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# Trade, Conquest and the Rise of West African Civilizations

A dissertation submitted to the department of English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master degree of Civilisation and Literature (Anglo Saxon)

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this simple work, first, to my husband: Mr. Refafa Brahim who gave me love and support to achieve my goal. To my son: Mohamed Rayene Moundir, and my daughters: Alaa Khadidja, and Afnane. I will not forget my dearest parents who helped me to continue this work.

I will never forget to dedicate this work also to my brother: Sofian, and my sisters: Houaria and Nour el Houda.

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## **Abstract**

In the world perspective, trade and conquest had very diverse effects, working through many mechanisms, occasionally encouraging the rise and development of a civilization. It is generally asserted that the rise of West African civilizations was due to trade and to a lesser extent conquest. My aim in this dissertation is mainly to check this hypothesis and to see whether other factors were more predominant. This research aims to broaden the perspective by providing more examples on how trade and colonialism influenced the rise of the West African civilization. I strived to find out that trade and colonialism had, one way or another, a positive impact on the rise of the West African civilization.

## **General Introduction**

When Man moved from the primitive human stage and walked in the path of humanity, he realized the society and the social relations in which he lived. Thus, he recognized that he did not live alone and that he shared with others life and existence.

Since he shared with others life and existence, he necessarily shared them harm and exchanged with them profit and to achieve all the aspirations for which these relations have been built and on which society is based. As a result, he achieves his social status, his citizenship and his civilization.

The civilizations that flourished in ancient West Africa were all based on trade, so successful West African leaders tended to be peacemakers rather than warriors. Caravans from North Africa crossed the Sahara beginning in the seventh century of the Common Era. Traders exchanged gold for something the West Africans prized even more: salt. Salt was used as a flavoring, a food preservative, and as today, a means of retaining body moisture.

History is the science of past and present. It can also foresee some predictable future events of human civilizations. It can exist in oral and written forms. African societies have oral, visual, and written forms of preserved knowledge about their past. Reports and narratives kept by African historians are among the most informative sources for the restoration of the African history.

Civilization on its part signifies a particular society at a particular place and time. It can also be a social process whereby a society becomes enlightened through the invasion of ideas, knowledge, and principles of advanced people from a different place and time.

There are many works, in history, that provide a wide-ranging history of African civilization— using the cultural, social, political, and economic lenses of Africa as instruments to enlighten the world about Africans.

In the world perspective, trade and conquest had very diverse effects, working through many mechanisms, occasionally encouraging the rise and development of a civilization and sometimes delaying it, especially conquest.



In order to draw conclusions it is necessary not just to know what in fact happened to the West African kingdoms during the colonial period, but also to take a view on what might have happened without colonialism.

It is generally asserted that the rise of West African civilizations was due to trade and to a lesser extent conquest. My aim in this paper is mainly to check this hypothesis and to see whether other factors were more predominant.

The present work represents an attempt to investigate the impact of trade, kingship and colonization to some extent on the rise of West African civilizations. This research aims also to make the world perspective to revisit and re-think about colonization in the history of Africa in general and West Africa in particular.

Civilizations flourished and developed over time. Some factors strengthened them and led to their growth and expansion. To this end, first I have conducted, in chapter one, a study to explore the concept of civilization. I also mentioned some characteristics of civilizations.

Many main factors led to the rise of many civilizations. In chapter two, I tried to deal with trade as an economic factor that helped in the rise of West African civilizations. I have mentioned through analysis some other important factors that had an impact in the rise of these civilizations.

It is true that trade played a key role in the economic growth of kingdoms and empires in West Africa. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that despite destructing some aspects of a civilization, conquest can play to some extent in the economic growth of a civilization. Thus, chapter three is about a study of the positive side of colonialism in West Africa, not deep but in order to state that conquest had some advantages.

***Chapter one:  
civilisation as a  
concept***

## **Introduction**

We use the term civilization in many different forms in our daily lives. Generally, they serve the same meaning. We say this is a civilized thing. This is a civilized man and many other sentences, but there are many who do not know what civilization means, what its characteristics are and what its elements are.

Scholars have different points of views in defining this term. This chapter is devoted for the definition of the term 'civilization' from different perspectives. Some characteristics of civilizations are mentioned also.

