African Civilizations (1500 B.C.E.-700 C.E.)

You Mean Africa Is Not One Country?

The Growth of Civilizations

On the African continent, large civilizations developed in sub-Saharan east, west, and southern Africa. These civilizations developed over time because of their rich natural resources, their geography, and the Trans-Saharan trade route. In the east, Axum developed because of its strong international trade system. In western Africa, the three kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai grew out of the Gold-Salt Trade. In southern Africa, Zimbabwe became a powerful empire due to its fertile lands and location on important trade routes. These kingdoms show the richness and diversity of the African continent, as well as their importance in the world’s economic development.

Axum (300 C.E.-700 C.E.)

The kingdom of Axum grew in the eastern part of Africa. This kingdom controlled land around the Nile River, the Ethiopian Highlands, and the Red Sea. This location helped Axum become a center for international trade. These trade routes were part of the Trans-Saharan commercial exchange. Traders from Egypt, Arabia, Persia, India, and the Roman Empire came to Axum to trade a variety of products. This international trade helped Axum to become a large and powerful kingdom. One of the effects of the international trade was that Axum was introduced to Christianity. The king of Axum made Christianity the kingdom’s official religion, and presently it is still the most popular religion in the areas where Axum was located.

Ghana, Mali, Songhai (700 C.E.-1500 C.E.)

In western Africa, three kingdoms developed south of the Sahara Desert and along the Niger River. The kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai became powerful kingdoms because of their large deposits of gold. They traded along the Trans-Saharan trade route and traded gold for salt. This was called the Gold-Salt Trade. During that time, salt was very difficult to find. Also, salt was necessary to preserve and give flavor to food. Because of this, it was as valuable as gold. In this region, the city of Timbuktu became a center of culture, learning and trade. In the 700s C.E. traders brought Islam to West Africa and converted many of the people. Even though Islam became popular, many people still believed in and practiced animism.

Zimbabwe (1000 C.E.-1400 C.E.)

The empire of Zimbabwe began between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers in southern Africa. The city of Great Zimbabwe became the capital of the empire and was located near critical trade routes on the Indian Ocean. This city became the political, religious, and economic hub of the empire.
African Civilizations (cont.) FCPS World I SOL Standards: WHI 10d

Key Vocabulary
Sub-Saharan: in Africa, places located south of the Sahara Desert
Trans-Saharan: trade routes that crossed the Sahara Desert and connected East and West Africa

Commercial: pertaining to trade; having an emphasis on profitability
Deposits: an accumulated amount of something in the earth
Gold-Salt Trade: camel caravans traded gold for salt and made West Africa prosper

Animism: belief that spirits living in animals, plants, and nature play an important role in daily life
Critical: of high importance; urgently needed
Hub: a city that is a focus of activity

Quick Review
1. Which kingdom existed between the Limpopo and Zambezi Rivers?
   A. Zimbabwe
   B. Ghana
   C. Axum
   D. Songhai

2. Using the map, in which part of Africa did the Gold-Salt Trade exist?
   A. West Africa
   B. East Africa
   C. Southern Africa
   D. None of the listed areas

3. What answer best fits the “?” regarding international trade in the graphic organizer?
   A. Ghana
   B. Mali
   C. Axum
   D. Zimbabwe

4. Identify and explain 2-3 ways Trans-Saharan trade contributed to the development of kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa.

Connection to Today
Today, four African nations (Nigeria, Egypt, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and South Africa) are in the top 25 most populated countries in the world. What natural resources do these 4 nations have? What other nations do you think are in the top 25?

Resources
Learn 360
- Timbuktu and the Songhai Empire (http://goo.gl/uy0lwO)
- Great Zimbabwe: (http://goo.gl/6thig)


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