

Lesson 2: West African Kingdoms

Vocabulary

griot a professional storyteller

Ghana

Gold was valuable in West Africa. The ancient kingdom of Ghana was known for its gold trade. Ghana was founded in about A.D. 300 by the Soninke people. It is believed that people in Ghana farmed, fished, and herded cattle. Ghana was located between salt mines in the Sahara and gold fields in Wangara. Ghana became a great trading empire by the late 900s. Berber people from North Africa helped traders get across the Sahara. The Berbers helped keep thieves away from the trade routes. Safe routes kept Ghana's capital, Koumbi, a major trade center. Ghana taxed major trade items. This made the empire even richer. Muslim traders brought new ideas and the religion of Islam to Ghana. By the early 1000s, the Soninke people began to lose control of Ghana. Different groups fought for power. By 1203 King Sumanguru took control of the empire.

Mali

In 1235 Sundiata defeated King Sumanguru. Sundiata started the empire of Mali. Sundiata's life story is still told by **griots**, or professional storytellers. People in Mali grew rice, onions, grains, yams, and cotton. Mali depended on trade for wealth. Gold was discovered in the empire. This made Mali wealthy. By 1300 Mali was the most powerful empire in Africa. Mansa Musa, Sundiata's grandson, became a great king. He was a Muslim. Mansa Musa is known for his trip to Mecca. On this trip he took thousands of people, gold, camels, and other supplies. He stopped in Egypt along the way. Many Egyptian writers remembered his wealth, intelligence, and generosity. Mansa Musa brought back an Arab architect to build mosques in Timbuktu, a trading city in Mali. He also

brought back Arab scholars to teach Muslim beliefs. His trip to Mecca interested European mapmakers. Europeans also became interested in Mali's resources.

Jenne-jenno

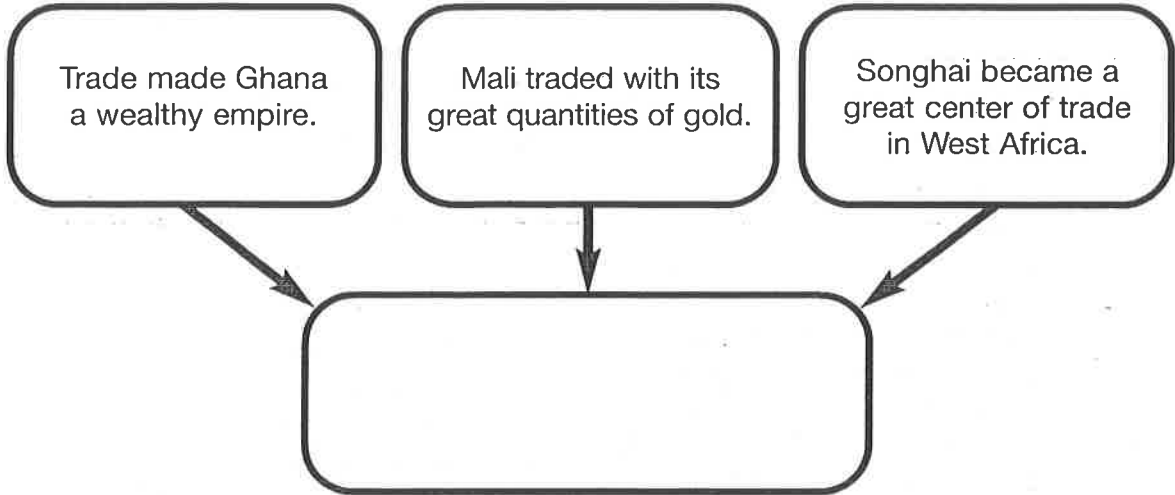
Jenne-jenno was a city on the Niger River. It is the oldest known city in sub-Saharan Africa. People first settled there about 200 B.C. During the Mali empire, trade goods were brought to Jenne-jenno. The goods were shipped on the river to Timbuktu. By 1400 the city was deserted. No one is certain why.

Songhai

The Songhai were farmers, traders, and warriors. They had fought to stay independent of Mali. By about 1464 the Songhai empire began taking over the land around it. King Sonni Ali helped make Songhai an even bigger trade and learning center than Mali had been. He split the empire into different states. Governors ruled these states. The king created an army and navy to protect his kingdom and trade. Yet the empire did not last as long as those of Ghana and Mali. Fighting among different Muslim groups led some states to leave the empire. In 1591 the Songhai empire was attacked by the Moroccans. They defeated the Songhai using a new technology, guns.

Lesson 2: Review

1. Summarize Write a summary of the sentences listed below.



2. What was the role of Ghana in the movement of trade goods across the Sahara?

3. Who was Mansa Musa?

4. How were the West African kingdoms crossroads for trade?

5. **Critical Thinking: Make Inferences** Why would European mapmakers include Mali on their maps after hearing about Mansa Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca?
