

Chapter 6 – West African Empires



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Early African Civilizations
and Africa Today



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Empire of Ghana



7.4.1

The Big Idea

The rulers of Ghana built an empire by controlling the salt and gold trade.

Main Ideas

Ghana controlled trade and became wealthy.

- Through its control of trade, Ghana built an empire.
- Ghana's decline was caused by attacking invaders, overgrazing, and the loss of trade.

Main Idea 1: Ghana controlled trade and became wealthy.

- Ghana was created when groups of farmers banded together.
- Ghana became a powerful state only when it gained control of valuable trade routes.
- The exchange of gold and salt followed a process called **silent barter**. This is a process in which people exchange goods without ever contacting each other directly.
- Ghana's rulers gained power and wealth, and the military grew in strength, too.

Main Idea 2: Through its control of trade, Ghana built an empire.

- Ghana protected traders with its army. Traders were not afraid to travel to Ghana.
- With so many traders passing through their lands, they made money by forcing traders to pay taxes.

- In addition, the people of Ghana and the small neighboring tribes they controlled had to pay taxes.
- Ghana also had rich gold mines.



Expansion of the Empire

- Ghana's kings used their great wealth to build a powerful army and conquered many of their neighbors, especially ones that had centers of trade.
- To keep order in the empire, conquered kings were allowed to keep much of their power. They acted as governors of their territories.
- The empire of Ghana reached its peak under **Tunka Manin**.

Main Idea 3:

Ghana's decline was caused by attacking invaders, overgrazing, and the loss of trade.

- Invasion
 - A Muslim group called the Almoravids cut off many trade routes, without which Ghana could not support its empire.
- Overgrazing
 - When the Almoravids moved, they brought herds of animals with them.
 - These animals ate all the grass, leaving the land worthless for farming.
- Internal rebellion
 - The people Ghana conquered rose up in rebellion and took over the entire empire.

Empire of Mali



7.4.3

The Big Idea

The wealthy and powerful Mali Empire ruled West Africa after the fall of Ghana.

Main Ideas

- A ruler named Sundiata made Mali into an empire.
- Mali reached its height under the ruler Mansa Musa.
- Mali fell to invaders in the late 1400s.

Main Idea 1: A ruler named Sundiata made Mali into an empire.

- Sundiata, Mali's first strong leader, was both a warrior and a magician.
- He conquered Ghana and took over the salt and gold trades.
- He had new farmlands cleared for crops of beans, onions, and rice. He also introduced cotton as a new crop.
- To protect his authority, he took power away from others and adopted the title *mansa*.

Mansa

- Mansas had both political and religious roles in society.
- The religious role of the mansa grew out of traditional Malian beliefs.
 - According to the beliefs, people's ancestors had made an agreement with the spirits of the land that would ensure the lands provided plenty of food.

Main Idea 2: Mali reached its height under the ruler Mansa Musa.

- Islam was important to Musa, so he made a pilgrimage to Mecca.
- He influenced the spread of Islam through a large part of West Africa and had mosques built throughout his empire.

- During this journey, he introduced the empire of Mali to the world.
- Mali became famous throughout Africa, Asia, and Europe.

- He also stressed the importance of education and learning to read the Arabic language.
- He sent scholars to study in Morocco. They came back and set up schools to study the Qur'an.



Main Idea 3: Mali fell to invaders in the late 1400s.

Weak rulers such as Maghan could not stop raiders, leading to the empire's gradual decline.



The empire had become so large that the government could not control it. Some areas declared their independence.



Invaders finally took over almost all the lands of the Mali Empire by the 1500s.



Empire of Songhai



7.4.3

7.4.4

The Big Idea

The Songhai Empire strengthened Islam in West Africa.

Main Ideas

- The Songhai built a new empire in West Africa.
- Askia the Great ruled Songhai as an Islamic empire.
- Songhai fell to Moroccan invaders, ending the great era of West African empires.

Main Idea 1: The Songhai built a new empire in West Africa.

