

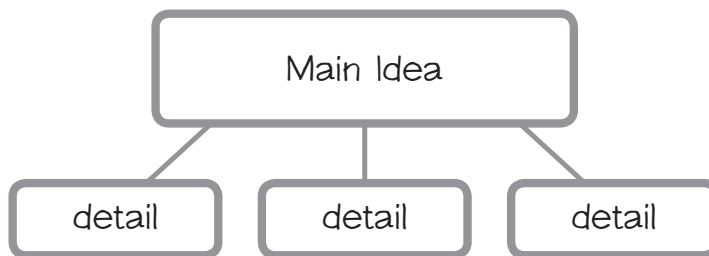
Lesson 2 The Empire of Ghana

BEFORE YOU READ

In this lesson, you will learn about the development of the trans-Saharan trade, and the growth and decline of Ghana's empire.

AS YOU READ

Use this chart to take notes about how the people of West Africa built empires from the wealth gained by trade. Answering the question at the end of each section will help you fill in the chart.



TERMS & NAMES

- **vegetation zone** a region that has certain types of plants
- **Sahara** a large desert of northern Africa
- **savannah** a grassland in a tropical region
- **Ghana** a region between the Sahara and southern West Africa that developed into an empire
- **Almoravids** a group of Muslim Arabs that came to power in North Africa during the 11th century

West Africa's Geography Fuels Empires

(pages 157–158)

What are the three vegetation zones in West Africa?

West Africa's geography helped people develop a strong trade. West Africa has three **vegetation zones**: desert, grasslands, and forests. Soil and climate determine what plants grow in a vegetation zone. For example, a desert has a dry climate. Only plants that use little water grow there.

The northern section of West Africa is part of a large desert. This desert is called the **Sahara**. The middle section of West Africa is a **savannah**. It is flat, grassy, and has scattered trees. Forests make up the southern region of West Africa. The Niger River runs across West Africa. For centuries, the river has been used for transportation and communication. It has also served as a trade route.

The Sahara has rich deposits of salt. Crops, such as millet, grow well on the savannah. The southern forests hold large amounts of gold.

People in the savannah and forests of West Africa had gold, but they wanted salt. People in North Africa had salt, but they wanted gold. As a result, a trans-Saharan trade of gold and salt developed. Trans-Saharan means across the Sahara. People in the Sahara would mine salt. Then they traded it for the gold mined in the forests of West Africa.

Around A.D. 300, savannah and forest people began to use camels to transport goods. Camels could cover great distances with little food or water. These qualities made camels ideal for carrying goods across the Sahara. Traders used camels in groups called caravans. Camel caravans helped increase trans-Saharan trade.

1. What trade goods are found in the different vegetation zones?

READING STUDY GUIDE CONTINUED

The Growth of Ghana's Empire

(page 159)

What, besides goods, can trade bring to a region?

The region between the desert and the forest of West Africa came to be called **Ghana**. The northern part of Ghana became a center of trade. Salt and other goods arrived there after crossing the Sahara. Gold, enslaved people, and goods reached Ghana from the south. The people of Ghana supervised the trading.

The king of Ghana gained wealth by taxing the trade. Using this wealth, Ghana expanded into an empire. It conquered surrounding lands. Cities in Ghana became thriving trade centers. The city of Koumbi Saleh was Ghana's capital.

Most of the people who traded salt and other goods from the north were Arabic speaking Berbers. Most Berbers practiced the religion of Islam. Berber traders brought more than just goods to West Africa. They also introduced their written language (Arabic) into West Africa. In addition, Arabs brought Islam to West Africa.

2. How did Ghana gain wealth?

Islam and Ghana

(pages 160–161)

In what ways did Islam influence Ghana?

Most of Ghana's common people kept their traditional beliefs. Some of Ghana's kings converted to Islam. Even so, they still practiced their traditional religion. According to this religion, kings were descended from the ancestors who settled Ghana. This ancestry gave the king the right to rule. Most people accepted this belief. So if the king rejected the traditional religion, he would lose his claim to the throne.

Still, Islam strongly influenced Ghana's rulers. Many Muslims advised the king on running the empire. Much of Ghana's upper class converted to Islam. They learned Arabic to study the Muslim holy book, the Qur'an. These people were often involved in government. As a result, Islamic beliefs about what is right and wrong influenced Ghana's legal system.

Islam's influence, however, could not stop Ghana's decline. The **Almoravids** came to power in North Africa during the 11th century. They were a group of Muslim Arabs. The Almoravids wanted other Muslims to follow their own view of Islam. In addition, the Almoravids were poor camel herders. Because of this, they did not gain much wealth in trans-Saharan trade. As a result, they envied the great wealth of Ghana. Soon the Almoravids declared war on Ghana. The war weakened Ghana's trade network. Before long, Ghana began to crumble. In 1076, the Almoravids seized the capital city of Koumbi Saleh.

3. Why did the Almoravids declare war on Ghana?
