

# Africa: Major Geographic Features

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# Africa

- Second largest continent
- 11.7 million sq. miles
- About 5,000 miles from N. to S.
- About 4,000 miles from E. to W.
- 3 times the size of the U.S.
- Bisected by the equator
- Over 1/3 desert
- Second most populous continent with 1.3 billion people
- 1250-3000 native languages

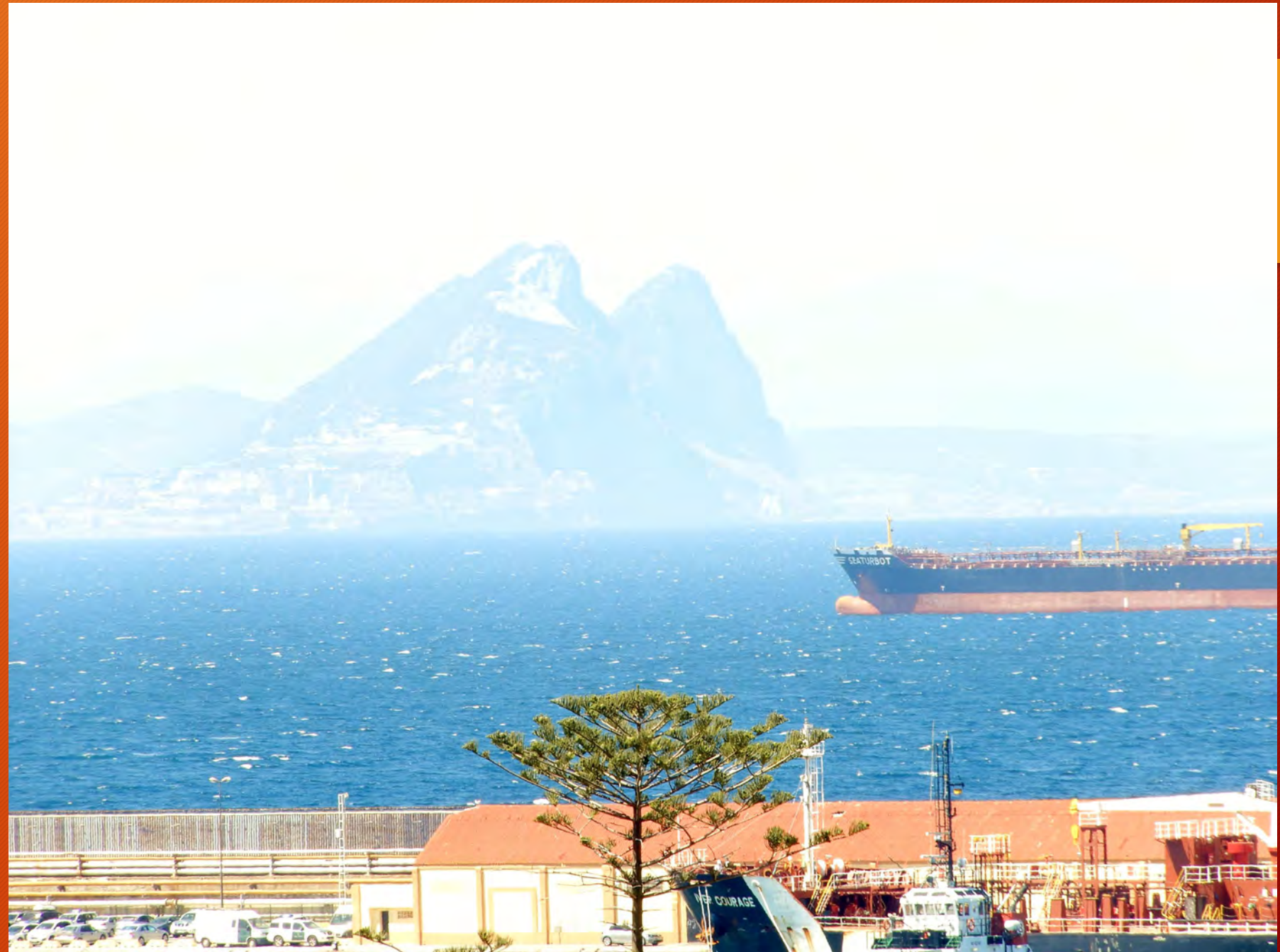


# Strait of Gibraltar

- A narrow strait under 9 miles wide and 1,000-3,000 feet deep separates Europe from Africa and the Pacific Ocean from the Mediterranean Sea.
- Renaissance tradition thought that beyond this passage was nothingness—where ships would go off the edge of the earth.