- Once a part of Mali, Songhai rose up against it and regained its freedom.
- Songhai grew in many ways, mostly due to the work of Sunni Ali.
 - Worked constantly to unify, strengthen, and enlarge it
 - Conquered the wealthy trade cities of Timbuktu and Djenné
- He participated in both Islam and local religions and brought peace and stability as a result.

Main Idea 2: Askia the Great ruled Songhai as an Islamic empire.

Muhammad Ture overthrew Sunni Baru because he did not support Islam.

He took the title of askia, a title of the highest military rank, and eventually became known as Askia the Great.



Education and Government

- Askia the Great worked to support education and especially supported learning about medicine.
 - Doctors discovered that mosquitoes spread malaria.
 - They also performed surgery on the human eye.

- To help maintain order, Askia set up five provinces within Songhai.
 - He removed local leaders and appointed new governors who were loyal to him.
 - He created special departments to oversee certain tasks.
 - He created a standing professional army.



Main Idea 3:

Songhai fell to Moroccan invaders, ending the great era of West African empires.

- Because Morocco wanted to control the Saharan salt mines, it invaded Songhai.
- The Moroccans brought with them a terrible new weapon, the arquebus, an early form of gun.
- The Moroccans' guns and cannons brought disaster to Songhai.
 - Cities were taken over and looted.
- Changes in trade patterns completed Songhai's fall.

Historical and Artistic Traditions



7.4.5

The Big Idea

Because the people of West Africa did not have a written language, their cultures have been passed down through oral history, writings by other people, and the arts.

Main Ideas

- Storytellers helped maintain the oral history of the cultures of West Africa.
- Visitors to West Africa from other lands wrote histories and descriptions of what they saw there.
- Traditionally, West Africans have valued the arts.

Main Idea 1: Storytellers helped maintain the oral history of the cultures of West Africa.

Writing was not common in West Africa. People passed along information through **oral histories**, a spoken record of past events.



West African storytellers were called **griots**. They helped keep the history of their ancestors alive for each new generation.



In addition to stories, they recited **proverbs**. These were short sayings of wisdom or truth. They were used to teach lessons to the people.



Some of the griot poems are epics that are collected in the *Dausi* and the *Sundiata*.



Main Point 2: Visitors to West Africa from other lands wrote histories and descriptions of what they saw there.

The people of West Africa left no written histories of their own. Much of what we know about early West Africa comes from the writings of travelers and scholars from Muslim lands such as Spain and Arabia.

One of the first people to write about West Africa was al-Masudi. He described the geography, customs, history, and scientific achievements of West Africa.



Other Writers

- Abu Ubayd al-Bakri wrote about life in West African kingdoms.
- Ibn Battutah described the political and cultural lives of West Africans.
- Leo Africanus was the last major Muslim visitor to West Africa. Leo lived and wrote in Europe, so for a long time, his writing was the only source about life in Africa available to Europeans.

Main Idea 3: Traditionally, West Africans have valued the arts.

- Of all the visual forms, the sculpture of West Africa is probably the best known.
 - The sculpture is mostly of people.
 - It was made for religious rituals.
 - Artists were deeply respected.

- Artists carved elaborate masks, used mostly for rituals as they danced around fires.
- They wove cloth such as kente, a hand-woven, brightly colored fabric.

- Music and dancing were important.
- These activities helped people honor their history and were central to many celebrations.



History Close-up

Timbuktu

Timbuktu became a major trading city at the height of Mali's power under Mansa Musa. Traders came to Timbuktu from the north and south to trade for salt, gold, metals, shells, and many other goods.

Mansa Musa and later rulers built several large mosques in the city, which became a center of Islamic learning.

Winter floods allowed boats to reach Timbuktu from the Niger River.

