

which brings about injustice. And it is written in reference to kings: "The honored king loves justice, but the unjust king loves evil and injustice, to the ruin of his soul." And Solomon the wise has said: "To increase justice and save the oppressed is better than the offering and sacrifices" [Proverbs 21:3].

Do not take the wealth of anyone by violence; do not buy from him by force, either openly or by trick, in order not to be afflicted by God in this world

and in the future. In this world, as befell the King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, when Naboth refused to sell him his vineyard and Jezebel schemed to kill him and took the vineyard; God smote Ahab and made his race perish; and next to him he smote Jezebel, and the dogs ate her in the aforesaid vineyard [2 Kings 21]. As for the future world, the Apostle said: "Wrong-doers and apostates shall not inherit God's Kingdom" [1 Corinthians 6:9].

▶ Working with Sources

1. How does the author of this portion of the Fetha Nagast use Biblical passages and historical comparisons to accentuate his points? Why?
2. What is the king's primary obligation to his people? Under what conditions could he lose his power?

SOURCE 14.2

Ibn Battuta on Mali, from the *Rihla*

ca. 1354

One of the great world travelers of all time, Ibn Battuta was an educated Moroccan who journeyed throughout Africa, the Middle East, Persia, and Asia. In 1354, at age 50, Ibn Battuta dictated an account of his travels, the *Rihla* (the *Journey*), to Ibn Juzayy, a court secretary in Morocco. Both men therefore had a role to play in shaping the narrative.

I set out on the 1st Muharram of the year seven hundred and fifty-three (18 February, 1352 CE) with a caravan including amongst others a number of the merchants of Sijilmasa [present-day Morocco/Algerian frontier region]. After twenty-five days we reached Taghaza, an unattractive village, with the curious feature that its houses and mosques are built of blocks of salt,

roofed with camel skins. There are no trees there, nothing but sand. In the sand is a salt mine; they dig for the salt, and find it in thick slabs, lying one on top of the other, as though they had been tool-squared and laid under the surface of the earth. A camel will carry two of these slabs. No one lives at Taghaza except the slaves of the Masufa tribe, who dig for the salt; they

Source: Ibn Battuta, "Mali," from *Travels in Asia and Africa, 1325-1354*, trans. and ed. H. A. R. Gibb (New York: Robert M. McBride, 1929), 323-327, 329-330.

subsist on dates imported from Dara and Sijilmasa, camel's flesh, and millet imported from the Negro-lands. The Negroes come up from their country and take away the salt from there. At Walata a load of salt brings eight to ten mithqals; in the town of Mali it sells for twenty to thirty, and sometimes as much as forty. The Negroes use salt as a medium of exchange, just as gold and silver is used elsewhere; they cut it up into pieces and buy and sell with it. The business done at Taghaza, for all its meanness, amounts to an enormous figure in terms of hundredweights of gold dust. . . .

Thus we reached the town of Walata after a journey of two months to a day. Walata is the northern most province of the Negroes, and the Sultan's representative there was one Farba Husayn, Farba meaning deputy (in their language). . . .

It was an excessively hot place, and boasts a few small date-palms, in the shade of which they sow watermelons. Its water comes from underground water beds at that point, and there is plenty of mutton to be had. The garments of the inhabitants, most of whom belong to the Masufa tribe, are of fine Egyptian fabrics. Their women are of surpassing beauty, and are shown more respect than the men. The state of affairs amongst these people is indeed extraordinary. Their men show no sign of jealousy whatever; no one claims descent from his father, but on the contrary from his mother's brother. A person's heirs are his sister's sons, not his own sons. This is a thing which I have seen nowhere in the world except among the Indians of Malabar. But those are heathens; these people are Muslims, punctilious in observing the hours of prayer, studying books of law, and memorizing the Koran. Yet their

women show no bashfulness before men and do not veil themselves, though they are assiduous in attending prayers. Any man who wishes to marry one of them may do so, they do not travel with their husbands. . . .

The women have their "friends" and "companions" amongst the men outside their own families, and the men in the same way have "companions" amongst the women of other families. A man may go into his house and find his wife entertaining her "companion," but he takes not objection to it. One day at Walata I went into the *qadi's* house, after asking his permission to enter, and found with a young woman of remarkable beauty. When I saw her I was shocked and turned to go out, but she laughed at me, instead of being overcome by shame, and the *quadi* said to me, "Why are you going out? She is my companion." I was amazed at their conduct, for he was a theologian and a pilgrim to boot. I was told that he had asked the sultan's permission to make the pilgrimage that year with his "companion" (whether this one or not I cannot say) but the sultan would not grant it.

. . . On feast-days, after Dugha [interpreter] has finished his display, the poets come in. Each of them is inside a figure resembling a thrush, made of feathers, and provided with a wooden head with a red beak, to look like a thrush's head. They stand in front of the sultan in this ridiculous make-up and recite their poems. I was told that their poetry is a kind of sermonizing in which they say to the sultan: "This pempi [throne] which you occupy was that whereon sat this king and that king, and such were this one's noble actions and such and such the other's. So do you too do good deeds whose memory will outlive you." After that the chief of the poets mounts the steps

Qadi: A Muslim judge.

of the pempi and lays his head on the sultan's lap, then climbs to the top of the pempi and lays his head on first on the sultan's right shoulder and then on his left, speaking all the while in their tongue, and finally he comes down again. I was told that this practice is a very old custom amongst them prior to the introduction of Islam, and they have kept it up.

... The Negroes possess some admirable qualities. They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence of injustice than any other people. The sultan shows no mercy to anyone who is guilty of the least act of it. There is a complete security in their country. Neither traveler nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence. They do not confiscate the property of any white man [Arab trader] who dies in their country, even if it be accounted wealth. On the contrary, they give it into the charge of some trustworthy person among the whites, until the rightful heir takes possession of it. They are careful to observe the hours of prayer, and assiduous in attending them in congregations, and in bringing up their children to them. On Fridays, if a man does not go early to the mosque, he cannot find a corner to pray in, on account of the crowd. It is a custom of theirs to send each

man his boy (to the mosque) with his prayer-mat; the boy spreads it out for his master in a place befitting him and remains on it (until his master comes to the mosque). The pray-mats are made of the leaves of a tree resembling a date-palm, but without fruit.

Another of their good qualities is their habit of wearing clean white garments on Fridays. Even if a man has nothing but an old worn shirt, he washes it and cleans it, and wears it at the Friday service. Yet another is their zeal for learning the Koran by heart. They put their children in chains if they show any backwardness in memorizing it, and they are not set free until they have it by heart. I visited the qadi in his house on the day of the festival. His children were chained up, so I said to him, "Will you not let them loose?" He replied, "I shall not do so until they learn the Koran by heart." Among their bad qualities are the following. The women servants, slave-girls, and young girls go about in front of everyone naked, without a stitch of clothing on them. Women go into the sultan's presence naked and without coverings, and his daughters also go about naked. Then there is the custom of their putting dust and ashes on their heads as a mark of respect, and the grotesque ceremonies we have described when the poets recite their verses.

► Working with Sources

1. Why does Ibn Battuta remark so often on the lack of generosity on the part of the sultan of Mali?
2. Ibn Battuta offers many details about the material culture of Mali. What does his description reveal about the interactions between Mali and other cultures? How do they interact?