### **1- Civilization as a Concept**

The word civilization is controversial. "The word originates from the Latin 'civis', meaning 'citizen' or 'civilized'" (Larry E. Sullivan, 2009: 73). According to Sullivan, the word dates back to the sixteenth century. It also refers to the Latin words 'civilis' that means 'civil' and 'civis', meaning citizen. Moreover, it was originated from the Latin word 'civitas' meaning in English 'city'. It came from the French word 'civilisé' that means in English 'civilized'.

According to Lissan Al Arab (Ibn Mandour, 1997, 103) civilization is to live in cities and villages. It is an urban residence not in a rural one.

According to Oxford English Dictionary, civilization is "the action or process of civilizing or of being civilized, developed or advanced state of human society." (Angus Stevenson, 2010, 319)

In his Comprehensive Dictionary (Abdel Moneim Al Hefni, 2000, 301) the term 'civilization' was first used in 1704 in the sense of urbanization i.e to behave depending on the ethics of the people of cities and to wear like them and to speak their language.

Some say that it is the social life of a group of individuals living in specific geographical areas such as cities. They are not linked to one geographical place, but rely on travel. Evidently, "Civilization is now generally used to describe an achieved state or condition of organized social life." (Raymond Williams, 1985, 57)

It is a sophisticated phase of organization. It has a system of government, culture, a system of economy, agriculture, language, and religion. Citizens are linked together politically, socially, financially and religiously. Raymond also mentioned

“Civilizations tend to be advanced cultures with multifarious social structure, well-developed laws, and varied economic, educational, and cultural opportunities.” (Raymond Williams, 1985, 57)

In addition to ‘city’, the word civilization is mixed with another word, culture. These three words are widely used. Many use one of these terms as an alternative to the other in a form that suggests that they are synonymous.

The two words ‘Civilization’ and ‘Culture’ are sometimes used interchangeably. For example, “Hegel, the philosopher of world history who may be considered the founder of civilizational studies, used the two words interchangeably in his lectures in the 1830’s” (Braudel, Fernand, 1994, 5)

According to this quotation, it is obvious that semantically, the words ‘Culture’ and ‘Civilization’ are entangled with each other.

“At the same time, the word “culture,” which was semantically almost equivalent with “civilization,” was circulating together with the latter.” (Ruan Wei, 2011, 3).

The term ‘Civilization’ sometimes deals a lot with culture. Evidently, “It is culture and way of life of a society at a particular time and place” (Oxford Learner’s Pocket Dictionary, 2008, 74)

According to the famous historian, Samuel P. Huntington, a civilization is the broadest cultural entity. Towns, regions, ethnic groups, nationalities, religious groups, all have diverse cultures at various levels of cultural heterogeneity. (Samuel P. Huntington, 1993, 25)

According to A. W. Green, a culture becomes civilization only when it possesses written language, science, philosophy, a specialized division of labour, a complex technology and political system.” (I. Clement, 2010, 79)

However, this cannot be a reason for some theorists to define ‘Civilization’ with the word ‘culture’. Some sociologists use the two terms at two different levels and phenomena. For example, “Civilization is easily passed without much effort to the next generation but not culture. Cultural facts, e.g., any art or a piece of literature, cannot be learned without some intelligence. It requires a few pains to understand it. Contrary to it, the equipment’s of civilization (building, TV, etc.) can easily be inherited without much or any use of energy and intelligence.” (Puja Mondal, 2016)

Abdel Moneim Al Hefni warned of the mixture of the two terms ‘civilization’ and ‘culture’ for their closest meaning.

It means that progress in arts and sciences, the use of record keeping, such as writing and the emergence of complex political and social societies mark an advanced state of intellectual, cultural and material development in human society. As a result, this is what we call civilization.

“The word ‘civilization’ has been used to define the progressed and developed aspects of life in rich societies (technology and experience in the field of production, wealth), and culture was used to define the spiritual and intellectual life of a developed or undeveloped society.” (Kamil Al Hadj, 2000, 206). For example, when we say ‘Western civilization’ which means technological development, and ‘African culture’ and we mean all that African society does in the spiritual sphere.

