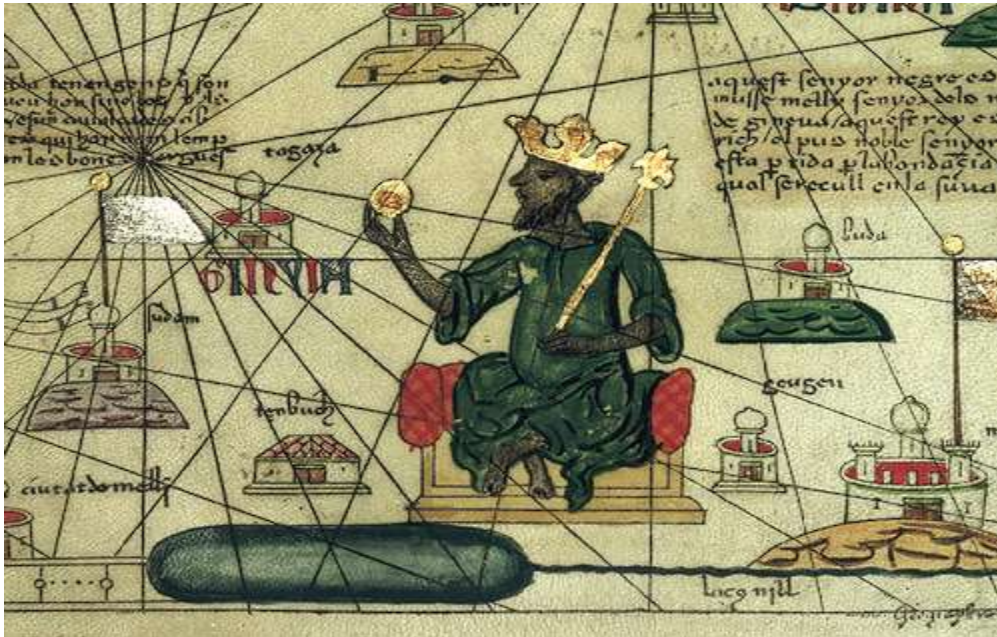


West Africa



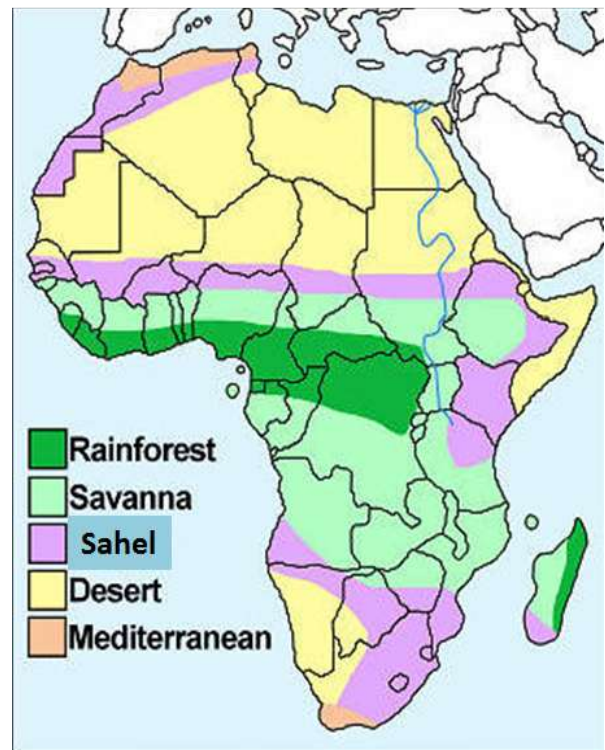
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/c/c1/Mansa_Musa.jpg/240px-Mansa_Musa.jpg

Geography

Africa is located in the middle of the globe and is the second largest of the seven continents. Africa is so vast in sheer size, that it has many climate zones. These zones played a large part in the development of the early kingdoms in West Africa (**Ghana**, **Mali**, and **Songhai**). Each zone has its own distinct characteristics and produced their own commodities. Think of these climates like the layers of a birthday cake. We will learn the climates in a north to south pattern, or from the frosting to the bottom of the plate.



<http://www.africatoursandsafaris.com/images/africaclimate.jpg>



- The top layer of our cake is called the **Mediterranean**. This climate zone is located along the northern coast of Africa and the Mediterranean Sea. It has hot dry summers and mild wet winters. The climate here is the same as the climates of Greece and Italy.



