

The Rise of African Civilizations

Get-Ready to Read!

What's the Connection?

Egypt and Kush were Africa's first great civilizations. In this section, you will learn about African civilizations that developed later.

Focusing on the **Main Ideas**

- Africa has a vast and varied landscape. (page 445)
- West African empires grew rich from trade. (page 447)
- Africa's rain forests blocked invaders and provided resources. (page 450)
- East African kingdoms and states became centers for trade and new ideas. (page 451)

Locating Places

Ghana (GAH•nuh)

Mali (MAH•lee)

Timbuktu (TIHM•BUHK•TOO)

Songhai (SAWNG•HY)

Axum (AHK•SOOM)

Meeting People

Sundiata Keita

(sun•dee•AH•tuh KY•tuh)

Mansa Musa

(MAHN•sah moo•SAH)

Sunni Ali (sun•EE ah•LEE)

Building Your Vocabulary

plateau (pla•TOH)

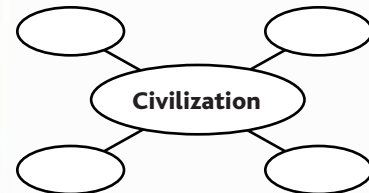
griot (GREE•OH)

dhow (DOW)

Reading Strategy

Summarizing Information

Create diagrams describing the accomplishments of each medieval African civilization.



When & Where?



A.D. 300

c. A.D. 300
Axum
conquers
Kush

A.D. 900

c. A.D. 750
Arab Muslim traders
settle in East Africa

1500

1468
Sunni Ali captures
Timbuktu

Africa's Geography

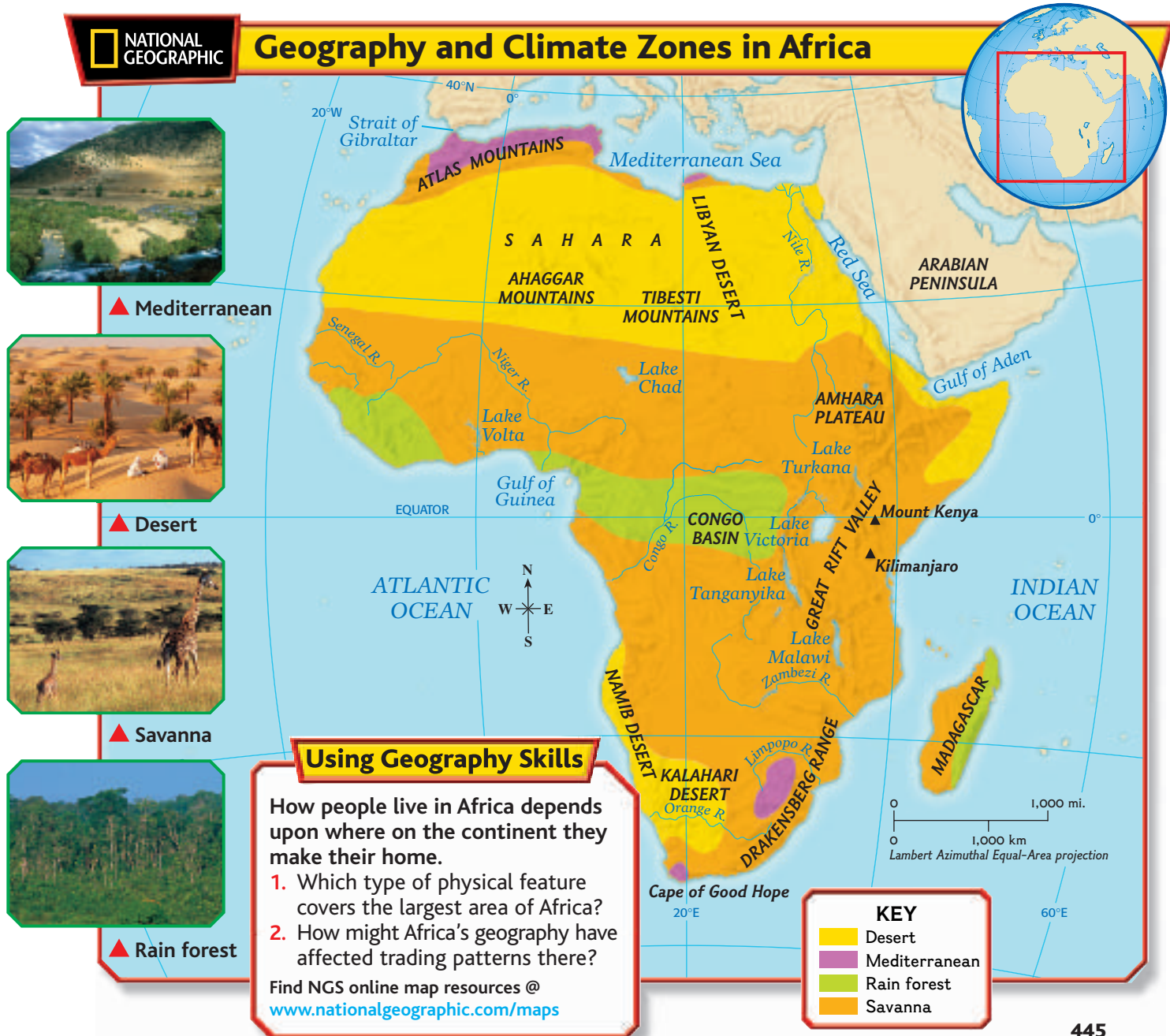
Main Idea Africa has a vast and varied landscape.

