

Traveler's Tales

EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

Ibn Battuta Witnesses a Unique Trading Tradition

Moroccan *qadi*, or judge, Ibn Battuta (1304–c.1368) was born in Tangier to a Berber family of the Muslim faith. After he completed his education at the age of 21, Battuta decided to make the hajj, or Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. What started as a reasonably challenging trek for the period became one of the great journeys of medieval times. During nearly 30 years of travel, Battuta visited much of Southwest Asia, West Africa, southern Russia, India, and China. Along the way he gained fame and wealth and met kings, sheiks, and holy men—including the Byzantine emperor and the sultan of Delhi—as well as ordinary people. In this excerpt from his book, the *Rihlah*, or *Travels*, Battuta describes the unique trading tradition of Mogadishu.



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

—Ibn Battuta
from the *Rihlah*

◀ Ibn Battuta
in Egypt



Sambuq sailing along the East African coast ▶

Thinking Critically

- 1. Draw Conclusions** Why do you think the merchants of Mogadishu used this method to conduct business?
- 2. Analyze Information** According to Ibn Battuta, regular merchants who traveled to Mogadishu were exempt from this strict trading practice. Why do you think some merchants were allowed this freedom?