

The Portuguese and West African Exploration

The demand from Europeans for goods from Asia continued to grow throughout the 1400s and 1500s. The problem was that the Europeans could not get these goods easily. We have learned that land routes became very expensive to travel which sparked the search for a water route to Asia. These searches led Europe to discovering new lands, new riches, and new people to trade and interact with. Like France, England, and Spain, Portugal was also looking for a water route to Asia. They were going to travel south around Africa. While sailing around Africa they discovered a wealth of goods that West African empires had to offer. They were home to rich cultures and civilizations that had long been linked by trade to the Middle East, India, and China.

Ghana, Mali, and Songhai each dominated West Africa in 300 to 1600 A.D. These West African countries became powerful by controlling trade in West Africa. Ghana was called the "land of gold" because its land had an abundance of gold. Ghana lacked an important resource-salt. Arab traders would carry goods between Mediterranean ports and Ghana, trading salt from the Sahara for the gold.

Mali, another West African Empire, began to grow in trade as well. Mali continued to trade gold, animal hides, and kola nuts. As Arab traders brought the goods into Mali and Ghana they also brought with them their religion to West Africa. This religion is known as Islam and the followers were known as Muslims. Timbuktu, the capital of Mali, became the center for learning throughout the Muslim world.

The third West African Empire was Songhai. The largest and most powerful of the West African Empires. By the end of the 1400s Songhai had taken control of the gold-salt trade and most of Mali. Songhai began to trade gold and ivory for salt, weapons, cloth, and other manufactured goods.

As you can see, African people and African goods played an important role in arousing European interest in world resources. This interest led to the interaction between different cultures, and caused ideas, cultures, and resources to spread around the world.

Directions: You are to use the story "The Portuguese and West

African Exploration" to answer the following questions.

1. Portugal was going to travel _____ around Africa to get to Asia.
2. Ghana, Mali, and Songhai became powerful West African empires by controlling _____ in West Africa.
3. Ghana was called the _____ because it had an abundance of this precious medal.
4. Ghana was rich in gold, but lacked what important resource? _____
5. Arab traders would bring salt from what location to Ghana?
6. Arab traders brought what religion to West Africa? _____
7. _____ the capital of Mali, became the center for learning throughout the Muslim world.
8. _____ was the largest and most powerful West African Empire.
9. Followers of Islam are known as?
10. What were the three most powerful West African Empires during the Age of Exploration?