Reading Focus How can geography discourage people from exploring another place? Read to learn about the geographic features that made it difficult for people to travel across parts of Africa.

In 1906 a teacher named Hans Vischer explored what he called the “death road,” a trade route connecting western Africa to the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. No

European or American had ever risked the journey before. The “death road” crossed more than 1,500 miles (2,414 km) of the Sahara, the world’s largest desert. To get lost meant certain death.

Only nomads living in the region knew the way, but Vischer hoped to map the route. Like the desert nomads, his life depended upon finding oases. Upon his return, Vischer amazed people with stories of the Sahara. He told of swirling winds and shifting sand dunes.



A Vast and Diverse Continent Africa is the world's second-largest continent. The United States fits into Africa three times, with room to spare. The Equator slices through the middle of the continent. Hot, steamy rain forests stretch along each side of it. Yet the rain forests cover only 10 percent of the land.

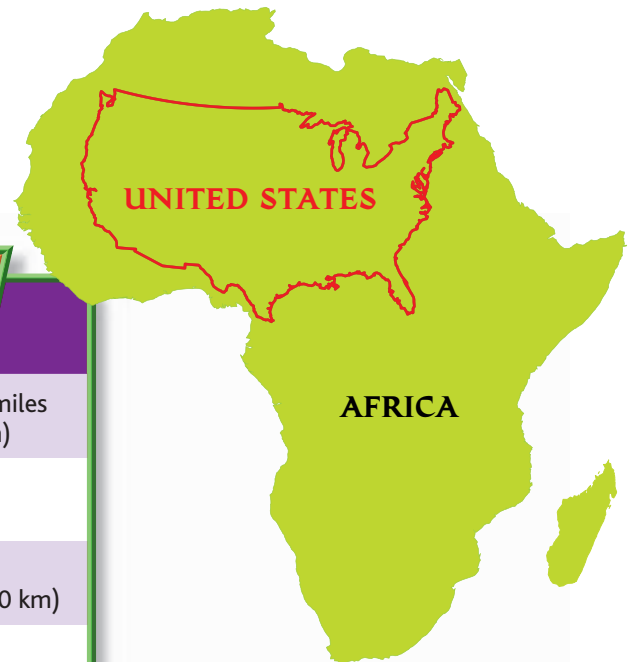
Most of Africa lies in the tropics. Here dry, sweeping grasslands reach for thousands of miles. Most of the tropical grasslands, known as savannas, have high temperatures and uneven rains. These wide-open grasslands are perfect for raising herds of animals. For much of Africa's history, the people of the savanna were hunters and herders.

North and south of the savannas are the deserts—the Sahara to the north and the Kalahari to the southwest. For many years, these unmapped seas of sand blocked travel. People had to follow the coastline if they wanted to get past the deserts. Areas of mild climate, good for growing crops, are found along the Mediterranean Sea in northwest Africa and in the south.

The African Plateau Almost all of Africa, except the coastal plains, rests on a **plateau** (pla•TOH)—an area of high flat land. Rivers spill off the plateau in crashing waterfalls and rapids, cutting off inland water routes. Although the Nile River is Africa's longest river, the Congo River winds 2,700 miles (4,345 km) through Africa, near the Equator.

