

Early Civilizations of West Africa

Key words:

Savanna – grassy plains where most Africans lived

Dehydration – loss of water in the body – people used salt in their diet to prevent.

Kingdoms of West Africa

| Ghana (800-1000) | Mali (1200-1450) | Songhai (1450-1600) |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Controls trade in gold and salt across West Africa | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mali conquers kingdom of Ghana | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Songhai grows into largest West African state |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Women work in business and government | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mansa Musa becomes great emperor | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Controls important trade routes |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• King has Muslim advisers | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mali controls gold trade routes | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emperor sets up Muslim dynasty |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Timbuktu becomes a great trading city and center of learning | |

West African rulers built powerful kingdoms by gaining control of trade routes and defeating their enemies.

Around 1250 the kingdom of **Mali** crushed Ghana and won control of the gold trade routes and built the great trading city of *Timbuktu*. The emperor of Mali, *Mansa Musa* converted to Islam. He based his system of justice on the Qur'an.

Around 1450 a new kingdom called **Songhai** emerged. This became the largest state that had ever existed in West Africa.

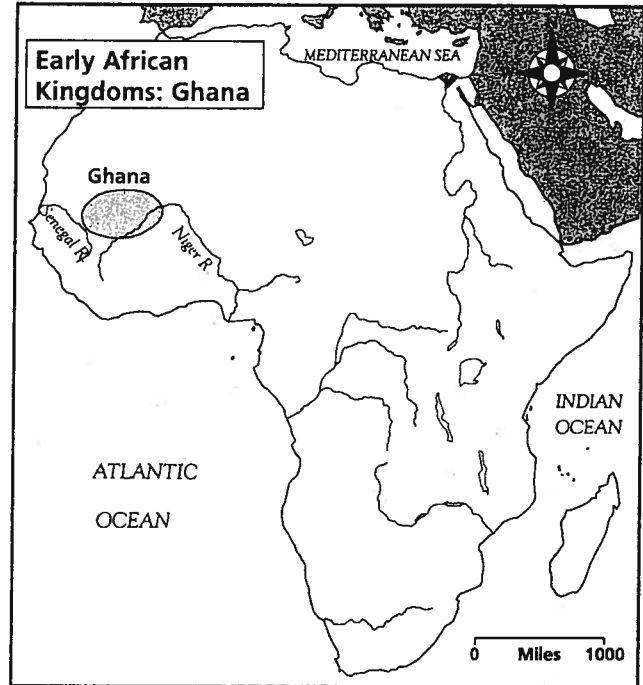
West African kingdoms also used Muslim military technology. They adopted Muslim ideas, including the written language, coins and business methods.

Early Civilizations of Africa

KINGDOM OF GHANA (750–1200)

The kingdom of Ghana was founded around 750. The people of Ghana used their ability to make iron swords, spears, and lances to defeat their neighbors and gain control over West Africa's major trade routes. Caravans would bring salt south to Ghana, and return north with gold from areas southwest of Ghana.

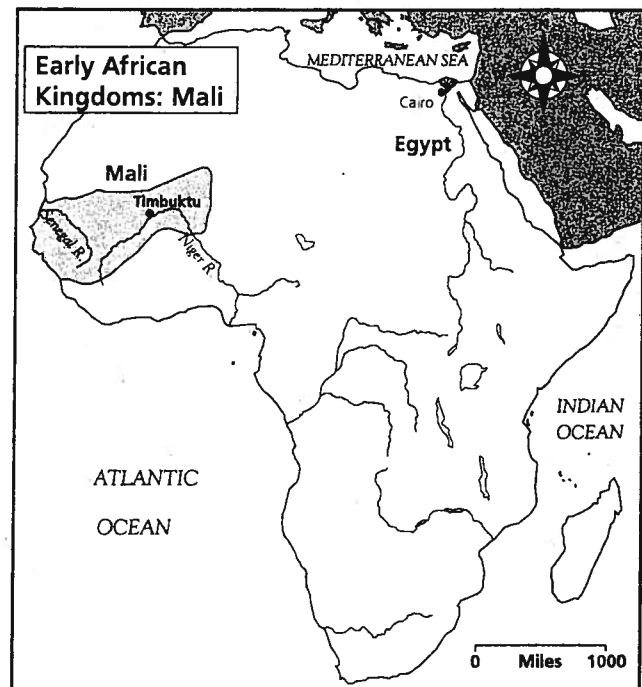
The power of the kings of Ghana rested on their ability to tax all trade passing through the region, especially the salt and gold trade. The rulers of Ghana built a capital city, developed a large cavalry, and governed a wide area. However, in 1076, they were invaded by Muslims from North Africa. Ghana never fully recovered and eventually dissolved into many smaller states.



KINGDOM OF MALI (1240–1400)

In 1240, Mali conquered Ghana. Mali's rulers established a new empire and brought gold and salt mines under their control. Mali's rulers converted to Islam, although most of their people did not adopt that faith.

