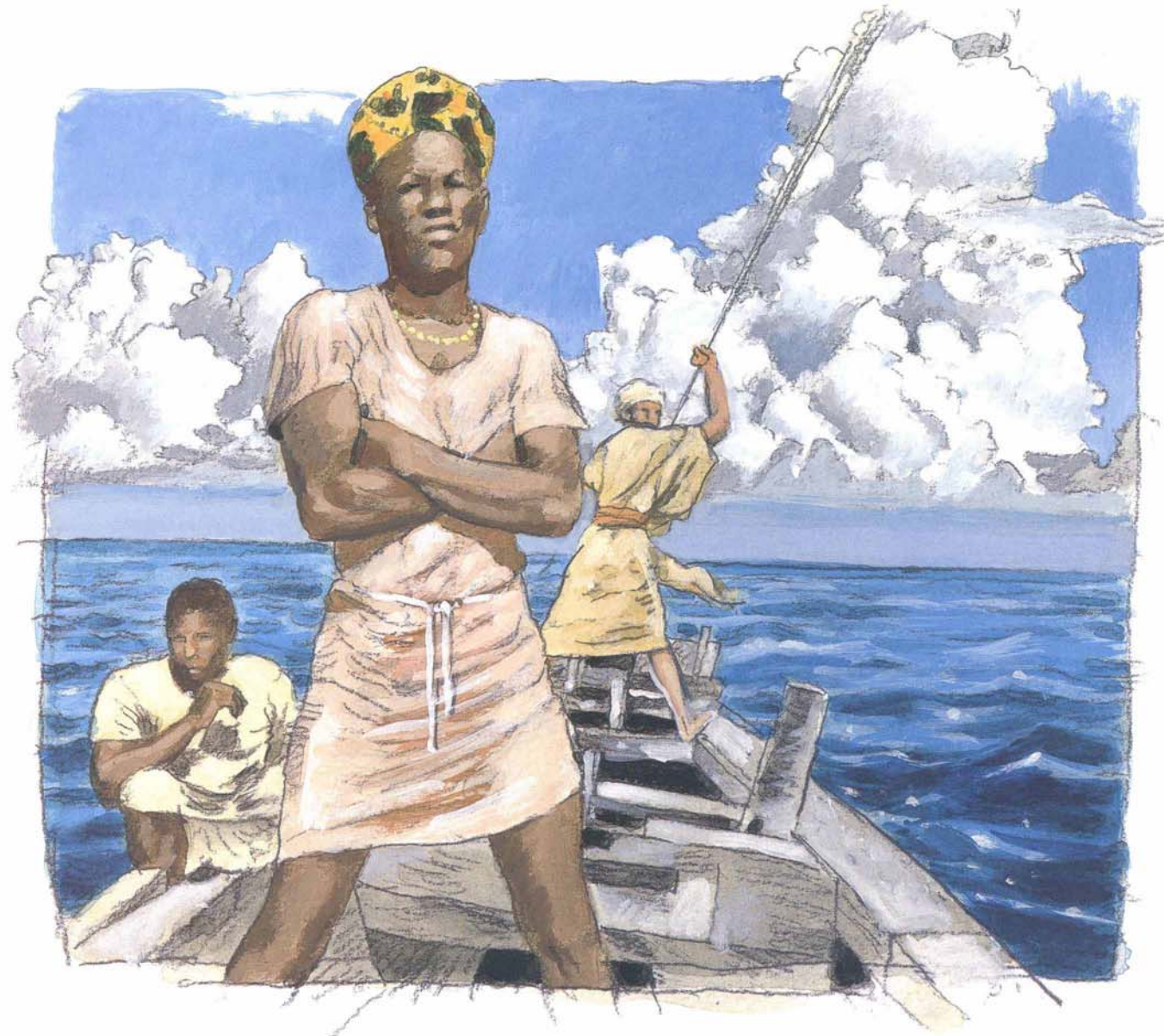
Yet he was also capable of speaking truth to power at times, as his account of a meeting with the sultan in the Persian town of Idhaj reveals:

I wished an audience with this sultan Afrasiyab, but that was not easily come by as he goes out only on Fridays, owing to his addiction to wine.... Some days later the sultan sent a messenger...to invite me to visit him. The sultan was sitting on a cushion, with two goblets in front of him which had been covered, one of gold and the other of silver....It became clear to me that he was under the influence of intoxication.... I said to him, "If you will listen to me, I say to you, 'You are the son of the sultan Atabeg Ahmad, who was noted for piety and self-restraint, and there is nothing to be laid against you, as a ruler, but this,' " and I pointed to the two goblets. He was overcome with confusion at what I said and sat silent. I wished to go but he bade me to sit down and said to me, "To meet with men like you is a mercy."

Ibn Battuta returned briefly to Baghdad, "received in full what the sultan had ordered for me," and used that gift not to go to Makkah—the caravan didn't leave for another two months—but rather to strike off again in another direction: the cities of the Tigris upstream from Baghdad. He returned to join the Hajj caravan, but he says little of this trip except that he caught an illness that from his descriptions may have been typhus. He made this Hajj in health so poor that "I had to carry out the ordinances seated."

Ibn Battuta says he remained in Makkah two years on this occasion, but in fact his stay was closer to one year. His account is full of chronological confusions that madden the scholar, but are more tolerable when we remember that the *Rihla* was written not to record his every move with precision but to communicate knowledge of the things that the book's patron, the sultan of Morocco, would consider important. And in a *rihla*, if one were going to err in describing one's time in Makkah, one would err on the side of generosity, for "resident in Makkah" was an academic credential throughout Dar al-Islam rather as "studied at Oxford" is today—even absent any specifics of subject, duration or degree.

When Ibn Battuta set out again, it was southward. He certainly visited Yemen, which he called al-Mashrabiyyah, "The Latticed Windows." Today, the byways of old Sana'a and Ta'izz still resemble his descriptions. The ornate latticeworks of carved wood admitted light and cooling breezes into Yemeni homes, but they blocked the inward view of passersby, preserving the residents' privacy. And, he wrote, "a strange thing about the rain in Yemen is that it only falls in the afternoon.... The whole town of Sana'a is paved, so when the rain falls it washes and cleans all the streets."



Inside those homes, walls were painted with as many colors as the owner could afford, and although there was little furniture, floors were covered with rugs to sit on. Men crossed their legs in front of them; women made cushions of their ankles as they folded their legs behind them. The last word in household luxury was a long *diwan*, a wide, low bench that might run all the way around the room, furnished with dozens of cushions. Beds were cushions that were rolled up and stuffed in a closet during the day.

Ibn Battuta's judgements were sometimes tart, as any traveler's might be on occasion:

We proceeded to the city of Ta'izz, the capital of the king of Yemen. It is one of the finest and largest cities of Yemen. Its people are overbearing, insolent, and rude, as is generally the case in towns where kings have their seats.

Somewhat later he sums up a minor sultan named Dumur Khan as "a worthless person," and adds, "His town attracted a vast population of knaves. Like king, like people."

But he liked the country. He found Yemen's air fragrant

Ibn Battuta described landing at Mogadishu, "a town of enormous size": "When a vessel reaches the anchorage, the *sambuqs*, which are small boats, come out to it. In each *sambuq* there are a number of young men of the town, each one of whom brings a covered platter containing food, and presents it to one of the merchants on the ship saying, 'This is my guest.'...The merchant, on disembarking, goes only to the house of his host.... The latter sells his goods for him and buys for him.... This practice is a profitable one for them."

with thyme, jasmine and lavender. Roses were picked while the dew was still on them; according to local folklore their fragrant attar, daubed on the body, all but guaranteed progeny. Myrrh, balsam and frankincense, whose export had helped build the already long-faded, ancient empire of South Arabia, were still produced.

Ibn Battuta then crossed the Red Sea to Somalia, disembarking first slightly north of Djibouti, then called Zeila. He judged it "a large city with a great bazaar, but it is in the dirtiest, most disagreeable, and most stinking town in the

Omani markets were perhaps the most exotic in the 14th-century world, and Ibn Battuta devotes appropriately longer descriptions to them than others. Goods from Egypt, Arabia, Africa, India, and China all passed through Omani bazaars, and a partial list of products indicates just how cosmopolitan Muslim trade could be. There were pearls from the Maldives, medicines from Tibet, swords from Scythia, spices from the Andaman Islands, dye-wood from Africa, teak from Burma; Sindhi perfumes, Indian sesame, Persian pistachios, Mom-basan ebony, Lankan ivory, iron, lead, gold, cotton, wool, leather and, in whatever space might have remained, fresh fruit. Today, an air-cargo manifest at Heathrow might hardly be so diverse.

world” because of its inhabitants’ habits of selling fish in the sun and butchering camels in the street.

He traveled down the East African coast as far as Mom-basa and Kilwa, a region in which there were large numbers of Africans locally called Zanj; the name of today’s Zanzibar keeps the word alive. They were “jet-black in color,” he notes, with “tattoo-marks on their faces.” In Kilwa, “all the buildings are of wood, and the houses are roofed with reeds.” The local sultan, Abu al-Muzaffar Hasan, was “a man of great humility; he sits with poor brethren, and eats with them, and greatly respects men of religion and noble descent.”

Then Ibn Battuta headed back to Arabia by way of Dofar, in southwestern Oman, where he mentions the ways the sultan lured merchants to his ports:

When a vessel arrives from India or elsewhere, the sultan’s slaves go down to the shore, and come out to the ship in a sambuq carrying with them a complete set of robes for the owner of the vessel [and his officers].... Three horses are brought for them, on which they mount with drums and trumpets playing before them from the seashore to the sultan’s residence.... Hospitality is supplied to all who are in the vessel for three nights.... These people do this in order to gain the goodwill of the shipowners, and they are men of humility, good dispositions, virtue, and affection for strangers.

The traveler also described the custom of chewing betel nut, which is still socially important in many parts of the world today:

A gift of betel is for them a far greater matter and more indicative of esteem than the gift of silver and gold.... One takes areca nut, this is like a nutmeg but is broken up until it is reduced to small pellets, and one places these in his mouth and chews them. Then he takes the leaves of betel, puts a little chalk on them, and masticates them along with the betel nut.... They sweeten the breath, remove foul odors of the mouth [and] aid digestion....

Farther up the coast, Ibn Battuta describes the efficient way Omani fishermen used the sharks they caught. They cut and dried the meat in the sun, as dwellers on that coast still do, then dried the cartilaginous backbones further and used them as the framework of their houses, covering the frame with camel skins.

As for his own adventures, he describes a hired guide who, outside the city of Qalhat, turned robber. Ibn Battuta and his companion outsmarted the man by hiding in a gully and

trekking into town, but with great difficulty: “My feet had become so swollen in my shoes that the blood was almost starting under the nails.”

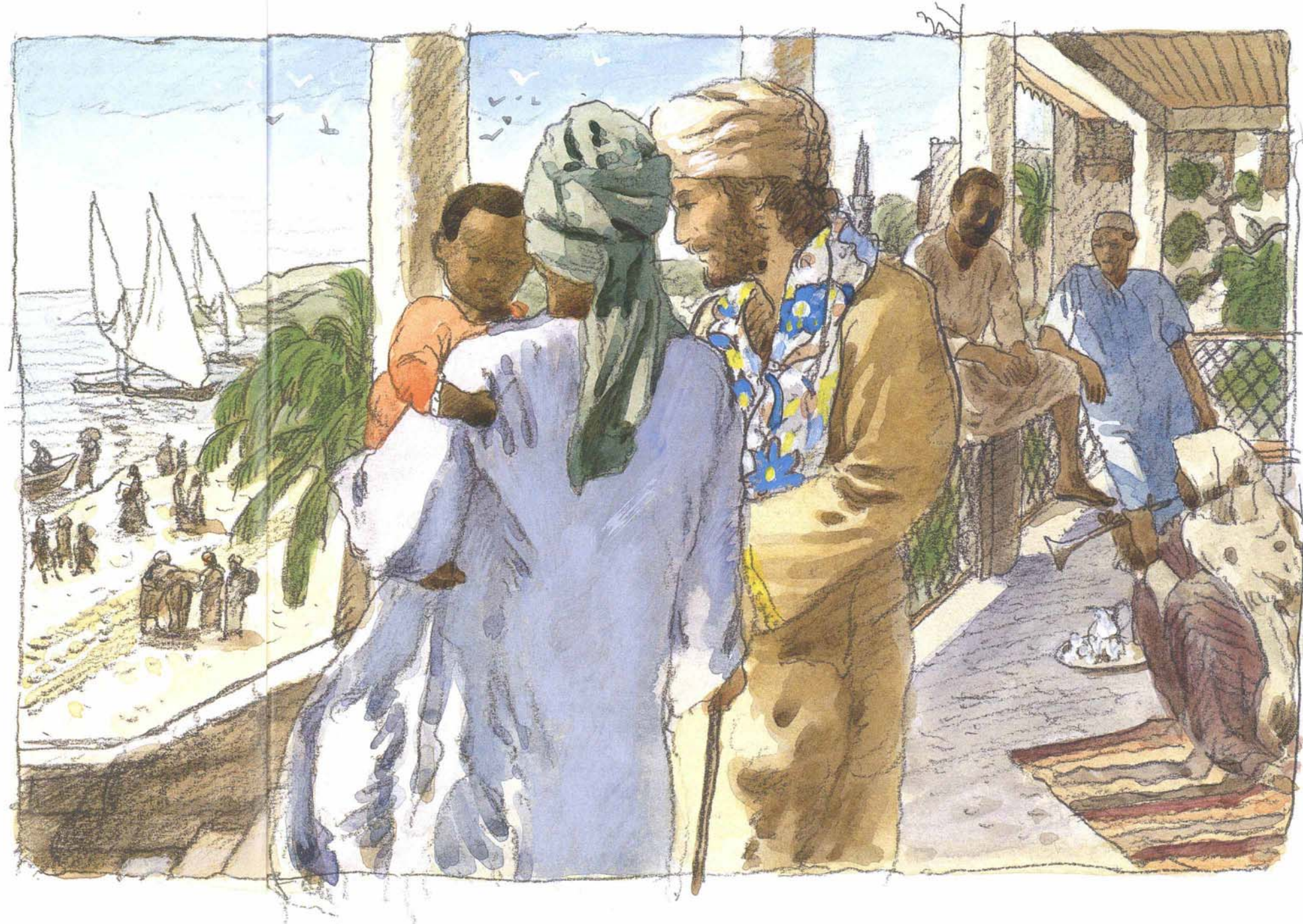
From this point, Ibn Battuta’s itinerary again seems muddled, but it is known that in 1332 he returned to Makkah for his third Hajj. He doesn’t say why, nor how long he stayed there. We do know that it was at about this time that he made his momentous decision to go to India. We also know that his motive was largely pecuniary. He had heard—perhaps in Oman, perhaps in Makkah or Baghdad, we don’t know—that the Turco-Indian sultan of Delhi, Muhammad ibn Tughluq, was extraordinarily generous to Muslim scholars, and in fact had invited such people from throughout Dar al-Islam to come to his court.

That call, with its promise of royal generosity, was Ibn Battuta’s lodestone for the next decade. He vowed to follow it. But as we might guess by now, his route to India was not the most direct. Indeed, it took him two years to get there.

One would think, looking at the map, that a goal-oriented traveler would go back to Oman, where he could embark on a dhow and ride the monsoon winds for about 40 days to the west coast of India. But at the time he made his decision to go, Ibn Battuta would have had to wait several months for the onset of the eastbound monsoon. Such was not his style.

Instead, he made his way back to Cairo, then around the east coast of the Mediterranean through Gaza and Hebron to a Genoese ship bound for Anatolia. Guided, it seems clear, by little more than serendipity and impulse, he crisscrossed that region, and became so familiar with its petty sultanates and local customs that his *Rihla* is our primary factual source for conditions in Turkey between the time of the Seljuqs and the arrival of the Ottomans.

One of these customs was the *akhi*, which is related both to the Turkish word for “generous” and the Arabic for “brother.”



The fraternal societies throughout the land that adopted the term clearly acknowledged both meanings. Ibn Battuta was introduced to them in a bazaar in Ladhiq (now Denizli):

As we passed through one of the bazaars, some men came down from their booths and seized the bridles of our horses. Then certain other men quarreled with them for doing so, and the altercation between them grew so hot that some of them drew knives. All this time we had no idea what they were saying [Ibn Battuta did not speak Turkish], and we began to be afraid of them, thinking that they were the [brigands] who infest the roads.... At length God sent us a man, a pilgrim, who knew Arabic, and I asked what they wanted of us. He replied that they belonged to the fityan...and that each party wanted us to lodge with them. We were amazed at their native generosity. Finally they came to an agreement

The seasonal winds of the northeast monsoon facilitated Muslim trade far down the East African coast, and the southernmost extent of Ibn Battuta’s sailing was Kilwa, now a small coastal city in southeastern Tanzania. In 1329, however, it had recently become a very prosperous city with a local monopoly of the gold trade, and its merchant clans, which included the ruling family, lived in substantial houses, wore silk and jewelry, and ate from Chinese porcelain. Ibn Battuta found the sultan, Abu al-Muzaffar Hasan, to be pious and generous, and “a man of great humility; he sits with poor brethren, and eats with them, and greatly respects men of religion and noble descent.”

to cast lots, and that we should lodge first with the group whose lot was drawn [and then with the other].

The *akhis* Ibn Battuta describes were known as *fityans* in Persia. They were a cross between a civic club and a trade fraternity, composed of unmarried younger men drawn by the ideals of hospitality and generosity that were such important virtues in the world of Islam. In Ibn Battuta's words, "They trace their affiliation...back to Caliph 'Ali, and the distinctive garment in their case is the trousers.... Nowhere in the world are there to be found any to compare with them in solicitude for strangers."

Such societies, however, were not unique to Anatolia. They existed in various forms and by several names throughout Dar al-Islam. Their social function was to institutionalize the sense of civic unity into a structure consistent with the ideals of the Qur'an but which was not addressed by the *waqf*, the hospice or other altruistic organization. Not hospitable only toward travelers, *akhis* and *fityans* also helped local individuals and their own members in time of need.

Leaving Anatolia, Ibn Battuta crossed the Black Sea to Crimea on a voyage one would think should have alienated him forever from sea travel. His vessel sailed into a storm so rough that at one point one of his companions went topside to see what was happening and returned to croak, "Commend your soul to God!" But God was merciful, and Ibn Battuta headed for the Mongol Kipchak Khanate, which rimmed the northern shore of the Black Sea.

There in Crimea Ibn Battuta bought a wagon for his travels. Unneeded and unknown in the lands of the camel, these were large, four-wheeled coaches drawn by oxen or horses. Ibn Battuta described them:

There is placed upon the wagon a kind of cupola made of wooden laths tied together with thin strips of hide; this is light to carry, and covered with felt or blanket-cloth, and in it there are grilled windows. The person who is inside the tent can see [other] persons without their seeing him, and he can employ himself in it as he likes, sleeping or eating or

reading or writing.... Those of the wagons that carry the baggage, the provisions and the chests of eatables are covered with a sort of tent much as we have described, with a lock in it.... We saw a vast city on the move with its inhabitants, with mosques and bazaars in it, and the smoke of the kitchens rising in the air, for they cook while on the march.