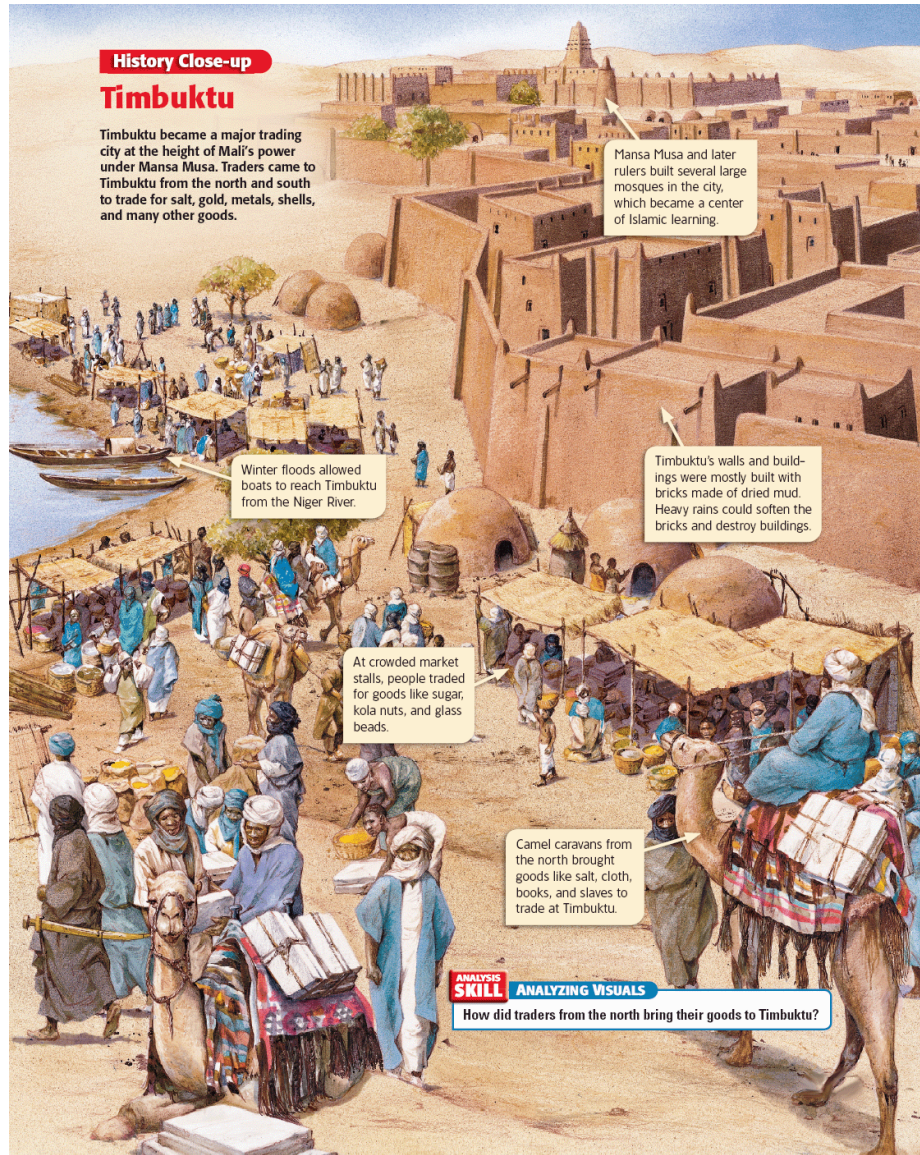
Timbuktu's walls and buildings were mostly built with bricks made of dried mud. Heavy rains could soften the bricks and destroy buildings.

At crowded market stalls, people traded for goods like sugar, kola nuts, and glass beads.

