

# SSWH6 Describe the diverse characteristics of early African societies before 1500 CE/AD.



***Element B: Describe the trading networks and distribution of resources by examining trans-Saharan trade in gold, salt, slaves; include the Swahili trading cities.***

# Trans-Saharan Gold Salt Trade

- ❑ Trade between the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa was quite limited until the camel came into regular use in the third century CE.
  - As a beast of burden, the camel was and continues to be ideal for merchants in the Sahara.
  - Able to travel up to 60 miles a day with 500 lbs. of cargo, a camel can go up to ten days without water.
- ❑ North African Berbers improved upon earlier advances by the Arabs to develop highly effective war saddles for camels.
  - These technological developments made regular caravans safe and profitable in the Sahara Desert. This regular exchange of goods led to the slow diffusion of Islam into the region.



# Trans-Saharan Gold Salt Trade

- Trade across the Sahara had three basic production and consumption centers.
  1. The forest regions between the Niger and Senegal Rivers exported gold, slaves, kola nuts and palm oil to the north.
  2. In return they purchased salt which was essential for life in the tropic climate. This salt was mined in the Sahara desert near Taghaza.
  3. Metal ware, pottery and glass manufactured along the Mediterranean coast was purchased with gold from the Niger River region and flowed south to the communities in and below the desert.
- Much of this exchange was handled by middlemen in the Sahel region which led to the growth of major trading cities like Timbuktu.



# Swahili Coast

- ❑ The east coast of Africa was also an import area for international trade.
- ❑ Highly predictable seasonal monsoon winds combined with the maritime technology of the dhow and lateen sail developed by Arabs made open ocean navigation safe and profitable.
- ❑ Arab merchants of the Indian Ocean maritime system visited ports in Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Zanzibar among others.
  - While visiting East African ports, merchants purchased ivory, gold, ebony, slaves, and exotic animal products and sold silk, cotton cloth, porcelain, metal ware, glass, and spices.
- ❑ Because the merchants of the Indian Ocean depended on seasonal winds, they generally spent several months in each port of call.
  - These extended stays led many merchants to marry local women creating a unique culture in the region that blends West African and Arab customs.
  - The Swahili language is an excellent example of this as it is a blend indigenous Bantu languages and Arabic.