The Rock of Gibraltar (Spain) is just under 9 miles from the north coast of Africa.



# Myths about Hercules



Statue of Hercules holding up the pillars of the sky (Ceuta, N. Africa).

In one version, Hercules enlisted Atlas' aid to get the golden apples. Since Atlas was holding up the pillars of the sky, Hercules relieved him. Atlas got the golden apples, but was going to skip out. Hercules asked him for help in readjusting the load, but then left Atlas holding the pillars.

In another version, Hercules used his brute strength to dig out the channel and create the Rock of Gibraltar on one side and either Monte Hacho (Ceuta) or Jebel Musa (Morocco) on the other side to serve as pillars and relieve Atlas of his burden.

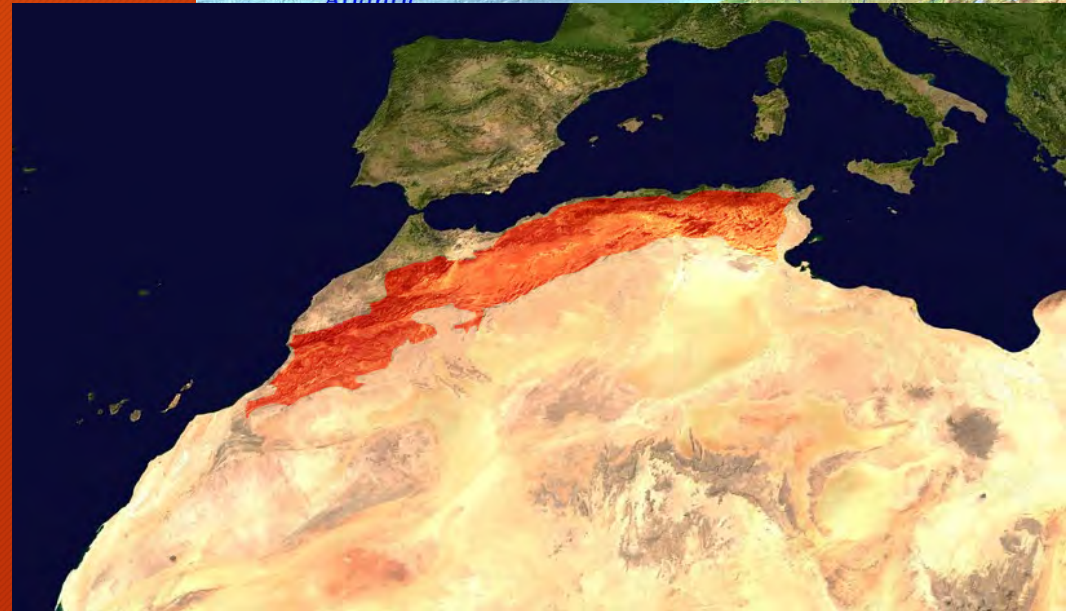
## The Cave of Hercules on the coast of Morocco by Tangier



# Atlas Mountains

The Atlas Mountains spread 1600 miles from Morocco through Algeria to Tunisia across northern Africa. The highest peak is Toubkal at 13,671 feet.

They were formed when the tectonic plates for N. American and Africa collided—once rivalling the Himalayas in height. Part of the original range is now the Alleghany Mountains in the U.S.



The region is mainly home to various Berber populations.



The Atlas Mountains are mineral rich and have iron ore, lead, copper, silver, mercury, rock salt, phosphate, marble, coal, anthracite and natural gas.

Sunset over the Atlas Mountains





# Mediterranean Sea

- The Mediterranean Sea covers 970,000 sq. mi. It is about 2400 mi. at its longest and 990 mi. at its widest.
- This sea became one of the most important travel routes for traders such as the Phoenicians in ancient times. It is still an important shipping route, especially providing access to the Suez Canal.



Beach on the  
Mediterranean  
Sea at Ceuta, a  
Spanish enclave  
on the coast of  
Morocco.