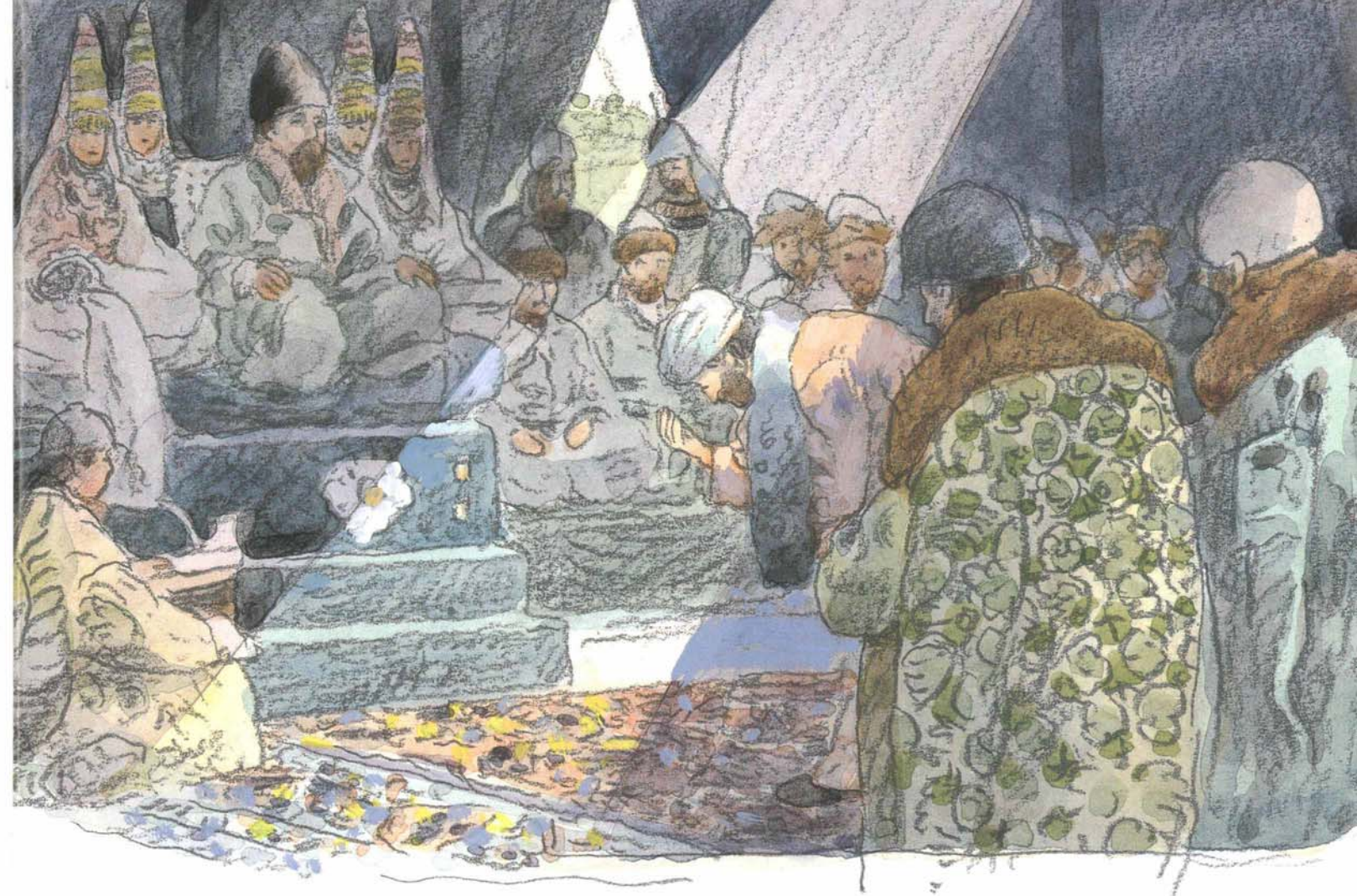
His descriptions of the long journey across the steppe reveal that his status as scholar, traveler and courtier was now such that he merited a new level of largesse from his hosts. By the time he crossed the Hindu Kush, he had accumulated a personal entourage of attendants, a sizable number of horses that he was prepared to give as gifts, and a number of wives and concubines. Thus had the lad from Tangier prospered—and greater good fortune was to come.

The trade routes Ibn Battuta traversed north of the Caspian were less busy than those across Afghanistan and Iran. Nonetheless, amber came down this way from the Baltic Sea to China via Moscow and the Volga. (He claims to have made an abortive attempt to journey up the Volga to the capital of the Bulgar state, but scholars doubt his veracity on this.) There is little doubt that he did indeed make a lengthy side trip to Christian Constantinople. He traveled there in the company of Princess Bayalun, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor Andronicus III who had been married, for political and economic reasons, to the Muslim Özbek, Khan of the Golden Horde, as his third wife; she was now returning to Constantinople for the birth of her child. Ibn Battuta reports that she wept "with pity and compassion" when he told her of his travels. Perhaps, unlike him, she was homesick.

After his return to the steppes from Constantinople, Ibn Battuta relates descriptions of the route's continuation along the Silk Road and its cities. Near Samarkand Ibn Battuta spent 54 days with Tarmashirin, the Čhaġatay khan who had only recently converted to Islam and was interested in what a worldly-wise *qadi* might tell him. Although Tarmashirin "never failed to attend the dawn and evening prayers with the congregation," he was overthrown by a nephew soon thereafter.

Ibn Battuta's exact path through Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush is uncertain because he does not make it clear where along the Indus he came out. But once on the hot plains, he headed for Multan, the sultan's westward customs outpost, which lay 40 days' march from Delhi "through continuously inhabited country." The traveler's pen waxed prolix as he noted the new foods, spices, trees, fruits and customs of this land where the ruling Muslims were the minority among the majority Hindu population.

Ibn Battuta's intention was to impress Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq sufficiently to win a sinecure—which we might justly call the Moroccan jurist-vagabond's first steady job. When he reached Multan he presented his credentials, including, in effect, the economic and social



Recalling the court of Muhammad Özbek Khan, one of the two Mongol sultans who, between them, controlled most of Central Asia, Ibn Battuta wrote: "His territories are vast.... He observes, in his [public] sittings, his journeys, and his affairs in general, a marvelous and magnificent ceremonial. It is his custom to sit every Friday, after prayers, in a pavilion, magnificently decorated, called the Gold Pavilion. It is constructed of wooden rods covered with plaques of gold, and in the center of it is a wooden couch covered with plaques of silver gilt.... The sultan sits on the throne...[and] afterward the great amirs come and their chairs are placed for them left and right.... Then the [rest of the] people are admitted to make their salute, in their degrees of precedence."

implications of his train and entourage, to the governor, who dispatched a courier to the sultan.

It was very important to make a good first impression, for no one in Delhi was likely to know anything about the new arrival's background or lineage. When Ibn Battuta was finally told to proceed to court, he was also informed that it was the custom of the sultan to reward every gift with a much greater one. So Ibn Battuta struck a deal with a merchant who offered to advance him a sizable stake of dinars, camels, and goods in exchange for a fat cut of the proceeds when the sultan's reward was duly given. The merchant, clearly an early venture capitalist, also turned out to be a fair-weather friend, for he "made an enormous profit from me and became one of the principal merchants. I met him many years later at Aleppo after the infidels had robbed me of everything I possessed, but he gave me no assistance."

Ibn Battuta's long stays in Baghdad and Damascus, studying the law and discussing *fiqh*, or legal interpretation, with fellow jurists, served him well in Delhi. He impressed Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq, who appointed him *qadi* in Delhi

with the handsome compensation of 12,000 silver dinars per year, plus a "signing bonus" of 12,000 dinars for agreeing to reside there permanently.

Ibn Tughluq's largesse, however, was out of proportion to the stability of his reign. His taxes beggared the countryside, yet in the cities his extravagance was mind-boggling. This was immediately apparent to Ibn Battuta, who observed:

This king is of all men the most addicted to the making of gifts and the shedding of blood. His gate is never without some poor man enriched or some living man executed.... For all that, he is of all men the most humble and the readiest to show equity and to acknowledge the right.... I know that some of the stories I shall tell on this subject will be unacceptable to the minds of many persons, and that they will regard them as quite impossible in the normal order of things.

Ibn Battuta devotes numerous pages to the lineage of the royal family, the history of the country, the details of a variety of elaborately choreographed court rituals, the wars and revolts preoccupying the sultan, his extensive gifts to religious



and political men and his ceremonies entering and leaving the capital. On one particular triumphal return to Delhi, the sultan had arranged for an unusually spectacular procession of caparisoned elephants, infantry columns of thousands, musicians and dancers:

The space between the pavilions is carpeted with silk cloths, on which the Sultan's horse treads.... I saw three or four small catapults set up on elephants throwing dinars and dirhams among the people, and they would be scrambling to pick them up, from the moment he entered the city until he reached the palace.

Ibn Battuta soon discovered that he, too, could find himself on the wrong side of this mercurial ruler, whose character, if one can judge from the length at which Ibn Battuta wrote about him, fascinated—perhaps even transfixed—the jurist like that of no other ruler.

When the severe drought reigned over the lands of India and Sind...the sultan ordered that the whole population of Delhi should be given six months' supplies from the [royal] granary.... [Yet] in spite of all that we have related of his humility,...the sultan used to punish small faults and great, without respect of persons, whether men of learning or piety or noble descent. Every day there are brought to the audience-hall hundreds of people, chained, pinioned, and fettered, and those who are for execution are executed, those for torture are tortured, and those for beating, beaten.

There were administrative errors as well: Once Ibn Tughluq misconstrued Chinese texts about finance and decreed that, since silver was in short supply, coins should thenceforth be made of copper. Since those coins were backed by the sultan's gold and copper was abundant, counterfeiters had a field day, and the kingdom lost heavily.

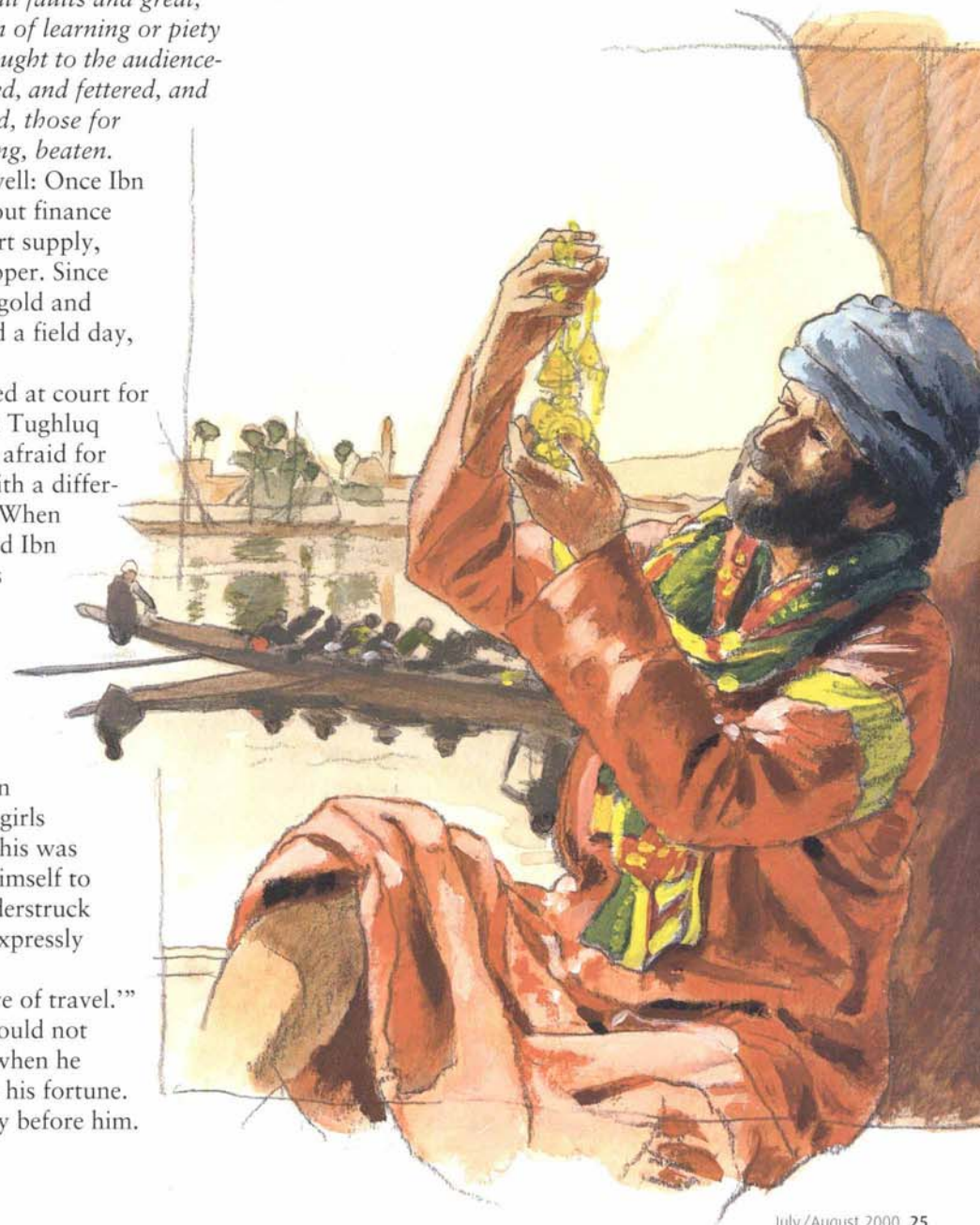
Eventually, Ibn Battuta was denounced at court for his association with a teacher whom Ibn Tughluq suspected to be a plotter. Disgraced and afraid for his life, Ibn Battuta retreated to study with a different teacher not in the ambit of the first. When Ibn Tughluq heard of this he commanded Ibn Battuta to present himself. "I entered his presence dressed as a mendicant, and he spoke to me with the greatest kindness and solicitude, desiring me to return to his service. But I refused and asked him for permission to travel to the Hijaz, which he granted."

After 40 days, Ibn Battuta recalled, Ibn Tughluq sent him "saddled horses, slave girls and boys, robes and a sum of money." This was clearly a summons. Again he presented himself to Ibn Tughluq, and he was no doubt thunderstruck to hear words he never forgot: "I have expressly sent for you to go as my ambassador to the king of China, for I know your love of travel."

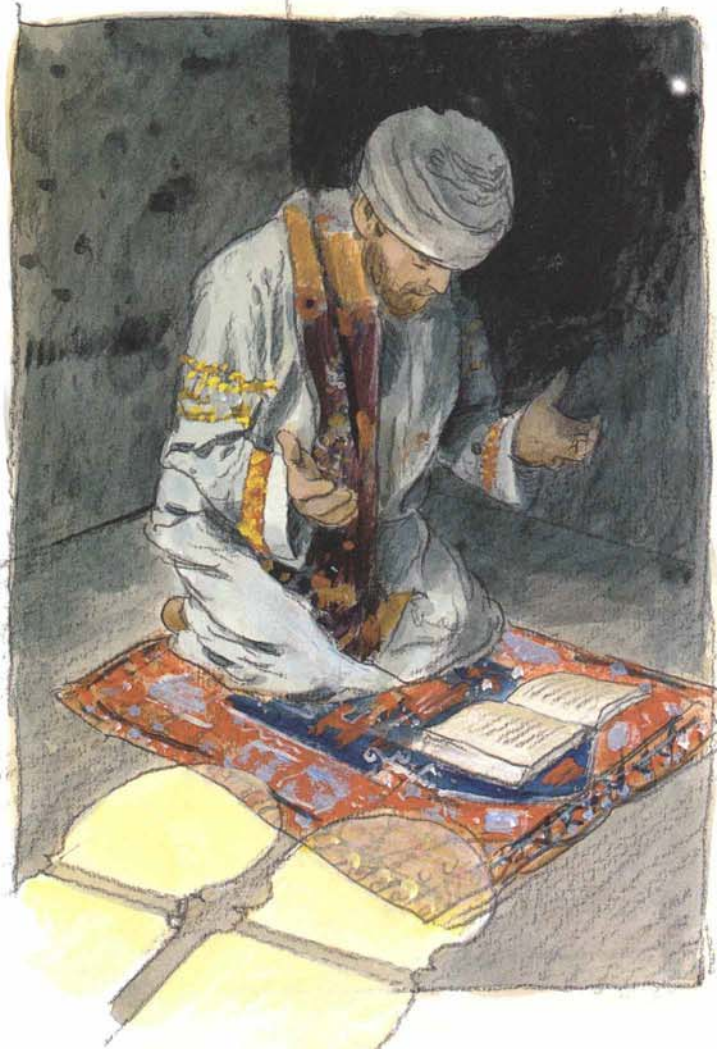
Here was an assignment Ibn Battuta could not even have dreamed of back in Makkah, when he first thought of heading eastward to seek his fortune. Now, it seemed that fortune lay spendidly before him.

Opposite: "From [Kabul] we rode to Karmash, which is a fortress between two mountains, where the Afghans intercept travelers. During our passage of the defile we had an engagement with them.... We entered the great desert...[and] our company arrived safely (praise be to God Most High) at Banj Ab, which is the water of Sind [the Indus River]." Although Ibn Battuta's descriptions of this leg of his journey are vivid, his geography is vague, and scholars still debate his route across the mountains to the Indus River Valley.

Below: Ibn Battuta arrived in Delhi the year of his 30th birthday, and, though he fully expected to be given some position at the court of Sultan Muhammad ibn Tughluq, he was nonetheless taken aback by the high level of his appointment: "The sultan said to me, 'Do not think that the office of *qadi* of Delhi is one of the minor functions; it is the highest of functions in our estimation.' I said to him 'Oh Master, I belong to the Maliki school [of Islamic jurisprudence] and these people are Hanafis, and I do not know the language.' He replied, 'I have appointed [two men] to be your substitutes; they will be guided by your advice and you will be the one who signs all the documents, for you are in the place of a son to us.' The salary Ibn Battuta received for his services was enormous, and soon after his appointment he married into the royal family.



Ibn Battuta's visit to a religious teacher who was later suspected of treasonous sentiments put him on the wrong side of the sultan, a ruler "most addicted to the making of gifts and the shedding of blood." Imprisoned, Ibn Battuta "fasted five days on end, reciting the Qur'an cover to cover each day." Though the sultan received him back and appointed him ambassador to China, the episode marked the end of the traveler's hopes for a permanent sinecure in India, and the beginning of the most tumultuous years of his travels.



On July 22, 1342, with an escort of "a thousand horsemen," Ibn Battuta set forth for Calicut, where the plan was to put the embassy on one of the Chinese junks that were there waiting out the contrary monsoon.

The trouble that was to dog him for the next five years began immediately, during the long march from Delhi to the coast via Daulatabad, the sultan's second capital. Ibn Tughluq's rule was breaking down rapidly, and Hindu rebels now roamed the roads, sometimes as guerrilla armies, other times as brigands. Near the town of al-Jalali, the ambassador's retinue battled "about a thousand cavalry and 3000 foot [soldiers]." There were skirmishes over the next few days, and at one point Ibn Battuta became separated from his train and fell from his horse. He ran for his life—straight into the arms of one of the rebel bands. Their leader ordered Ibn Battuta executed, but for unknown reasons the rebels dithered and then let him go. He hid in a swamp, and for seven days found no refuge. The locals who saw him refused him food. A village sentry took away his shirt. He came to a well, tried to use one of his shoes as a bucket, and lost the shoe in the depths. As he was cutting the other in two to make sandals, a man happened along—a Muslim. He asked Ibn Battuta in Persian who he was, and Ibn Battuta replied warily, "A man astray." The man replied, "So am I." The Muslim then carried Ibn Battuta, fainting with exhaustion, to a Muslim village.

Thanks to his coreligionist, Ibn Battuta regained his caravan, and in time they reached Calicut. The gifts and the slaves were put aboard the hired Chinese junk while Ibn Battuta stayed ashore to attend prayers. There he decided that he was unwilling to travel on the junk because its cabin was "small and unsuitable." His personal retinue, including a concubine pregnant with his child, transferred to a smaller *kakam* that would sail with the junk.

In the night, a storm came up, which "is usual for this sea.... We spent the Friday night on the seashore, we unable to embark on the *kakam* and those on board unable to disembark and join us. I had nothing left but a carpet to spread out." But rather than abate the storm increased. Junks were cumbersome in shallow, narrow harbors, and the junk captain tried to make for deeper water where he might safely ride it out.

This junk didn't make it. Ibn Battuta had the ghastly experience of watching it smash onto the rocks, where "all on board died." When the crew of the *kakam* saw what had happened, they did not return to pick up the ill-fated embassy's leader. Rather, "they spread their sails and went off,...leaving me alone on the beach."

Wrecked with the junk and lost with those aboard it was Ibn Battuta's Delhi career. He knew the first question Ibn Tughluq would put to him was why he had failed to go down with his ship. This time, no show of mendicancy would be an adequate answer.

Despite the trauma of the incident, Ibn Battuta inserts in his account one of those factual and informative observations that make his *Rihla* such a treasure today:

The [Sultan of Calicut's] police officers were beating the people to prevent them from plundering what the sea cast up. In all the lands of Malabar, except in this one land alone, it is the custom that whenever a ship is wrecked,



"Now it is usual for this sea to become stormy every day in the late afternoon.... We spent the Friday night on the seashore.... That night the sea struck the junk which carried the sultan's present, and all on board died.... When those on the *kakam* saw what had happened to the junk they spread their sails and went off, with all my goods and slave-boys and slave-girls on board, leaving me alone on the beach with but one slave whom I had freed. When he saw what had befallen me he deserted me, and I had nothing left with me at all except the 10 dinars that the yogi had given me, and the carpet."

all that is taken from it belongs to the treasury. At Calicut, however, it is retained by its owners, and for that reason Calicut has become a flourishing and much frequented city.

Ibn Battuta withdrew to the port of Honavar, where he spent some six weeks in nearly solitary prayer and fasting—perhaps to keep a low profile, perhaps to grieve for the loss of his child and his dream of an exalted ambassadorial career, or perhaps to figure out what to do next. His retreat ended when he volunteered—exactly why he does not say—to lead the

Honavar sultan's military expedition against the rival port of Sandapur. Though briefly victorious, the attack was swiftly countered: "The sultan's troops...abandoned us. We were...reduced to great straits. When the situation became serious, I left the town during the siege and returned to Calicut."

He had no means left to him, no prospects of an appointment, and one friend fewer in Honavar. There were few options.