"39 Awesome Young Olive Trees Images." Hdimagelib. 2015. Web. 17 June 2015.
 "Turkish Riviera." Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation, 16 May 2015. Web. 17 June 2015.
 "African Wax Prints & Textiles." Global Inspired Interiors Home Decor Blog Authentic Textiles. Web. 17 June 2015.
 "The Healing Power Of Spices." Food Matters. Food Matters International, 1 June 2012. Web. 17 June 2015.
http://usercontent2.hubimg.com/4122893_f520.jpg

Commodities produced in this zone are cloth, spices, and weapons.

- Next we have the northern **Sahel**. It is a *transition zone* and serves as a *buffer* between the Mediterranean and Sahara climates. This semi-arid land is mostly flat barren plains.



Stewart, Robert. "Desertification in the Sahel." Desertification in the Sahel. 2 Mar. 2010. Web. 16 June 2015.
"UNEP Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch." UNEP Post-Conflict and Disaster Management Branch.
UNEP, 2015. Web. 16 June 2015.

No **commodities** are produced in this transition zone.

- Next we have the **Sahara**. The Sahara is the largest hot desert in the world. It makes up 25% of all the land in Africa. The terrain is made up of sand, gravel, dunes, rocks, and high plateaus. Water is very scarce and so is wildlife.



Walt, Vivienne. "Renewable Energy." Time. Time Inc., 15 Jan. 2009. Web. 16 June 2015.
"The Global Resource Chase Leads Exxon to the Sahara." Oil Energy Daily. Ed. Jason Simpkins. Wall Street Daily LLC, 26 Nov. 2012. Web. 16 June 2015.

Camels are used for transportation in this zone, because they are well suited for the arid conditions and their feet are well adapted for walking in sand and rock.



"The Lonely Walk across the Earth's Most Unforgiving Landscape: Incredible Pictures of Vast Desert Basin at the Heart of Ethiopia's Ancient Salt Trade." Mail Online. Associated Newspapers, 17 May 2013. Web. 16 June 2015. <http://financesonline.com/uploads/Photo-213.jpg>

The **commodity** produced in this zone is salt.

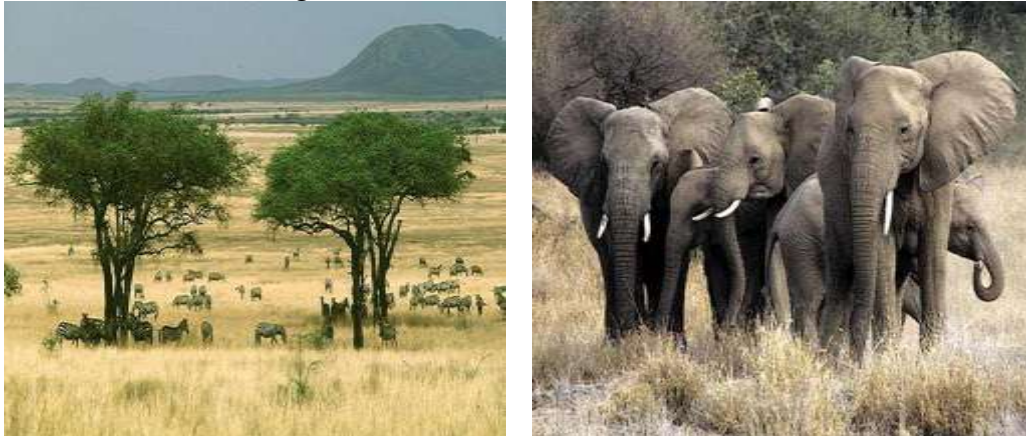
- Next we have the southern **Sahel**. It is a *transition zone* and serves as a *buffer* between the Sahara and Savanna climates. This semi-arid land is mostly flat barren plains. The southern Sahel's fertile land is rapidly becoming desert as a result of drought, deforestation (cutting down trees), and intensive over farming of the land. This process is known as **desertification**.



<http://www.hobotraveler.com/184niger africa2005/00394.jpg>

No **commodities** are produced in this transition zone.

- Next we have the **Savanna**, or grasslands. The terrain here is wide open, generally flat, with a few trees scattered here and there. The grasses vary in length and it is generally muddy. This is where lions, gazelles, rhinos, giraffes, zebras, and other large animals live.



