The Three Kingdoms of West Africa: Ghana, Mali, Songhai

The Kingdom of Ghana
• Ghana was a wealthy and powerful trade state by 500 AD.
• They traded their few resources of gold & salt through silent barter: a process in which people exchange goods without contacting each other directly.
• This method of trade kept trade peaceful & the location of the gold mines secret.

Ghana Controls Trade
• Berbers in the north traded salt, cloth, and metals from the Mediterranean in exchange for gold, ivory, iron, and slaves.
• Camel caravans were used to transport goods across the Sahara Desert.
• Both Ghana kings and Islamic merchants became wealthy from this trade.
Ghana’s Decline

• By the early 1200s, Ghana collapsed.
• **Factor 1:** Muslims (the Almoravids) from North Africa attacked in the 1060s; weakening the empire by cutting off trade routes & forming new trade partnerships with Muslim leaders.
  • No trade meant no income for Ghana.

Ghana’s Decline

• **Factor 2:** Almoravids brought herds of animals with them, allowing them to overgraze the land.
Ghana’s Decline

- **Factor 3:** Rebellion within the expanded empire left Ghana weak & unable to keep control.
- **As Ghana declined, the Kingdom of Mali grew.**

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The Kingdom of Mali

- Sundiata took control of region & the gold & salt trade.
- He improved agriculture by clearing new fields for beans, onions, rice and introduced cotton.
- He took control from all the local leaders and took their title of Mansa—political & religious leader.
- After Sundiata’s death in 1255, later leaders took the title Mansa as well.
Mansa Musa
• Mansa Musa was Mali’s most famous ruler.
• In the 1300s, Mali reached its height under Mansa Musa.
• He encouraged the spread of Islam through his pilgrimage to Mecca.
• Added trade cities like Timbuktu throughout empire.

Fall of Mali
• After Mansa Musa’s death, his son could not stop raiders from the southeast from burning down Timbuktu’s schools & mosques.
• By 1500 Mali had all but broken apart.
The Kingdom of Songhai
• In the 1300s Mansa Musa conquered the Songhai people.
• But in the 1400’s they rebelled & regained their freedom.
• Because the Songhai were Muslims, the Berbers in the north were willing to trade with them.
• 1464, Sunni Ali organized & expanded the Songhai empire through religious tolerance.

Askia the Great
• 1492, Sunni Ali dies & a rebellion overthrows his non-Muslim son.
• Muhammad Ture (Askia the Great) led the rebellion & took control of the Songhai empire.
• Timbuktu flourished again with schools, universities, libraries, & mosques.
Songhai Falls to Morocco

• Morocco wanted control of Songhai’s salt mines.
• 1591, Morocco attacked Songhai with arquebus—early form of gun & destroyed Timbuktu.
• Changes in trade patterns ended the Songhai empire.
• Port cities on the Atlantic coast were preferred by the European merchants who did not like dealing with the overland Muslim traders.

Which description best characterizes the city of Timbuktu?

(1) port on the water route to East Asia
(2) major urban and industrial center on the Silk Road
(3) commercial and cultural center of West Africa
(4) inland city of the Hanseatic League

Much of the wealth of the West African kingdoms of Ghana and Mali was gained from the
(1) sale of slaves to Europeans
(2) creation of colonies on the Mediterranean coast
(3) taxation on goods brought by Indian merchants
(4) control of the trans-Saharan trade in gold and salt