

Ghana

Medieval Trading Empire of West Africa

A Unit of Study for Grades 5–8

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COVER ILLUSTRATION: Stone circles of Sinè-Saloun Mauritania, Senegal.
Courtesy of Merrick Posnansky. One of thousands of similar burial sites in the region.

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INTRODUCTION

APPROACH AND RATIONALE

Ghana: Medieval Trading Empire of West Africa is one of over sixty teaching units published by the National Center for History for the Schools that are the fruits of collaborations between history professors and experienced teachers of World History. They represent specific issues and “dramatic episodes” in history from which you and your students can delve into the deeper meanings of these selected landmark events and explore their wider context in the great historical narrative. By studying crucial turning points in history the student becomes aware that choices had to be made by real human beings, that those decisions were the result of specific factors, and that they set in motion a series of historical consequences. We have selected issues and dramatic episodes that bring alive that decision-making process. We hope that through this approach, your students will realize that history is an ongoing, open-ended process, and that the decisions they make today create the conditions of tomorrow’s history.

Our teaching units are based on primary sources, taken from government documents, artifacts, magazines, newspapers, films, private correspondence, literature, contemporary photographs, and paintings from the period under study. What we hope you achieve using primary source documents in these lessons is to have your students connect more intimately with the past. In this way we hope to recreate for your students a sense of “being there,” a sense of seeing history through the eyes of the very people who were making decisions. This will help your students develop historical empathy, to realize that history is not an impersonal process divorced from real people like themselves. At the same time, by analyzing primary sources, students will actually practice the historian’s craft, discovering for themselves how to analyze evidence, establish a valid interpretation and construct a coherent narrative in which all the relevant factors play a part.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

Within this unit, you will find: 1) Unit Objectives, 2) Correlation to the National History Standards, 3) Teacher Background Materials, 4) Lesson Plans, and 5) Student Resources. This unit, as we have said above, focuses on certain issues and key moments in time and should be used as a supplement to your customary course materials. Although these lessons are recommended for grades 5–8, they can be adapted for other grade levels. The teacher background section should provide you with a good overview of the entire unit and with the

Introduction

historical information and context necessary to link the specific “dramatic moment” to the larger historical narrative. You may consult it for your own use, and you may choose to share it with students if they are of a sufficient grade level to understand the materials.

The Lesson Plans include a variety of ideas and approaches for the teacher which can be elaborated upon or cut as you see the need. These lesson plans contain student resources which accompany each lesson. The resources consist of primary source documents, any handouts or student background materials, and a bibliography.

In our series of teaching units, each collection can be taught in several ways. You can teach all of the lessons offered on any given topic, or you can select and adapt the ones that best support your particular course needs. We have not attempted to be comprehensive or prescriptive in our offerings, but rather to give you an array of enticing possibilities for in-depth study, at varying grade levels. We hope that you will find the lesson plans exciting and stimulating for your classes. We also hope that your students will never again see history as a boring sweep of facts and meaningless dates but rather as an endless treasure of real life stories and an exercise in analysis and reconstruction.

TEACHER BACKGROUND MATERIALS

I. Unit Overview

Western historians have traditionally neglected the African past, placing too little importance on its pre-colonial societies. Indeed, teachers of primary through high school students have only recently begun to find substantive discussion of pre-colonial Africa in their curricular guides or textbooks.

There are two reasons for this: first, Western civilization has historically thought of Africans as inferior and unworthy of cultural consideration, often denying Africa an indigenous history and assuming its history began with the coming of Europeans. Secondly, most ancient African societies did not develop systems of writing. Western scholars have traditionally relied on written records as evidence of civilized societies, belittling the historical validity of archeological findings and oral traditions. Yet these findings and oral histories expose a rich and complex African heritage.

The fact remains that, as historian Basil Davidson has noted, “To understand the African present it is necessary to understand the African past;” to appreciate the African past it is necessary to examine African civilization before colonization and expose students to the richness of this past. This unit provides students with a taste of that past, as it explores the medieval kingdom of Ghana, a thriving center of trade in the Western Sudan that boasted advanced technology and a sophisticated social and political organization.