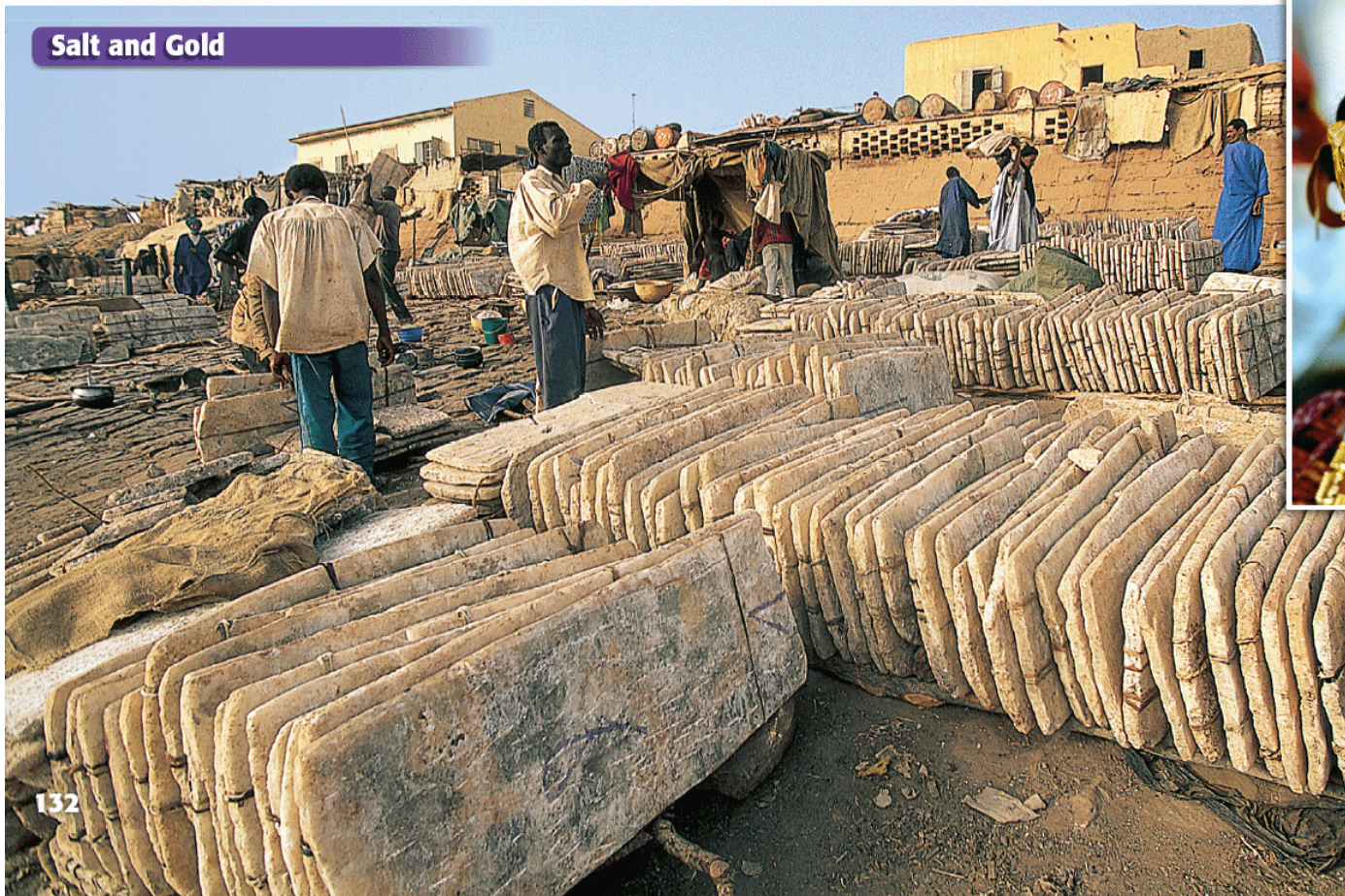
Camel caravans from the north brought goods like salt, cloth, books, and slaves to trade at Timbuktu.