According to Mohamed Abdmouneim Nour, “Culture differs from civilization. The difference is simple rather than complex. All societies have its simple and its complex. Culture is the product of intellectual society and the result of this thought and its derivatives.” (Mohamed Abdmouneim Nour, 1984, 23)

Some scholars often consider that wherever there is a progress, it is a civilization. Doing so, they make a link between the two terms. Accordingly, André Lalande, in his Philosophical essay, defines civilization as “A group of complex social phenomena of an itinerant nature characterized by a religious, ethical, aesthetic, artistic technical or scientific character and common to all parts of a wider society or in the habit of interdependent societies.” (André Lalande, 2001, 172)

We note clearly that he had stressed on the word ‘civilization’ and what it contained of scientific and technological development, and the role of progress, the achievements and innovations in various fields of life.

Civilization is “The range of features and values that measure the degree of human progress and the positive development of societies.” (The Little LAROUSSE, 2007, 251) i.e. cultural, artistic, moral and material aspects of a human society, for example: Greek civilization, Roman civilization, and Islamic civilization. The term ‘civilized’ is to bring (people or place) to a stage of social, cultural, and moral development considered most advanced. (Angus Stevenson, 2010, 319)

Generally, civilization has a great relationship with progress and development. Albert Schweitzern defines civilization as:

“It is the sum total of all progress made by man in every sphere of action and from every point of view, in so far as the progress helps towards the spiritual perfecting of individuals, as the of all Progress” (Klaas Van Egmond, 2014,140)

Kamil Al Hadj states: “The range of characteristics that characterize developed societies” (Kamil Al Hadj, 2000, 206). Thus, civilization deals a lot with progress.

Besides, throughout history, the term was used to distinguish behavior. During the eighteenth century, the word ‘civilization’ was used to assimilate uncivilized people. They were called primitive. ‘Civilization’ means to be a civilized person. The opposite is primitive or barbarian.

The French thinkers revealed the idea of civilization, and developed it in the nineteenth century as opposed to the concept of "barbarism", civilized society is different from primitive society, because it was stable and urban and not illiterate (Samuel P. Huntington, 1993, 67)

“Civilization refers to an earlier phase of human development, in contrast to the stage of brutality and barbarity.” (Kamil Al Hadj, 2000, 206). In the sense that if the individual is characterized by high qualities and high morals, we say that he is civilized and on the contrary, if he is characterized by savage and barbaric qualities, we say he is not civilized.

In some cases, a ‘Civilized Man’ is the opposite of ‘savage’. According to Wallerstein;

“Two Enlightenment scholars in the middle of the 18th century – Honoré Mirabeau and Adam Ferguson – began to use “civilization” and “civilized” in comparison with and contrast to “savagery” and ‘savage’.” (Wallerstein Immanuel1994, 216)

However, some scholars assert that the term civilization must be contrasted with savagery and barbarism. (Keywords,1985, 59). In addition, Hocein Moueniss stated “All species of Humans are civilized and every society has its level of civilization. The primitive groups who still live in mountains have their civilization too.” (Hocein Moueniss, 1978, 44).

Some scholars measure the degree of civilization with inventions and achievements such as writing. For example Professor Grahame Clark, in explaining Gordon Childe's 'What Happened in History', said; "The distinctive achievements of civilizations that differentiate them from barbarism are the invention of writing and the elaboration of exact sciences." (Grahame Clark, 2014, 74)

For some scholars, there is a difference between 'civilization' and 'Civilizations'. This is evident in " 'Civilization' in the singular implied propriety and elegance of manners considered as the result of one's upbringing and cultivation, whereas "civilization" in the plural could mean the specific way of life of a specific nation or nations at a specific time." (Bagby, Philip, 1963, 74-75)

As a conclusion, We have noticed through these definitions and explanations that there is a difference in defining the concept 'civilization' from the perspective of different scholars and thinkers. Civilization does not rely on a single unique explanation or vision that grants a specific meaning, because of the large number of researchers over the various periods of time.

Historically, although civilizations differ across time and place, they share common characteristics including political, economic, religious characteristics. In addition, they also share social systems, science, and technology. Thus, in order to distinguish between civilizations, we have to know their characteristics.

## **2- Characteristics of a Civilization**

Civilizations are developed thanks to transformations related with the combination of agricultural, economical, and technological advances. Many different people have given them many characteristics.

Many historians and scholars have identified numerous important characteristics of civilization. However, not all of them agree on the same characteristics. Some of them have emphasized on the way of life in terms of agriculture, economical system, settlement, government. Others have added other characteristics such as religion, education and other social characteristics.

