

2.2 Early States and Trade

African empires and the profits of Great Zimbabwe



Main Idea Trade helped develop powerful states and empires in sub-Saharan Africa.

Trade was important in the development of sub-Saharan Africa. The promise of valuable trade goods brought Arab traders to a transportation corridor from North Africa to West Africa. This **trans-Saharan** trade, or trade across the Sahara, introduced Africans to the Islamic religion, which spread from the Arabian peninsula beginning in the 8th century A.D.

West African Empires

In West Africa, a number of empires arose over the centuries and all thrived because of the gold and salt trade. **Alluvial** (a LOO vee ahl) gold, or gold deposited by a river, was found in forests, and salt was found in deserts. These goods were traded in the savanna between the forest and desert, where the empire of Ghana began.

Ghana gained wealth and power by taxing the gold and salt trade, controlling West Africa from A.D. 700 to the 1200s. Ghana declined, and the kingdom of Mali, led by King Sundiata, overtook Ghana. His great-nephew, Mansa Musa, continued to control trade, spread Islam, and make the city of **Timbuktu** a center of education.

Another empire that traded gold and salt was Songhai. Brought to its height by Askia Muhammad, Songhai prospered from the 900s to the 1400s. South of Songhai, the kingdom of Benin lasted from the 1200s to the 1800s. Benin actively traded with European countries such as Portugal and the Netherlands.

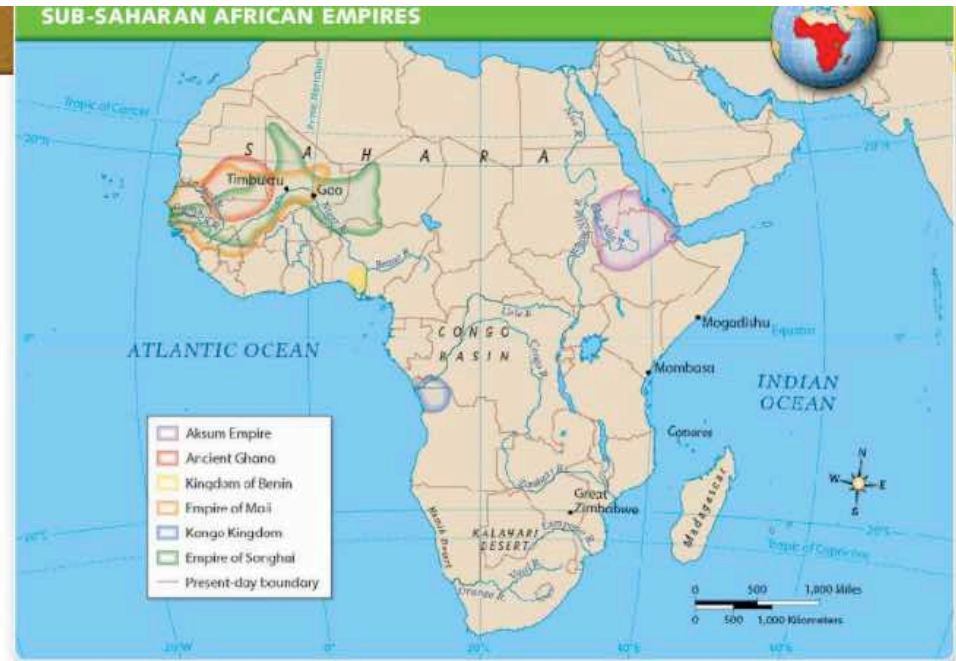
East African Empires and States

The powerful East African empire of Aksum was located in present-day Ethiopia. Aksum flourished between A.D. 300 and 600. Adulis, its main port, was located on the Red Sea and served as a center of trade. Many **city-states** (independent states made up of a city and the territories depending on it), such as Mogadishu, formed on the coast of East Africa as trading grew.

Other African States

Powerful states also arose in Central and Southern Africa. In Central Africa, the state of **Kongo** (different from the modern country of Congo) was founded in 1390. Kongo became known for its highly-organized government. Soon after its founding, the Portuguese arrived and became involved in many aspects of the state, including politics, trade, and religion.

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN EMPIRES



Between 1200 and 1450, the Shona people in Southern Africa built a walled city out of stone, called **Great Zimbabwe** (zim BAH bwe). *Zimbabwe* is a Shona word meaning “stone houses.” The Shona traded gold, copper, and iron with places as far away as China and India.

Before You Move On

Summarize In what ways did trade help develop the early states and kingdoms in Africa?

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

MAP LAB



- Place** Locate the city-state of Mogadishu on the map. Why would its location be beneficial for trade?
- Interpret Maps** Based on the map and the time line, which empire was oldest?
- Make Inferences** What might explain why the West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai overlapped?

Aksum Coins

300

600

A.D. 300
East African empire of Aksum begins growing to its height in present-day Ethiopia.

A.D. 700
Ghana becomes center of gold and salt trade in West Africa.



900

1200

Modern vendor cuts a slab of salt to sell in a Mali market.

1300s
Mali empire in West Africa at its height



1500

1800

1591
Songhai empire comes to an end.

Mansa Musa ruled Mali for about 25 years.