II. Unit Context

The unit is written for middle school students but can be adapted for older or younger students. The time frame covers the first millennium CE. and could follow the study of ancient civilizations or be integrated with a study of the Middle Ages, the rise of Islam, or the development of long-distance trade.

Further, it forms a foundation for the study of European imperialism in Africa by providing students with an understanding of the dynamics of an African Kingdom before the intrusion of European imperialism and colonialism. It also informs us about the regional trade in gold and other commodities which later became a major European attraction about them.

III. Correlation to National History Standards

Ghana: Medieval Trading Empire of West Africa provides teaching materials that address history standards in *National Standards for History, Basic Edition* (National Center for History in the Schools, 1996), **Era 4**, “Expanding Zones of Exchange and Encounter.” Lessons specifically address **Standard 5A** on state-building in West Africa, regional commerce, and trans-Saharan trade, as well as **Standard 7** on patterns of international trade and the spread of Islam.

This unit likewise integrates a number of specific Historical Thinking Standards including: *Draw upon data in historical maps* (**Standard 2**, “Historical Comprehension”); *Analyze multiple causation* (**Standard 3**, “Historical Analysis and Interpretation”); and *Interrogate historical data* (**Standard 4**, “Historical Research”).

IV. Unit Objectives

1. To appreciate the relationship between African geography and historical change during the era of the Ghana empire.
2. To understand the dynamics of long-distance trade in Africa during the first millennium CE.
3. To appreciate the technological and organizational and material conditions of the medieval kingdom of Ghana.

V. Lessons

Lesson One: The Geography of Africa

Lesson Two: The Royal Palace of the Kingdom of Ghana

Lesson Three: Wealth Through Trade

VI. Historical Background

Much of the history of Africa comes from the Western Sudan — the grassland plains that lie along the upper waters of the Niger and Senegal Rivers. Within this area, for more than one thousand years, a series of powerful empires developed as large and prosperous as the medieval empires of Eurasia. Historians often call this period the Golden Age of West Africa.

Taken as a whole, the Sudan runs all the way from the valley of the Nile to the shores of the Atlantic in modern Senegal and Mauritania. Geographers have roughly divided the Sudan into two ‘halves’: the Eastern Sudan, from the Nile River to about Lake Chad; and the Western Sudan, from Lake Chad to the Atlantic.

Consisting mainly of grasslands, or savannahs, the Western Sudan marks the southernmost border of the Sahara Desert. Despite the desert barrier, the people living there have a long tradition of trading with the peoples of North Africa. As early as 400 BCE, Berber traders made the arduous journey across the desert to exchange their salt and cloth for gold and ivory. Early trade was often unprofitable because horses and donkeys that carried the goods were ill-suited for desert travel. From around the year 100 CE, the domesticated camel came into use in both north and south of the Sahara. Having broad splayed feet that did not sink into sand and the ability to store water for as much as ten days, the camel could endure the long journeys between oases. With the formation of long caravans, trade became more profitable and by the late seventh century it began to flourish.

The three main sources of knowledge about the African past — archaeology, oral history, and written sources by North Africans — speak often about the trading empire of Ghana. Some specifics related by North African traders regarding the people of Ghana may still be in question, though the deep respect revealed in these historical documents towards this empire cannot be in doubt or undervalued.

It is estimated that Ghana existed as early as 400 CE. By 800, it was a thriving trading center, and by 1070 it was one of the most powerful empires in the world.

Farming, raising livestock, and the trading in salt and gold formed the basis of Ghana’s empire. Ghana never owned any salt or gold fields. The gold came from an area south of Ghana called Wangara, which scholars place near the Senegal River. The salt came from the northern Sahara Desert. The ability of Ghana to develop into a wealthy and powerful empire reflects its achievements in foreign

Teacher Background

policy, social organization, and use of military power. Ghana did not control the source of trade; rather, it controlled the process of trade.

