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| **African Trading Kingdoms** |

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| **Background**The African Trading Kingdoms consist of three main cultures, **Ghana**, **Mali**, and **Songhai**, all located in West Africa. All three kingdoms maintained **vast trading networks** across the Sahara desert and into the Middle East and North Africa. The main export was **gold**, which made each kingdom wealthy and strong, and provided them with the conditions necessary for cultural and intellectual achievement. **Islamic Influences**Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were all influenced by **Islam** to different degrees. The kings of Ghana often had **Islamic advisors**, while Mali and Songhai established **Islamic Empires** after converting. In Mali, the **emperor** **Mansa Musa** was famous for his **pilgrimage** **to Mecca**, one of the **Five Pillars of Islam**. This pilgrimage gained Mali closer ties with the Islamic world, and increased **trade** between Mali and the Muslim Empire. **Arts & Literature**African art is often **religious** in nature. Religious **statues and masks** were carved from **ivory**, **wood**, and **bronze**. Some art was decorative, usually identifying royalty or membership in a particular clan. Africans used both **oral** and **written** literary **traditions**. Most written material is in Arabic due to the influence of Islam. These writings contain information on **government** and **law**. **Histories** and **folktales** were usually passed from generation to generation orally. These stories often contained moral lessons and were used as a teaching device. **Education**During the 1400s, **Timbuktu** became a center of learning under the leadership of Mali emperor, **Mansa Musa**. Again, this is the influence of **Islam**, with Islamic **scholars** traveling from around the Muslim world to study and teach and the **University of Timbuktu**. **Commerce**Ghana, Mali, and Songhai established trade routes that were in use for centuries. Besides gold, these kingdoms transported a number of **agricultural products** to the Mediterranean and then on to Europe. A negative effect of this interaction was the start of the **slave trade**.  |

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