

Lesson 2 The Empire of Ghana

MAIN IDEAS

Geography The people of West Africa built empires using the wealth gained from trade in resources such as gold and salt.

Economics Ghana's empire was built on trading gold. It also benefited from cultural contact with foreign traders.

Belief Systems Muslim traders brought Islam to Ghana. Islam greatly influenced Ghana's development.

West Africa's Geography Fuels Empires

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What are the three vegetation zones in West Africa?

Geography of West Africa

- Three **vegetation zones**—regions that have certain types of plants
 - desert, grasslands, forests
- **Sahara**—large desert in northern West Africa
- **Savannah**—flat grassland in tropical region, such as middle West Africa
- Niger River—West African trade, communication, transportation route

Trade Across the Sahara

- Each vegetation zone is rich in certain resources, plants
 - Sahara has salt, savannah has crops and cattle, southern forests have gold
- Trans-Saharan trade of gold, salt developed (across the Sahara)
 - slaves, food, other goods also traded between North, West Africa
- Camel caravans introduced around A.D. 300; increased trans-Saharan trade
 - camels can cover great distance in desert without food, water

REVIEW QUESTION

What trade goods are found in the different vegetation zones?

The Growth of Ghana's Empire

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Besides goods, what can trade bring to a region?

The Foundation of the Empire

- **Ghana**—region between Sahara, southern forests
 - “Ghana” is African word for “king”
- Northern Ghana bordered Sahara; ideal hub for salt, gold trade
 - served as trade regulators of salt from north, gold from south
 - kept gold source secret and limited supply; increased trade value
- Ghana king taxed trade, gained wealth
 - conquered surrounding lands
- Ghana's capital Koumbi Saleh was thriving, wealthy center of empire

Religious and Cultural Changes

- Berbers—North Africans who developed trade routes, raised camels
 - spoke Arabic, practiced Islam, worked with Umayyads in African trade
- Berbers brought writing (Arabic), Islam, scholars to West Africa
 - some Ghana kings converted to Islam, used Arabic in government
- Berbers, Islam, Arabic greatly influenced empires of West Africa

REVIEW QUESTION

Who brought Islam and written language to West Africa?

Islam and Ghana

ESSENTIAL QUESTION In what ways did Islam influence Ghana?

Influence of Islamic Beliefs

- Some Ghana kings converted to Islam but kept some traditional beliefs
 - belief that ancestry gave king right to rule was maintained
- Muslims gained power in Ghana government, advised kings
- Ghana's upper class accepted Islam, learned Arabic, read Qur'an
- Islamic ethics, or beliefs, influenced Ghana's culture, laws

Ghana Under Attack

- Despite Islam's influence, Ghana began to decline
- **Almoravids**—North African Muslims who came to power in 11th century
 - Almoravids were camel herders who envied Ghana's wealth
 - wanted Muslims to follow their interpretation of Islam
- Almoravids attacked Ghana, weakened trade network
- Ghana crumbled; Almoravids seized capital in 1076

REVIEW QUESTION

What led to Ghana's decline?

Lesson Summary

- The geography of West Africa supported the development of a strong trade network.
- The empire of Ghana was built on controlling the trade of gold and salt within its borders.
- Islam strongly influenced the empire of Ghana.

Why It Matters Now . . .

Today Islam continues to win new converts in West Africa. The modern nation of Ghana takes its name from the ancient empire.