Scholars point to several factors leading to this power and control. First, Ghana had superior technology, having developed the art of iron work. According to Al Bakri, the Arab geographer, "When the king of Ghana calls up this army, he can put 200,000 men in the field." The men were armed with finely crafted iron spears. Secondly, Ghana developed an efficient and effective social and political organization. At the top was the king, and under him were subordinate officials and governors who ruled the empire. They paid allegiance to the king; in return they received protection and the right to rule their local areas. Such military and social organization enabled the empire to provide services for the traders. As all trade between the gold fields and the desert passed through Ghana, safe passage was a primary need. Ghana's large army could maintain the peace and assure safety for the traders. In return for safe passage, Ghana made certain demands. First, it restricted the trade of gold to gold dust, declaring that all nuggets found in the land belonged to the king. This restriction assured the high value of gold. In essence, the empire stabilized the trade by holding a monopoly on it.

Secondly, and another example of Ghana's excellent organization, was its tax system, which today would be referred to as import and export taxes. Taxes consisted of sums of money (or more probably their equal in goods) which traders had to pay for the right to bring goods into Ghana or to take other goods out. "The king of Ghana," wrote Al Bakri, "places a tax of one dinar of gold on each donkey-load of salt that comes into his country . . . [and] a tax of two dinars of gold on each load of salt that goes out." Similar taxes were applied to loads of copper and other goods.

A third factor, closely related to social organization, was Ghana's strong leadership. The king, though having a council of advisors, made all important decisions. He also, it appears, exerted his power and influence to ensure justice throughout the empire, personally holding court to judge cases. He also developed a diplomatic foreign policy, inviting from the north and east Muslim traders from the north to live in Ghana. As long as the Muslims from the north and the east paid their taxes, they were welcome. Though tolerant of the merchants' Muslim religion, the king himself and most of his people followed their own traditional African religion and customs, another factor contributing to Ghana's strength and stability.

This evidence invalidates the outdated notion that medieval Africa was unsophisticated and devoid of history. It demonstrates that Africa had well-organized states and kingdoms with fairly developed diplomatic systems

limited only by the means of communication then available. At the center of these highly organized states were kings and chiefs who have been described variously as despots, benevolent monarchs, or even democratic rulers. Significantly, African kings, assisted by other ranking members of the royal blood, military leaders, and personal appointees, made the important decisions regarding their kingdoms and states. Naturally, they controlled the wealth of their states and decided how it was to be shared. The king rewarded his subordinates according to the loyalty they accorded him. Kings raised wealth through taxation, control of trade, land allocation, and exaction of tribute.

Dramatic Moment

The Royal Palace of the Medieval Kingdom of Ghana

One of the earliest empires of the Western Sudan was the medieval kingdom of Ghana. Historians believe that it existed as early as 400 CE. The empire was called Awkar. The word Ghana was a title which meant “war chief” and was used by the king. By 800 CE, this kingdom was a large trading center. By 1070 it had become one of the most powerful empires in the world. We know about this empire from the writings of Arab geographers. Read this description by one famous geographer of the twelfth century describing how the sultan, or ruler, of Ghana dispensed justice to his subjects.



Traditional African Dress

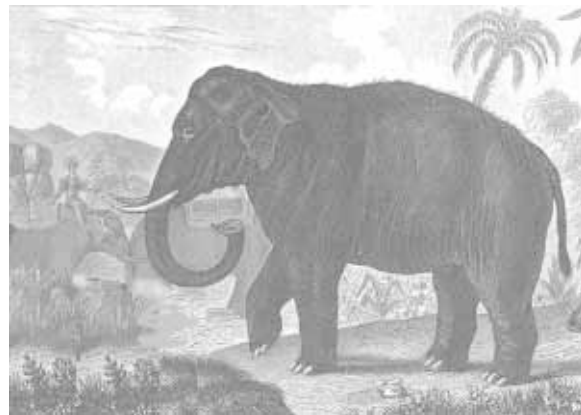
According to what is related about him, he is the most righteous of men. One of his practices in keeping close to the people and upholding justice among them is that he has a corps of army commanders who come on horseback to his palace every morning. Each commander has a drum, which is beaten before him. When he reaches the gate it is silenced. When all the commanders have assembled, the king mounts his horse and rides at their head through the lanes of the town and around it. Anyone who has suffered injustice or misfortune confronts him, and stays there until the wrong is remedied. Then he returns to his palace, and the commanders disperse. Following the afternoon prayer, when the heat of the sun abates, he

mounts his horse again and comes out, surrounded by his soldiers, but [this time], no one may approach him or reach him. His riding, twice every day, is a well-known practice and this is what is famous about his justice.