Then fate beckoned again. He happened on a ship's captain bound for the remote Maldives. 🌐

From Traveler to Memoirist

CHINA, MALI *and* HOME

The Maldives, off the southwest coast of India, comprise so many numerous, small islands—the *Rihla* puts their number at 2000—that Ibn Battuta could be confident of escaping Sultan Ibn Tughluq's agents—or even his notice altogether.

The ruler of the Maldives, Queen Rehendi Kilege, locally called Khadija, was a puppet of her husband, the vizier. Despite Ibn Battuta's attempts to keep a low profile, the royal couple soon heard that a well-traveled *qadi*—indeed, one who had served in the metropolis of Delhi—was in their midst. As they had no one in the islands filling the office of *qadi* at the time, they invited Ibn Battuta to take up the post, and they made it clear that they would not take “no” for an answer.

So reasoning with myself that I was in their power and that if I did not stay of my own free will I would be kept by main force, and that it was better to stay of my own choice, I said to his messenger, “Very well, I shall stay.”

For the next few months Ibn Battuta enjoyed the perquisites of power while acting in the familiar function of *qadi*, punishing thieves and adulterers, adjudicating disputes, and even trying, quite unsuccessfully, to require women to cover themselves more fully than island custom dictated. He married into the royal family, and soon found himself the husband of four wives, the full complement allowed under Islamic law. All of these unions were, at least in part, political, and it was not long before Ibn Battuta, whose Delhi credentials made him a big fish in this very small pond, began to acquire a power base of his own among the local nobles. This led to a falling out with the rulers and his departure under suspicion—apparently well-founded—of plotting a coup d'état. In a mere seven months Ibn Battuta had gone from a much-courted *qadi* to *qadi non grata*.

He went to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), which Marco Polo had described as “size for size, the most beautiful isle in the world.” There he rekindled his spiritual side, and made a trek up to the heights of Adam's Peak, where he met Christians and Hindus, for the place was revered in all three faiths. Along the way, he noted the abundance of rubies and sapphires, monkeys and “flying leeches.”

On the way back to the Coromandel Coast, on the eastern flank of India, a fierce squall broke up his ship. He got his wives safely aboard a raft, but there was no room on it for him, and Ibn Battuta was not a good swimmer. He clung to the slowly sinking stern of the ship through the night. In the morning, just as it appeared to be going down for good, a boat of local fishermen arrived. They set him on his way to the sultan, who proved to be Ibn Battuta's brother-in-law, the brother of a former wife in Delhi—one of those coincidences that highlight the “small world” of 14th-century nobility in Dar al-Islam.

Ibn Battuta and the sultan, Ghiyath al-Din, plotted their joint return to the Maldives, accompanied by a military force that would carry out the unrealized coup. But on the way back to the coast with the expeditionary force, the *qadi* was repelled by his ally's brutal treatment of non-Muslim prisoners, calling his behavior “an abomination” and asserting, “that is why God hastened his death.” Indeed, it was not long before, in the coastal city of Pattan, “a plague from which people died suddenly,... in two or three days” claimed



Ghiyath al-Din, and Ibn Battuta appears to have abandoned his designs on the Maldives.

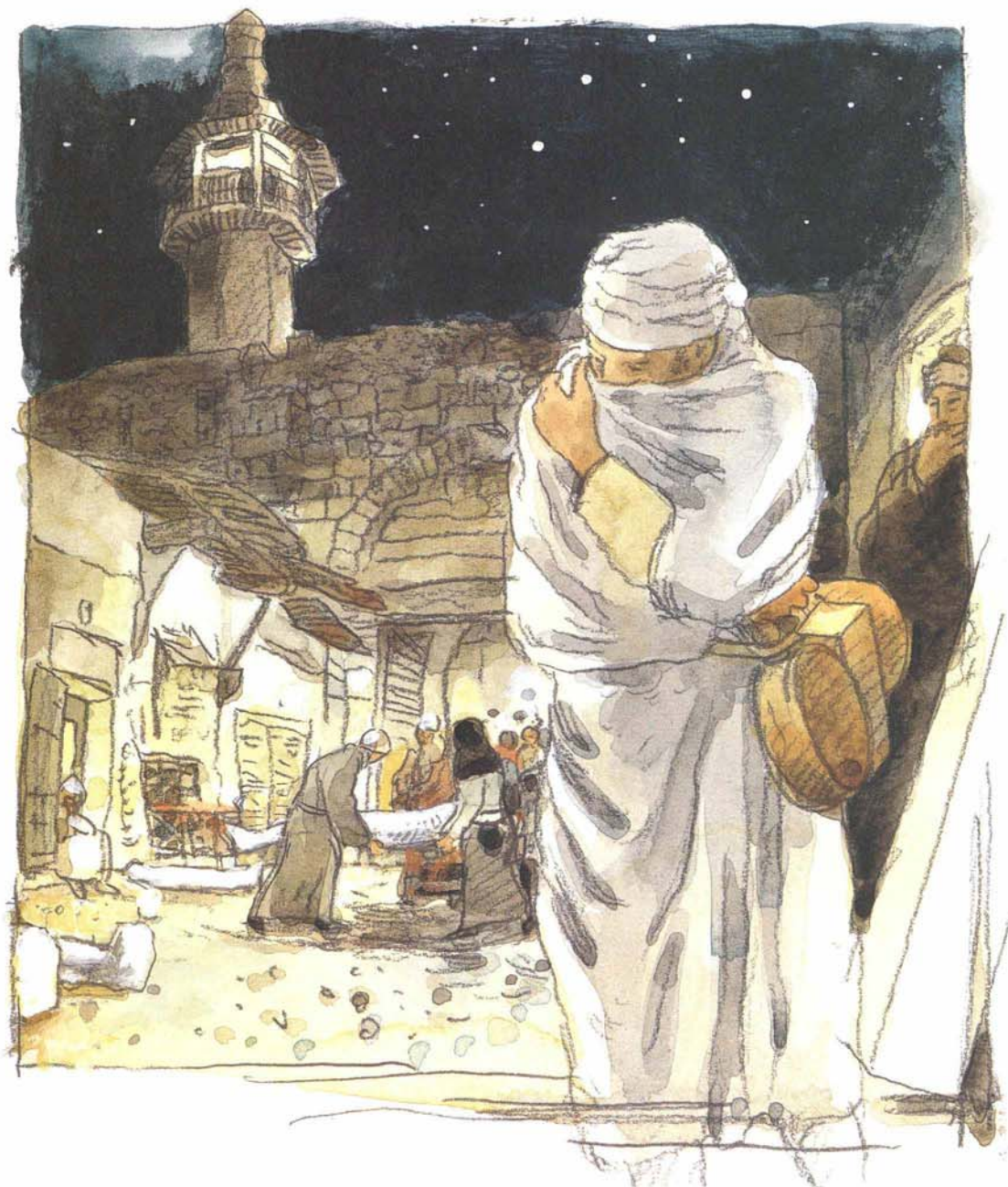
He set sail once more for Honavar on India's west coast, and once more he lost everything, this time to a sea-cordon of pirate vessels. Their tactic was to disperse far out at sea but just within sight of each other. When a victim neared, they communicated with light signals and swarmed on their target *en masse*:

They took everything I had preserved for emergencies; they took the pearls and rubies that the king of Ceylon had given me, they took my clothes and the supplies given me by pious people.... They left me no covering except my trousers.

It speaks well of Ibn Battuta's resourcefulness and the brotherhood of the *'ulama* that, after coming ashore stripped, he was again well-dressed by day's end and, within weeks, had money to spend and was again embarked on a boat headed for the Maldives, alone. It was a brief visit, he told the decidedly mistrustful vizier and queen: He wanted only to see the son he had fathered there. And five days later he was on his way to Bengal, Sumatra, and on—to China.

Ibn Battuta's long journey through Southeast Asia and China is strikingly less clear in its geography and chronology than his accounts of India. In the town of “Sumutra,” on the northeast tip of what is today the island of Sumatra, he recalled being told, “It is our custom that a newcomer does not greet the sultan for three days, so that the fatigue of the journey has gone out and he has recovered his faculties. ...They brought us food three times a day, fruit and delicacies evening and morning.”

At this point, it is fair to ask, “Why China?” The superficial answer is that Ibn Battuta had obviously determined to travel as widely in Dar al-Islam as he possibly could. From the Malabar coast of India, China was almost as distant as Tangier, where he had started his traveling 20 years earlier. His first attempt to get to China was as the head of a royal embassy, which would have been a magnificent way to see that country. Now he was merely a well-traveled, politically savvy, well-connected *qadi* who offered potential patrons a greater knowledge of the world,



and a better grasp of how it worked, than most of his peers. He had no particular need to go to China. Why not pack up his sandals and go home?

Yet China was a tremendous attraction for travelers. From the 10th to the 13th century, mutually reinforcing prosperity in the Islamic lands, under the Abbasids, and in China, under the Sung Dynasties, boosted Arab trade to heady heights. The Mongol Yuan Dynasty took China in 1279, and despite the Mongol devastations within Dar al-Islam, the maritime trade was little affected. Omani and other traders, as before, continued their arduous, 18-month voyages unmolested from the Arabian Gulf to Chüan-chou.

Even though the Yuan never embraced Islam, unlike the other Mongol dynasties that controlled Persia and Central Asia, they tended to trust Muslims more than they trusted their Chinese subjects. They esteemed Muslims as men of their word, as merchants who did not err because of intoxication,

On his way back to Morocco in 1348, Ibn Battuta encountered history's greatest pandemic, the Black Death, which affected the Middle East as dramatically as it did Europe. "I went to Damascus and arrived on a Thursday; the people had been fasting for three days.... The number of deaths among them had risen to 2400 a day.... Then I went to Cairo and was told that the number of deaths there had risen to 21,000 a day. I found that all the religious scholars I had known were dead. May God Most High have mercy upon them!"

Opposite: "The memory of my homeland moved me, affection for my people and friends, and love for my country, which for me is better than all others.... [In the spring of 1349] I sailed in a small *qurqura* belonging to a Tunisian.... I reached the city of Taza, where I learned that my mother had died of the plague, God Most High have mercy upon her.... I sought to visit my mother's grave [in Tangier and] visited it." Ibn Battuta was now 45 years old, and although he was in his native city for the first time in a quarter-century, he did not stay, but set out for "the holy war and the frontier fighting" in Spain.

and as people whose behavior in the spirit of the Qur'an was also laudable by the principles of Confucius. The Yuan's open-door policies filled their bureaucracy with Muslims of all origins—not to mention a few Westerners like Niccolo Polo and his son Marco. Thus Ibn Battuta may have been lured toward China for two of the same reasons he had been lured to India: the prospect of employment, and a persistent memory of the sage in Alexandria, Burhan al-Din, who two decades earlier had predicted that Ibn Battuta would one day visit China and greet his brother of the same name.

Ibn Battuta's account of his sojourn in China proper is much briefer than that of the 5700-kilometer (3500-mi) voyage that took him there by way of Burma and Sumatra. This is surprising in light of the rich detail lavished earlier in the *Rihla* on every corner of the Indian subcontinent that the traveler could reach. It is especially surprising given that a number of Chinese ports were the most significant long-distance Muslim trade destinations of the era, and the Marinid patron of the *Rihla* would hardly be any less interested in news of those destinations than of India. Ibn Battuta's scanty account of China is one of the great riddles of the *Rihla*.

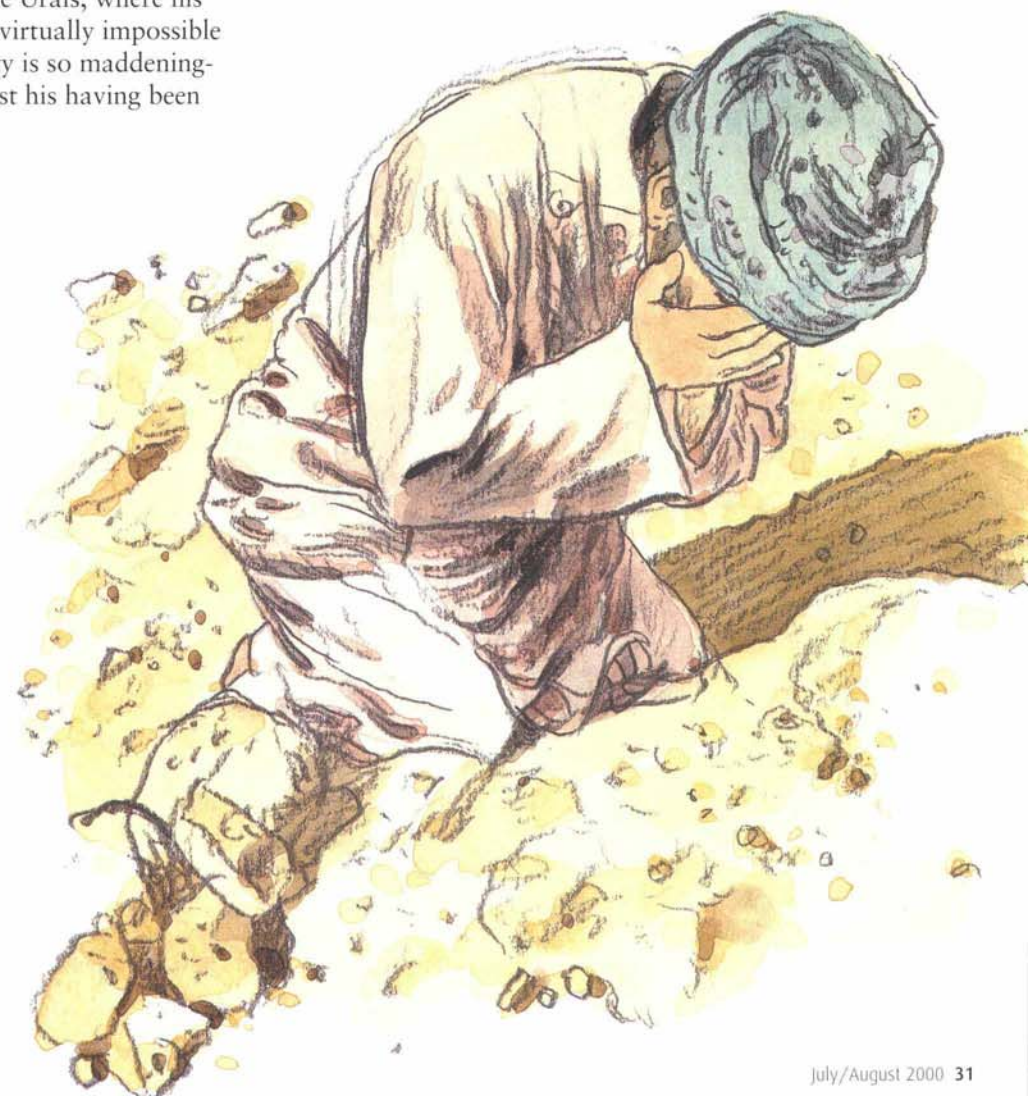
The troubles are more than scant treatment, however. There is plenty of evidence that either Ibn Battuta or the scribe of the *Rihla*, Ibn Juzayy, incorporated the writings of others in the text or embellished second-hand information, perhaps to supplement gaps in the traveler's memory. Such liberties appear most egregiously in the account of Ibn Battuta's trip up the Volga to "Bulgary" in the Urals, where his descriptions are fuzzy and his chronology virtually impossible to follow. Similarly, in China, his reliability is so maddeningly variable that one can argue for or against his having been there at all. On the one hand, many of his visual descriptions are just detailed enough to keep them in line with the rest of the *Rihla*. On the other, the portions that describe Fu-chou, Hang-chou, and Beijing are so devoid of anecdote and so generic that it is hard to believe that these are first-hand recollections: More likely, he learned about these places from other Muslim traders he met in the southern Chinese ports that he actually did visit, and about which he offers reasonably rich, nuanced description.

Occasionally he is simply wrong, although the rarity of outright error in the *Rihla* is part of what has made it such an enduringly valuable document. En route to China he describes the port of Qaqla (now in Myanmar): "Elephants are very numerous there; they ride on them and use them to carry loads.... The same is the case with all of the people of China and Cathay [Northern China]." This is not correct, as anyone who had been to China could attest and as Ibn Battuta himself should have known.

Elsewhere, his facts on China are largely correct, and they are fascinating, if too brief. He describes the universal use of paper money, which was also noted by others: "If anyone goes to the bazaar with a silver dirham or dinar, no one will accept it from him until he changes it into *balisht* [paper money]." He notes that fine porcelain costs less in China than common pottery in India and Arabia. Some of the best, he says, comes from Sin-Kalan, from whose name comes the word *kaolin*, the finest porcelain clay known. Ibn Battuta also reports one of those revealing vignettes that say much about the psychology of a culture:

The Chinese are of all peoples the most skillful in depiction. I never returned to any of their cities after an earlier visit without finding my portrait and the portraits of my companions drawn on the walls and on sheets of paper exhibited in the bazaars.... I was told that the sultan had ordered this. The artisans had come to the palace while we were there and observed us, drawing our portraits without our noticing. If a stranger commits any offense among them, they send his portrait far and wide. A search is then made for him. Wheresoever a person resembling that portrait is found, he is arrested.

But he was not always admiring. Here he notes the severity of Chinese maritime customs inspections:





After another narrow escape—this time from Christian corsairs who took a preceding company of Muslim soldiers prisoner—Ibn Battuta arrived in Granada. It was a time when the beleaguered kingdom was struggling to maintain its cultural and political brilliance, and its ruler, Yusuf I, was constructing what are today some of the most elegant portals and courtyards within the Alhambra. Yet Ibn Battuta did not meet him “because of an illness he had, but his nobly born, pious and excellent mother sent me some gold dinars, of which I made good use.”

They order the ship's master to dictate to them a manifest of all the merchandise in it, whether small or great. Then everyone disembarks and the customs officials sit to inspect what they have with them. If they come upon any article that has been concealed from them the junk and whatever is in it is forfeit to the treasury. This is a kind of extortion I have seen in no country, whether infidel or Muslim, except in China.

On the whole, Ibn Battuta seems to have enjoyed China less than any other place he had so far visited. Although “the Chinese are of all peoples the most skillful in crafts and attain the greatest perfection in them,” and “China is the safest and best country for the traveler,” the fussbudget, provincial side of his

character came out here in nines. Perhaps he was simply road-weary.

China, for all its magnificence, did not please me.... When I left my lodging I saw many offensive things which distressed me so much that I stayed at home and went out only when it was necessary. When I saw Muslims it was as though I had met my family and my relatives.

After a sojourn of less than a year—the exact duration is uncertain—a “rebellion broke out and disorders flared up,” giving him a welcome excuse to quit the country. He left aboard a friend's India-bound junk. Though he was not fully aware of it, he was on his way home.

In India, he met only ghosts of his past: “I wanted to return to Delhi, but became afraid to do so.” He sailed on to Oman.

By this point in his travels, the flush of youthful discovery and the prospects of success just over the horizon seem to have left Ibn Battuta—or perhaps by this point in his

recounting he was growing weary of dictating to Ibn Juzayy. For whatever reason, a few pages suffice to cover his return from China, via Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo, to make his fourth Hajj in Makkah.

Among those pages are one of the *Rihla*'s most harrowing accounts. It was late spring in 1348, in Aleppo, when Ibn Battuta learned that “at Gaza the plague had broken out and the number of deaths reached over a thousand a day.” Although his numbers were hardly official statistics, his impressions of the Black Death are now certainly first-hand:

I went to Homs and found that the plague had already struck there; about 300 persons died on the day of my arrival. I went to Damascus and arrived on a Thursday; the people had been fasting for three days.... The number of deaths among them had risen to 2400 a day.... Then we went to Gaza and found most of it deserted because of the number that had died.... The qadi told me that only a quarter of the 80 notaries there were left and that the number of deaths had risen to 1100 a day.... Then I went to Cairo and was told that during the plague the number of deaths rose to 21,000 a day. I found that all the shaykhs I had known were dead. May God Most High have mercy upon them!

He reported only on the areas he visited, and that briefly. Today we know that the plague was as great a pandemic in Dar al-Islam as it was in Europe, and that to the east, the Great Wall did nothing to stop the rat and the flea that brought the disease to China in cargoes of grain. The scale of the deaths there was taken as a sign that the mandate of heaven had been withdrawn and that the Yuan Dynasty would fall. Fourteen years later, it did.

In Damascus Ibn Battuta learned that a son he had fathered there had died 12 years before and that his own father had died no fewer than 15 years earlier in Tangier. But his mother, a fellow Berber reported, was still alive, though now advanced in years. He resolved to see her.

But first he made his intended fourth Hajj. He remained in Makkah from Ramadan through the month of the Hajj, about three months, and “every day I visited the holy places.” He comments little on the city in this passing, and little on plague-ridden Cairo, now a honeycomb without honey. The great builder, Mamluk sultan al-Nasir Muhammad Qala'un, had nine years earlier fallen to a cabal of rivals, under whom the city's administration all but collapsed.