V. Gordon Childe, a social scientist, distinguished a civilization from other one using a number of traits. He believes civilizations are recognized from different types of society by their sorts of livelihood, settlement patterns and types of government, economic systems, and education. (V. Gordon Childe, 1942)

The emergence of a civilizations exhibit some patterns of development including stable food supply, specialization of labor, an organized government, social classes, and a developed culture.

## **2.1 Agriculture**

Before the emergence of the first old civilizations, humans transitioned from the Paleolithic Age to the growth of civilizations and cities. Initially, they were hunters and gatherers. Then, during the Neolithic Revolution, they started to practice agriculture and domestication of animals. Agriculture resulted food surpluses because there was a growth in the production of extra food. Therefore, populations grew and increased. Finally, cities started to grow and civilizations began to flourish.

There are many major civilizations in the world today. Some of these civilizations were formed in river valleys such as Egypt on the Nile River, China on the Huang He River, India on the Indus River, and Mesopotamia on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. River valleys were essential in the rise of these civilizations. Rivers played a vital role in the formation of the civilization. They were used for irrigation of crops. They made a good soil with a lot of silt.

“Like Sumer, Harappa, and Egypt, the civilization of ancient China began as a collection of autonomous villages cultivating food crops along a major river system. Improvements in agricultural techniques led to a food surplus and the growth of an urban civilization characterized by more complex political and social institutions, as well as new forms of artistic and intellectual creativity.” (William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, 2010, 68)

In ancient times, since water was a source of food, people started to settle near bodies of water where they could practice farming in order to feed their large populations.

“Most scholars now agree that three elements of Childe’s Urban Revolution were of great importance in the development of all the world’s early, large food surpluses, diversified farming economies, and irrigation agriculture.” (Brian M Fagan, Chris Scarre, 2016, 31)

From this quotation, we can conclude that civilizations depended a lot on agriculture as a substance. Farming using intensive agricultural techniques such as irrigation resulted a surplus of food for human beings in order to survive.



Humans invented agriculture. This led to the growth of populations and enabled the emergence of glorious civilizations. Agriculture generally helped civilizations to prosper. In addition, it could lead to the development of government, especially systematizing irrigation and dependency on river system. For example, new inventions such as irrigation allowed expansive surpluses that marked the advancement of many civilizations.

“On the whole, government policy according to Morgan Munton (1971) depends largely on the level of agricultural development and its importance within the parameters of the national economy.” (Jasbir Singh, S. S. Dhillon, 2004, 191)

Moreover, an increase of food supply brings for any society the ability to practice trade through specialization of labor. “Surpluses of agricultural crops freed some people to work in occupations other than farming. Demand among ruling elites for luxury items encouraged the creation of new products. And as urban populations exported finished goods in exchange for raw materials from neighboring populations, organized trade grew substantially.” (William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, 2010, 9)

The development of farming, domesticating plants and animals led people to settle in one place. As populations grew, they formed cities, states, and empires in order to live in. we call this an urban focus. Their aim was to build places where they could practice their farming, agriculture all together. Cities are one of the main features of a civilization.

## **2.2 Settlement Patterns**

Civilizations had different settlement designs from different societies. According to Mare, settlement Pattern is “The way in which man disposed himself over the landscape in which he lived.” (E, Christopher Mare, 1999, 2)

E, Christopher Mare mentioned “Civilization is derived from the Latin root ‘civitas’, or ‘city;’ civilization is essentially the culture of cities – city life” (E, Christopher Mare, 1999, 2)

All through history, geographic characteristics of societies in ancient civilizations affected human settlement of these civilizations. For example, people settled in places where there is enough water to do their farming and produce

sufficient food in order to live. These places marked a growth in the number of populations and villages grew into towns, cities and finally advanced civilizations.

Fertile lands near river valleys can make enough food surpluses. Therefore, societies marked a growth of population and settlements. These settlements grew into cities. People constructed powerful well-situated large cities. They constructed them in locations with plentiful food production; available water sources because water is very important for the rise of populations.

The term Civilization means ‘living in cities’ (Tom Standage, 2005, 25). This means a city is a settlement pattern. Because people started living in cities, new patterns of living emerged. There were palaces constructed in the first city they built. The city where the palace existed was considered the capital of the empire.