"Six Million Years of African Savannah." Nsf.gov. National Science Foundation, 3 Aug. 2011. Web. 17 June 2015. http://www.wildlife-pictures-online.com/elephant_fb-ns23.html

Donkeys and cattle are used for transportation in this zone, because they are well suited for walking through the muddy grasslands.



http://ecolibrary.org/images/full_image/Water_transport_via_donkey_Tanzania_DP1302.jpg

"Medieval African Food." For Kids. Web. 17 June 2015.

Brown, Cathy. "Gold." Gold. Web. 17 June 2015.

Krupnik, Timothy. "West African Rice Farmers Explore Alternatives to Cheap, Dangerous Insecticides." Rodale Institute. Web. 17 June 2015.

<http://thisepiciourney.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Organic-Cotton-2.jpg>

Commodities produced in this zone are gold, rice, cotton, cattle, and livestock (donkeys, cattle, etc.).

- The last layer of our cake is the **Tropical Rainforest**. This dense wet jungle is located in central Africa. Thousands of different plant and animal species can be found here. Some of the plants and animals in the rainforest are so unique, they can only be found there and new ones are constantly being identified.



Akana, David. "African Rainforest." Inside Environment. 20 Oct. 2011. Web. 17 June 2015.
"Tropical Rainforest Pictures." Tropical Rainforest Pictures. Web. 17 June 2015.

Humans and rivers are used for transportation in this zone, because livestock cannot survive in this zone. The bite of the **tsetse fly** is deadly to all domesticated farm animals.



Tsetse Fly



Gold



Kola Nut

<http://fohn.net/pictures-of-flies/tsetse-fly.jpg>

Brown, Cathy. "Gold." Gold. Web. 17 June 2015.

"Kola Nut | Plant." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Encyclopedia Britannica. Web. 17 June 2015.

Commodities produced in this zone are gold and the kola nut (a mild stimulant).

Question: Why do you think the camel is called the "ship of the desert?"

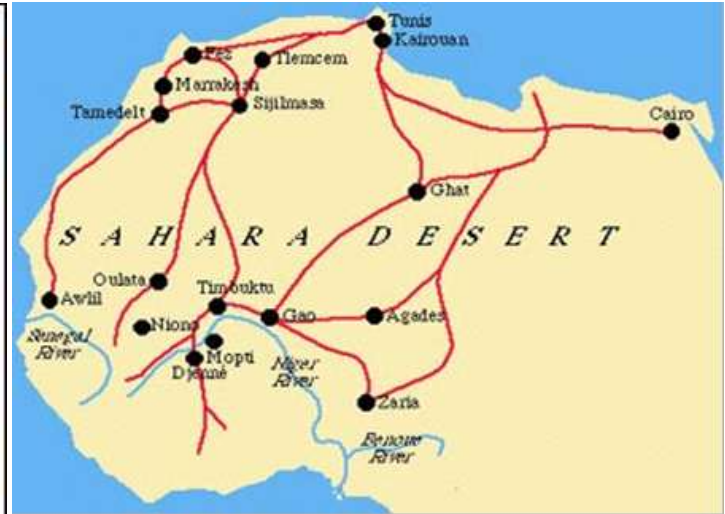
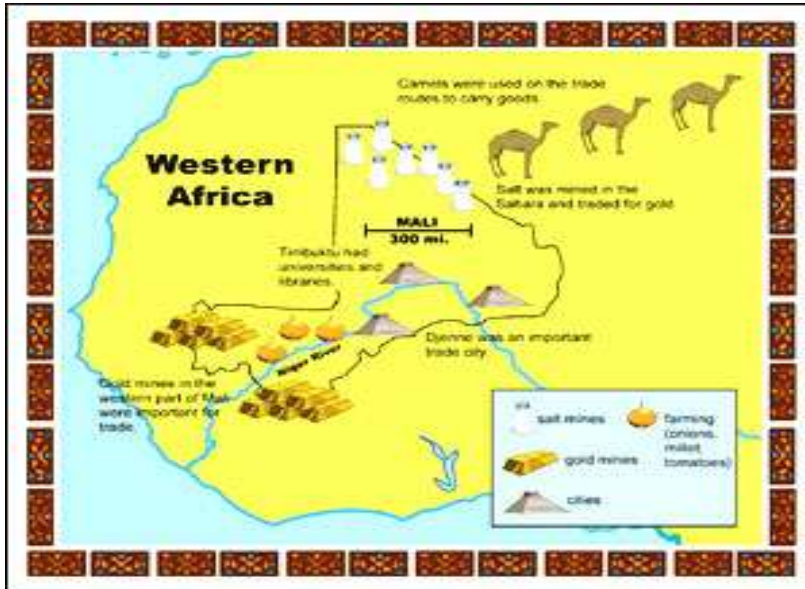
Question: What do you think was more valuable to the people living during this age...gold or salt? Why?