Further west, the tribes of Ifriqiyyah were once more besieging Tunis. The one strong leader in the region, Abu al-Hasan, seized the central Maghrib, then sent an expedition to retake Gibraltar. Emboldened by its success, he sent another into Spain to try to stop and drive back the waves of Christian knights out of Castile, but he lost much of his army at the battle of Río Salado, an event that augured the last scene of the last act of Islam's presence in southwestern Spain and Portugal.

Ibn Battuta says nothing of his filial feelings as he made his halting way toward Tangier, but surely they were there. Then, alas: In Taza, near Fez, he learned that death had knocked on his mother's door before he had been able to. She had died of the plague that he had escaped.

In Fez, Ibn Battuta presented to the Marinid sultan's repre-

sentative. Considering that Sultan Abu 'Inan was later to become Ibn Battuta's final and most steadfast patron, as well as the underwriter of the *Rihla*, it is understandable that the traveler now spends little time describing his private reunions with family, friends and colleagues and indulges instead in the rhetorical equivalent of kissing the soil of his homeland—as well as the staff of its ruler. It is a reminder again of his ability to ingratiate himself with the right person in the right way at the right time, at home no less than abroad.

I stood before our exalted master, the most generous imam, the Commander of the Faithful,... Abu 'Inan, may God establish his grandeur and crush his enemies. His majesty caused me to forget the majesty of the sultan of Iraq, his beauty caused me to forget that of the king of India, his gracious manners those of the king of Yemen, his courage the king of the Turks.... I laid down my traveling staff in his noble country after verifying, with superabundant impartiality, that it is the best of countries.

This panegyric carries on for several pages of the *Rihla*, but when Ibn Battuta moves on to Tangier, he describes in one sentence his visit to his mother's tomb, and in the next three sentences a visit to Ceuta, his illness there, and his decision “to take part in the *jihad* and the defense of the frontier” against the Christians in Spain.

So though the great traveler had returned home, he was not yet done traveling. There were two more significant journeys to make, one to the north, and one to the south.

In contrast to the anomalous China narrative, his descriptions of al-Andalus are no less copious and rich than the rest of the *Rihla*. For anyone who has been to southern Spain, the scenery has been changed only in that the tracks he walked are now mostly paved roads, and that, in the towns, television antennae clutter what were then unbroken roofscapes of red tile.

Ibn Battuta was as charmed with Granada as visitors are today. It was the time of Yusuf I, who was then building the Alhambra, though Ibn Battuta does not mention it. He does mention one item, almost in passing, that speaks again of the extraordinary mobility of the population of Dar al-Islam in the early 14th century: There was a company of Persians in Granada, he notes, “who have made their homes there because of its resemblance to their native lands. One is from Samarkand, another from Tabriz, a third from Konya [Turkey], two from Khurasan, two from India, and so on.”

He also met a young man, scion of a long line of gentleman poets, who was mesmerized by the places and people Ibn Battuta had seen. His name was Muhammad ibn Juzayy, and he wrote down a number of the traveler's stories, sketchily and spontaneously. The two would meet again, in Fez, some five years later, when Ibn Juzayy would be commissioned to record the full extent of Ibn Battuta's travels. In the *Rihla*, Ibn Juzayy notes as an aside: “I was with them in that garden [in al-Andalus]. Shaykh Abu 'Abdallah [Ibn Battuta] delighted us with the story of his travels.”

Then Shaykh Abu 'Abdallah returned to Fez by way of Rabat and Marrakech, where he noted "magnificent mosques, like the principal mosque, known as the Mosque of the Booksellers. It has a wonderful and awe-inspiring minaret, which I climbed and from which the whole town can be seen." Today we can't climb that minaret, but we can certainly agree on its beauty.

When he got back to Morocco, political conditions were stable and Sultan Abu 'Inan was building the finest *madrasa* Fez had ever known. Ibn Battuta was three years short of his 50th birthday. What a wonderful place and time this would have been to end his peregrinations!

But no. By now Ibn Battuta had traversed the entirety of Dar al-Islam except that part almost the closest to his home, but which, because of the difficulty of getting there, was, in practical terms, farther away than all the rest.

On the first day of the month of Muharram in early 1352, Ibn Battuta left with a caravan to cross the Sahara to Mali and *bilad al-sudan*, "the country of the blacks." Today, Tuareg guides in their indigo blue still make that camel trek, from Goulemine in Morocco, near his departure point of Sijilmasa, then prosperous but now deserted. The crossing takes 63 days. Ibn Battuta did not count them, but simply described the trip as "long and arduous."

It was not out of casual curiosity that Ibn Battuta went in this direction. Central West Africa was on the rise, undergoing its own remarkable blossoming. The upper valleys of the Senegal and Niger rivers were fruitful. They easily provisioned the rich gold mines at Bambuk and Bure. Had the demand for gold from Dar al-Islam been all there was, the region around the kingdom of Mali would have maintained a prosperous but stagnant economy. But there was far greater demand for gold. The Christian lands of Europe were converting to stably priced but foreign gold from local, but price-volatile, silver. The effect on Mali, which then produced 60 percent or more of the world's total supply of gold, was an economic boom. The new wealth could support stronger armies, whose conquests in turn enlarged the tax base to include more farmers and herders.

The caravans of camels that carried the gold of Mali north to Morocco also carried the region's other exports, such as hides, nuts, ostrich and other feathers, ivory and salt. In the opposite direction went cotton textiles, spices, finished jewelry, grain, dried fruit, horses for the Malian army, and the metals that West and Central Africa lacked: silver, copper, and iron. One example alone demonstrated the extraordinary range of the Muslim commercial system: Cowrie

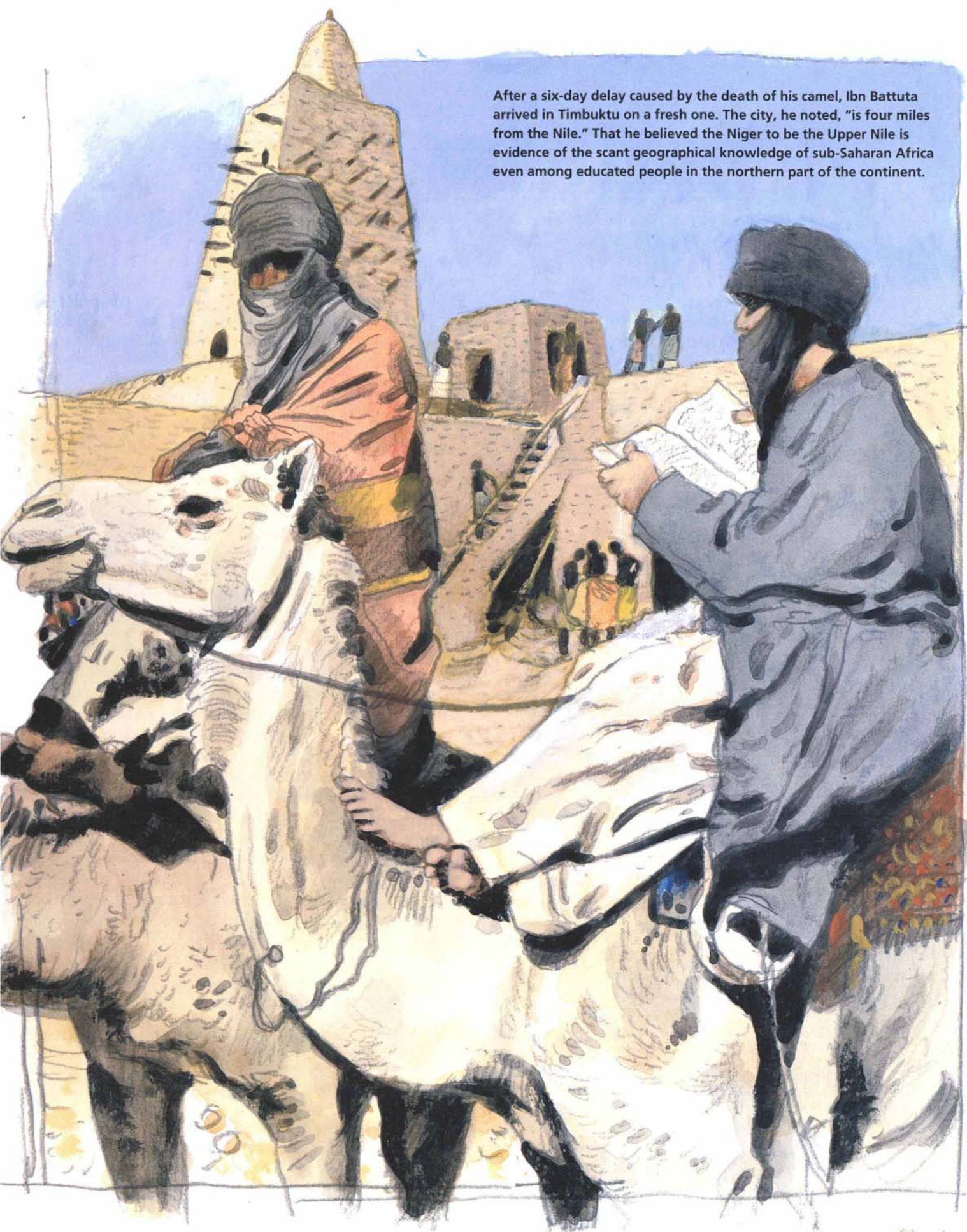
shells from the Maldives were used as money in Sudan and Mali, and gold from Mali turned up in the Maldives, 9000 kilometers (5500 mi) and an ocean away.

The Mali-Morocco trade was dominated by Berber merchants, who had settled in Mali and the savanna lands south of the gold fields. Thanks to their connections with these merchants, Muslim traders also arrived, settled among the locals, built mosques and called the people to prayer. Muslim concepts of fair trade helped bring order to the boom times and won their practitioners respect that reflected well on their religion.

As with other expansions of Islam, conversion brought the need for administration, for *qadis*, for *'ulama*, and all the administrative infrastructure that was part of the network that had produced Ibn Battuta and thrived by his labors and those of his colleagues. This process is spectacularly illustrated by the example of Mali's most fabled king, *mansa* ("sultan") Musa, who became a legend by distributing so much gold in Cairo en route to the Hajj in 1324 that he depressed the market. The chronicler al-'Umari wrote: "He established the Friday observances



Mali, renowned for its gold, was the destination of perhaps the most arduous of all Ibn Battuta's journeys, and he was, when he set out, 48 years old. In the capital of Mali, whose location at that time is uncertain, he visited *mansa* ("sultan") Suleyman, and noted sourly that "he is a miserly king, and a big gift is not to be expected from him." Ibn Battuta waited at the local *qadi*'s house for the customary welcoming gift, "but [instead of robes of honor, or money] there were three round loaves of bread, a piece of beef fried in *gharti*, and a calabash with curdled milk. When I saw it I laughed."



After a six-day delay caused by the death of his camel, Ibn Battuta arrived in Timbuktu on a fresh one. The city, he noted, "is four miles from the Nile." That he believed the Niger to be the Upper Nile is evidence of the scant geographical knowledge of sub-Saharan Africa even among educated people in the northern part of the continent.

[in his kingdom], prayers in the congregation, and the muezzin's call. He brought jurists...to his country and...became a student of religious sciences."

This was a familiar pattern to Ibn Battuta, and he pursued what role he could in it. But this last adventure produced few of the glories of his previous ones. In fact, it had pretty much the opposite effect. He begins observantly enough:

[In Taghaza] there are no trees, only sand in which is a salt mine.... They dig the ground and thick slabs are found in it, lying on each other as if they had been cut and stacked under the ground. A camel carries two slabs.... A load of it is sold at [Walata] for eight to 10 mithqals, and in the city of Malli for 20 to 30, sometimes 40. The blacks trade with salt as others trade with gold and silver; they cut it in pieces and buy and sell with these. For all its squalor qintars and qintars of gold dust are traded there. We spent 10 days there, under strain, for the water is brackish and it is the place with the most flies.

The next stage of his journey, from Taghaza to Walata, was some 800 kilometers (500 mi), broken by only one oasis. The terrain was so barren, and the chance of becoming lost so great, that a relief-convoy system had evolved. Caravan leaders would hire a local Musafa tribesman to act as a *takshif*, a messenger who, for a high fee, would precede them and inform the merchants of Walata of the caravan's coming. Those merchants then equipped a convoy of water-bearers to march four days' distance out to meet the incoming caravan. The *takshif* was paid only when the two groups met, and "sometimes the *takshif* perishes in this desert and the people of [Walata] know nothing of the caravan, and its people, or most of them, perish too." Imagine the relieved sighs when the men of the caravan—traveling mostly at night because of the heat—saw the lights of the water convoy on the horizon!

In Walata, some 400 kilometers (250 mi) west of Timbuktu, Ibn Battuta was less than impressed by his reception. The local governor spoke to him only through an interlocutor, and, though he was told this was correct Malian protocol, the *qadi* took offense. His sour mood curdled altogether when "the repast was served—some pounded millet mixed with a little honey and milk and put into a calabash shaped like a large bowl." Ibn Battuta, a man accustomed to the cuisine of the finest courts of the world, was taken aback, and conceived an uncharitable sentiment that he harbored for the rest of his trip: "I then became convinced that no good was to be hoped for from these people." Nonetheless, he remained in that country for 50 days, and admitted that "its people treated me with respect and gave me hospitality."

From Mali he took to the Niger River, which he mistook for the Nile, since it flows eastward through Mali before abruptly turning south into Nigeria. He wrote copiously about this region, especially its Arabic language and Islamic culture, and recounted stories about cannibal tribes in the south.

Later, in the capital of Mali, which he neither names nor locates, he visited Mansa Suleyman and noted that "he is a miserly king and a big gift is not to be expected from him." To make Ibn Battuta's mood worse, he contracted food poisoning from a meal that killed one of its six partakers. He waited at the *qadi*'s house for a welcoming gift. When it arrived, he expected "robes of honor and money, but there

were three round loaves of bread, a piece of beef fried in *gharti*, and a calabash with curdled milk. When I saw it I laughed and was greatly surprised at their feeble intelligence and exaggerated opinion of something contemptible."

At this point in the *Rihla*, we begin to get an impression of travel-weariness, probably exacerbated by extended illness. Fortunately for Ibn Battuta—and for our impression of 14th-century Mali—there were also better times, such as what appears to have been a pleasant river trip by dugout canoe from near Timbuktu to Gao on the Niger, which he continues to refer to as the Nile:

At Tunbuktu [sic] I embarked on the Nile in a little boat hollowed out from a single piece of wood. Every night we stopped at a village where we bought the food and butter we needed, paying with salt, aromatics and glass trinkets. We reached a town whose name I have forgotten; the amir was an excellent man, a hajji.

Later, journeying over the desert to Takadda, "I fell ill from the extreme heat and excess of bile. We hastened our march." He recovered sufficiently to visit a nearby copper mine, and then a messenger arrived with a command from the sultan of Fez, ordering his return to his exalted capital.

I kissed [the letter] and obeyed instantly. I bought two riding camels...[and] took on provisions for 70 nights, for no grain is found between Takadda and Tawat. Only meat, curdled milk and butter are to be had; they are bought with cloth.

Ibn Battuta's venture across the Sahara shows vividly that the world he traveled through was not demarcated by linear borders, as it is on maps—though not always in fact—today. Rather, the geographical limits of a 14th-century ruler's power were more like what we see at night from a commercial jet at cruising altitude. Looking down from the airplane, we see cities as intense agglomerations of light whose brilliance becomes progressively less as we look from the city centers to the suburbs. The lights thin out further as we look at less populated countryside, with lines stretching outward along river courses and fertile valleys until finally, in the open, scantily populated lands, there appears only the occasional flicker of an outpost. Then the land goes dark, until traces of the tentacles of the next urban core begin to appear.

The sultanates, kingdoms, fleeting petty trading states and vast dynastic empires that Ibn Battuta visited were also lights seen from altitude. Around the temple and the palace, the shining core of power, were the houses of the nobles, hardly less brilliant. Beyond them, within easy serving distance, lay the quarters of merchants, workers and students, shining lights of intellect and the industry. Then there were suburbs of the somewhat well-to-do, the government functionaries, the retired soldiers, whose light was mostly a reflection of the light at the center. Finally came the poor quarters of laborers, freed slaves, disenfranchised farmers, refugees from other principalities' wars, and others of the underclasses. Beyond them lay the fields, though only as far as water might be found. Where these last skeins of light ended, so also did the ruler's writ—a fact ruefully noted by every tax collector sent to perform his duties in the hinterlands.

On the trek back he was rather better impressed by the rough but sincere piety of some Berber customs:

We...reached the country of the Hoggar, a Berber clan,... who are scoundrels. We had arrived in their country in the month of Ramadan, during which they do not go on raids or intercept caravans; if their robbers find goods on the road in Ramadan they do not take them. It is so with all Berbers along this road.

We can almost hear him sighing, "Civilization at last!"

In January 1354 Ibn Battuta arrived back in Fez to an enthusiastic welcome from Sultan Abu 'Inan, who deemed Ibn Battuta's stories worth recording. He assigned the task to the scribe and poet Ibn Juzayy, who had been so impressed with Ibn Battuta when they met in Granada and who may indeed have expressed an enthusiasm for the job. Although we know Ibn Battuta's account today by its generic title of *Rihla*, its original title was more florid, in the court style of the day: *Tuhfat al-Nuzzar fi Ghara'ib al-Amsar wa-'Aja'ib al-Asfar* (A Gift to Those Who Contemplate the Wonders of Cities and the Marvels of Traveling).

Strictly defined, a *rihla* was a written account of a Hajj journey. We saw earlier how portions of Ibn Battuta's descriptions of Madinah and Makkah closely paralleled, or were copied directly from, a *rihla* of Ibn Jubayr's penned a century earlier. Such unacknowledged copying, done with or without Ibn Battuta's knowledge, was not fair play by the standards of his time any more than our own, but perhaps Ibn Juzayy thought that only one pair of eyes—the sultan's—would ever read this *rihla*.

More forgivable are Ibn Juzayy's touching up Ibn Battuta's prose with the addition of narrative highlights, since most of them are likely indistinguishable from the moments of Ibn Battuta's own fitful eloquence that Ibn Juzayy claimed to have recorded verbatim. Ibn Juzayy was, after all, a professional court poet, and the eloquence of the finished work, both collaborators knew, would reflect less on either of them than on the work's patron, the sultan. Thus beautiful writing and spectacular description was a matter, once again, of knowing which side of the narrative bread would receive the royal butter. And there is, of course, the question of first- and second-hand information from Ibn Battuta himself: How much credence did he give to tales wafting through the caravansaries? We cannot tell, and so must be content with what we have.

Ironically, despite these questions, Ibn Battuta only came to be appreciated centuries after his death. His peers and contemporaries, the Moroccan *'ulama*, often flatly disbelieved him and said so. Some dismissed him as a *qadi* of middling rank who substituted tall tales for a respectable record of juridical achievement—a sentiment perhaps spread by some degree of envy, provincialism and academic rivalry. Ibn Khaldun, the great political scientist and sociologist who was a close contemporary of Ibn Battuta, muttered darkly that the latter "reported things...that his listeners considered strange." Abu al-Barakat al-Balafiqi of Granada called him "purely and simply a liar," and said snidely that Ibn Battuta "possessed only a modest share of knowledge." Though Abu al-Barakat may have been technically correct in that statement, which of the two is being read today? A more gracious comment came

in the 15th century from Muhammad ibn Marzuk, a scholar who said, "I know of no person who journeyed to so many lands...on his travels, and he was generous and well-doing."

After that, little is heard about the *Rihla*, although it circulated in Arabic, mostly in the Maghrib, until European scholars rediscovered it a century and a half ago. It attracted the interest of historian Sir Hamilton Gibb, whose unabridged translation made the *Rihla* widely available in English beginning in 1958, and from whose definitive, four-volume work (with minor liberties) the translations in this article have been taken.

Ibn Battuta died in 1369 at the age of 65. His death came 11 or 12 years after he finished dictating the *Rihla*, a project that appears to have come to an end with the death of Ibn Juzayy. We know nothing of the rest of Ibn Battuta's life, except that he served as a *qadi* in an unrecorded Moroccan town. He had no known descendants in Morocco.

As to his world, one of the great virtues of the *Rihla* is that it is so voluminous that everyone who reads it finds facets to enjoy. Let us focus for a concluding moment on one largely unremarked but very important aspect of the work: Local markets. Here are the prices of chickens, there the markups for salt, and everywhere the cash and barter prices for no end of eggs, cucumbers, yams, jewelry, household items, perfumes, carpets, and so on, to say nothing of the cash price for other cash. The *Rihla* is our era's only available stroll through the supermarkets and banks of the early 14th century, the only source for the *longue durée* view of history that became so influential in the second half of the 20th century. Put these details together with his descriptions of transport and delivery infrastructure, support them with his specifics on the number and funding of *waqfs*, *madrasas*, royal entourages, modes of taxation, armies, shipbuilding and the organizing of caravans, and there takes shape before our eyes an enormous canvas detailing the workings of an intricate, sophisticated, global, pre-industrial economy.