ANALYSIS SKILL ANALYZING VISUALS

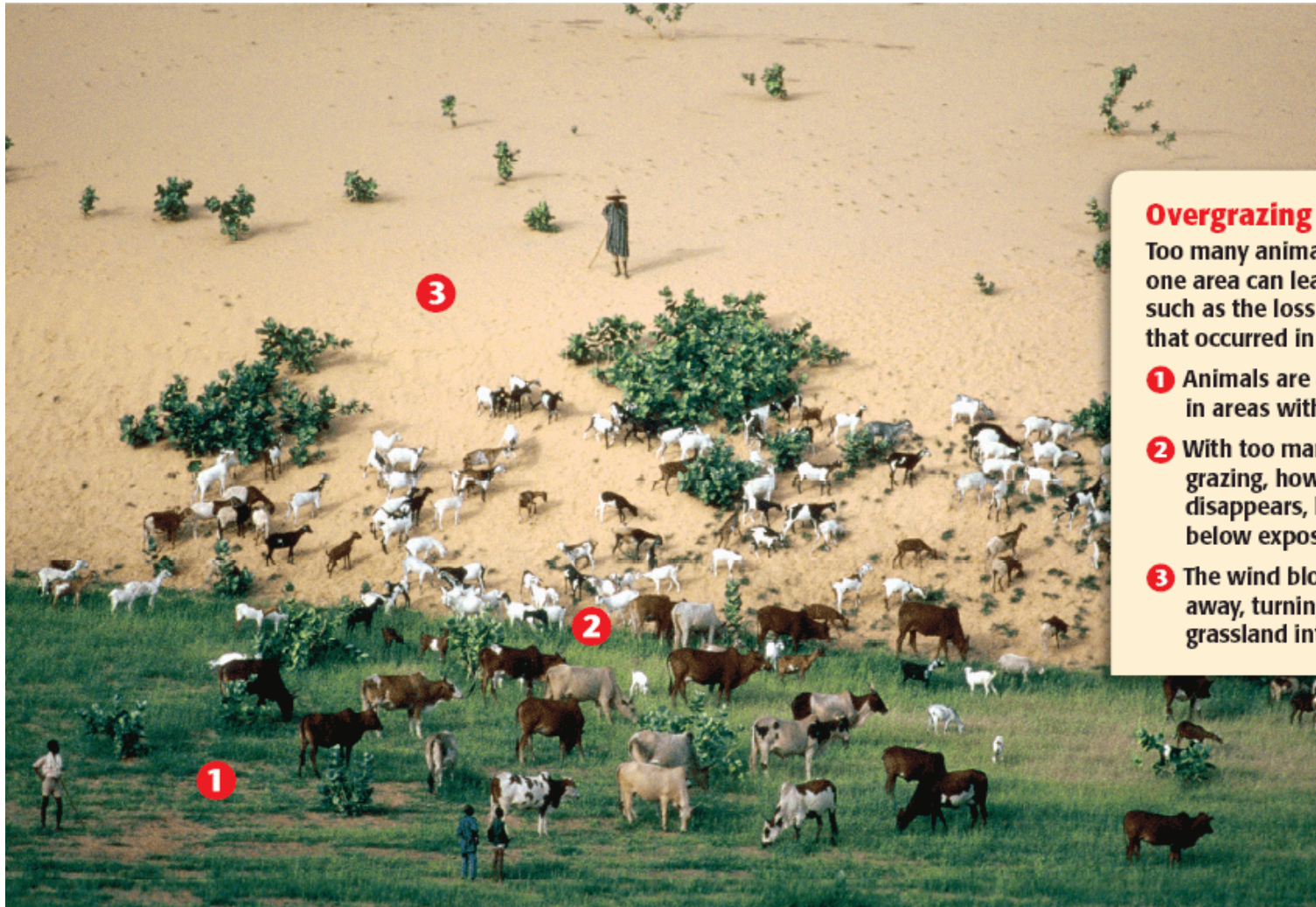
How did traders from the north bring their goods to Timbuktu?



Salt and Gold



Ghana's rulers got rich by controlling the trade in salt and gold. Salt came from the north in large slabs like the ones shown at left. Gold, like the woman above is wearing, came from the south.



Overgrazing

Too many animals grazing in one area can lead to problems, such as the loss of farmland that occurred in West Africa.

- 1 Animals are allowed to graze in areas with lots of grass.
- 2 With too many animals grazing, however, the grass disappears, leaving the soil below exposed to the wind.
- 3 The wind blows the soil away, turning what was once grassland into desert.



