

West African Civilizations

BEFORE YOU READ

In the last section, you read about societies in North and Central Africa.

In this section, you will read about kingdoms in West Africa.

AS YOU READ

Use the chart below to take notes on the kingdoms and states of West Africa.

TERMS AND NAMES

Ghana West African empire that grew rich from trade

Mali West African empire that grew rich from trade

Sundiata Founder and first emperor of the kingdom of Mali

Mansa Musa Mali ruler who created a large kingdom and adopted Islam

Ibn Battuta 14th century traveler who visited most of the Islamic world

Songhai West African empire that conquered Mali

Hausa West African people who lived in several city-states of what is now northern Nigeria

Yoruba West African people who formed several kingdoms in what is now Benin

Benin Kingdom that arose near the Niger River delta and became a major West African state

Ghana	<i>Gained wealth through gold and taxing trade.</i>
Songhai	
Mali	
Benin	
Other States	

Empire of Ghana (pages 413–415)

How did the kingdom of Ghana arise?

Traders crossed the Sahara Desert of North Africa as early as A.D. 200. The desert was harsh. This limited trade. Then the Berbers began using camels. Trade increased.

By the 700s, the rulers of the kingdom of

Ghana were growing rich. They taxed the goods that traders carried through their land. The two most important trade goods were gold and salt. Gold was taken from mines and streams in the western and southern parts of West Africa. It was traded for salt from the Sahara region. Arab traders also brought cloth and manufactured goods. These came from cities on the Mediterranean Sea.

The king of Ghana was powerful. Only the king

could own *gold nuggets*. He was the religious, military, and political leader. By the year 800, Ghana had become an empire. It controlled the people of nearby lands.

Over time, Muslim merchants and traders brought their religion to Ghana. By the 1000s, the kings converted to Islam. Many common people in the empire, though, kept their traditional beliefs. Later, Ghana fell to the Almoravids of North Africa. Ghana never regained its former power.

1. What goods were traded in Ghana?

Empire of Mali (pages 415–417)

How did Mali rise to power?

By 1235, a new kingdom began—**Mali**. It arose south of Ghana. Mali's wealth and power were also based on the gold trade. **Sundiata** became Mali's first emperor. He was a great military and political leader.

Later Mali rulers adopted Islam. One of them was **Mansa Musa**. He made Mali twice the size of the old empire of Ghana. To rule this large empire, he named governors to head several *provinces*. Mansa Musa was a devoted Muslim. He built *mosques* in two cities. One was Timbuktu. It became a leading center of Muslim learning.

Ibn Battuta was a later traveler to the area. He described how peaceful Mali was. Mali, though, declined in the 1400s. Mali was replaced by another empire that grew wealthy from gold.

2. What did Mansa Musa achieve?

Empire of Songhai (page 417)

How did Songhai arise?

The next trading empire was **Songhai**. It was farther to the east than Mali. Songhai arose in the 1400s. It had two great rulers. One was Sunni Ali. He gained control of new areas. His conquests included the city of Timbuktu.

Songhai's other great ruler was Askia Muhammad. He was a devoted Muslim. He ran the government well.

The Songhai Empire fell, however. Its army lacked modern weapons. In 1591, Moroccan troops used gunpowder and cannons to beat Songhai soldiers. They had only swords and spears. This defeat ended the period when empires ruled West Africa.

3. Why did Songhai fall?

Other Peoples of West Africa

(pages 417–419)

What other states and kingdoms arose?

In other parts of West Africa, city-states developed. The **Hausa** people lived in the region that is now northern Nigeria. Their city-states first arose between the years 1000 and 1200. The Hausa rulers depended on farmers' crops. They also relied on trade goods. These included salt, grain, and cotton cloth.

The **Yoruba** people also first lived in city-states. These were located in what is now Benin and southwestern Nigeria. Over time, some of the small Yoruba communities joined together. Many Yoruba kingdoms were formed. Yoruba people believed their kings were gods.

The kingdom of **Benin** arose in the 1200s. It was located near the delta of the Niger River. In the 1400s, a ruler named Ewuare led Benin. He made the kingdom more powerful. During his reign, Benin became a major West African state. He strengthened Benin City, his capital. High walls surrounded the city. The huge palace contained many works of art.

In the 1480s, trading ships from Portugal came. They sailed into a major port of Benin. Their arrival was historic. It marked the start of a long period of European involvement in Africa.

4. What was important about Benin?