Our delight in his gift, as we contemplate the wonders of his travels, lives on. 🌐



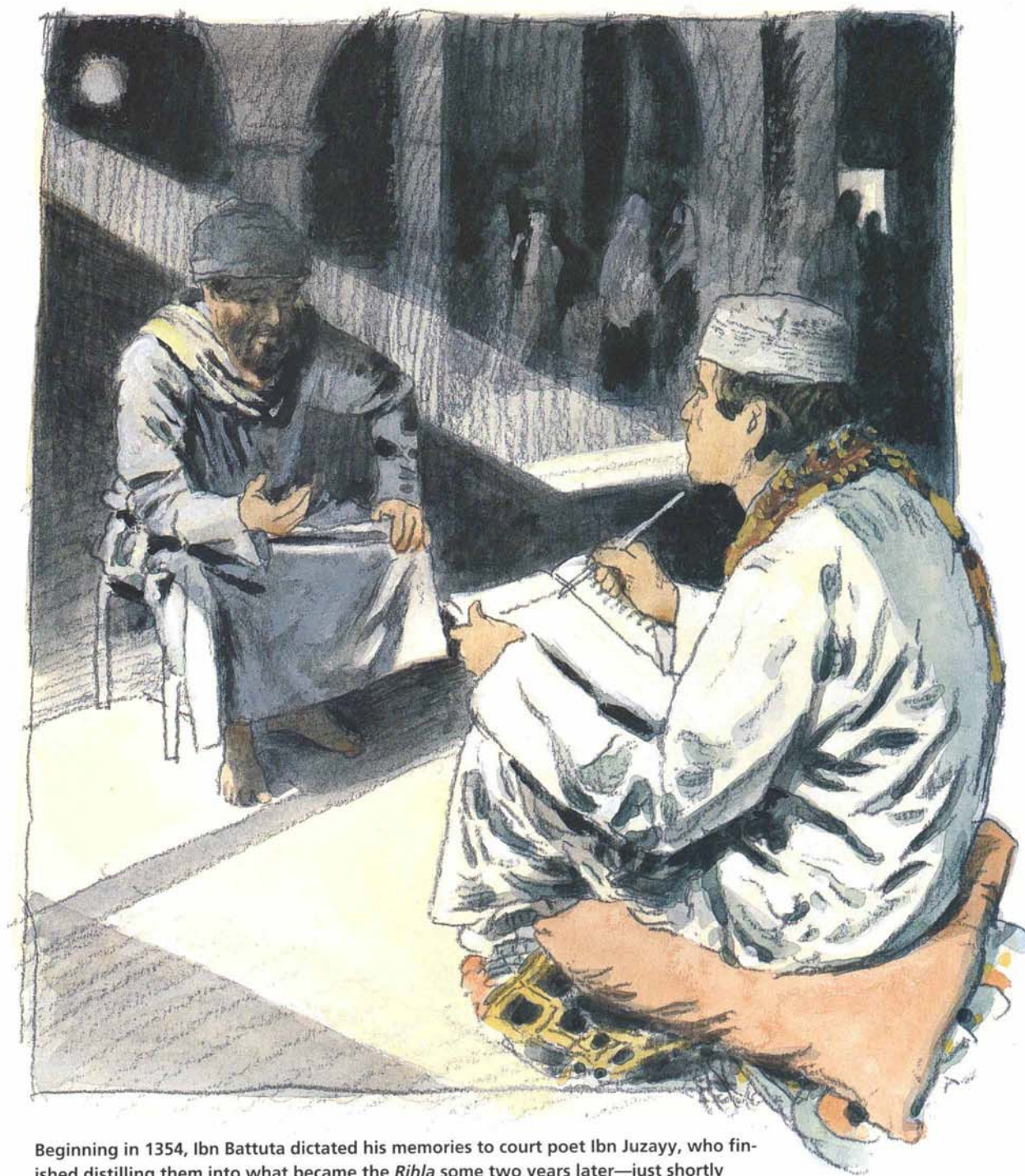
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Quotations taken from:

Sir Hamilton A. R. Gibb, ed. and trans. from the Arabic edition of C. Defrémery and B. Sanguinetti. *The Travels of Ibn Battuta*, vol. 1 (1958); vol. 2 (1962); vol. 3 (1971); vol. 4 (1994, with C. F. Beckingham). Cambridge (UK): The Hakluyt Society.



Beginning in 1354, Ibn Battuta dictated his memories to court poet Ibn Juzayy, who finished distilling them into what became the *Rihla* some two years later—just shortly before his own death. In his introduction, Ibn Juzayy called Ibn Battuta "the most trustworthy and veracious traveler, the ranger of the earth and traverser of its climes in length and breadth...." and averred that he himself had "rendered the sense of the narrative...in language which adequately expresses the purposes that [Ibn Battuta] had in mind and sets forth clearly the ends which he had in view. Frequently I have reported his words in his own phrasing, without omitting either root or branch." At the end of the *Rihla*, Ibn Juzayy wrote, "This completes the epitome I made of the composition of the shaykh Abu 'Abdallah Muhammad ibn Battuta, God ennoble him. It is obvious to anyone of intelligence that [he] is the traveler of the age, [and] if anyone were to call him 'the traveler of the [entire Muslim] community' he would not exaggerate."

duel in the desert

It's just before dawn in the desert of Seyh al-Salam, deep in the interior of the emirate of Dubai, but already there is a quiet bustle of activity under the bright lights of the endurance racing center in the dunes.

Horses nicker softly, and there is the familiar squeak of leather on leather as saddles are hoisted up and girths tightened. I can hear snippets of jokes and clipped commands in a half dozen languages, as riders, trainers and support teams from around the world prepare for the start of the United Arab Emirates' second annual World's Most Preferred Endurance Ride. This is no ordinary horseback trek, but a top-level endurance race, a two-day contest that will require competitors to cover an astonishing 200 kilometers (125 mi) over several roughly circular courses in the desert.

Called "the sport of a million steps," endurance racing is one of the most challenging international equestrian competitions for both horses and riders. And in the UAE, where the sport has found a particularly hospitable home, it takes on the added

Endurance Racing in Dubai

Written by Carol Flake Chapman

Photographed by Lorraine Chittock

The start in the desert dawn is no cavalry charge: In a two-day contest covering 200 kilometers, getting an early jump on the pack is of no advantage.

challenge of the hot, dry terrain of the desert. Unlike the brief cavalry charge of a thoroughbred race, an endurance race has a series of stages, each varying in length and difficulty. In musical terms, the rhythm of an endurance race is something like a fugue, with a multitude of variations played out on a similar theme. From the haven of the endurance compound, the competitors will venture out each day for four different forays into the sands of Seyh al-Salam, returning after each stage of the race for a veterinary inspection of the horses and a chance to rest and rehydrate. The key part of the race, some riders told me, won't even begin until the last 30 kilometers (19 mi).

Even so, there is a quickening of tension and excitement as the moments before the start of the race tick away. If this race follows the pattern of previous ones, fewer than two-thirds of the horses entered will even finish. With strict veterinary checks along the way, any horse with even a hint of a health or soundness problem will be removed from the competition. "For some riders, just to finish is to win," I had been told by leading US rider Valerie Kanavy, who won the last World Endurance Championship race, held here in Dubai in 1998. "There is a lot to this sport, from the training to the horsemanship," she said. "And even if you've done your homework, plenty of things can go wrong."

As the horses are led from the sheltered stable area toward the enclosed staging ground behind the gates through which they'll leave and return to the compound, the animals toss their heads, some prancing in anticipation. They are veterans of the sport, all at least five years old, by local and international rules. They've had to pass a number of tests in order to reach this level of racing, and there's little doubt they have some notion of what lies ahead. Almost all are of Arabian bloodlines, although many have been flown in from Europe, Australia, and North America to compete in this race.

The riders hoist themselves into the saddle, some getting a boost up from team members, and I can recognize a number

of the trainers, riders, and horses I've been following during the past few days of race preparations. Checking on several horses and riders is Ismaeel Mohammed, the wiry, ebullient former Dubai policeman who now heads the training program for Shaykh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the defense minister of Dubai. Although Shaykh Mohammed himself won't be riding in this race, he often competes, and his sons have taken up the sport. His three eldest sons, Rashid, Hamdan and Maktoum, still in their teens, will be riding today, with Hamdan aboard the high-spirited Ali Leujah, one of the favorites to win. Just two weeks earlier, Ali Leujah had won an 80-kilometer (50-mi) race at the new Al-Wathba endurance racing center in Abu Dhabi, with Rashid as the rider. At the end of that race, Ali Leujah, a former sprinter that Ismaeel Mohammed had discovered and purchased in Australia, had been prancing as though he were ready to go another 80 kilometers.

The endurance world, for all its high-profile competitors, still seems very much a family affair, with friends and relatives often serving as trainers, teammates, or cheering squads. Also in the race from Dubai are the veteran Hassan bin Ali, a former camel trainer who rides and trains for Shaykh Mohammed's brother, Shaykh Hamdan bin Rashid al-Maktoum; and yet another trio of siblings, Mohammed Ali al-Shafar and his brothers Khalid Ali and Osama Ahmed. Their father, a contractor in Dubai, will follow their progress in the race from his four-wheel-drive vehicle. From the tiny nearby emirate of Ajman is Shaykh Ahmed bin Humaid al-Nuaimi, a rising star in the sport, who trains and rides his own horses. After victories in two races in the UAE this year and a surprising victory last year in Australia's big Queensland State Endurance Ride, where he was the first non-Australian to win, he's currently ranked as the top endurance rider in the world. Rashid al-Maktoum, who was a top rider last year, is currently a close second.

Among the challengers from North America is Canadian rider Christy Janzen, aboard her well-regarded 10-year-old mare Tais, known for her consistency. Janzen, whose husband Dan heads her support team, has done well in three previous races in the Emirates, including a ninth-place finish in this race last year. Janzen checks the pocket of her specially made numbered vest to make sure she hasn't forgotten her "smart card," the chip-embedded cards assigned to riders that will make it possible to track their progress by computer as they enter and leave the compound at each stage of the race.

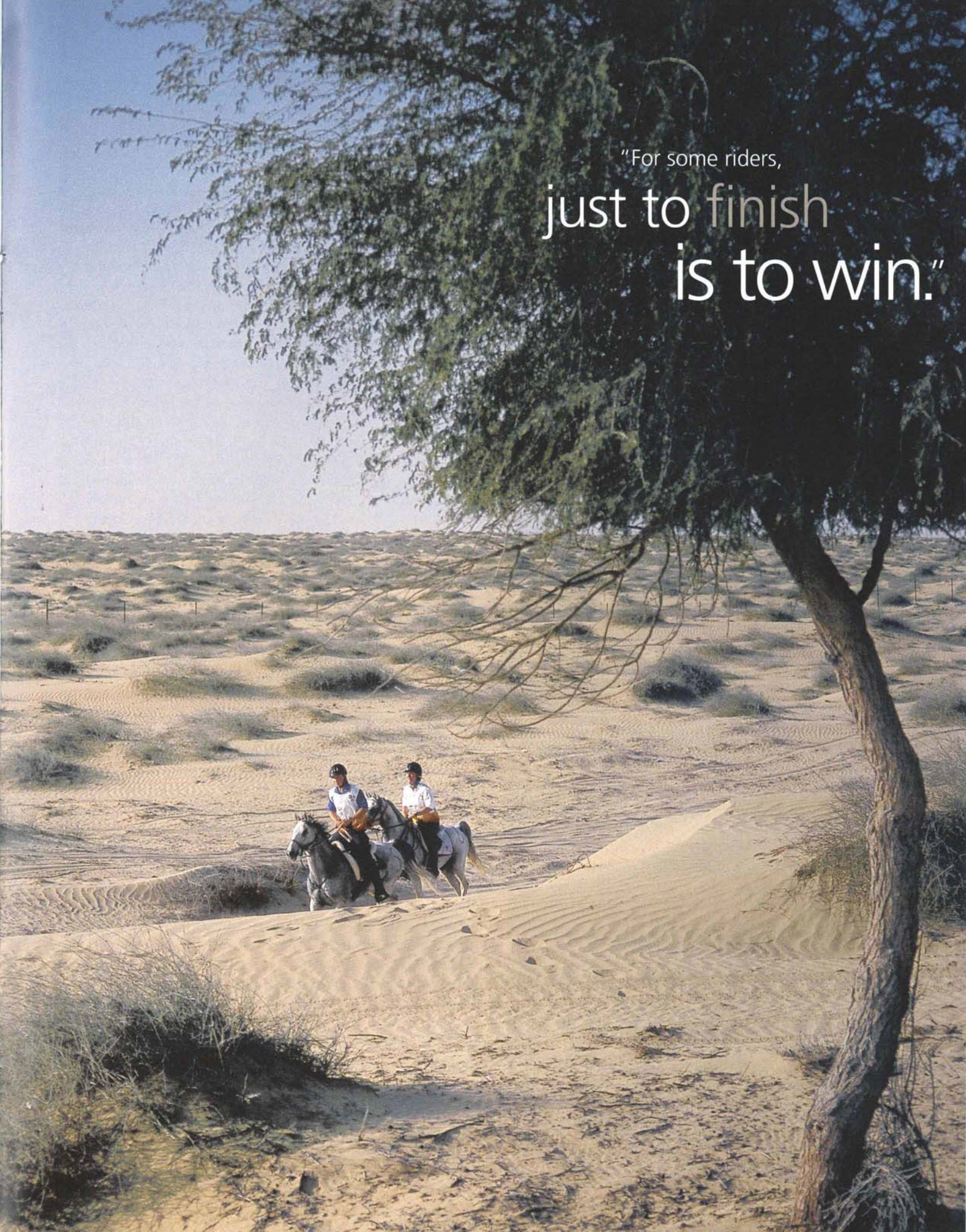
Altogether, there are 55 riders entered, and they appear to be a remarkably diverse bunch, including men and women of many ethnic backgrounds, ranging in age from teens to 60's and in size from short and slight to tallish and substantial. Unlike thoroughbred racing, there is no advantage in endurance racing to being small or thin, since all horses must carry a minimum weight, which is currently about 70 kilos, or 154 pounds. Any difference is made up by weights placed in the saddle.

At a signal from the announcer, all the competitors gather

"For some riders,
just to finish
is to win."



At each checkpoint, progress among the 55 contestants is tracked electronically using each racer's "smart card." Opposite: "You find a pace that works for you and your horse," says Shaykh Ahmed bin Humaid al-Nuaimi, this year's winner. "You never want to push too hard early."





and begin to position themselves behind the entrance gates, some jostling a bit for position up front, but most apparently content to keep their horses in the middle or toward the back of the pack. With nearly 10 hours of riding ahead, getting a jump on the pack is not a particularly advantage. And then they're off, streaming out into the desert as the first rays of light turn the buff-colored sand a mellow gold. Some are trotting, some already at a gallop, though they'll soon slow to a steady canter. The wind and the thundering hooves stir the sand into a kind of mist that envelops the horses and riders as they head toward the horizon, following the green flags of the first course, and it's an unexpectedly dramatic sight.

The support teams have already left in their four-wheel-drive vehicles, some to wait at watering stations along the course, and I head for my own vehicle to try to find a good vantage point to view the early progress of the race. For spectators, I have learned, watching an endurance race is itself a kind of participatory sport. Either you find a high lookout point along the way, or you try to maneuver your vehicle along the track, being careful to stay on the leeward side of the horses so as not to stir up the sand—and so as not to get stuck. This first stage is among the easiest, along a fairly hard-packed track, and as I stop my vehicle and climb the highest dune along the course I can see that Hamdan al-Maktoum and Ali Leujah have already gone to the lead, and they are setting a strong pace, with Rashid al-Maktoum and their teammate Abdullah Billhab close behind. The rest of the riders are already strung out behind them, some going along in groups of two or three.

Ahmed bin Humaid, the Ajmani, is in the middle of the pack, moving up gradually and easily, as he had told me he planned to do when I asked him a few days earlier about his strategy. "You never want to push too hard early, or go neck and neck with other horses all the way," he said. "You find a pace that works for you and your horse. You place yourself where you want to be and ride your own race, even while you stay aware of what everyone else is doing. Then, when it gets closer to the end of the race, you see what your horse has left. If your horse is capable, you go for it." And if the horse is not, he added, you wait for another day: "The last thing you want to do is harm your horse."

Riders, in fact, can go to great lengths to protect their horses. Ismaeel Mohammed, who used to ride in the races before training became a full-time job, recalled a race that took place between the emirates of Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah, during which he took the lead but decided to dismount and walk when he felt his horse tiring. He walked several kilometers to let the horse recuperate, he said, and watched as the eventual winner passed him. "With your horse, you have to give as well as take," he says.

So far, things have gone smoothly in today's combination of old-fashioned horsemanship and high-tech innovation—as though the Emirates had been hosting such races for ages. But in fact, the UAE has traveled a considerable distance in this sport in a remarkably short period of time. It was just seven years ago that the country sponsored its first endurance race, of sorts, with a somewhat



Because of the distance between staging points, the only "grandstand" is a pack of four-wheel-drive vehicles: Team support members and spectators drive alongside and ahead of the contestants. Below: Between stages, a team checks the silicone caulk that gives their horse's hooves additional protection against sand and small rocks. Any evidence of injury or foot-soreness is grounds for elimination from the race.

chaotic competition between horses and camels. The start of the 30 kilometer (19-mi) race was marked by a cannon blast, and things did not go exactly as planned, according to Faisal Seddiq al-Mutawa, a top official of the UAE Equestrian and Racing Federation, who is helping to officiate the race at Seyh al-Salam. "The horses were worried about the camels," he says wryly. "It was like a zoo." (The race was won by a horse, he says, responding to my curiosity.)

Despite that somewhat inauspicious beginning, however, a number of leaders in equestrian sports in the Emirates became serious about endurance racing as an organized sport. Members of the federation traveled abroad to observe how distance racing was conducted in other countries, and began to plan how the UAE should launch itself into the sport. In 1996, a handful of riders from the Emirates leased horses from owners in the US and elsewhere in order to participate in the world championship ride in Kansas, and one UAE rider managed to finish 12th in that race. "We were clearly new to the game," says Seddiq.

Within just two years, however, the UAE was selected as host country for the next world championship ride. Although in one sense the UAE has had to play catch-up in the sport, it and other countries in the region might be regarded as having had a considerable head start—of many centuries—when it comes to handling the Arabian horse. The Arabian was selectively bred in this harsh, demanding environment to continually



After a race stage, teams walk their horses, douse them with cooling water and take them for a brief but strict veterinary checkup: During the first day, 19 horses failed "vet checks" and were eliminated. Middle: UAE trainer Ismaeel Mohammed shouts encouragement to a rider on one of the three horses he is overseeing in the race. Bottom: In the desert heat, riders get thirsty, too.

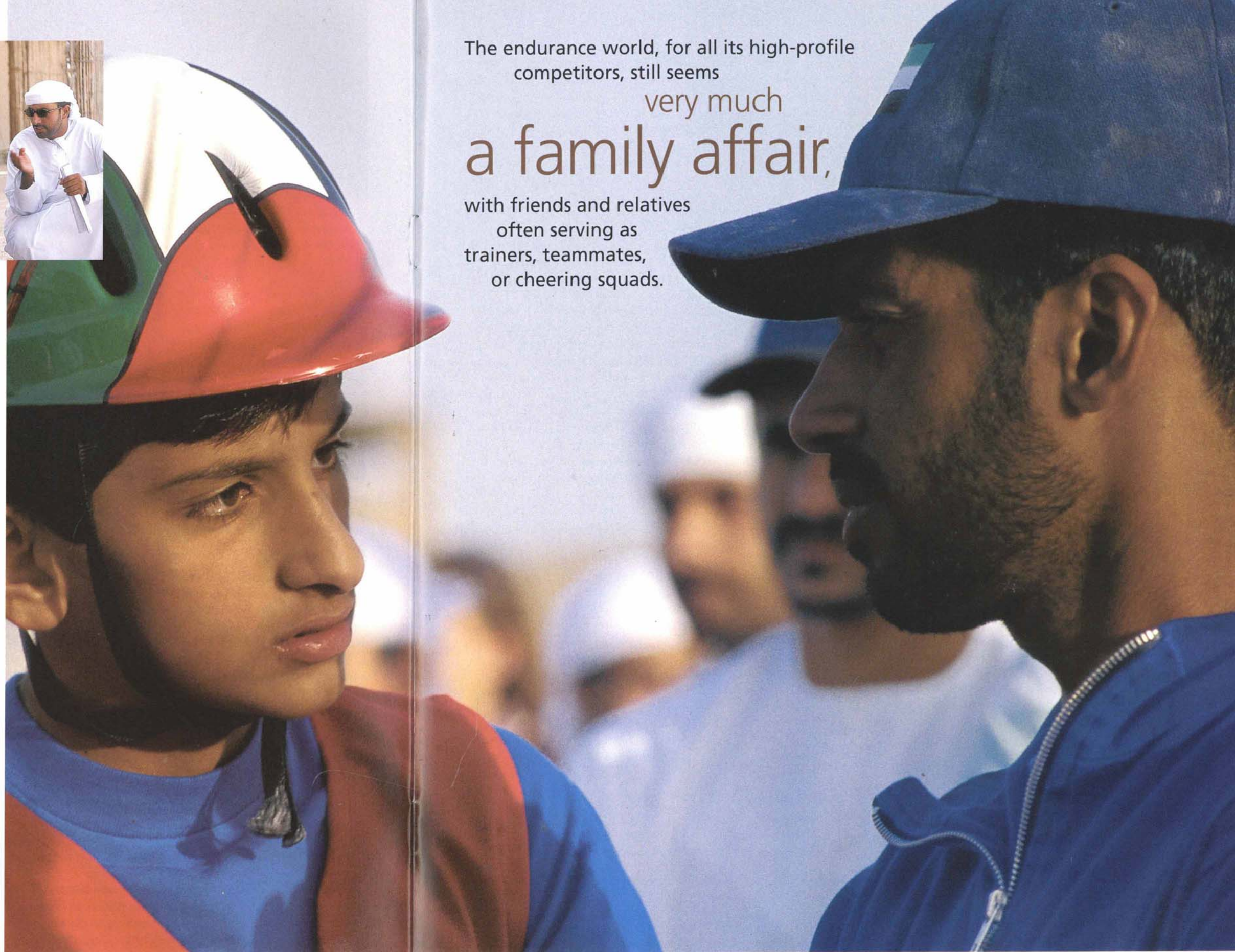
improve its stamina and soundness. (See *Aramco World*, March/April 1986.) Not surprisingly, it has proved to be the superior breed for endurance racing, even in cold, mountainous climates, and there is something rather fitting in its return to its place of origin to further demonstrate its mettle. "This horse is very personal to us," said Faisal Seddiq. "It is part of our history."

