**West African Kingdoms & The Trans-Sahara Trade Route**

**#15**

**I. Introduction**

As the Sahara dried out due to desertification, some Neolithic people migrated southward into the savanna, an area of grasslands that was good for farming. By 100 A.C. E., settled agricultural villages were expanding. This expansion from farming villages to towns was due, in part, to the development of trade. Farming villages began to produce a **surplus**, which is making more food than they needed. They began to trade their surplus food for products from other villages. Gradually, a trade system linked the savanna to the rain forests in the south. Even though the Sahara was a large barrier, this did not prevent the trade of goods across the Sahara to civilizations along the Mediterranean, Europe, and in Southwest Asia. A series of trade routes that crossed the Sahara desert that connected West Africa with Mediterranean coast was called the **Trans-Sahara Trade Route.**

**DIRECTIONS: Actively read (highlight/underline important words/phrases, circle things you do not understand) about the many positive influences and the negative effects that the Trans-Sahara Trade Route had for West African kingdoms. Then, fill in the template below.**

From West Africa, caravans crossed the Sahara carrying goods for trade. The two products, gold and salt, dominated the Sahara trade. As farming and trade prospered, cities developed in the region of West Africa. Soon strong monarchs (kings & queens) arose, gained control of the most trade routes, and built powerful kingdoms. Three powerful kingdoms rose at different time periods in the West Africa. The first was called **Ghana**, followed by **Mali**, and then **Songhai**. The two streams of trade, one from the north and the other from the west met in the marketplaces of these western kingdoms, where the kings collected tolls on all goods entering or leaving their lands. This allowed the western kingdoms to become very wealthy, in which rulers took advantage of this wealth and built powerful armies that protected their kingdoms. The Gold and Salt trade across the Sahara also attracted people from many regions to the trading cities in the Western Kingdoms. These people came from parts of Asia, Europe and mainly the Middle East. With them they brought goods, wealth, and ideas (cultural diffusion). Muslim merchants brought the religion of Islam to the Western kingdoms. Beginning with the kings of Ghana, Muslim merchants were employed as counselors and officials to the kings. Gradually, the Western African kings adopted some of the Muslims military technology and ideas about government. Muslims also introduced their written language, coinage (making coins), and business methods. In Mali, the rulers based their justice system on the Koran. This would help bring peace and order to the kingdoms of West Africa. Because so many ideas from different parts of the world came across the Trans-Saharan routes to trading centers in West Africa, cities, like **Timbuktu**,had become leading centers of learning. The first universities of Africa would begin in West Africa that would attract people as for as China to learn from African scholars. As a result of such wealth and prosperity, North Africans wanted their wealth conquered Ghana and Songhai Kingdoms. For example, the ruler of Morocco sent his armies across the Sahara and south to seize (capture) the West African gold mines, such as Timbuktu, Gao, and other important trading centers. The invaders used gunpowder weapons to defeat the Songhai forces. They destroyed buildings and property. This disruption of trade led to a dramatic decline in the importance of these cities and animosity (hostility) reduced trade. However, the Moroccans who were successful in conquering Songhai and the Almoravids, who were successful in conquering Ghana, struggled to rule empires across the Sahara.

For nearly a thousand years, camel caravans traveled the sands of the Sahara Desert. Traveling from oasis to oasis, merchants transported the products of West Africa to the rest of the known world at the time of Europe, Asia and Middle East. Trade along the Trans-Saharan trade routes had a positive influence on the development of West Africa’s greatest empires, but also some negative effects.

Trade had a positive influence on the development of West Africa’s greatest empires. One reason trade had a positive influence on the development of West Africa’s greatest empires was \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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**Regents Questions:**

**1. One similarity between the Ancient African kingdoms of Egypt, Ghana, Mali and Songhai is that all of these kingdoms were located**

1. in mountainous terrain
2. in coastal areas
3. on major trading routes
4. in rain forest areas

**2. The trans-Saharan trade carried out by West African civilizations was primarily based on an exchange of**

1. gold and salt.
2. ivory and silk.
3. silver and tea.
4. hardwoods and animal skins.

**3. Trade along the Silk Roads and the trans-Saharan trade routes resulted in**

1. elimination of all traditional beliefs
2. a movement toward decolonization
3. the Columbian exchange
4. cultural diffusion between different societies