In the east, movements of the earth's crust millions of years ago cracked the continent, and parts of the plateau's surface dropped. This formed the Great Rift Valley, where some of the earliest human fossils have been unearthed. The valley extends through eastern Africa from present-day Mozambique to the Red Sea.

Reading Check Cause and Effect What caused the Great Rift Valley?



Comparing Africa to the U.S.

	Africa	United States
Size	11,667,159 square miles (30,217,894 sq. km)	3,794,085 square miles (9,826,680 sq. km)
Population Today	about 891 million people	about 291 million people
Longest River	Nile River 4,160 miles (6,693 km)	Missouri River 2,565 miles (4,130 km)
Largest Desert	Sahara 3,500,000 square miles (9,065,000 sq. km)	Mojave 15,000 square miles (38,850 sq. km)

Sources: *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 2004;
World Population Data Sheet, 2003;
The New Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1990

Understanding Charts

Africa has a land area roughly three times that of the United States.

1. How does the size of the Sahara compare to the size of the United States?
2. How does the population of Africa compare to that of the United States?

West African Empires

Main Idea West African empires grew rich from trade.

Reading Focus What would you rather have—a pound of gold or a pound of salt? Both of these goods were important to West Africans and helped them build large trading empires.

Stories of golden lands south of the Sahara seemed hard to believe. There's a country, claimed one story, "where gold grows like plants in the same way as carrots do, and is plucked at sunset."

The Berbers who told the tales had seen the gold with their own eyes. The Berbers, the first known people to settle in North Africa, crossed the Sahara to trade with people in western Africa. They began making the trip about 400 B.C.

For hundreds of years, Berber traders carried goods on horses and donkeys, which often died in the hot Sahara. When the Romans conquered North Africa, they introduced camels from central Asia. Camels, nicknamed "ships of the desert," revolutionized trade. Their broad feet did not sink in the sand, and their humps stored fat for food. In addition, they could travel many days without water.

Traders grouped hundreds, maybe even thousands, of camels together to form caravans. They traded salt and cloth from North Africa and the Sahara for gold and ivory from western Africa. The trade led to the growth of cities in western Africa. Eventually, rulers of these cities began to build a series of empires. During the Middle Ages, these African empires were bigger than most European kingdoms in wealth and size. The first empire to develop was Ghana.