In 1998, construction proceeded apace in Seyh al-Salam on the permanent endurance-racing "village" in the desert, the first of its kind in the world. UAE officials, according to Seddiq, felt that having a permanent compound "so that we could gather ourselves in one location, would make the sport more functional and make it a more interesting game." In the past, most endurance races had been from point to point, beginning at one location and ending at another. But with competitors returning to the same location after each stage, the support teams, veterinarians, media and spectators have a fixed base from which to operate.

"The sport has really improved here," observed Mohammed Ali al-Shafar, who finished fourth in the 1998 world championship. He has been riding, he says, since he was a child but "not really pushing" as an endurance competitor until the past few years. In 1999, a hiatus year between the biannual world championships, the UAE added a late-winter race to the calendar, sponsoring the first World's Most Preferred Endurance Ride, and many of the top foreign riders from the world championships returned to compete with local riders. This time, it was UAE riders who dominated the race. "They've risen through the ranks very rapidly," says former winner Valerie Kanavy of the UAE competitors. "I expect them to be a strong force in this year's world championship ride in France in August."

As the sport continued to grow locally, a second permanent endurance site was added last year at Al-Wathba, near Abu Dhabi's camel racetrack in the dunes south of the city. But the UAE has also become an enthusiastic promoter of the sport in the other countries, sponsoring races in Europe and in other Arab countries, including Syria, Bahrain and Egypt. The federation maintains a kind of portable endurance support unit that can be dispatched to help organize events outside the country, complete with a computerized timing unit and an experienced team of racing officials and veterinarians.

If UAE equestrian officials have been keen to improve some technical aspects of the sport, however, they're also been intent on sustaining some of the sport's more informal aspects. And that has meant keeping it open to ordinary riders and owners and maintaining a feeling of openness during the races, where spectators, family and friends can mingle with the competitors and observe every step of the race. "We want to keep it a sport not for professional riders," says Faisal



The endurance world, for all its high-profile competitors, still seems
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Ismaeel Mohammed coaches Ahmed bin Mohammad al-Maktoum. Inset, opposite: Al-Nuaimi, trainer Ismaeel Mohammed and fellow rider Ali Mohammad al-Muhairi share experiences and strategies. "This is still mostly an amateur sport," says al-Nuaimi. "Most of the people who ride have day jobs."



Al-Nuaimi won with a time of nine hours, 23 minutes and 10 seconds—one second ahead of the second-place rider, Abdullah Bilhab. Al-Nuaimi is now the world's top-rated endurance rider.

Seddiq, "but for horse lovers and for the whole family."

Ahmed bin Humaid, for example, who attended business school in the United States, spends a good deal of time looking after his business affairs. "This is still mostly an amateur sport in most ways," he says. "They take the time to train after work and on weekends." And as for the difficult, demanding nature of the sport, he says, with a smile, "That's the point." But it's also the point, he adds, to have a good time during the race, and at one stage I could see him riding alongside two other competitors, laughing and joking.

As the competitors return to the endurance compound at the end of the fourth stage, the last of the first day, I am startled to see that bin Humaid has moved all the way up to the fourth position, trailing Hamdan al-Maktoum and Ali Leujah by only 10 minutes. The number of riders still in competition has decreased considerably, and by the end of the veterinary checks, a total of 19 riders have dropped out. When horses return from the course, their handlers have 30 minutes to get the animals' heart rates down to the regulation 64 beats a minute or be eliminated. "We also look for signs of dehydration, and we listen to the sounds of the gut to make sure their digestive systems are working properly," explains Jim Bryant, one of the attending veterinarians. At the "vet gate," or inspection center, the horses are led back and forth at a trot to determine that they are still sound and healthy. They are then led to "crewing bays," the shelters where they are worked on like boxers in their corners between rounds. There are fans to keep air circulating, and some horses get massages, which is more comfort than the riders receive.

By the next morning, horses and riders seem remarkably fresh, and they head out with as much eagerness as the day before. This time, however, they depart the compound at staggered times, according to the results of the previous

day's race. I've been told that the pace today will probably be a bit slower than yesterday's, when the top three finishers averaged a speedy 21 kilometers per hour (about 13 mph). At the end of the third course, Ali Leujah's average speed has dropped just below 20 kilometers an hour. But as I check the computerized results, I notice that Penbac Park Caleb, Ahmed bin Humaid's horse, has actually increased his speed a bit from yesterday's pace. And as the riders prepare to leave for the last round, bin Humaid now has less than five minutes to make up on the leaders. He leaves the compound at a gallop, and they are really moving. He's going for it, as he put it a few days earlier.

I find a vantage point atop a dune about a mile from the compound, and through my binoculars I can see three horses moving along, just steps apart. Bin Humaid and Penbac are barely trailing Hamdan al-Maktoum on Ali Leujah and teammate Abdullah Bilhab aboard the Spanish horse Luzan. I run to my car and join the caravan of four-wheel-drives following the action, as the three horses canter along, neck and neck. And now all three are galloping flat out, and I jump from my car to watch the final hundred meters of the race. Ali Leujah finally gives way grudgingly to the other two horses. They continue to duel, and Penbac edges Luzan in the final seconds, with Ahmed bin Humaid leaning low over his neck like a thoroughbred jockey.

As the horses fly through the gates, I find myself applauding and yelling, along with the rest of the crowd, cheering for the sheer grit of these astonishing animals and for the horsemanship of their riders. I look over at Peter Toth, a Australian trainer who works with Ismael Mohammed, and he's a bit choked up. He puts his hand over his heart and thumps his chest softly, saying, "These horses never stop giving. They're amazing animals." And they prove it yet again by passing the veterinary check without a hitch. Their heart rates have returned to normal within minutes, and Ali Leujah, though he is clearly tired, still has a bit of bounce in him. The riders, too, still have something left, as the top three competitors offer each other a smile and friendly embrace.

Later, I am reminded of something that Valerie Kanavy had said about what it's like to ride here in the desert. "I think that when people dream about horses, about riding them, what they dream about is something like this—this feeling of freedom, of wide-open spaces," she said. And it is clear why this sport has taken root here so quickly and become part of the landscape and part of the culture of this region. Already, it seems to have been here for ages. 🌍

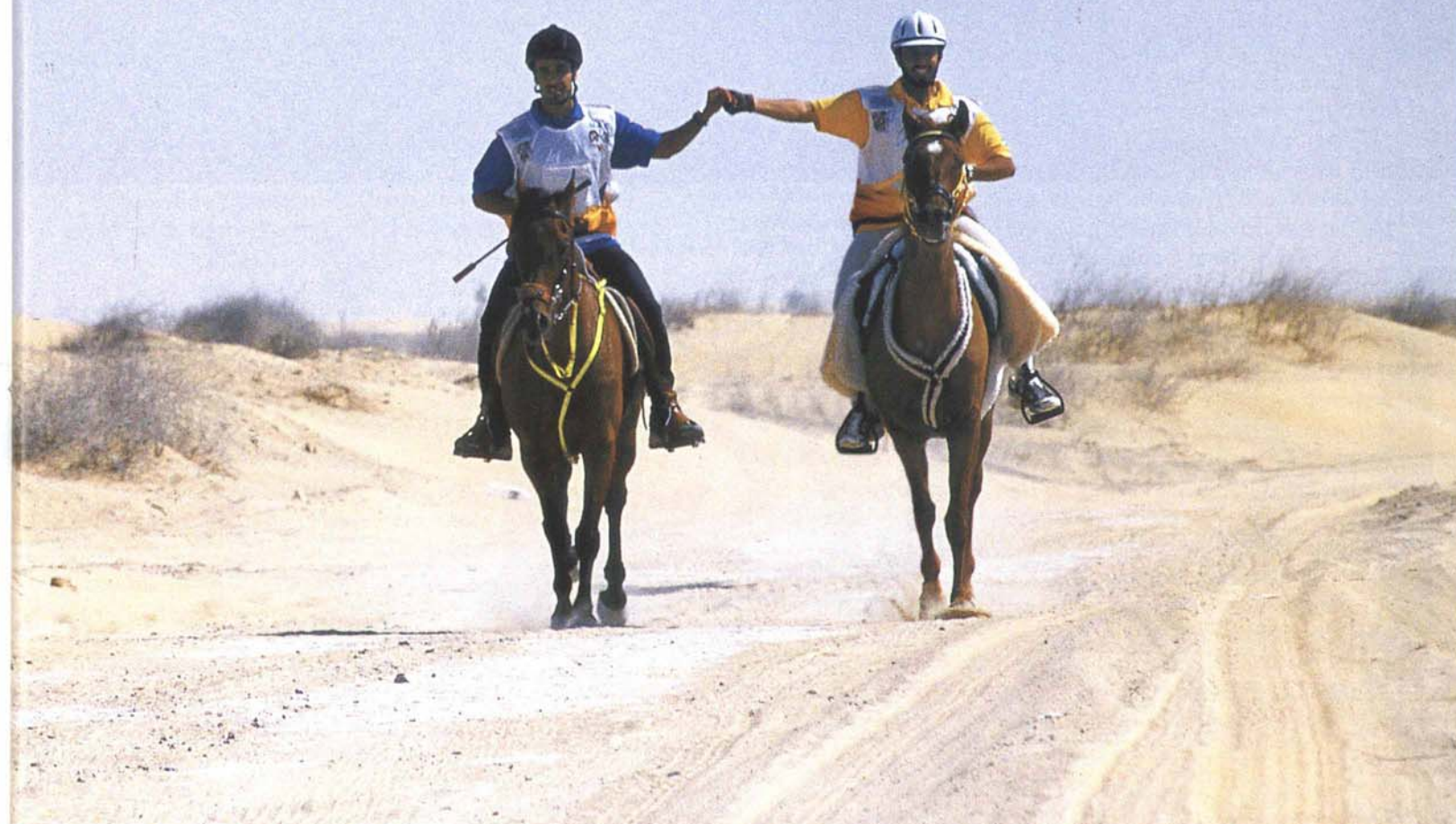


Carol Flake Chapman, who lives in Austin, Texas, is the author of two books about horses, and once, at a camel-race meeting in Dubai, read on television an ode she had composed in honor of a winning camel. She regrets that her own late, beloved Arabian horse Majedd, a retired endurance racer, never got the chance to race in the desert.



Lorraine Chittock (www.cats.camels.com) is a free-lance photographer and writer living in Kenya with an assortment of animals both in and outside the house. She has published two books: *Shadows in the Sand: Riding the Forty Days' Road* (1997) and *Cairo Cats: Egypt's Enduring Legacy* (1999).

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"Najd is the heartland of the Arab world, the reservoir of new movements."

—Hisham Nashabe

When Sa'ad al-Shabanat is not tracking Saudi Arabian Airlines traffic at King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh, he can usually be found at his home working on *Al-Summan*, his multi-volume history and geography of the Summan region northeast of Riyadh. "I've traveled and camped there since I was a child," says al-Shabanat, whose early days were spent as a shepherd in what is regarded as one of the most historically significant parts of Najd, Saudi Arabia's central province. Al-Summan is the historic spring grazing ground of the country's ruling Sa'ud family, among others, and is well-known for its extensive caves.

"I've heard the stories and folklore of al-Summan, and listened to the poetry. And I know that when an old man dies, it is like a library burning down. So I decided to record what I collected." That he had only completed high school did not deter al-Shabanat, and 15 years later he admits that his history "is a hobby that's taken me over." In the field, he seeks out isolated, little-known settlements and encampments, where he listens to Bedouin recollections, tales and poetry. Along the way he notes evidence of grazing areas, old desert highways, and ruins.

Al-Shabanat's subject and methods so impressed Shaykh Hamid al-Jasir, winner of the 1996 King Faisal International Prize for Arabic literature and an expert on the cultures of the Arabian Peninsula, that al-Jasir wrote an introduction to al-Shabanat's book, thus giving the unknown, self-taught historian a valuable academic endorsement. *Al-Summan* is due to be published this year.



Sa'ad al-Shabanat, Saudi Arabian Airlines employee and self-taught historian of the Summan region, is part of a growing wave of grass-roots cultural creativity

in Riyadh. Above: The pen rises above the sword in the Riyadh 2000 logo. Opposite: "Looking for You 'Abd al-'Aziz" is a mixed-media painting by Sarah Majid that honors the founder of Saudi Arabia while also expressing the creative tension brought by rapid cultural change.

Al-Shabanat is part of a little-noticed but growing wave of cultural creativity generated in Riyadh. His book, for example, is one of an estimated 2000 new titles that will be published in the capital this year—a publishing boom that has resulted in Riyadh's now offering the greatest printing capacity in the Middle East.

To support this blossoming, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has endorsed Riyadh as the Arab Cultural Capital for the millennium year. (See page 56.) The logo for what is being called "Riyadh 2000" is telling: Whereas the 1999 national centennial celebration was symbolized by a graphic that combined Riyadh's Masmak fort, a date palm and a sword, the similar Riyadh 2000 logo substitutes a pen as the trunk of the date palm.

"Don't underestimate the importance of Riyadh and Najd in modern Arab history," says Hisham Nashabe, an expert in Islamic studies and Lebanon's representative to UNESCO's executive council. Riyadh, he explains, "was remote, and never fell under Ottoman rule. Najd remained free to exercise independent thought, and to grow to become an intellectual center. The work and movement of Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab [in the early 18th century] was a landmark in the history of Islamic thought. From it flowed considerable cultural changes."

Beyond that, Nashabe observes, "We Arabs have toward the desert a secret tenderness. Najd is the heartland of the Arab world, the reservoir of new movements. All sedentary communities have drawn on the desert to revitalize themselves."

The effect of the "cultural capital" title, conferred on a different city annually since 1996, is more than symbolic. Nashabe's own city of Beirut carried it in 1999. "Lebanon needed this to improve its sadly tarnished, war-torn image," he says. "The

Arab Cultural Capital 2000

Riyadh

Written and Photographed by Peter Harrigan

OPPOSITE: ©1999 SARAH MAJID, COURTESY OF RIYADH DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

New offices and a modern minaret rise north of Riyadh's center.



"Cultural spaces are now drawing in content, providing Riyadh with the opportunity to display its culture, traditions and heritage."

—Abdullatif al-Shaikh

cultural-capital status helped Beirut in the rebirth and healing process."

Coordination of Riyadh 2000 is the job of the Saudi Arabian Presidency of Youth Welfare, the government's arm for cultural, sports and social activities. Its 236-page guide to Riyadh 2000 events details poetry readings and competitions, lectures, art and historical exhibitions and displays of school-children's drawings—as well as exhibits, lectures and events abroad. (See page 54.)

"We are here primarily to stimulate interest," explains Mohammed al-Tuweijeri, who is on the team coordinating Riyadh 2000 programs. "We encourage participation and provide information" to organizations that sponsor activities of their choosing under the Riyadh 2000 banner.

Some of the most popular events involve poetry, the oldest and greatest of Saudi Arabia's traditional arts. In pre-Islamic times, poetry was primarily the art of Bedouins, who committed their verses to memory and transmitted them orally across generations. With Islam came more widespread literacy, and written forms began to complement and bolster the oral ones. Today, the love of poetry and literature remains one of the strongest Saudi cultural threads. As a result, Riyadh 2000 offers dozens of evenings of readings in classical and colloquial style, as well as competitions among new modern and folk compositions.

Just how popular poetry can be is shown by one of today's biggest poetry celebrities, a prodigy born not quite six years ago. Hamad Munawir Hamad al-Anazi is being acclaimed as Saudi Arabia's youngest poet. His father, who is also a poet in the Bedouin oral tradition—he neither reads nor writes—says he began to notice his son's prodigious memory and poetic creativity at age two. Al-Anazi now recites traditional poems elegantly, and composes folk poems that follow classical forms but use vernacular language. The monthly arts magazine *Al-Funun* recently featured him, and he also recited recently before Prince Sultan ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, Saudi Arabia's

minister of defense. It is this honor, even more than appearances in magazines or on television, that promises to make the child poet the stuff of desert legend for years to come.

Following on the popularity of poetry, prose literature is not far behind, and the rapid growth of libraries in Riyadh is also a source of pride—again one that is rarely noticed by outsiders.

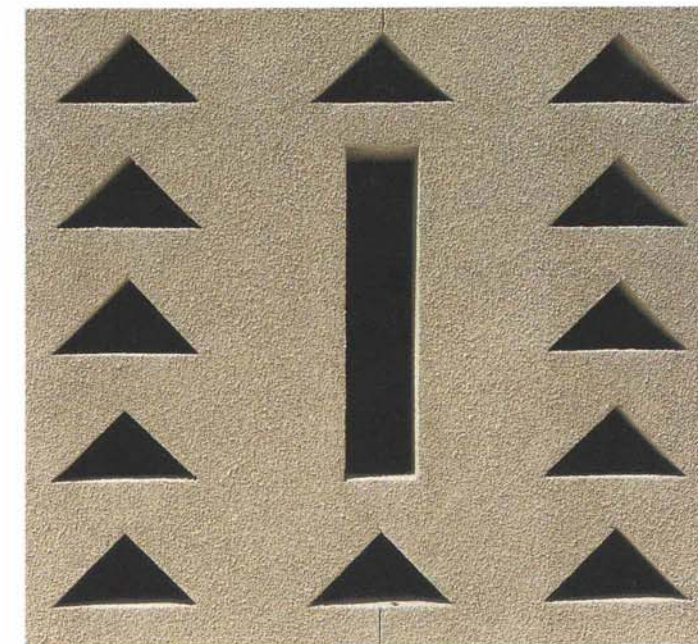
"The extraordinary development of libraries that has taken place in Riyadh over the last 20 years is without parallel in recent history," says Stephan Roman, who has studied Islamic libraries around the world. "Riyadh has among the finest libraries in the Arab world in terms of materials, infrastructure and systems."

Yahya ibn Junaid, secretary general of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, has known this for some time. His study of the Islamic contribution to civilization through books and libraries earned him the King Faisal International Prize for Islamic studies in 1998. In its historical collections alone, the center houses nearly 25,000 Arabic manuscripts, the largest collection in the Arabian Gulf and one of the largest in the Arab world. "We acquired the collection over long years," ibn Junaid explains. Many manuscripts were purchased on the international art market; others, he says, were bequeathed to the center. In addition, Riyadh's two major university libraries and its public libraries together house another estimated 26,000 historical manuscripts.

Riyadh 2000, says ibn Junaid, gives the King Faisal Center a context to "highlight our own and other important cultural treasures to the city and the world." In addition to an exhibition of books and manuscripts of the Qur'an, the center will open the Islamic Heritage Museum this September, Riyadh's first public museum dedicated exclusively to the broad sweep of

Islamic arts dating back to the eighth century. The center is also holding a lecture series in which international scholars will discuss Arab cultural influence in India, Central Asia and Europe, an exhibition of electronic books, and a competition of Saudi documentary films—the first film festival of this genre to screen in Saudi Arabia.