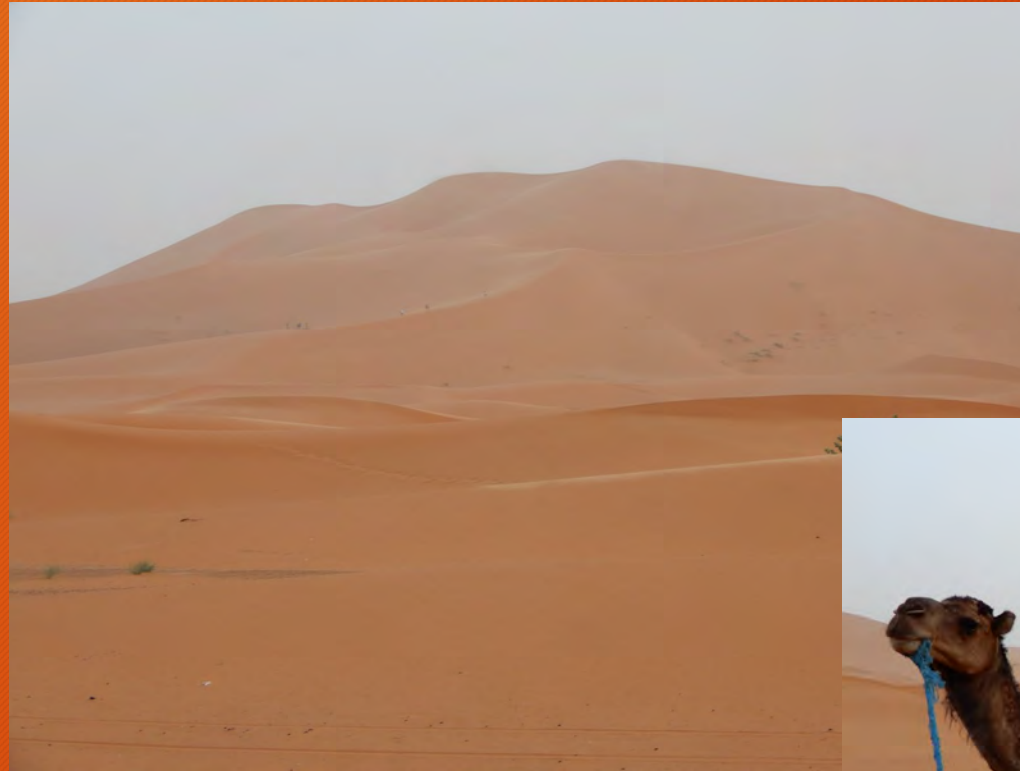
# Sahara Desert

- The Sahara is the largest hot desert on Earth.
- It covers 3.5 million sq. mi., with a length of 3,000 miles and a width of 1,100 miles.
- It has sand dunes, mountains, plateaus, sand- and gravel-covered plains, salt flats, basins and depressions.
- During its "wet phase," it was a lush grassland teeming with wildlife.
- It should return to a wet phase in about 15,000 years!





Camels traveling by moonlight, like ancient caravans.