His garments consist of a silk cloth . . . which he wraps round himself or a mantle . . . in which he envelops himself; loose trousers cover the middle



of his body, and he wears sandals . . . on his feet. His mounts are horses. He has handsome ornaments and excellent attire, which are carried in front of him on his feast days. He has many flags and one banner. Ahead of him go elephants, giraffes, and other kinds of wild animals, which are found in the country of the Sudan.



— Al-Idrisi, *Kitab Rujar*
(of *The Book Roger*)

Source: J.F.P. Hopkins and N. Levtzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 110.

LESSON ONE

THE GEOGRAPHY OF AFRICA

A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To locate Africa on a world map, identify bordering continents, Middle Eastern countries, major bordering water formations, and the equator.
- ◆ To identify three main climatic and vegetation regions in Africa.
- ◆ To locate major rivers, lakes, and mountain ranges in Africa.
- ◆ To appreciate the size of Africa, relative to other large land masses.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES (One day)

1. Have students locate Africa, surrounding continents and waterways, neighboring Middle Eastern countries, and the equator on the classroom wall map.
2. Discuss the climate as you might expect it to be in those areas.
3. On a blank regional map (**Map One**), have students fill in and label the geographical locations identified in Activity 1.
4. Distribute the African Climate map (**Map Two**) and the Africa Physical map (**Map Three**). Discuss the three main types of climate and plant life: desert, tropical forests, and savannah (grasslands). Note main rivers, mountain ranges, plateaus, and deserts. Note that the equator runs through changing altitudes, affecting climate and plant life.
5. Discuss geographical dynamics of the area. Be sure students understand climate and plant life, especially as they relate to agriculture, natural resources, and transportation.

C. EXTENDED ACTIVITIES

1. On a blank map of Africa (**Map Four**), have students label and color code the three types of climate and plant life, label all water areas and mountains, and label the equator. Creating a series of overlapping acetate maps is particularly effective (e.g., one map outlining the shape of the continent, the next map noting the climate and plant areas and the equator, the next showing the rivers and mountains. Such maps reinforce the relationship of the geographical parts of the world).
2. Create three dimensional relief maps of Africa using water, salt, and flour mixtures. Maps should be color-coded (with water color or tempera paint) to identify land types, formations, and main water ways.