Oral Traditions

West African storytellers called griots had the job of remembering and passing on their people's history. In this photo, everyone wears their best clothes and gathers around a griot to listen.

Ghana Empire, c. 1050



Carving of a human head from Ghana

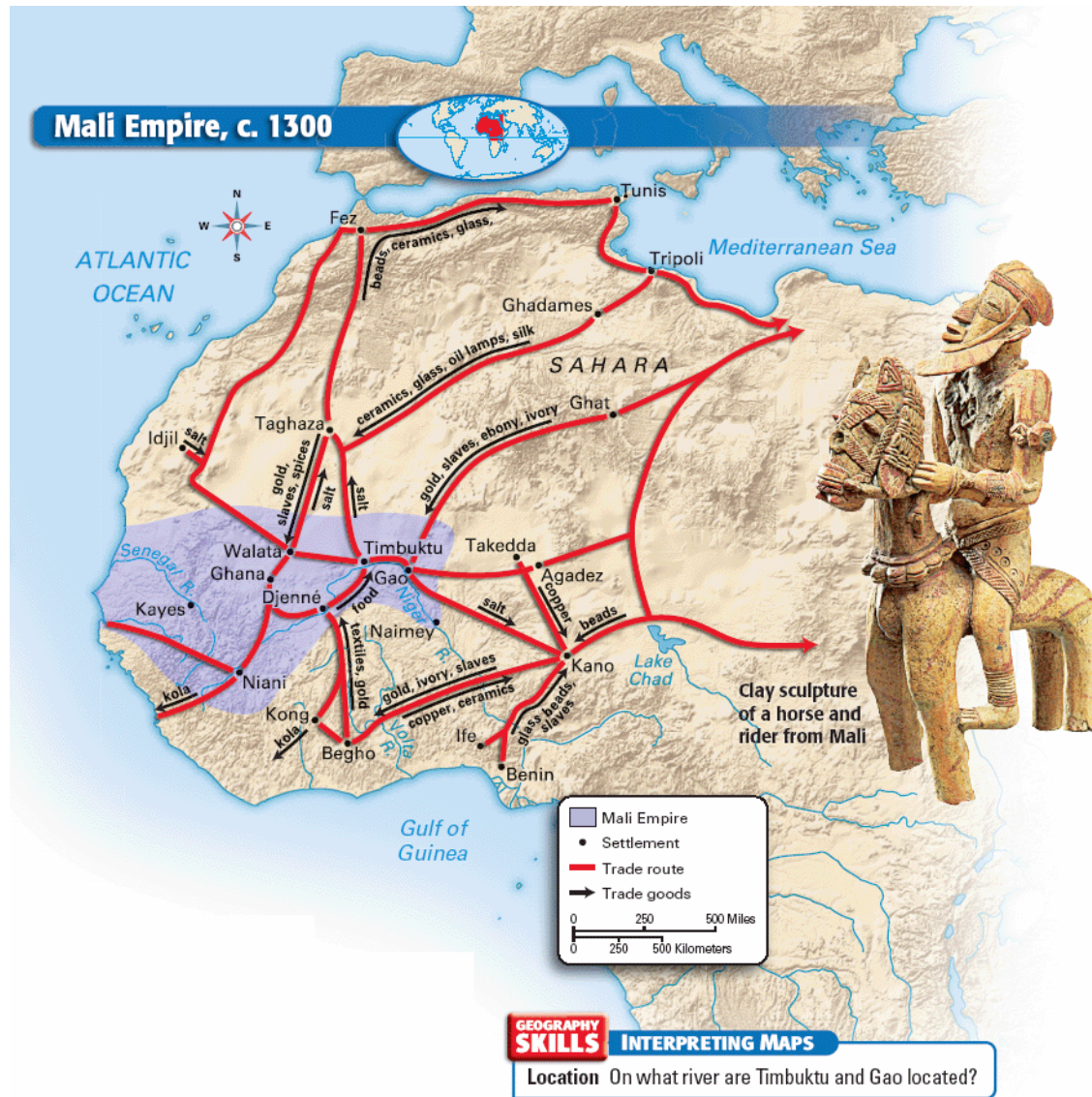
	Ghana Empire
	Settlement
	Trade route
	Trade goods

0 250 500 Miles
0 250 500 Kilometers

GEOGRAPHY SKILLS INTERPRETING MAPS

Movement What goods came to Ghana from the north?