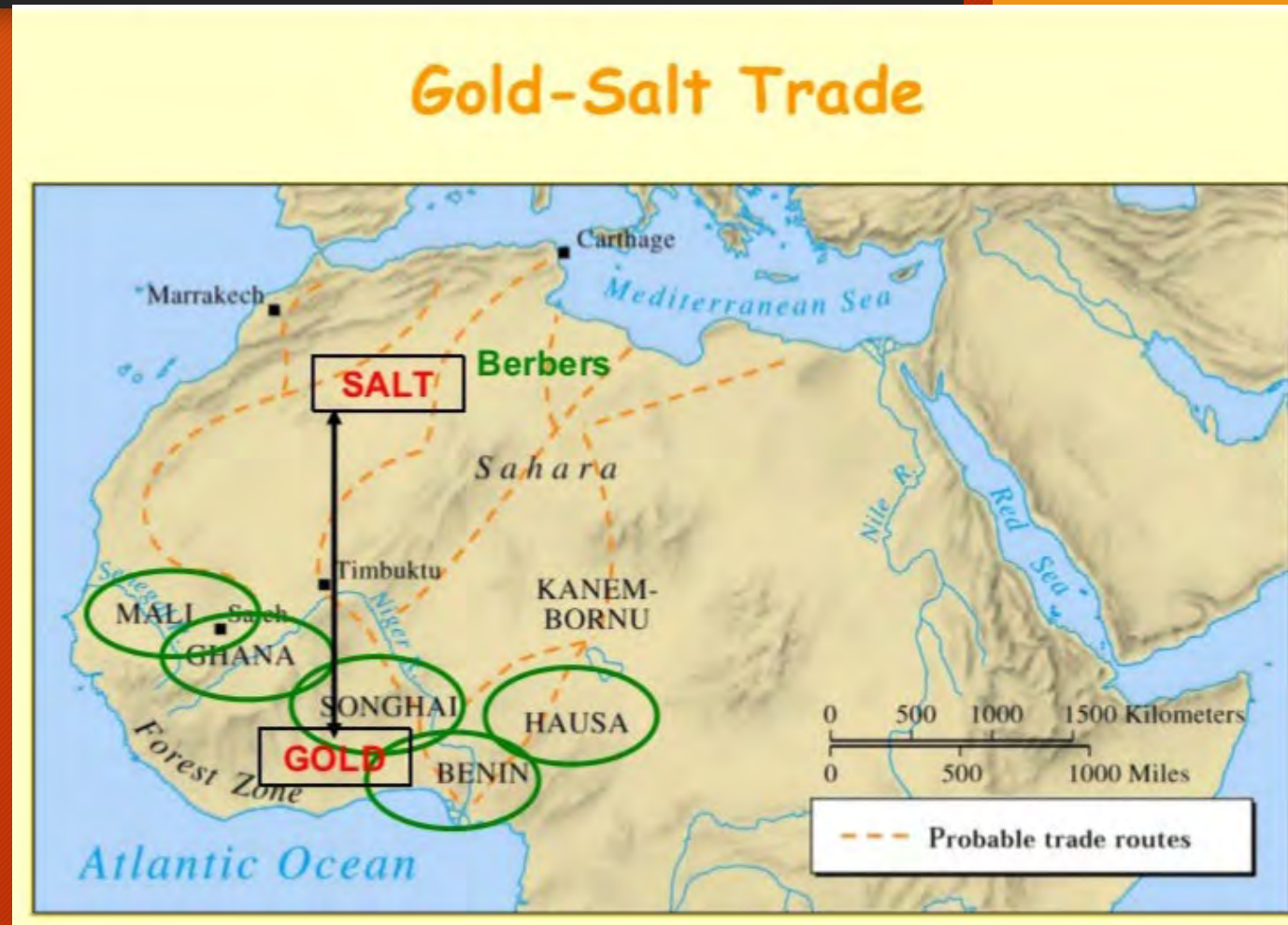


The Sahara desert at Merzouga, Morocco



# Ancient Trade Routes Across Sahara

- Numerous trade routes were used by camel caravans to cross the Sahara Desert. Gold from west Africa was used to mint the major currencies of Europe.
- At the north, Carthage and Cairo were key destinations. At the south, Timbuktu linked the Saharan routes with the western gold fields and commerce on the Niger River.



# Niger River

- Starting just 150 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, the Niger River flows inland toward the Sahara Desert, and then turns southeast to drain into the Gulf of Guinea for a total of 2,600 miles.
- The “bend” became Timbuktu, one of the most important cities in the trans-Saharan trade and a renown center of learning.



# Nile River

- The Nile is the longest river on earth, stretching for 4,132 miles.
- Its drainage area includes 11 countries and is the primary water source for Sudan and Egypt.
- In a famous quote, Greek historian Herodotus wrote that "Egypt was the gift of the Nile."
- Cyclical flooding and silting increased the fertility of surrounding croplands, creating food surpluses that allowed the region to flourish.



# Suez Canal

- The Suez Canal is a human-made waterway between the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea through the Isthmus of Suez. It was designed to shorten boat travel distance between Europe and Asia.
- Over 17,000 vessels go through it a year.
- Use of the Suez saves about 5,000 miles on a trip from London to Mumbai and shortens the trip for a tanker from 44 days to 26.





# Construction of the Suez Canal

- Earlier versions were attempted by Senusret II, Ramesses II, Necho II, Darius I, and Ptolemy.
- Built under British auspices, the Suez Canal is 120.1 miles long and took 10 years (1859-1969).
- Over 1.5 million people worked on it.
- Thousands of laborers died, mostly by cholera and epidemics.