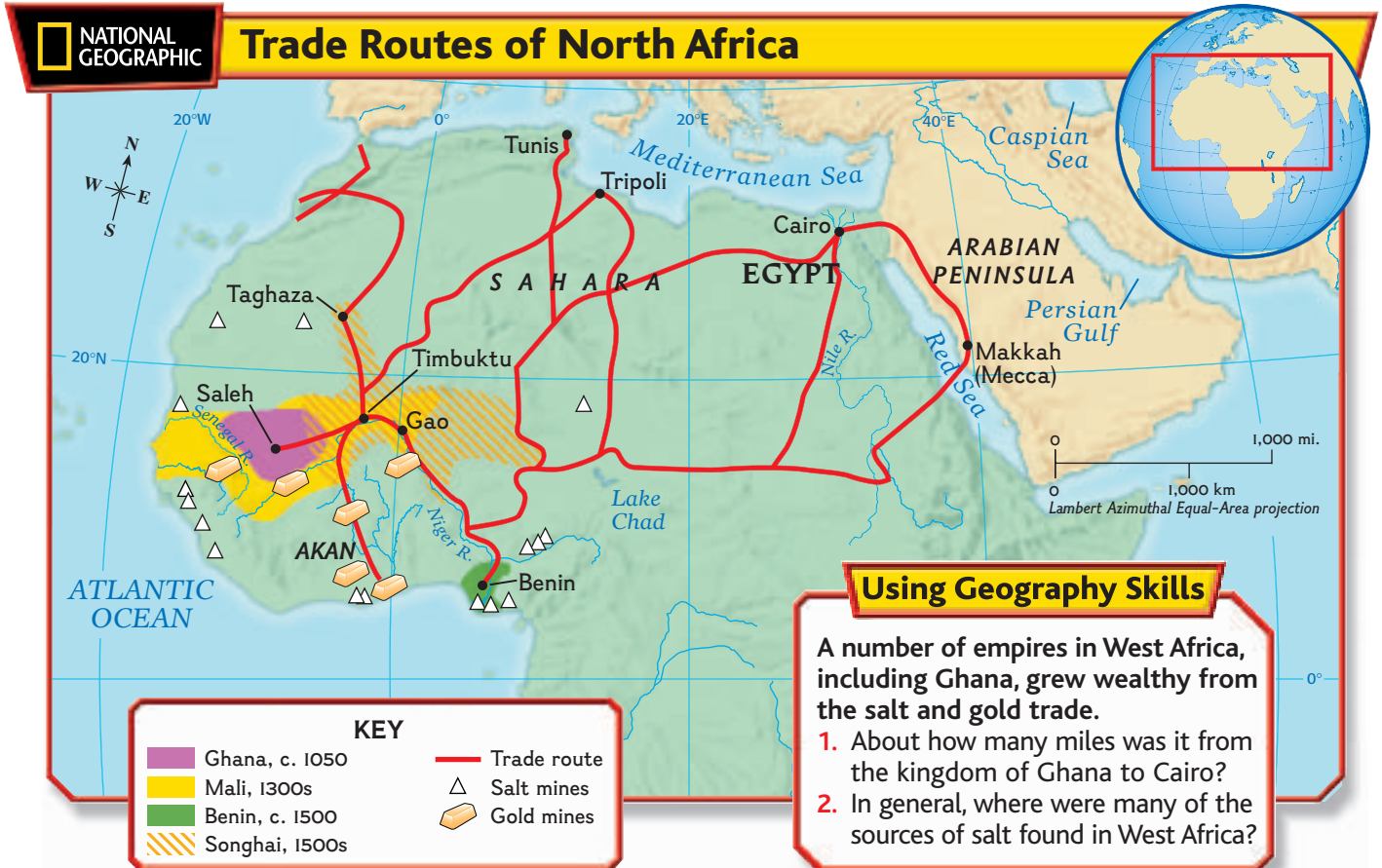
▲ While many of the caravans that crossed the desert going to and from West Africa included about 1,000 camels, some caravans may have had as many as 12,000 camels. **What were some of the items traded by caravans?**

Rise of Ghana **Ghana** (GAH•nuh) rose to power in the A.D. 400s. It was a “crossroads of trade,” a place where trade routes come together. Trade routes reached across the Sahara into North Africa and down the Niger River (NY•juhr) to kingdoms in the rain forest. Some extended all the way to Africa’s northeastern coast.

For traders to meet, they had to pass through Ghana. Passage came at a price—a tax paid to Ghana’s rulers. These taxes made Ghana rich. Why did traders pay the taxes? First, Ghana knew how to make iron weapons. Like ancient Kush, it used these weapons to conquer its neighbors. Although Ghana owned no gold mines, it controlled the people who did. Second, Ghana built a huge army. “When the king of Ghana calls up his army,” said one trader, “he can put 200,000 men in the field.”

Third, people wanted the trade items, especially salt and gold, at almost any price. West Africans needed salt to flavor and preserve food, and their bodies needed salt to stay healthy. They paid taxes to get salt from Berber mines in the Sahara. In turn, the Berbers paid taxes to get gold to sell at a huge profit in Europe.

Rise of Mali Ghana did not last forever, however. The discovery of new gold mines outside Ghana’s control reduced the taxes it collected. In addition, heavy farming robbed the soil of minerals and made it harder to grow enough crops to feed people. Constant fighting also hurt Ghana. Ghana’s rulers had accepted the religion of Islam, but they fought with North African Muslims who wanted to build empires of their own.



After Ghana fell in the 1200s, the kingdom of **Mali** (MAH•lee) replaced it. West African **griots** (GREE•ohz), or storytellers, give credit to a great warrior-king named **Sundiata Keita** (sun•dee•AH•tuh KY•tuh)—the “Lion Prince.” Sundiata, who ruled from 1230 to 1255, seized the capital of Ghana in 1240. He then won control of lands from the Atlantic coast to the trading city of **Timbuktu** (TIHM•BUHK•TOO) and beyond. His conquests put Mali in control of the gold-mining areas, allowing him to rebuild the gold and salt trade.

Rise of Songhai Mali began a slow decline after the death of its last strong king, **Mansa Musa** (MAHN•sah moo•SAH), in 1332. The kings who followed failed to stop Berber conquerors, who for a time even ruled Timbuktu.