“Cities became the centers for political, economic, social, cultural, and religious development. The cities that emerged were much larger than the Neolithic towns that preceded them.” (William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, 2010, 8)

Therefore, ancient civilizations were characterized by urban centers. They integrate urban areas or towns all through the area occupied by a civilization. These cities were united under centralized government i.e. a person or group of people who make and enforce laws in a society. Power was concentrated in a central location and in the hands of a relatively small group of people.

### **2.3 Political Structure**

Civilizations depended a lot on political and military structures. Some characteristics consist of the creation of political institutions and the development of governments in order to maintain security and to provide defense.

“An organized government bureaucracy arose to meet the administrative demands of the growing populations, and armies were organized to gain land and power and for defense.” (William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, 2010, 9)

In ancient civilizations governments were formed to maintain law and order between people. These governments were led by rulers, usually monarchs (kings and queens) who organized armies to protect the people and made laws to regulate their subjects’ lives. Strong well- organized governments grew in order to control and manage human actions. The first forms of governments in ancient civilizations were

theocracy or monarchy. While the government was established, they create a bureaucracy in order to assist the leader run the government.

Monarchy is “a state or government in which the supreme power is vested absolutely in a single person.” (Arnold James Cooley, 1861, 404). Thus, a monarchy is government ruled by king or queen. However, Theocracy is “divine government of a state.” (Arnold James Cooley, 1861, 768). This means that it is a government by religion ruled by priests. Besides theocracy is considered as the first form of governments because ancient civilizations believed that gods controlled natural occurrences.

“A state is politically organized society that is regarded by those who live in it as sovereign or politically independent and has leaders who control its social, political, legal, economic, and cultural activities. Two sorts of states appear to have been associated with early civilizations: city states and territorial states.” (Bruce G. Trigger, 2003, 92)

According to this quotation, ancient civilizations also consisted of city-states. Originally, city-states emerged in the Neolithic Age. It means “a city that with its surrounding territory forms an independent state.” (Angus Stevenson, 2010, 318). City-states included a town and the nearby territory.

Some government was based on ‘law by vengeance’ (i.e, revengeful actions). However, after the contribution of ‘Code of Hammurabi’ brought order and harmony among these governments. (Mary Stanton, Albert Hyma, 1976, 62)

In addition, social structure based on economic power was one of the characteristics of civilizations. Ancient societies had different social classes. The ruling class or the elite were normally concentrated in the cities and had control over the surplus. Under their rule, we find the free men. They are workers, laborers, artisans, and professionals. The slaves were the lowest class.

“While kings and an upper class of priests, political leaders, and warriors dominated, there also existed large groups of free common people (farmers, artisans, craftspeople) and, at the very bottom of the social hierarchy, a class of slaves.” (William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, 2010, 9)

## 2.4 Religion

Religion also became more organized. During the Old Stone Age, prehistoric people's religious beliefs centered around nature, animal spirits, and some idea of an afterlife. During the New Stone Age, farming peoples worshiped the many gods and goddesses who they believed had power over the rain, wind, and other forces of nature. Early city dwellers developed rituals founded on these earlier religious beliefs. As populations grew, common spiritual values became lasting religious traditions.

Religion played an enormous role in shaping and cultivating each civilization. Each civilization has a religious system, set of beliefs, and systems of worship, for instance, Islam, Hinduism, Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), Buddhism, and Judaism.

According to Huntington, religion is a central defining characteristic of civilizations (Samuel P. Huntington, 1993, 24). Therefore, there is no surprise that civilizations have frequently been identified by religions. For example "Islamic civilization" or a "Christian civilization" implying that each religion has its civilization. The term 'Islamic Civilization' is rooted from two concepts; namely 'Islam' and 'Civilization'. Therefore it means a civilization based on Islam which is also a religion of comprehensive way of life argued Qardawi (Tijani Ahmad Ashimi, 2016, 181).

Important religious features also characterized civilizations. Religion made people living together with a common identity. As it was mentioned above, people believed that gods controlled natural occurrences. Religion was the essential focus of their lives. This is evident in "Religion can be understood as a by-product of the human mind." (Malcolm Heath, Christopher T Green, Fabio Serranito, 2014, 21)

Besides, most of people in ancient societies were polytheistic. They had more than one god. They believed in many gods that were symbolized by objects such as: stones, sun... Their loyalty towards their gods made them giving the priests important positions in the state. Leaders likewise asserted that their energy depended on divine support, and some of them considered themselves as divine. In addition, some societies had some religious ceremonies. These ceremonies concerned human sacrifices. Other societies were monotheism, such as the Islamic civilization.