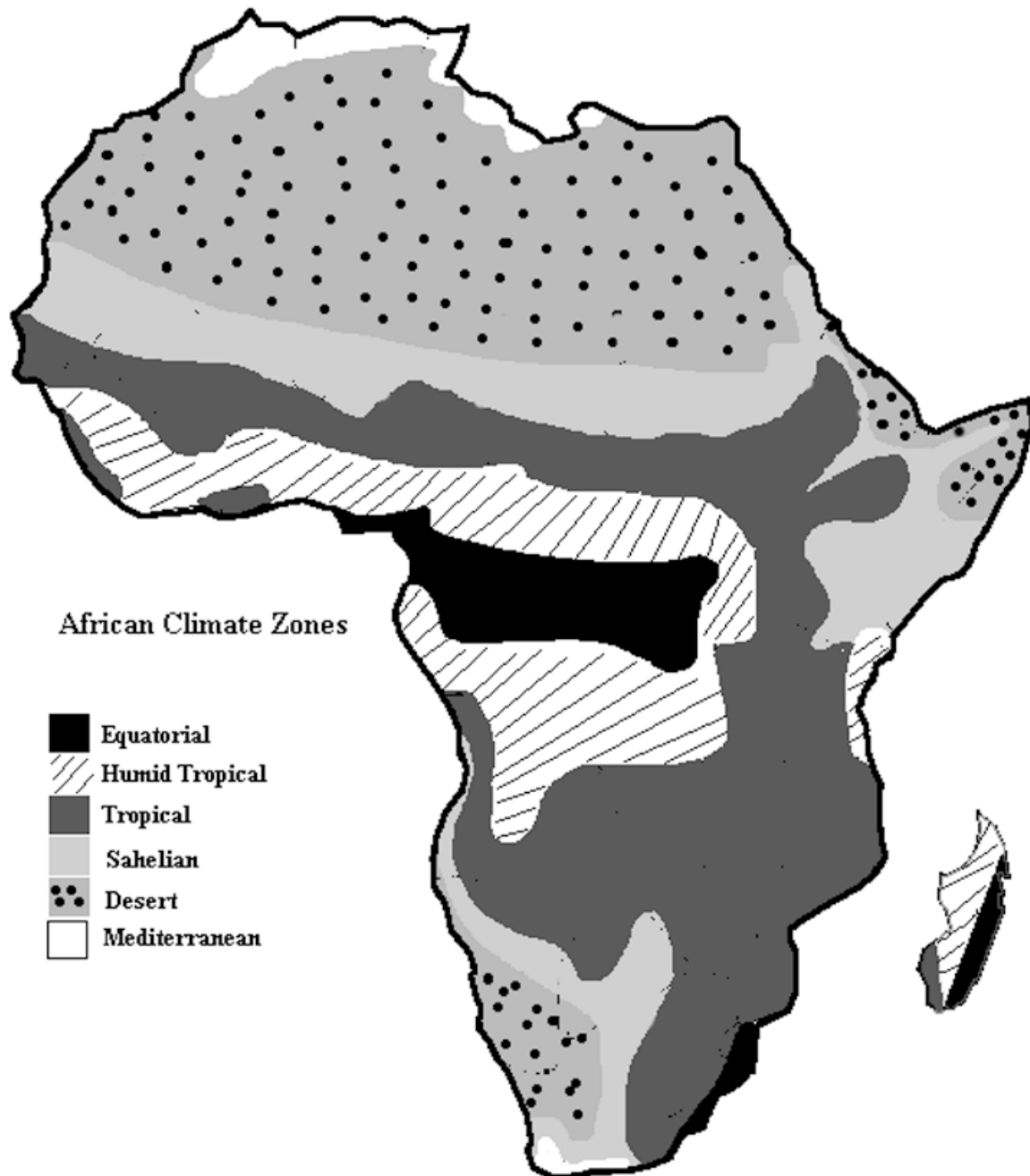
D. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

Have individual students or students groups share orally about one aspect of African geography—for example, climate diversity, land formations, or major rivers. They should refer to individual or group maps as they report to the rest of the class.

Outline Map of Europe, Asia, and Africa



Africa: Climate



Africa: Physical Features



Outline Map of Africa



LESSON TWO

THE ROYAL PALACE OF THE KINGDOM OF GHANA

A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To identify when and where the kingdom Ghana existed.
- ◆ To examine the Dramatic Moment.
- ◆ To speculate on life in medieval Ghana, especially economics and government.
- ◆ To understand the historical connection between Africa's past and present.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES (Two days)

1. Have students identify the western half of Africa, then identify the area known as the Western Sudan. Have students identify from their previous map work the type of climate and vegetation to the north and south of the Sudan.
2. Show students the area believed to be that of medieval Ghana (Have them refer to their completed **Map One** from **Lesson One**). Students should identify that area on their self-made maps by labeling or drawing an icon on the area.
3. Have students read the **Dramatic Moment**. Then discuss the description.

Sample questions:

- a. What do we know of the kingdom from this description?
- b. What might be the economic level of the people?
- c. What does the description of the horses and their care tell you about the kingdom?
- d. From what you know about the area's geographic location, can you guess how the kings might have gotten their wealth?

4. Have the students paint or draw a picture of what they envision the palace to like. (You may want to incorporate this picture into a culmination mural which includes information learned in this lesson and **Lessons Three** through **Five**).
6. Share **Document A**, “Kwame Nkrumah’s Comments on Ghana,” with the class. Have the students discuss the modern leader’s justification for using the medieval name “Ghana” for a modern state. Students should be encouraged to discuss issues of national and cultural pride. Students can record their observation in double-entry journals.