In 1468 **Sunni Ali** (sun•EE ah•LEE), the leader of **Songhai** (SAWNG•HY), stormed into Timbuktu and drove out the Berbers. He then began a campaign of conquest. Sunni Ali used Songhai’s location along the Niger River to his advantage. He ordered a fleet of war canoes to seize control of the river trade. His armies then swept westward into the Sahara, where they took over Berber salt mines. By the time of his death in 1492, Sunni Ali had built the largest empire in West Africa.

The empire lasted almost 100 more years. In 1591, however, a small army from the Arab kingdom of Morocco crossed the Sahara. Soldiers with cannons, guns, and gunpowder easily cut down Songhai soldiers armed with swords, spears, and bows and arrows. Within months, Songhai’s empire was gone.

Reading Check Analyze Why did West Africa become the center of three large trade empires?

Focus on Everyday Life

Africa’s Salt Mines Salt mining began in the Sahara in the Middle Ages. Ancient miners worked underground and in sand dunes to extract solid blocks of salt. The salt trade became a successful business for the African people. In ancient times, salt was so desirable that it was traded ounce for ounce for gold.

There are many salt deposits in western Africa because part of the desert was once a shallow sea made up of salt water. When the sea dried up, salt was left behind.

People need a small amount of salt to stay healthy. It is lost when people and animals sweat, so people need some in their food. In ancient times, before refrigerators or canned foods were invented, salt was used to keep foods from going bad. It also was used to add flavor to food.



◀ African salt mine today

Connecting to the Past

1. How do salt deposits form?
2. Why do you think salt was so valuable that it was traded ounce for ounce for gold?

Kingdoms of the Rain Forest

Main Idea Africa's rain forests blocked invaders and provided resources.

Reading Focus What does your state make that people in other places want to buy? Africa's rain forest kingdoms had something the savanna kingdoms wanted. It was not gold or salt, but something just as valuable—food.

Ghana, Mali, and Songhai ruled the wide-open savannas. However, the dense rain forests along the Equator kept them from expanding to the southern coast. People living in the rain forests built their own kingdoms and empires. They included Benin, which arose in the Niger delta, and Kongo, which formed in the Congo River basin.

Griots who live in the Niger delta still tell stories about King Ewuare (eh•WOO•ah•ray), who founded the empire of Benin around 1440. In describing his ancestor's accomplishments, one storyteller boasted:

“He fought against and captured 201 towns and villages. . . . He took their . . . rulers captive and caused the people to pay tribute to him.”

—J.V. Egharevba,
A Short History of Benin

Farmers in the rain forest kingdoms enjoyed many natural advantages, including farmable soil and a warm, wet climate. In cleared-out areas of the forest, they often produced a surplus, or extra supply, of foods like bananas, yams, or rice.

The Kingdom of Benin



◀ Bronze statue of queen from Benin

▶ Statue of horn player from Benin



▲ This bronze casting honored the king of Benin. **Around when was the kingdom of Benin founded?**

Food surpluses supported rulers and a class of artisans. Kongo weavers, for example, wove fabrics from bark and plant fibers that looked to Europeans like velvet. In Benin, artists excelled at sculpting and carving metal, wood, and ivory.

Rain forest kingdoms that bordered on the dry savannas traded surplus food and crafts for copper, salt, and leather goods from the savannas. Later, when the Europeans arrived, traders from Benin and Kongo met ships along the coast. They traded, among other things, captives taken in war.

Reading Check Describe What advantages did farmers in the rain forests have over farmers in other parts of Africa?






East Africa

Main Idea East African kingdoms and states became centers for trade and new ideas.

Reading Focus Have you ever met someone who used to live somewhere far away? Did their ideas help you to think about the world differently? Read to learn how new ideas arrived along the coast of East Africa.

People today in the East African country of Ethiopia trace their history back to 1005 B.C. In that year, Queen Makeda rose to the throne of a great empire called Saba or Sheba. According to the *Glory of Kings*, Ethiopia's oldest written history, Makeda traveled to meet with King Solomon, ruler

African Trading Empires A.D. 100–1600

	Axum	Ghana	Mali	Songhai	Zimbabwe
Location	East Africa 	West Africa 	West Africa 	West Africa 	SE Africa 
Time Period	c. 100–1400	c. 400–1200	c. 1200–1450	c. 1000–1600	c. 700–1450
Goods Traded	ivory, frankincense, myrrh, slaves	iron products, animal products, salt, gold	salt, gold	salt, gold	gold, copper, ivory
Key Facts	King Ezana converted to Christianity; made it the official religion.	Taxes from traders passing through made Ghana rich.	King Mansa Musa built mosques and libraries.	Songhai gained control of West African trade by conquering Timbuktu and mastering trade by river.	Kings Mutota and Matope built the region's biggest empire.

