

Trading Salt for Gold: The Ancient Kingdom of Ghana

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A trade caravan traveling in Africa. Ghana played an important role in early trans-Saharan trade. Photo from Wikimedia

The ancient kingdom of Ghana was very rich a long time ago. Today, there is a country called Ghana in Africa. It is named after the ancient Ghana. But the ancient kingdom of Ghana was in a different place. It is where Mauritania, Mali and Senegal now are.

Ancient Ghana was so rich that dogs there wore golden collars. And, the horses slept on carpets. Many people thought Ghana's kings were the richest men in the world.

How did Ghana become so wealthy? The answer is gold.

Gold is found in some parts of the earth. Ghana's land was full of gold.

Its rulers traded Ghana's gold to other countries. This allowed Ghana to be very rich for many years.

Ghana was full of gold

Ghana used to be called Wagadugu. "Ghana" was the name given to Wagadugu kings. The word was also used for the land they ruled.

A tribe known as the Soninke started Ghana as a nation. The Soninke leaders helped Wagadugu grow in size. This made it even stronger.

Some of the land they took over was filled with gold.

Being in charge of this land made Ghana the most important trader in that area.

The king was very powerful

The king was the most powerful person in Ghana.

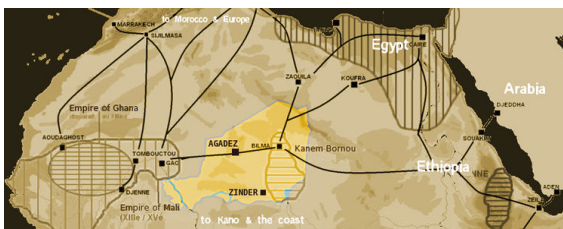
Each day, the king listened to people's problems. If there was a crime, the person would be tested. If he passed the test, he was innocent. If he did not, he was guilty. Then the king would punish him.

The people of Ghana were not the only ones put to the king's test. In other areas, Ghanaian leaders were watchdogs. They reported almost everything that happened to the king.

Ghana traded gold and ivory

The king of Ghana also used his power to help trade grow with other countries. Ghana mostly traded gold, ivory and slaves. Ghana exchanged these for salt, horses, cloth, swords and books.

Some people would



travel many months through the desert to reach Ghana to trade. The country became rich.

Soon, other countries were jealous of Ghana. They were also afraid of its power. So, they decided to stand up to the kingdom.

Ghana was taken over

An empire known as the Almoravids invaded Ghana. The Almoravids came from North Africa. Some of Ghana's land was taken and the government had to pay the Almoravids. In time, Ghana was able to make the Almoravids leave.

Ghana was not so lucky about 200 years later. It was weakened by more attacks. Ghana was also cut off from trading with other countries.

It was unable to stay strong and was defeated.

In A.D. 1240, the growing nation of Mali took over Ghana. Mali became the next great empire.

Quiz

1 Read the introduction [paragraphs 1-5].

Which paragraph explains where the ancient kingdom of Ghana was located?

2 Read the paragraph from the section "Ghana traded gold and ivory."

The king of Ghana also used his power to help trade grow with other countries. Ghana mostly traded gold, ivory and slaves. Ghana exchanged these for salt, horses, cloth, swords and books.

Which question is answered by this paragraph?

- (A) How did people get to Ghana in order to trade?
- (B) What did other countries think of Ghana being rich?
- (C) How big did the country of Ghana become?
- (D) What kinds of things did people trade with Ghana?

3 Look at the image at the top of the article and read its caption.

What does the image show?

- (A) a group of Soninke starting Ghana as a nation
- (B) a group of traders traveling across Africa
- (C) a group of people being tested by the king
- (D) a group of Almoravids leaving Ghana

4 Look at the map in the section "Ghana traded gold and ivory."

Which of the following questions can be answered by the map?

- (A) What things did countries most often bring on trade routes to Ghana?
- (B) What country traded with Ghana most often on its trade routes?
- (C) What was the fastest and safest route to get to and from Ghana?
- (D) What routes did people travel through the desert to trade with Ghana?