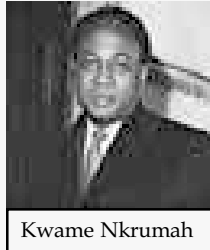
C. EVALUATING THE LESSON

1. Before beginning the next lesson, students should begin a double entry journal reviewing information learned in **Lessons One** and **Two**. This can be done at first orally in a group but then individually in a notebook or scrapbook. The student should recount information in note form, paragraph form, or graphic drawings. All students should do the journal after each lesson or at the beginning of a new lesson.

Note to the Teacher

Double-entry journals are journals or notebooks in which students describe, list, and draw literal information presented in a book, lecture, or picture, that is what is told and/or observed. The second entry, usually placed on the opposite page, includes reflections, appraisals, evaluations, conclusions, and generalizations made about the literal information. Thus, the facts are on one side, the opinions and thoughts are on the other side. Double-entry journals are effective in literature, art, history, and science.

The Naming of a Country



Kwame Nkrumah

The present-day nation of Ghana won its independence in 1957. A year earlier, when Ghana was still called the Gold Coast, Kwame Nkrumah, independence leader and Ghana's first president, made the following comments in a speech to the Gold Coast Assembly.



"Kwame Nkrumah: His Rise and Fall 7 March 1957–24 February 1966, Part III" *Great Epic Books Newsletter*, January 1998.

Available: <http://www.greatepicbooks.com/epics/january98.html>

The government proposes that when the Gold Coast attains independence, the name of the country should be changed from "Gold Coast" to the new name of "Ghana". The name Ghana is rooted deeply in ancient African history, especially in the history of the western portion of Africa known as the western Sudan. It kindles in the imagination of modern African youth the grandeur and the achievements of a great medieval civilization which our ancestors developed many centuries before European penetration and subsequent domination of Africa began. According to tradition, the various peoples or tribal groups in the gold coast were originally members of the great Ghana empire that developed in the western Sudan during the medieval period.

For the one thousand years that the Ghana empire existed, it spread over a wide expanse of territory in the western Sudan. Its influence stretched across the Sudan from Lake Chad in the east to the Futa Jalon mountains in the west and from the southern fringes of the Sahara Desert in the north to the bights of Benin and Biafra in the south. Thus the Ghana empire carried on extensive commercial relations with the outside world – extending as far as Spain and Portugal. Gold, animal skins, ivory, kolanuts, gums, honey, corn, and cotton were among the

articles that writers had most frequently named. It is reported that Egyptian, European, and Asiatic students attended the great and famous universities and other institutions of higher learning that flourished in Ghana during the medieval period to learn philosophy, mathematics, medicine, and law.

It is from this rich historical background that the name Ghana has been proposed as the new name of the Gold Coast upon the attainment of independence, we take pride in the name, not out of romanticism, but as an inspiration for the future."

Originally published in Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom* (New York: Praeger, 1961). Reprinted from Leon E. Clark, ed., *Through African Eyes -- Cultures in Change: The African Past and the Coming of the European* (New York: Praeger, 1975).

LESSON THREE

WEALTH THROUGH TRADE

A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To understand the need for and process of trade within medieval Africa.
- ◆ To explore the nature and significance of the “silent trade” system.
- ◆ To analyze methods developed by the Kingdom of Ghana to capitalize on the trade process.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES (One day)

1. Using the sample questions below, initiate a discussion about trade. Have students look at a map of Africa and the surrounding continents. Explain that salt was a product of the Sahara Desert and that gold was mined in the area south of Ghana.
 - a. Have you ever made a trade with a friend?
 - b. Why did you want to trade?
 - c. Did you ever think the trade was unfair?
 - d. How did you decide how much your possession was worth?
 - e. Looking at the map of Africa, why might people need to trade goods?
 - f. What natural conditions might encourage trade in Africa? What conditions might make it difficult?
2. Explain to the students that what is known as “silent trade” is based upon descriptions left to us by Arab and European travelers and might contain inaccuracies. It has been passed down, however, as having been the method of exchange between African and Arab tradesmen.

3. Distribute **Document B**. Divide the class into small groups to read the sequence of events in a silent trade. Encourage them to role play the sequence.

- a. Questions to facilitate discussion

Why was this called silent trade?

What are some reasons (pros and cons) for trade without words?

Some historians believe that silent trade was a story made up by foreign travelers. Why might foreign travelers fabricate this story?