Understanding Charts

Large trading kingdoms developed in several areas of Africa.

- Which kingdom developed earliest?
- Generalize** What were some of the common trade items of the West African empires?



▲ Picture of a dhow, an African sailing vessel

KEY

- Zimbabwe, c. 1300
- Coastal settlement, c. 1300
- Trade route

Using Geography Skills

Prosperous trade cities, such as Mogadishu and Kilwa, developed along Africa's east coast.

1. Into what bodies of water did trade routes from eastern Africa extend?
2. Describe the location of Zimbabwe.



▲ A stele, or monument, from Axum

of the Israelites. On her return, Makeda introduced ancient Israel's religion to her empire. Over time, eastern Africa would feel the impact of two other religions—Christianity and Islam.

The Rise of Axum Like other empires, Saba declined. However, Ethiopia, known in ancient times as Abyssinia, did not. Its power was centered in a city-state called **Axum** (AHK•soom). Axum owed its strength to its location on the Red Sea. Goods from Africa flowed into Axum, which served as a trading center for the ancient Mediterranean and East Asian worlds.

Axum fought neighboring Kush for control of trade routes to inland Africa. Around

A.D. 300, King Ezana of Axum sent his armies against Kush and defeated it. A few years later, Ezana helped to bring a new religion to Africa when he converted to Christianity. In A.D. 334 he made it the official religion of Axum. Within a few hundred years, another religion—Islam—brought many changes to Axum and other trading states along Africa's eastern coast.

Coastal City-States Arab traders from the Arabian Peninsula had been coming to eastern Africa long before the rise of Islam in the early A.D. 600s. They invented a wind-catching, triangular sail that let them sail to Africa. The sails powered sailboats called **dhow**s (DOWZ).

In the A.D. 700s, many Arab Muslim traders settled in East African city-states. Here Africans and Arab Muslims shared goods and ideas. By the 1300s, a string of trading ports extended down the East African coast. They included Mogadishu (MAH•guh•DIH•shoo), Kilwa, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. These ports became major links in an Indian Ocean trading network. They traded with places as far away as China.



▲ Some of the walls of Great Zimbabwe still exist. **What trade goods from the interior of Africa passed through Zimbabwe?**

Great Zimbabwe Another great trading center known as Zimbabwe (zihm•BAH•bway) arose inland in southeastern Africa. Founded around A.D. 700 by the Shona people, Zimbabwe supplied gold, copper, and ivory to the East African coast. From there, African goods were shipped to Arabia, Persia, India, and China.

During the 1400s, two kings—Mutota and his son Matope—made Zimbabwe into a large empire. It stretched from south of the Zambezi River to the Indian Ocean. Evidence of Zimbabwe’s power can still be seen at Great Zimbabwe, the empire’s capital. Here more than 300 huge stone buildings stand—silent reminders of Zimbabwe’s past greatness.

Reading Check Explain How did new technology help East Africa’s trade?

Section 1 Review

History online

Homework Helper Need help with the material in this section? Visit jat.glencoe.com

Reading Summary

Review the Main Ideas

- The continent of Africa has varied landscapes, including rain forests, grasslands, and deserts.
- Beginning in about A.D. 300, a succession of kingdoms, including Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, arose in West Africa.
- Rain forest kingdoms, including Benin and Kongo, traded with the surrounding savanna kingdoms.
- In East Africa, trade with the Arab world helped kingdoms and port cities grow.

What Did You Learn?

1. What items were traded in the kingdoms of West Africa?

Critical Thinking

2. **Organizing Information**

Draw a chart like the one below. For each region, write names of the kingdoms and/or city-states that developed there.

West Africa	African Rain Forests	East Africa

3. **Analyze** What city-states grew as trading ports in East Africa, and why were they successful?

4. **Compare and Contrast** Which African kingdoms developed away from the coast? How did their economies compare to other African kingdoms?

5. **Reading Compare and Contrast** Create a Venn diagram that shows the similarities and differences of two African kingdoms.