As these events were being planned, construction crews were transforming the center's surroundings. In 1997, the King Faisal Foundation (KFF), which supports the center and numerous other religious, cultural and philanthropic endeavors, began construction of a skyscraper that would expand the KFF's own working space and would, as well, house apartments, other offices,



Originally developed centuries ago to conveniently light and ventilate mud-brick buildings, patterned triangles have become a fashionably roots-oriented modern Najdi window motif.

an international-scale shopping mall, a five-star hotel and a conference center. Uniquely for such a complex, all revenues from the commercial activities would be used to underwrite KFF charitable and cultural activities.

The resulting Al Faisaliah Center, which opened May 15, dramatically changes the city's skyline with its tapering, 276-meter (900') office tower—among the most assertive, forward-looking designs in the Arab

world. To celebrate the opening of what the KFF hopes will become Riyadh's equivalent of New York's Empire State Building or the Eiffel Tower of Paris, several hundred thousand people thronged the streets after twilight prayers to watch seven tons of fireworks launched from the tower combine with a laser light show, the first of its kind in the kingdom.

"We are conservative, but we are open to experimentation," says Saleh al-Hathloul, educator, futurist, architectural critic and town planner for

Riyadh. "Riyadh prides itself on the quality of its modern architecture." For Riyadh 2000, the Harvard- and MIT-educated professor, author of the 1996 study *The Arab-Muslim City*, is offering public lectures on the city's modern landmarks, from the futuristic inverted pyramid of the Interior Ministry building to the white-tented King Fahd International Stadium and the neo-traditional Diplomatic Quarter. (See *Aramco World*, September/October 1988.) His book focused much on Riyadh, he explains, because to him

the city epitomizes the tension of modernity: "Saudi society is considered the most traditional in the Arab-Muslim world, though at the same time it has a very high capacity for change."

And what change it has seen! Once a diminutive, walled oasis town in the early 20th century, Riyadh's vast expanses now beg comparison with Los Angeles or Houston. This change, al-Hathloul says, "implies Riyadh's constant rethinking of its values and its tradition, and a continuous reinterpretation of the past in terms of the present."

Riyadh 2000 at the British Museum

by Arthur Clark



Saudi Arabia opened a window onto its heritage for audiences in Great Britain early this year by giving a *bayt al-sha'ar*—a Bedouin tent, literally a "house of hair"—to the British Museum as part of the celebration of Riyadh as the Arab Cultural Capital for 2000. It was displayed as part of the museum's ongoing "Arab Cultures: Young Worlds" exhibition, and it hosted some 1500 visitors between March and May.

The brown-and-white striped camel- and goat-hair shelter offers unique insights into the kingdom. "It's not what people expect to find here," admits Carolyn Perry, Arab-world education officer at the museum. But for that very reason the tent and its contents had an impact beyond expectations.

Muslim youngsters in Britain, says Perry, "know that Saudi Arabia is the heartland of Islam, the place of the pilgrimage, and they aspire to go there themselves. It's wonderful to have 15-year-old Muslims from a London inner-city school get an idea of the bigger picture" by touching, smelling and tasting what comes from the kingdom. For non-Muslims, the tent offered insight into the core values of Arab culture.

"The tent was much bigger and more glamorous than the one I used to go camping in, and looked as though it was for someone important, with lots of wonderful objects inside it," says a wide-eyed 14-year-old British lad.

"It was lovely to sit and have tea in the tent," says one of the tent's older guests.

Perry believes the tent made a special impact because many of the museum's collections are behind glass, and its "hands-on" accessibility made it uniquely experiential. The tent is scheduled to travel to at least four more venues in Britain before becoming part of the museum's permanent "handling collection."

The tent, a gift from Prince Turki ibn Sultan ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, Saudi Arabia's deputy minister of foreign information, was specially woven at a factory in Riyadh for display in the British Museum's former State Papers Room. It is part of the ongoing effort, supported by Information Minister Fouad Al-Farsi and Ghazi al-Gosaibi, Saudi ambassador to Great Britain and Ireland, to promote understanding between Saudis and Britons in particular, and Arabs and Westerners in general. It measures four by seven meters (13' x 23') and stands some three meters (10') tall—actually closer to square and with more headroom than the traditional tents of Saudi Arabia's nomads. In fact, it represents a "new generation" of Bedouin tents now popular in towns and cities in the kingdom, according to Dr. Fawaz Al-Dakheel, attaché at the Saudi Embassy's information center.



"It is critically important to let people know that we are hospitable people," says al-Gosaibi, "and that our religion is one of peace and tolerance. The message must be that Arab culture offers a welcoming hand."

The tent and its contents, including traditional clothing and objects such as lamps, a camel saddle and woven dining mats, served as a backdrop for storytelling and real-life examples of Saudi hospitality: Visitors sipped cardamom-flavored coffee and traditionally prepared tea, and tasted culinary delights such as *kalijah*, a wheat and date-honey pastry from Qasim, a northern region, as well as *iq*: milk condensed to a paste and then sundried in patties.

Ambassador al-Gosaibi says that giving the tent to the museum "was the act of a good friend and neighbor. I believe Riyadh 2000 offers Saudis an excellent opportunity to communicate the strengths and achievements of the national culture.

"Islam is our culture," he explains. "Without a doubt, our service to Islam, which is the foundation of Arab culture, has been our main contribution to the world at large. We have also shown that it is possible to develop a country at the most impressive pace

without forgetting our traditions and cultural heritage. Many elements of our culture are sacred, timeless and offer hope to humanity. I am confident that the culture represented by Riyadh will continue to thrive."

Arthur Clark is a staff writer for Saudi Aramco in Dhahran, where he edits the weekly *Arabian Sun*. He visited the British Museum in March.

A Riyadh restaurant distinguishes itself from its international competition with a heritage-based tableau. Below: *Al-Sakhra* ("The Rock") is among the city's busy Internet cafés, one manifestation of the important role that digital technology is playing in reshaping the city's culture.



"Saudi society is considered the most traditional in the Arab-Muslim world, though at the same time it has a very high capacity for change."

—Saleh al-Hathloul

Riyadh 2000 and the Arab Decade for Cultural Development

The idea of annual "cultural capitals" grew out of a 1982 United Nations conference whose delegates agreed that a broad definition of "development" must include a cultural dimension. It is culture, they concurred, more overtly than economics, that aspires to nurture the good of humankind. In 1986, the United Nations General Assembly declared 1988 to 1997 as the World Decade for Cultural Development and designated UNESCO as the lead body. Among the more than 1000 projects undertaken by the UN's 152 member countries was the Regional Cultural Capitals Program, which started in Europe to give a boost to cultural efforts in cities such as Glasgow, Manchester and Barcelona.

In the Arab world, since 1964, the 22 member countries of the Arab League have supported the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), founded to mirror and give regional direction to UNESCO's worldwide cultural activities. ALECSO launched an Arab Cultural Capitals program, selecting Cairo for 1996 and Tunis for 1997. As the World Decade for Cultural Development drew to a close, ALECSO announced that 1998 would begin the Arab Decade for Cultural Development. Sharjah, in the United Arab Emirates, was selected as Arab Cultural Capital for 1998; Beirut followed in 1999. Riyadh was selected for the millennium year.

Hisham Nashabe, a Beirut resident who sits on UNESCO's executive council, explains that **the concept "celebrates the life, heritage and spaces of an Arab city. Cultural diversity, just like ecological diversity, is a positive value, and UNESCO has become its champion."**

Upcoming Arab Cultural Capitals include Kuwait City (2001); Amman, Jordan (2002); Rabat, Morocco (2003); Sana'a, Yemen (2004) and Khartoum, Sudan (2005).



Farouk Bkdash heads the indexing unit at the library of the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, which supports the research database built around the library's collection of some 25,000 Arabic manuscripts.

This rethinking shows not only in official buildings, designed to be landmarks, but also in new vernacular commercial and residential building. Throughout the city, small businesses are building in a uniquely Riyadh style that, in many cases, draws from the well of Najdi tradition. The resulting forms and colors express a creative, youthful energy that points toward a return to local roots. Particularly popular are the small triangles that formerly ventilated mud-brick walls, but which are now often glazed windows; similarly, rooftops may be edged with stepped crenelations—another motif from Najdi mud-brick design. Tan and golden brown are increasingly popular colors.

Overseeing the growth of the metropolis is the Arriyadh Development Authority (ADA). One of its major projects under Riyadh 2000, run by its historic preservation division, is the restoration of al-Dir'iyah, the abandoned 19th-century mud-brick capital of the first and second Saudi states that lies on the outskirts of Riyadh, and which is one of the city's premier historic sites.

The ADA, explains its president, Abdullatif al-Shaikh, has long been

concerned not only with commercial, industrial and residential construction, but also with making sure that "extensive and world-class cultural spaces" were included in Riyadh's development. These spaces, he says, are now "drawing in content, providing Riyadh with the opportunity to display its culture, traditions and heritage." This is essential to national life, he says, because such spaces are "the context that helps create our culture."

Abdulrahman al-Sari, director of urban and cultural development for the ADA, points out that the organization is involved in more than planning: For Riyadh 2000, it is also preparing exhibitions on traditional mud building and the origins of language. Among the lectures offered by the ADA-managed Science Oasis is one that discusses the different names of stars and planets that appear in popular, scientific and official usage, and in pre-Islamic and ancient Arabian cultures. In those cultures—and still in the present day—the desert night sky was enormously significant field, not only for navigation and time-telling, but as a nourisher of human imagination and a wellspring of reverence.

"Culture is an integral part of religion, too," says al-Sari. "Religion is the system determining our lives, relationships, code of behavior and manner of worship. The more we work on it, the clearer our distinctive identity becomes."

And much of Riyadh's religious culture, he explains, is expressed in the evenings in mosques around the city, where people gather for discussions and lessons after *al-isha*, the fifth and last prayer of the day, called at the end of twilight. In some of the larger mosques, where some of the best religious speakers hold forth on topics that range broadly from ethics to history, poetry, the arts and diverse cultural subjects, the lectures may be tape-recorded and the tapes later sold for educational purposes. Such tapes have proven uniquely popular among the city's growing numbers of automobile commuters.

Another popular cultural gathering is the *majlis*, a desert tradition probably as old as human habitation itself in the Arabian Peninsula. Today the *salon*-like gatherings still take place, in the comfort of modern homes, and

though they, like most mosque lectures, are not included in the official Riyadh 2000 program, they are nonetheless a well-recognized part of the cultural life and energy of Riyadh. By religious and social custom, men and women hold separate *majalis*, and newer homes often include a tent in a courtyard to accommodate men while, inside, generous parlors seat women. The heart of any *majlis* is lively conversation, which may cover philosophy, poetry, literature, history and family and tribal genealogy as well as current events. Refreshments, by tradition, nearly always include cardamom-flavored coffee, sweet black tea, and the dates whose cultivation, over nearly 5000 years, helped give Riyadh ("Gardens") its name.

Among other cultural expressions, Riyadh 2000 is providing official recognition of the recent revival of traditional cuisine. Not long ago, a fine Riyadh restaurant would serve Levantine and Western dishes, but now many offer Saudi ones as well, and some are exclusively Saudi-oriented.

The date—the most symbolic of Saudi foods—is undergoing its own revival. In addition to large commer-

cial date farms, thriving "boutique" groves serve specialized retailers of gourmet dates and date products.

Salman al-Sudairy is a director of Bateel, whose Riyadh-based fancy-date shop has recently opened franchises in every Arabian Gulf capital, and who plans to try one or two in the West. He is among a growing corps of mostly young Riyadh entrepreneurs who are tapping a growing demand for retail products that carry a connection to cultural tradition.

"The date is a true cultural export," he maintains. "It uniquely represents important aspects of our culture—generosity, concern for health, gratitude. We are all connected to the date palm. It has withstood the test of time. We grew with it, and as you learn more about the date palm you have more respect for how it endures and what it provides."

Tents, too, are popular: "Our adapted Bedouin-style framed black-hair tent is in high demand as a home *majlis*," says Abdullah al-Tamimi, who runs a family business manufacturing Arabian tents, often now using high-tech materials in traditional designs and colors.

"We have been through the boom. Saudis have traveled extensively in recent years, and now people want to find out more about their own heritage."

—'Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary



"Tradition is an important resource and asset, and it can guide us through changing times."

—Prince Sultan ibn Salman ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz

"Travel and education in the West have exposed us to modern branding and service concepts," he says. "But we stay tuned to and rooted in traditional society, and see many opportunities in businesses that focus on Najdi design and building concepts, heritage products and traditional foods. Saudi consumers are turning to these."

The high-ceilinged office of Fahd al-Semmari, secretary general of the King 'Abd al-'Aziz Foundation for Research and Archives, lies behind a traditional Najdi door that opens off a simple Najdi courtyard with supporting columns.

Here, there is a Riyadh 2000 exhibition of little-known books and publications whose production and distribution throughout the Arab world were sponsored by King 'Abd al-'Aziz in the 1920's and 1930's. Al-Semmari explains that Saudi Arabia's first king, celebrated for his nation-building (See *Aramco World*, January/February 1999), also materially supported his kingdom's literary arts during the Great Depression, even though times were no less hard in Saudi Arabia than elsewhere.

This year will also see an exhibition of Najdi manuscripts dating to the 17th century and a show focusing on

Umm al-Qura, the first Saudi newspaper. A conference examining the place of Saudi culture in the larger Arab context will "give us an opportunity to review and discuss the contribution of Saudi intellectuals," says al-Semmari, "as well as the observations and commentaries of Arab travelers and writers on what is now Saudi Arabia." For families, a festival and heritage market will come in September to the expansive plaza and gardens that lie about the foundation's headquarters.

"As this year's Arab Cultural Capital, Riyadh has a lot to reflect upon," al-Semmari adds. "It is a chance to consider our past and to think what can be done for the future." For example, he says, Saudis need to "celebrate our creative talents, especially among children and women."

To address this need, the foundation will soon publish the first book on prominent Central Arabian women, and a number of Riyadh 2000 events highlight the heritage of Saudi women, including their intellectual and scientific contributions in such fields as medicine, management and

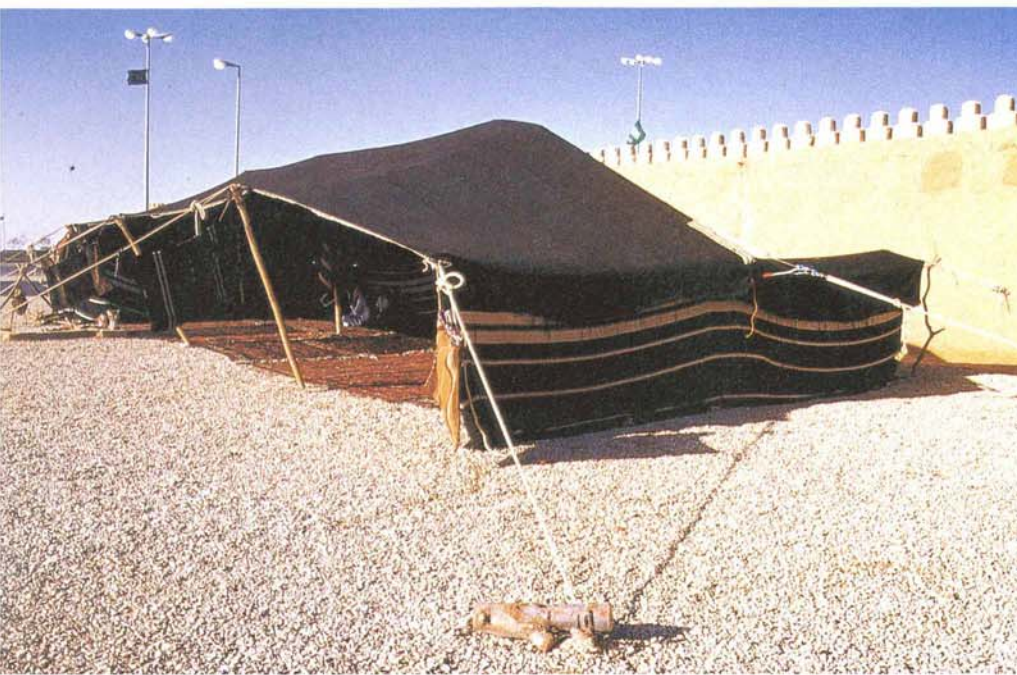
the media. Both the foundation and the Saudi National Museum have opened departments staffed by professional Saudi women who will make the services of those institutions more available than ever to other women.

At Riyadh's King Sa'ud University, 'Abd al-Rahman al-Ansary, who established the department of archeology in the mid-1960's, also emphasizes Riyadh's crossroads role in the present as well as in the past. Today's urban population has come to the city from numerous culturally distinct regions of the country, he says, "so when we look at Riyadh as the Arab Cultural Capital for 2000 we should consider the city as a mosaic of Saudi Arabia—something representing all aspects and regions, a place where there are dialects, traditions, songs, poetry from all over, and various forms of social gatherings and activities."

Remembering his own past, the soft-spoken professor recalls that "while this capital was growing and being expanded, we archeologists were out in the desert, exploring and digging. [See *Aramco World*, March/April 1980.] I remember people here who used tell us we were mad! They would

OPPOSITE: KING FAISAL FOUNDATION

A fireworks-and-lasers show marked the opening of the architecturally striking Al Faisaliah center, now Riyadh's tallest building, last May.



Camel-hair tents, which are still used by Bedouins, are increasingly popular among urban dwellers, too, who use them as outdoor living rooms.

ask, 'Why are you out there digging for broken stones while everyone else is digging for money? We are going toward the future and you are pulling us back to the past!' But today, those same people are asking me about our latest finds. We have been through a boom," al-Ansary says. "Saudis have traveled extensively in recent years, and now people want to find out more about their own heritage."

Among those in Riyadh who juggle tradition and modernity, perhaps none has done so as visibly as Prince Sultan

ibn Salman ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, who in 1985 was the first Arab and the first Muslim in space, and who has since used his leadership of the national architectural association to promote a rediscovery of traditional Saudi architectural forms and materials. (See *Aramco World*, July/August 1999.)

In May, Prince Sultan's lecture in London on "Riyadh: Its Future and Cultural Heritage" was one of the international events of Riyadh 2000. (See page 54.) "We cannot lose our historical perspective," he said then.

"Tradition is an important resource and asset, and it can guide us through changing times."

The changes still to come may overshadow those that have already taken place. The day before his lecture, Prince Sultan had been told of his appointment as secretary general of the nation's new Supreme Commission of Tourism. In addition to the three million annual visitors whom Saudi Arabia welcomes during the Hajj, the Muslim pilgrimage, and the 'Umrah, or lesser pilgrimage, the country is also opening its doors this year to international tourists.

Educational group tours are expected to arrive first, particularly those sponsored by university alumni associations and museums. "Saudi Arabia is a destination that appeals to travelers who have been almost everywhere else and are dying for some place new and unknown," wrote Ted Conover in March in *Travel + Leisure*.

In this way, Riyadh 2000 marks not only the new florescence of Saudi culture, but also a new interest in sharing that culture, more widely than ever, with the world. ☉



Peter Harrigan is a language instructor with Saudi Arabian Airlines in Jiddah, where he also works as a contributing editor and columnist for *Diwaniya*, the weekly cultural supplement of *The Saudi Gazette*.

"Saudi Arabia is a destination that appeals to travelers who have been almost everywhere else."

—Ted Conover

The Saudi Aramco Exhibit

has, since 1987, helped visitors, employees and more than 50,000 schoolchildren every year understand all that led to the world-changing discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia, and all that has followed it. Newly upgraded, the spacious exhibition hall now offers large-scale, walk-through replicas as well as numerous multimedia and multi-sensory interactive displays. The sequence begins with the geology and biology of petroleum formation and the early uses of bitumen and natural oil seeps; it carries on through the 20th-century search for oil in the Arabian Peninsula. Subsequent displays demonstrate how 21st-century Saudi Aramco uses seismic and infrared satellite-based imaging to locate oil; how drillers steer a drill bit from the vertical to drill a horizontal well; how natural gas is separated from crude oil and, in a uniquely complex display, how Saudi Aramco manages the output of hundreds of wells and refining centers so that each petroleum product is delivered reliably, safely and affordably throughout the country and the world. The exhibit also explains the connections between all the modern petroleum technology and the 1200-year-old Arab and Islamic technical heritage. Information: www.saudiaramco.com/frm_about.html. The permanent Saudi Aramco Exhibit, **Dhahran**, is open to the public.



A full-scale replica of a drilling rig helps visitors appreciate one of the petroleum industry's most essential tasks.

Exploring Muslim Cultures is a series of exhibits, university courses, forums, lectures and teacher workshops aimed primarily at helping non-Muslims learn about the diversity of the Islamic world and its interactions, past and present, with the West. All events are free. Information: 773-325-7863, www.depaul.edu/~islam. DePaul University, **Chicago**, through July 15.

Gilgamesh, a new opera by Volker David Kirchner, sets the world's oldest epic to music, retelling the tale of the adventures of Gilgamesh and Engiddu, the death of the latter, and Gilgamesh's grief-stricken search for the secret of immortality. Opernhaus Hannover, **Germany**, July 20 and 22.