Niger River

The **Niger River** is the third largest river in Africa. It provided the people of West Africa with food, water, transportation, and trade. The river is such a major feature in West Africa that it flows through several climate zones: the southern Sahel, Savanna, and into the tropical rainforest. The Niger River forms a delta before it spills into the Atlantic Ocean.

Trans-Saharan Trade

Trade was very important to the people of West Africa and would be the determining factor in who gained power or lost power. Whoever controlled the trans-Saharan trade profited from the exchanging of goods and taxes. Many of the towns were built where the zones came together. This meeting of zones was the ideal place to trade goods, stop for the night, or to switch your mode of transportation. An example of this would be a town built in the southern Sahel. A trader would need to trade his camel for a donkey. Camels cannot walk through the slippery muddy grasslands of the savanna. There would be many hotels, places to get food, and other goods to trade.



Trade routes are marked by red lines crossing the Sahara in a north to south pattern.

The people who met in these West African towns came from many different cultures and backgrounds. They not only exchanged goods with each other, they also shared ideas. The religion of Islam diffused into West Africa as Muslim desert dwellers called **Berbers** traveled the trade routes north and south. Islam quickly was adopted by the **Wangara** or **Dyula**; the main long distance traders. In the towns and cities, Islam became the religion of the elite (upper class), city people, and their leaders. The majority of farmers and herders in the countryside continued to practice local African religions.

Three great kingdoms controlled the Trans-Saharan Trade in West Africa for hundreds of years. The kingdom that controlled the trade was significant; when that kingdom lost control of the trade, they fell from power and became insignificant. The wealth accumulated from long distance trade and agriculture allowed each dominant kingdom to support an elaborate royal court, many government officials, a large and powerful army, and to have a rich cosmopolitan (worldly) culture.

Ghana 400-1235 A.D.

The **kingdom of Ghana** took over the trans-Saharan trade and became very powerful. Ghana was located along the trade routes that ran in a north and south pattern throughout West Africa. Being located in the middle of these trade routes presented Ghana with an extraordinary opportunity. The people to the north had salt mines and the people in south had gold mines (**Bamburk-Bure goldfield** and **Akan goldfield**). Ghana had an army of 200,000 men and was the military power of the region. Ghana became guards for the traders and charged them a fee for their protection in gold, salt, or other goods. This arrangement worked well for everyone and Ghana became very rich. Only the rulers were allowed to own gold nuggets.



Map showing location of ancient kingdom of Ghana

"Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History." Art of the Asante Kingdom. Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2015. Web. 17 June 2015. <https://sheroesofhistory.files.wordpress.com/2014/08/bkf09weddingchiefbobo-021.jpg?w=624>

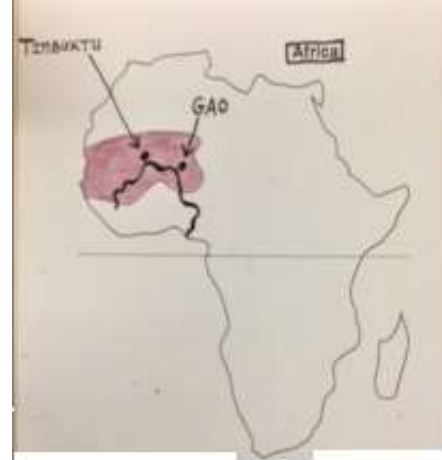
The capital city of the kingdom of Ghana was called **Kumbi-Sahel**. This city was located in the southern Sahel or transition zone between the desert and the savanna. The king and the nobles lived in the best houses and enjoyed a life of luxury. The people of the empire were generally happy and benefited from the wealth that poured into their empire. No one went hungry in Ghana and they were safe and well protected.

Ghana thrived and was the main power in West Africa for hundreds of years. A combination of severe drought and invasion (by Almoravid Muslims) will eventually weaken Ghana. This allowed another kingdom to take control of the trans-Saharan trade.

Mali 1235-1470 A.D.

