Sand Roads

Trans-Saharan Trade
The Trans-Saharan Trade Route
- Linked North Africa and the Mediterranean world with the land and peoples of interior West Africa.

Environmental Variations
- North African coast
  - Cloth, glassware, weapons, books, and manufactured goods
- Sahara Desert
  - Copper and SALT
  - Sweet and nutritious dates at its oases
  - Sparse populations were most pastoral or nomadic
- Sub-Saharan Africa
  - Agricultural with a variety of crops
  - Produced their own textiles and metal products
  - GOLD
  - Savanna grasslands = grain crops
  - Forests to the south = root and tree crops
History of Trade in this Region

– Not across the Sahara
– Mostly among agricultural peoples in the area known as the Sudan ("the land of black people")
– Gradually expanded to boats along the Niger River and donkeys used overland
  • Urban area of Jenne-jeno was an early Niger River civilization
Camels

• The introduction of the camel to North Africa made the trek across the desert possible.

• Camel-owning people who lived in the oases initiated trans-Saharan commerce by 300-400 CE.

• Several centuries later, North African Arabs, now bringing Islam, organized trans-Saharan caravans.
Gold

• Transported by donkey from the borders between the grasslands and the forests to caravan points along the southern edge of the desert. Then transferred to camels for the longer journey.
  – African ivory, kola nuts, and slaves were also in high demand in the desert and the Mediterranean basin.
  – In return, the peoples of the Sudan received horses, cloth, dates, manufactured goods, and SALT
A New International Trade Route

- The caravans that made the desert crossing could be as many as 5,000 camels and hundreds of people.
  - Traveled mostly at night
  - Journey could take up to 70 days (15-20 miles per day)
  - Linked the interior of West Africa with land and people far to the north
  - Caravans traveled the desert for over 1,000 years
New Political Structures

• Between 500 and 1600 CE we see the creation of a series of states in western and central Sudan, including Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Kanem, and Hausa city-states
  – All were monarchies with elaborate court life and at least some administration and military forces.
    • Taxed merchants and goods
  – All had a reputation for great riches
West African Empires

Sudanese Empires, 11th-16th Centuries
- Mali
- Songhai
- Kanem-Bornu
- Ghana

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As in all civilizations, slavery was prevalent in West Africa.
- At first, most slaves were women (domestic servants or concubines)
- With the development of civilization, male slaves were used as officials, porters, craftsmen, miners, agricultural laborers
- Most slaves came as a result of raids on non-Islamic and stateless societies farther south

While most slaves were used in West Africa, some 5,500 slaves a year crossed the Sahara between 1100 and 1400.
- Most were sold in North Africa
- A few ended up in Europe
  - Slavic-speaking slaves (from eastern Europe) were much more common in Europe (origin of word “slave”)
  - African slaves only became common in Europe starting in 1440s (Atlantic slave trade)
Urban and Commercial Centers

• The states of Sudanic Africa developed substantial urban/commercial centers (such as Koumbi-Saleh, Jenne, Timbuktu, Gao, Gobir, and Kano)
  – Some became manufacturing centers
  – Cosmopolitan places where court officials, artisans, scholars, students, and local and foreign merchants all rubbed elbows.
  – Islam became an important element of urban culture
In your groups, complete the basic research on the empires and cities of West Africa. Remember, you are looking for the key characteristics of each one. This will get reinforced with your textbook reading.

When you are done, you have the rest of the period to work in your groups on your projects.