Common Threads: Samplers from Around the Globe shows 65 masterpiece samplers from the museum's collection that span 300 years and four continents. Samplers originated as pattern and stitch reference guides, and they have frequently been integral to the passing on of textile traditions, particularly among women. Museum of Fine Arts **Boston**, through July 23.

Founding the City: Mesopotamia, Greece and Rome. According to the beliefs of antiquity, the founding of a city was an act of divine influence, involving myth, legend and ritual. Texts, symbolic objects and sacrifices might be buried in the city's literal foundations to serve as cosmic foundations for the space thus carved out of chaos. Some 270 artifacts illuminate the origins of urban space. Centre de Cultura Contemporània, **Barcelona**, through July 23.

Hassan Fathy: A Centennial Celebration. The Rare Books and Special Collections Library of the American University in Cairo exhibits sketches, annotated volumes and memorabilia representing more than 60 years of

the life and work of the famous Egyptian architect. In **Desert Architecture:** Baris and Sidi Kreir, the Sony Gallery at AUC presents previously unexhibited photographs of two of his most important projects. American University in **Cairo**, through July 27.

Empire of the Sultans: Ottoman Art from the Khalili Collection explores the influence of the Ottoman sultans over affairs of state and religion with displays of calligraphy, Qur'an and other manuscripts, arms and armor, metalwork, ceramics, textiles and scientific instruments from the Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. Catalogue. **Detroit Institute of the Arts**, July 30 to October 8.

Exotica: The Age of Portuguese Discoveries: Exotic Worlds and their Impact brings the age of discovery to life, displaying 200 objects from Austrian, Portuguese and Spanish collections that once found their places in the "chambers of wonders" of European merchant houses and rulers. Ostrich eggs, *cocos-de-mer*, narwhale horns and similar oddities, often in precious settings, were collected along with exotica made of mother-of-pearl, ivory, and jade as objects of astonishment. Ambras Castle, **Innsbruck, Austria**, through July 30.

Flowers of Silk and Gold: Four Centuries of Ottoman Embroidery offers a unique window onto urban Ottoman society, for embroideries played a role in most aspects of domestic and public life. A woman's trousseau was begun when she was born, and as soon as she could hold a needle she joined in embroidering napkins, towels, wrapping cloths, quilt covers, coverings for walls, floors and furniture, sashes, scarves and other items of clothing, which were used throughout her life. Presented in their historical context, the more than 50 textiles displayed

reveal changing social and economic aspects of Ottoman culture. A "virtual exhibition," including images, activities and lesson plans, is available at www.textilemuseum.org/fsg. Catalogue \$45/\$30. Textile Museum, **Washington D.C.**, through July 30.

Scholars, Scoundrels, and the Sphinx: A Photographic and Archaeological Adventure Up the Nile takes the visitor on an exploration of the Nile Valley between 1850 and 1930, a time that saw the first flowering of both Egyptology and photography. The archaeologists and photographers featured were pioneers in their respective fields and opened the way to a deeper understanding of a remarkable ancient civilization. More than 80 original photographic images, including albumen and silver prints, stereoviews and postcards, of more than 35 sites along the Nile River are exhibited, taken by such photographers as Felix Teynard, Francis Frith, Antonio Beato, the Bonfils family and J. Pascal Sebah. Catalogue. McClung Museum, **Knoxville, Tennessee**, through July 30.

A Bold Aesthetic: Textile Arts of Central Asia highlights 60 examples of apparel, decorative fabrics and jewelry from the early 1800's to the early 1900's. The show emphasizes work from Samarkand and Bukhara, urban centers where Silk Roads trade stimulated the textile arts for more than a millennium. Period photographs enlarge visitors' understanding of Central Asia of the times. **Los Angeles County Museum of Art**, through July 31.

Burned Books And Blasted Shrines: Cultural Heritage Under Fire In Kosovo documents the destruction of cultural heritage during the 1998-1999 conflict in Kosovo. Harvard Fine Arts Library, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through July 31.

Mughal and Rajput Painting is a small display, drawn from the Museum's collection of Indian paintings, that includes portraits of rulers, scenes of court life, and illustrations of poetical texts and *ragas*, or musical modes. Ashmolean Museum, **Oxford**, August 8 through September 3.

The Fourth Annual Arabic Music Retreat offers instruction in chamber and orchestral music, as well as private lessons. Faculty include Simon Shaheen, Marcel Khalife, Jihad Racy, Nasim Dakwar and others. Information: 781-740-0788, www.simon-shaheen.com. Mount Holyoke College, **South Hadley, Massachusetts**, August 13-20.

Paid in Burnt Silver: Wealth and Power in the Viking Age explores the concept of wealth that underlay Viking raiding and trading, looks at different ways of measuring wealth, and traces the development of a monetary economy in the light of social, political, economic and religious change. British Museum, **London**, through August 13.

Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga commemorates the millennial of the Viking landfall in North America, which marked the farthest reach of a westward expansion financed in part by wealth accumulated in trade with the East. The displays contain some 200 artifacts, many the results of recent archeology in Scandinavia. Smithsonian Institution, **Washington, D.C.**, through August 13.

Tribal Traditions: Village and Nomadic Weaving of Anatolia shows village-made flat-woven rugs, grain sacks, saddlebags and other items decorated in bold patterns and designs that once explicitly identified the tribal affiliation of their makers. The forced settlement of nomadic groups in Anatolia, which began as early as the

16th century, began the blending of designs, so that in the 19th and early 20th centuries they ceased to be means of identification. Yet a strong design tradition remains in Anatolia and links these beautiful weavings to specific regions or even villages. Thirty-five rugs, bags and bands from the Museum's collection explore four regions known for their "classic" textile designs: Bergama, Konya, Malatya and Erzurum. Textile Museum, **Washington, D.C.**, from August 25 through January 28, 2001.

The Art and Tradition of the Zuloagas: Spanish Damascene from the Khalili Collection features some of the finest work of Plácido Zuloaga, a late 19th-century Spanish master of the art of damascening, the process of decorating iron, steel or bronze surfaces with gold or silver "onlays." The process took its name from Damascus, from where it spread to Italy and Spain. Museo de Bellas Artes de **Bilbao [Spain]**, through August 31.

Transatlantic Dialogue: Contemporary Art In and Out of Africa charts the relationship between African artists with experience in the West and African-American artists who have traveled (primarily) in West Africa. The 40 works in varied media by 16 artists—including Jean-Michel Basquiat, John Biggers, Rashid Diab and Amir



Displays in Arabic and English relate the Arab and Islamic heritage in mathematics, engineering, astronomy, navigation and biology to today's petroleum industry.

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Nour—constitute esthetic reports from a quest by artists on two continents to reconcile questions of identity and heritage. Information: 202-357-2700, www.si.edu/nmafa/. National Museum of African Art, **Washington, D.C.**, through August 31.

Life and Death Under the Pharaohs: Egyptian Art from the National Museum of Antiquities in Leiden, The Netherlands spans the history of pre-Islamic Egypt, from the earliest settlements to the Byzantine period. The treasures on display are from one of the world's leading collections. Information: www.fernbank.edu/museum. Fernbank Museum of Natural History, **Atlanta**, through September 4.

Noble Dreams, Wicked Pleasures: Orientalism in America 1870-1930. From oil paintings and photographs to films and cigarette packages, some 90 objects illustrate the images and associations conjured up by the word "Orient" in the popular imagination of turn-of-the-century America. This exhibition surveys the character and evolution of American representations of the "Orient" during a formative phase in US history (1870-1930), when America was emerging on the world stage and mass culture was first coalescing. Painters represented include Jean-Léon Gérôme, Frederic Edwin Church, John Singer Sargent and William Merritt Chase; decorative arts by Louis Comfort Tiffany and associated artists are also included. Catalogue. Clark Art Institute, **Williamstown, Massachusetts**, through September 4.

Earthly Beauty, Heavenly Art: The Art of Islam shows some 300 works that date from the seventh through the 19th century. The exhibition is organized by notional locales, such as "the palace," "the mosque," and "Paradise," and visitors will be led through these past jeweled objects, splendid ceramics and glassware, elegant Qur'an manuscripts, textiles and prayer rugs. Elements from the natural world—water, birds and flowers—are pointers to Paradise, so the exhibition includes fountains and ponds, and the rustling and fluttering of birds in an aviary. Catalogue. State Hermitage Museum, **St. Petersburg, Russia**, through September 9.

John Singer Sargent Beyond the Portrait Studio: Paintings, Drawings and Watercolors from the Collection includes sketches, studies and vignettes from his travels to Spain and Morocco in 1879-1880, and his later journeys to North Africa and the Near East between 1890 and 1925, among 100 rarely seen works. Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through September 24.

Treasures from the Royal Tombs of Ur presents 150 extraordinary objects revealing traditions of royal life and death, excavated in the 1920's by Sir Leonard Woolley. They include the famous "Ram in the Thicket"—a statuette of a goat nibbling the leaves of a tree—jewelry, a comb, a wooden lyre decorated with a gold-and-lapis bull's head, games, furniture, seals and vessels of gold, silver and alabaster, many found in the intact

tomb of a woman—a queen or high priestess—named Pu-abi who died between 2600 and 2500 BC, a high point of Sumerian culture. Catalogue \$50/\$35. Pierpont Morgan Library, **New York**, through September 10.

Third-Party Laughter: Satirical Graphics and Caricature from the Third World. Especially in the younger nations of the South, political and social satire often take pointed graphical forms, and the First World is often the target of both the politics and the humor. Museum für Völkerkunde, **Frankfurt**, through September 10.

Recent Acquisitions: Islamic and Later Indian is one of a year-long, multi-gallery series of exhibitions showcasing recent acquisitions and revealing a glimpse of the collecting practices of an important teaching and research museum. Sackler Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through September 13.

Artists from Bilad al-Sham, Part 1, highlights Jordanian artists in the fourth of six surveys of contemporary Arab-world arts, with an emphasis on painting. Information: www.daratalfunun.org/. Darat al Funun, **Amman, Jordan**, through September 15.

Precious Dyes From the Mediterranean: Purple, Crimson, Blue is a sweeping artistic, historical and technical review of the dyes that were an enormously important part of world trade and of regional economies from at least the first millennium BC until the dominance of synthetic dyes became complete only in the last 75 years. The exhibition opens with a Babylonian cuneiform tablet that gives recipes and describes dyeing techniques used to achieve five different colors; other dye recipes and natural-historical descriptions range in time from Pliny the Elder to illustrated late-18th-century technical manuals. There are purple textiles from Palmyra that date from the first centuries of our era; others from Muslim Spain; 19th-century photographs on cloth, made with light-sensitive purple dye from the Murex mollusk; and modern textiles from recent designer collections. Cochineal from Poland and Armenia provided treasured red dyes, and the arrival of New World cochineal insects, parasites on the *Opuntia* cactus, was responsible for both an economic upheaval and for the wide diffusion of that cactus in the Old World. Indigo and woad were traded worldwide, and woad plantations brought such prosperity to the Languedoc that the French term for "the land of plenty" refers to the loaves of blue woad that were produced there. Catalogue in French and Spanish. Centre de Documentació i Museu Tèxtil, **Terrassa, Spain**, through September 15.

Artists from Bilad al-Sham, Part 2, highlights Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian artists in the fifth of six surveys of contemporary Arab-world arts, with an emphasis on painting. Information: www.daratalfunun.org/. Darat al Funun, **Amman, Jordan**, September 20 through November 17.

Pharaohs of the Sun: Akhenaten, Nefertiti, and Tutankhamen focuses on the cultural flowering of the Amarna period—a brief two decades in the mid-14th century BC—that centered on the revolutionary pharaoh Akhenaten, sometimes called the first monotheist. His capital, Amarna, was a city of 20,000 to 30,000 people; with his wife, Nefertiti, he engineered a wholesale reorganization of Egyptian religion, art and politics. Catalogue \$30. Information: www.artic.edu. Art Institute of **Chicago**, through September 24.

In the Shade of the Tree is the first retrospective of more than three decades of photography by London-based Peter Sanders. Included are images from Saudi Arabia, where Sanders photographed the 1990's expansions of the Grand Mosque in Makkah and the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah; images from Africa, Central Asia, other Arab countries and the Indian subcontinent are

also shown. "Because of his deep understanding of the culture and his impeccable spiritual courtesy, he has been able to photograph places and people that virtually no other Western photographer would be able to access," says writer Michael Sugich. Information: +44-20-7898-4020, www.soas.ac.uk/Brunei/home.html. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, **London**, through September 15.

Teaching About the Arab World and Islam is the theme of teacher workshops co-sponsored by the Middle East Policy Council in Washington, D.C., and conducted by Arab World And Islamic Resources and School Services (AWAIR) of Berkeley, California. Sites and dates include: **Houston**, September 15; **Louisville, Kentucky**, October 14; **Columbus, Ohio**, October 18; **Lansing, Michigan**, November 4; **Cincinnati, Ohio**, November 10. Information: 202-296-6767 or 510-704-0517, awair@igc.apc.org.

Traces of Paradise: The Archaeology of Bahrain 2500 BC-AD300 presents nearly 600 objects outlining the history of this past and present center of trade in the Arabian Gulf. As the bronze-age link among the civilizations of the Indus, Oman and Mesopotamia, Bahrain was the home of the rich and sophisticated Dilmun civilization (2100-1700 BC). To the Sumerians, Dilmun was also a prelapsarian paradise that figured in numerous stories, including the Epic of Gilgamesh. Seminar July 24. Information: +44-20-7898-4020, www.soas.ac.uk/Brunei/home.html. Brunei Gallery, SOAS, **London**, through September 15.

Agatha Christie and the East: Criminology and Archeology traces those two strands in the life of the "Queen of Crime," displaying diaries; hitherto unpublished photographs of Christie and her husband, archeologist Max Mallowan; more than 200 artifacts from his excavations in Iraq and Syria; and a compartment from the Orient Express. The exhibition emphasizes Christie's participation in the digs as restorer and photographer. Museum für Völkerkunde, **Vienna**, through September 17.

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Souvenirs of the Nile: Nineteenth-Century Photographs of Egypt displays images collected in Egypt in the

1890's. Most are picturesque views mass-produced by photographers for the growing tourist market. Only with the invention of the hand-held camera in the early 20th century did tourists begin to take pictures for themselves. Carlos Museum, **Atlanta**, through September 24.

Scythian Gold From the Steppes of Ukraine presents 165 of the finest gold objects from Scythian graves and burial mounds, many in the "animal style" associated with the Central Asian steppes, and many excavated since 1975 and thus never before exhibited in the United States. The Scythians were a nomadic people who originated in Central Asia in the early first millennium BC and flourished in what is now Ukraine from the fifth to the third century BC through trade with the Greek cities of the Black Sea coast. Their arms, horse trappings and other artifacts show Near Eastern and Greek influence, and the recently excavated items are causing a reevaluation of the interrelationships among the Aegean world, the Near East, and Central Asia as far east as Mongolia. **Los Angeles** County Museum of Art, through September 25; **Brooklyn [New York]** Museum of Art, October 29, 2000 through January 21, 2001.

Silk Road Festival features lectures, dance, theater, exhibits, books and regional cuisine. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, **San Francisco**, September 30 and October 1.

Music and the Figurative Arts: Music and Society in Spain from the Middle Ages to the Year 2000 presents more than 100 old and reproduction musical instruments as well as paintings, sculptures and other music-related objects to study the evolution of the instruments over time, the ways they were used, and their social roles. The importance of the traveling musician and the large contribution of Arabo-Andalusian music—in repertoire, rhythms and instrumentation—are highlighted. Catalogue F150. Musée Goya, **Castres, France**, through October 8.

Palace of Gold and Light: Treasures from the Topkapı, Istanbul. The heart of the Ottoman dynasty for 400 years, Topkapı Palace houses an extraordinary range of objects, including silk and satin costumes, carpets from imperial looms, military trappings, calligraphic works, ceramics and porcelains. The exhibition is divided into thematic sections that focus on the palace as the center of dynastic power, military administration and religious leadership as well as a domestic residence. **San Diego** Museum of Art, through October 27.

The Heroic Past: The Persian Book of Kings looks at the historical figures who became legendary in the great Persian epic *Shahnama*, composed in 1010 by the poet Firdawsi. Coins, paintings, metalwork and ceramics are on display. This is the first exhibition to examine some of the underlying concepts behind the Persian *Book of Kings* and its sources in ancient Iranian art and legend. Sackler Gallery, **Washington, D.C.**, through October 29.

The Egyptian Disease presents drawings, engraving, sculpture and other objects to demonstrate that the Empire style was born of the 19th century's fascination with Egyptian art. Napoleonic Museums, **Portoferraio, Elba, Italy**, through October 31.

New Galleries for Ancient Near Eastern Art set the artifacts of one of the world's most far-reaching, extensive collections into new contexts that illuminate their use and significance in antiquity as well as their connections to the art of neighboring cultures. The spectacular Assyrian reliefs are now illuminated by natural light. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, **New York**, through December 31.

Batak: Art From Sumatra presents masterworks illuminating religion and everyday life from the Lake Toba region of northern Sumatra, drawn from museum and private collections. Museum für Völkerkunde, **Frankfurt**, through January 1.

Syria, Land of Civilizations assembles more than 400 cultural treasures—some never before seen abroad—to present one of the world's oldest cultural centers and explore some of the seminal events that took place there. Mesopotamia, the palace of Mari, the most ancient forms of writing and the earliest evidence of farming, Queen Zenobia and her oasis city of Palmyra, the first great Islamic dynasty in Damascus—all are parts of Syria's legacy. The exhibition views 12,000 years of history from successive viewpoints: first, political, then economic, then spiritual. Finally, it highlights the West's intellectual and scientific ties to Syria. Catalogue. A concurrent exhibition, **Contemporary Syria**, explores everyday life, particularly from the perspective of young people. Musée de la Civilisation, **Quebec**, through January 7.

Nuzi and the Hurrians: Fragments From a Forgotten Past opens a window on the little-known world of the Hurrians, displaying objects excavated at Nuzi, now Yorghana Tepe, in northeastern Iraq. Nuzi was only a provincial agricultural town, but yielded finds—including nearly 5000 cuneiform tablets—that illuminate everyday life in the 14th century BC. Very early glass, pottery and figurines, jewelry, tools and weapons are among the 150 objects on display, part of the largest Nuzi collection outside Iraq. So are texts of depositions taken in a lurid case of malfeasance brought against a town mayor. Harvard Semitic Museum, **Cambridge, Massachusetts**, through April.

Whem Ankh: The Cycle of Life in Ancient Egypt explores daily life in Ptolemaic Egypt (323-330 BC), a time when the great classical civilizations of the Mediterranean, North Africa and South Asia came together and eventually clashed in the aftermath of the conquests of Alexander the Great. The exhibition follows the life, death and presumed afterlife of a known individual, Nes-Hor, one of two mummies in the exhibit. Examination of his mummy and detailed readings of the icons and text on his coffin have provided a great deal of infor-

mation on Nes-Hor's life history, family relationships and place in society as a priest in the Temple of Min in Akhmin. More than 200 artifacts illuminate the domestic life, economy, religion, politics and preparations for the afterlife of a "middle-class" Egyptian family of about 2200 years ago. **Buffalo [New York]** Museum of Science, through September 2003.

The **Persian Gallery**, newly renovated, has re-opened with displays of several hundred items, many never before shown. Roughly half the gallery

Nader Khalili's earthen architecture was the subject of an article in the May/June 1995 issue of *Aramco World*. His sandbag-dome house, he said, could be built in two weeks by two people for as little as \$500, using two rolls of barbed wire and 1400 bags filled with almost any sort of earth. Now Khalili has been granted us and international patents for his earthquake-resistant construction methods, whose nub is the use of one to three strands of barbed wire laid between the filled bags to prevent them moving in relation to each other, thus giving the wall, or dome, or embankment construction needed tensile strength. Using a cement admixture in the bags makes permanent constructions possible. And foresightedly, the patent also points out that Khalili's materials and methods of construction would be applicable in building on the moon and other planets, using "in-situ materials"—moondust.

Levni and the Surname: *The Story of an Eighteenth-Century Ottoman Festival*, a beautiful and illuminating book by Ottoman art historian Esin Atıl, was the subject of a starred review in the March/April 2000 issue of *Aramco World*. Incorrectly and very regrettably, we listed the University of Wisconsin Press as the publisher. The book is in fact published by the University of Washington Press in Seattle, whose phone number is 206-543-8870. We apologize to both presses for the error.

50 Years of Aramco World is a traveling exhibit of 76 color photographs from the magazine's first half-century, selected for their artistic and educational qualities. The images show a changing view of the Middle East, and captions link photographs to historical patterns of communication about the region. The exhibit is suitable for schools, university Middle East centers and special events. For specifications, including thumbnail images, and information on the exhibit's availability, please write to Dick Doughty, Assistant Editor, *Saudi Aramco World*, Box 2106, Houston, Texas 77252, USA.

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