

7.14 Trans-Saharan Trade Route Reading

The Establishment of the Trans-Saharan Trade Route

The Trans-Saharan trade route was conducted throughout a vast region between the Mediterranean countries and sub-Saharan Africa. It was an important trading route commencing from the early eighth century to late sixteenth century. A place where countless numbers of people practiced trade; the Sahara progressed around small trading routes. The establishment of trade interconnected the Europeans to African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. However, traveling across the Sahara is difficult; transportation relied and gravely depended on camels.

Post-Classical Period

In 750 C.E, during the post-classical era, caravans of camels improved the way of transaction through the hostile constituency. Due to the hardships of crossing through the desert, camels were the used for transportation, because they could adapt to desert conditions. Camels could go days without water and carry heavy loads, so they were ideal for the desert. A caravan of camels usually consisted of thousands of camels.



Trade was primarily located in northern part of Africa. Flourishing cities that developed around the Trans-Saharan trade route resulted in thriving population growth. Popular exchanges had consisted of: spices and iron from Kush and India, tools, ceramics, silk and beads from Europe and Asia. Spices and slaves were locally among the empires. Empires prospered under the Saharan trade and as an outcome migrations, linguistic diffusion and cross-cultural exchanges occurred.

Ghana Empire

The upsurge of the Ghana Empire was a result of the Trans-Saharan trade route. The Saharan trade routes remained influential to Ghana's triumph. Koumbi, a trade center during the realm, was the capital of Ghana's kingdom. Ghana's main imports were cloth, brocades, copper and salt. The empire had possessed a grave extent of gold, but were limited in salt. For that reason, the gold-salt trade amongst the Arab merchants and Ghana Empire prospered. Sidjilmassa, a commercial city where the gold-salt trade began, ended in the gold expanse of Wangara. During this time, slaves were being traded on a consistent basis. They were imported to serve as domestic servants or highly qualified slave warriors. Later on Ghana would capture Audaghost which then the Mali Empire would flourish.



Mali Empire

In 1235, the Ghana Empire collapsed and the Islamic Mali Empire ascended to rule. Due to the strong Muslim push at the time, many of Ghana converted to Islam. Though the gold-salt trade continued to linger, a second major gold-salt trade emerged. This route weaved through the Sahara and continued into Egypt's interior. As both routes thrived, the growing impact of Egypt's culture cultivated throughout Sudan. Under the Mali Empire, wealthy towns proliferated. Particular cities such as, Gao and Djenne, of the Niger bend developed with grave prosperity. As for Timbuktu, it became widely known as a city of fortune. The growth of the Mali Empire led to an advance of provisional region amongst the savanna and forest. Western courses were essential, and with that cites such as, Ouadane, Oualata, Chinguetti, Begho, and Bono Manso emerged along important trading routes.



Songhai Empire

When the Songhai realm came to power, they thrived on the prominence of the trans-Saharan trading routes. Timbuktu and DJenne, both centers for education and trade, were captured as the Songhai came to rule. It was under their rule that the city of Gao and Takedda grew of population and prospered as important market and financial centers. During the late 1400's, the trans-Saharan trade finally reached its full potential.