Mali Empire, c. 1300



Clay sculpture of a horse and rider from Mali

GEOGRAPHY SKILLS INTERPRETING MAPS

Location On what river are Timbuktu and Gao located?

Songhai Empire, c. 1500

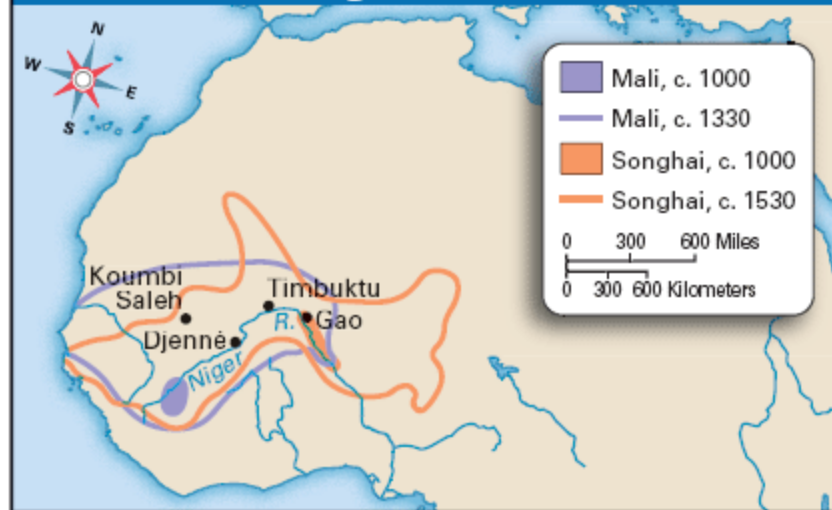


Moroccan coin used to trade in Songhai

GEOGRAPHY SKILLS INTERPRETING MAPS

Region About how many miles did the Songhai Empire stretch from west to east?

Mali and Songhai



Time Line

QUICK
FACTS

West African Empires



ANALYSIS
SKILL

READING TIME LINES

Which empire came first?

Visual Summary

Use the visual summary below to help you review the main ideas of the chapter.

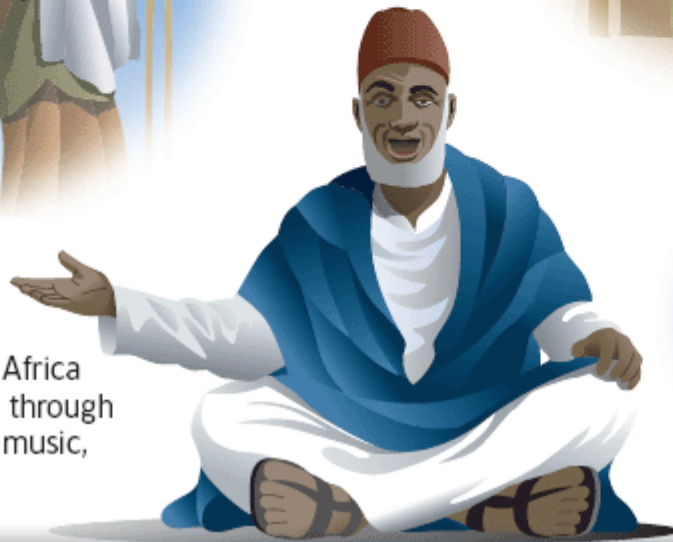
**QUICK
FACTS**



The Ghana Empire developed in West Africa and controlled the trade in salt and gold.



Mali's kings built an empire and spread Islam in West Africa.



The history of West Africa has been preserved through storytelling, writing, music, and art.



The Songhai Empire continued to spread Islam.