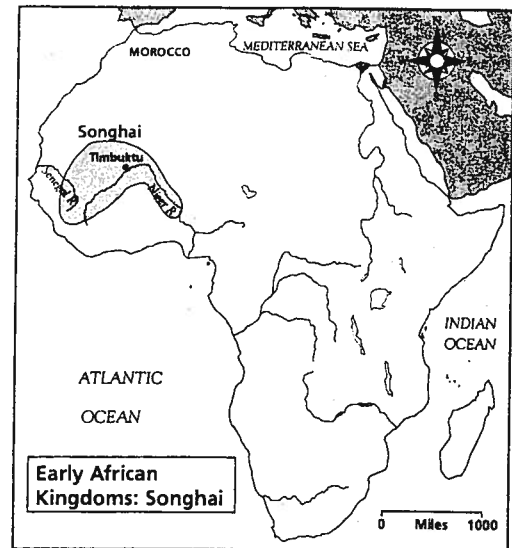
Mali's most famous ruler, **Mansa Musa**, expanded his kingdom greatly. In the 1330s, he made a religious pilgrimage to Mecca. Mansa Musa turned his capital city of **Timbuktu** into a flourishing center of trade and learning. Because of the importance of studying the Qu'ran, more West Africans learned to read and write. Later rulers of Mali proved less capable than Mansa Musa, and the empire collapsed in the 1400s.



THE KINGDOM OF SONGHAI (1464–1600)

In 1464, the Songhai people captured Timbuktu and brought the middle of the Upper Niger region under their control.

The kingdom of Songhai emerged as the largest of Africa's three trading empires. The people of Songhai were skilled at farming, fishing, and trading. Like Ghana and Mali, Songhai grew rich from trade across the Sahara Desert. Songhai expanded its trading network as far as Europe and Asia. Like Mali, it was also Muslim. Despite its riches and power, the kingdom of Songhai lasted only about 100 years. In 1591, Songhai fell to the invading armies of Morocco. The fall of Songhai marked the end of the great West African kingdoms. West Africa again split into a large number of independent areas.



OTHER AFRICAN STATES

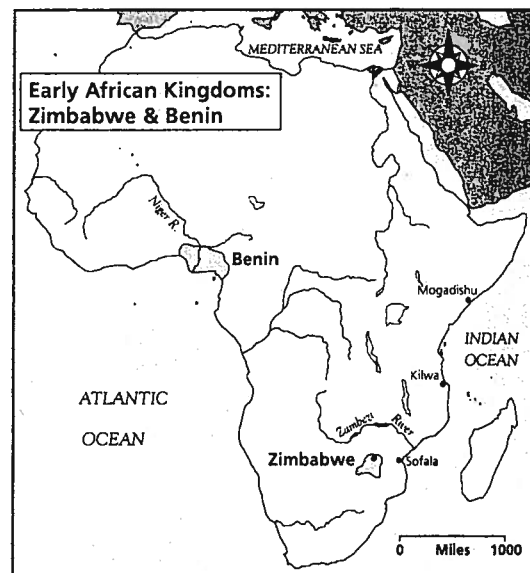
The growth of kingdoms in the West African savanna like Ghana, Mali, and Songhai was matched by the rise of other trading centers in Africa.

BENIN

Benin developed in the rain forests of West Africa. Benin was famous for its bronze sculptures, among the finest in all of African art. By the 16th century, Benin became involved in the slave trade. Benin traded captives from other tribes and exchanged them with Europeans for guns and iron goods.

ZIMBABWE

Farther to the south, Zimbabwe became one of Africa's best known trading kingdoms. The existence of gold deposits was crucial to its rise. Zimbabwe traded gold, copper, and ivory to traders who appeared along Africa's east coast.



COASTAL CITIES OF EAST AFRICA

Around the 10th century, a number of independent city-states arose along the east coast of Africa. Gold from the African interior was sent down the Zambezi and other rivers to these cities, where it was sold to merchants from Arabia and India.

ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia, a continuation of the ancient kingdom of Axum, became a Christian state in the 4th century. It remained Christian despite the rise of Islam, which cut Ethiopia off from the rest of the Christian world until the 1400s.

Trade Routes of East Africa

The Kingdom of Axum: Located on the coast of East Africa. In A.D. 350 it was conquered and absorbed by Nubia. Axum controlled a trade network that linked Africa, India and the Mediterranean world. In the cities of Axum Africans mixed with people from other lands. Axum was Christian since the 300's but civil war and the spread of Islam in North Africa led to the decline of this nation. However people still lived in the mountains and remained Christian in the beliefs. These people became the ancestors of the Ethiopians. Ethiopian Christians borrowed many different traditions from other cultures. They adapted East African music and dance. They observed Jewish holidays and rules about their diet. While Axum declined, other trading cities arose along the East African coast. In the 600's Arab and Persian communities grew there. By 1000 merchant ships from port cities such as Mogadishu (Somalia) sailed to India to trade. Trade led to a mixing of culture. Over time this cultural diffusion led to a new language called Swahili. Swahili mixes Arabic words with Bantu (an African language).

The Rise of East African Trading Cities