The **kingdom of Mali** rose up and conquered Ghana. They took control of the Trans-Saharan Trade and used their army to expand their territory in West Africa. Mali took

control over some of the gold and salt mines for themselves and became very powerful and rich.



Map showing location of ancient kingdom of Mali

"Mali Empire and Djenne Figures." Mali Empire and Djenne Figures. NMAFA. Web. 17 June 2015.

The capital city of Mali was called **Timbuktu**. This city was located in the southern Sahel or *transition* zone (between desert and savanna) along the northern portion of the Niger River. Timbuktu was the most important city in all of West Africa. It was a center for intellectual learning and a center for Islamic culture. People from near and far came there to learn math, science, and other important subjects. People were taught to read by reading the **Qu'ran** (Koran) and many mosques were built here for worship.

The most famous king from Mali and one of the richest individuals in world history was named **Mansa Musa**. Mansa Musa had a passion for learning and education and built a university for study in Timbuktu. He is most known for taking a **hajj** (religious journey or pilgrimage) to **Mecca**. Mansa Musa was a practicing Muslim and took this trip to fulfill his religious duty. His journey was an epic one; records state that he took with him...

Number of people on the <i>hajj</i>	60,000
Number of slaves who were Mansa Musa's personal servants	12,000
Number of slaves who carried gold	500
Number of miles traveled	4,000
Time it took to cross Mali on a donkey	4 months
Number of camels	1,000
Number of camels to carry gold	80-100
Amount of gold on each camel	100-300 pounds
Distance a camel can travel without water	100 miles
Distance a loaded camel can travel in a day	20-25 miles
Total amount of gold (for alms giving, gifts, salaries, supplies)	24,000 pounds



"Mansa Musa the Richest Human in the World!" TWGM. 10 Dec. 2014. Web. 16 June 2015.

Mansa Musa gave away so much gold on his pilgrimage, that he actually caused the price of gold to drop throughout the Mediterranean and the Middle East. This generosity would catch the eye of the Europeans and caused them to question where all this gold came from.

Overtime, Berber traders started to favor another West African kingdom called Songhai. This caused Mali to lose control of the trans-Saharan trade and fall from power. Songhai would conquer Mali.

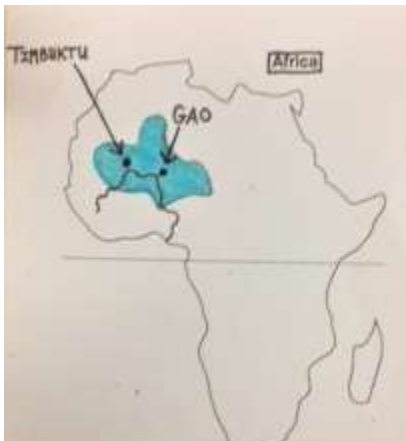
Songhai 1470-1591 A.D.

The **kingdom of Songhai** (SONG-hi) rose up and conquered Mali. They took control of the trans-Saharan trade and used their army to expand their territory throughout West Africa. The capital city of Songhai was called **Gao**. This city was located in the southern Sahel or *transition zone* (between desert and savanna) along the northern portion of the Niger River. Controlling the gold mines and salt made Songhai very wealthy and powerful; unfortunately the timing of their empire was bad.

For 500 years, Africa was the source for the world's gold. It was valued throughout Europe and the Islamic world, because it was used to make coins. The stories of Mansa Musa's generosity had spread far by this point and people had taken an interest in West Africa. In 1591 A.D. **Morocco** launched a surprise invasion of Songhai for control of the gold trade. The Moroccan army's up to date fire arms allowed them to easily defeat the Songhai army and seize control of the gold trade. Morocco gained short term wealth, but because of the distance was unable to control the territory long term. No successor to the great kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai would emerge and the area would stay fragmented for many years to come.

European explorers by this time had come to the West coast of Africa, looking for the source of Mansa Musa's legendary fortune. They shifted the trade route from a trans-Saharan trade to a **trans-Atlantic trade**. The Europeans also saw how profitable the existing slave trade the Arabs had established to the Middle East and North Africa

could be. The Europeans started their own slave trade and they began to export West Africans to their colonies in the Americas. This was the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and would have a devastating impact on the population of West Africa.



Map showing location of ancient kingdom of Songhai

Zerbinati, Giorgio. "Sailing Ships, Slaves, Plantations: Colonial Products That Conquered the World." EXPONet. 2 Dec. 2014. Web. 17 June 2015