4. Inform the students that Ghana's wealth grew partially from long-distance trade. Ask them to speculate on how the empire managed to benefit from the trading of gold and salt when neither was produced within the kingdom of Ghana.

C. EVALUATING THE LESSON

Before beginning **Lesson Four**, have students write or draw in their Ghana double-entry journals (or scrapbooks) information recounting the system of silent trade. A painted scene depicting silent trade could be added to an ongoing mural. (Some teachers might prefer to wait until the end of the unit to begin a mural when the students have more information for planning the location of particular scenes.)

Silent Trade

From the north, Arab traders arrived in the Kingdom of Ghana and arranged their goods, salt, silk, copper, and metal pots, in marked piles along the banks of the Senegal River. They announced the opening of the market with the beating of drums and then retreated into town to await the arrival of merchants from the south. Traders from Wangara [a region south of Ghana], hearing the drums, sailed up the river with gold. The Wangara traders examined the goods and placed what they felt was an equivalent value of gold by each pile of goods and then retreated to their sailing barks on the river. Arab traders returned to the market. If they were satisfied with the amount of gold left, they sounded the drums again signalling the end of the barter. If they were unsatisfied, they retreated into town and waited for the Wangara traders to return and increase their payment. This process was repeated until both sides were satisfied with the exchange. One Syrian geographer of the fourteenth century described the silent trade in the following passage. By “Sudan” he means people of the Sudan, the region just south of the Sahara Desert.

Abu ‘Abd Allah ibn al-Sa’igh told me that salt is lacking in the interior of the land of the Sudan. There are people who risk themselves and bring it to some of these people who give them in exchange for each heap of salt the like of it in gold. He said that he had heard that some of the remote peoples of the Sudan do not show themselves. When the salt merchants come, they put the salt down and then withdraw. Then the Sudan put down the gold. When the merchants have taken the gold, the Sudan take the salt.

— Al-‘Umari, *Masalik al-absar fi mamalik al-amsar*
(*Pathways of Vision in the Realms of the Metropolises*)

Source: J.F.P. Hopkins and N. Levtzion, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 273.



The Senegal River was a channel of communication running through the southern part of the Ghana Empire.

LESSON FOUR

MEDIEVAL GHANA: THE CENTER OF TRADE

A. OBJECTIVES

- ◆ To understand the relationship between the Kingdom of Ghana and the traders of North Africa.
- ◆ To know of the social organization of the kingdom
- ◆ To understand the relationship between trade and the tax system.
- ◆ To appreciate a civilization's use of the above factors for achieving cooperation, wealth, and power.

B. LESSON ACTIVITIES (Two days)

1. Remind students that Ghana did not own the gold or salt fields and did not control the mining of gold or salt—these resources came from areas to the north and south of the kingdom. Present to the students the question, “How did Ghana develop the wealth exhibited in Al-Bakri’s description of the palace court?” Have students brainstorm possibilities.
2. If not suggested by the students, tell them that the wealth came from the kingdom’s ability to control the trade of goods. Have students suggest ways that a king could achieve this control of trade.
3. If students suggest “a strong military” or “conquest,” fill them in on the detail that yes, Ghana did develop a strong military. Share with them that Ghana used its technological expertise to develop iron spears, which gave it an advantage in the field. But suggest that this advantage could have been used for other than conquest and political control. Ask students to suggest functions for a military other than threat and warfare. How might a strong military aid in the passage of trade? How might it be used as a factor in cooperation?
4. Have students read the original sources from Al-Bakri (See **Documents C–E**), and discuss the implications of each. From the readings,

have the students describe Ghana's social organization, foreign policy, and tax system.

5. Have students role play interactions between palace court members and North African traders, using the information gained in the readings.
6. Have students sketch a picture of the two towns and/or the act of traders paying taxes to the representatives of the palace court.
7. Explain that the kingdom of Ghana retained its indigenous way of life (architecture, religion, burial ceremonies, myths), rather than take on the lifestyle of the North African merchants. Encourage students to do further reading on the cultural attributes of African kingdoms and report back to the class.

C. VOCABULARY

The following words or phrases appear in the unit and may need further exploration by the students.

climate	mining
cooperation	monopoly
desert	savanna
export tax	social organization
foreign policy	tax
import tax	trade
justice	wealth

D. EVALUATION ACTIVITIES

1. Students should enter this new material in their double-entry journals.
2. Students should write a separate journal entry that reflects one day in the life of either an African official in the kingdom or a North African trader. The day should accurately reflect information introduced and discussed in this unit. Students should share this journal entry to the class.
3. Students can now begin (or complete) a mural on Ghana. Scenes to be depicted should include the palace, the two towns, traders passing through the towns, the collection of taxes, a court of justice, the barter process, the Sahara Desert to the north, and the Senegal River and the gold mines to the south.

Al-Bakri: On the City of Ghana

The city of Ghana (Kumbi - with a population of 15,000) consists of two towns lying in a plain. One of these towns is inhabited by Muslims. . . . Around the town are wells of sweet water from which they drink and near which they grow vegetables. The town in which the king lives is six miles from the Muslim one. The land between the two towns is covered with houses . . . The king has a palace and a number of dome-shaped dwellings . . . surrounded by an enclosure like the defensive wall of a city. In the town where the king lives, and not far from the hall where he holds his court of justice is a mosque where the Muslims pray when visiting on diplomatic missions.

Source: Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1980).



Chinguetti, Mauritania

An example of one of the towns founded in the 11th and 12th centuries as trading and religious centres serving the caravans crossing the Sahara.

UNESCO, photo #10011914

Al-Bakri: On the Court of Justice in Medieval Ghana

Ghana is the title of the kings of this people. . . . the king who governs them at present is called Tunka Minen; he came to the throne in AH 455 [1067 CE] Tunka Minen is the master of a large empire and a formidable power. The king of Ghana can put two hundred thousand warriors in the field. When he gives audience to his people, to listen to their complaints and set them to rights, he sits in a pavilion around which stand ten pages holding shields and gold mounted swords; and on his right hand are the sons of the princes of his empire, splendidly clad and with gold plaited into their hair. The Governor of the city is seated on the ground in front of the king, and all around him are his counselors in the same position. The gate of the chamber is guarded by dogs of an excellent breed, who never leave their place of duty; they wear collars of gold and silver, ornamented with the same metals. The beginning of a royal audience is announced by the beating of a kind of drum which they call deba, made of a long piece of hollowed wood. The people gather when they hear this sound.

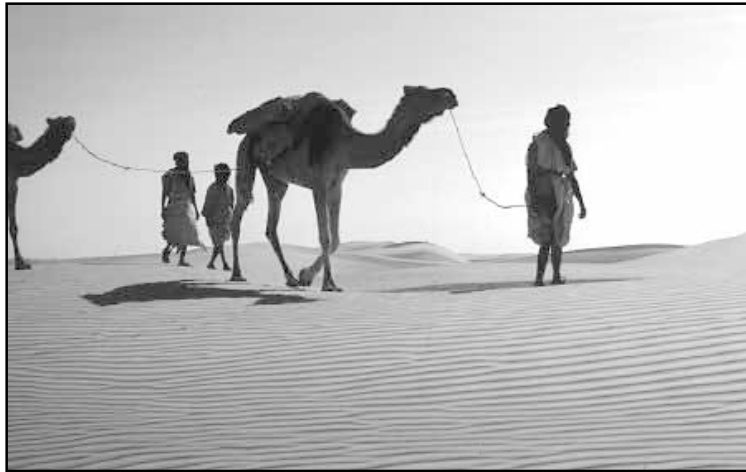
Source: Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1980).



Al-Bakri: On How the King Raises Money Through Trade

The King exacts the right of one dinar of gold on each donkey load of salt that enters his country and two dinars of gold on each load of salt that goes out. A load of copper carriers duty of five mitqals and load of merchandise ten mitqals. The best gold in the country comes from Wangara, a town situated eighteen days journey from the capital city. . . . The nuggets found in all mines of the empire are reserved for the king, only gold dust being left for people; without this precaution the people would accumulate gold until it had lost its value.

Source: Nehemia Levtzion, *Ancient Ghana and Mali* (New York: Africana Publishing Company, 1980).



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