From the Islamic perspective,

“Polytheism was considered central to the perpetuation of the injustices, exploitation, and general absence of welfare... Monotheism is considered central to Islam’s emphasis on the rule of law and social cohesion.” (Halim Rane, 2010, 15)

“The gods were deemed crucial to the community’s success, and a professional priestly class, serving as stewards of the gods’ property, regulated relations with the gods.” (William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, 2010, 9)

## **2.5 Economic Structure**

Societies, in ancient civilizations, were based on economic systems. Most of the economy of ancient civilizations relied on agriculture and natural resources. As evidence, “Greece is a peninsula and a group of small islands. People on these islands had different products and natural resources to trade with each other.” (Melanie Ann Apel, 2004, 21)

In addition to agriculture, they practiced commerce. Many trading empires existed throughout history, for example, the West African Kingdoms. They were wealthy empires thanks to gold- salt trade. Another example is the Sumerians: “The economy of Sumerian city-states was primarily agricultural, but commerce and industry became important as well.” (Melanie Ann Apel, 2004, 21)

To cultivate more land and to produce extra crops, ancient people in larger villages built elaborate irrigation systems. The resulting food surpluses freed some villagers to pursue other jobs and to develop skills besides farming. Individuals who learned to become craftspeople created valuable new products, such as pottery, metal objects, and woven cloth. In turn, people who became traders profited from a broader range of goods to exchange such as: craftwork, grains, and many raw materials. Two important inventions such as: the wheel and the sail, also enabled traders to move more goods over longer distances. Additionally, the expansion of trading systems led to the creation of money and markets. This demonstrates a level of wealth within a civilization.

Depending on trade also marked the distributions of employment. People were able to work as traders because of food production sufficiency. Traders moved to distant places from town to town in order to sell their goods due to the spread of cities all over the land.

Well- Planned organized cities made commerce easy. Prosperous trade routes are one of the most important characteristic of civilizations. They made it easy for civilizations to trade with their neighbours thanks to the transportation technology. For instance, in order to develop their economy, they moved to industrial inventions: “All trade done in ancient Greece made a large shipbuilding industry necessary.” (Melanie Ann Apel, 2004, 21)

Moreover, a more complex and prosperous economy affected the social structure of village life. For example, building and operating large irrigation systems required the labor of many people. As other special groups of workers formed, social classes with varying wealth, power, and influence began to emerge. A system of social classes would become more clearly defined as cities grew.

The increased wealth of urban societies brought about job specialization. As people specialized, social classes developed. Rulers, nobles, warriors, and priests made up the highest social and economic class. In the middle were traders and merchants. Artisans and farmers formed the lower classes. In many societies, slaves were at the very bottom of the class system.

The social structure was based on the economic power. For instance, the upper class was for those wealthy people. The middle class was for soldiers, artisans and merchants. In addition, of course the lower class was reserved for the poor people and slaves.

## **2.6 Technology/ Inventions and Contributions**

New tools and techniques are always needed to solve problems that emerge when large groups of people live together. Civilizations depended on technology in various aspects of life, saving a lot of time and effort. Technology gave them the ability of manufacturing and local production.

All civilizations strived for development and progress. As a result, they developed new forms of technology and invented many things. For example, agriculturally, over the centuries, people settled in stable communities that were based on agriculture. Domesticated animals became more common. The invention of new tools—hoes, sickles, and plow sticks—made the task of farming easier. Additionally they grew next to water sources .This marked new technologies for farming and irrigation to produce food surpluses. Systems of irrigation were developed and new

technological tools were used in farming. Obviously, the shift to agriculture coincided with advances in stone tool technology, so this period is called the Neolithic Age (from the Greek, “new stone”). Productive animals, such as sheep and goats, were domesticated, as were food crops including wheat and barley. This permitted their harvests to be produced in great numbers.

“Employing flood management and irrigation systems, the peoples of the region (Mesopotamia) established civilizations based on agriculture. these civilizations developed writing, law codes, and economic specialization.” (William J. Duiker, Jackson J. Spielvogel, 2010, 11)

Furthermore, in order to keep records, writing systems were developed. Writing also led to the development of government and trade, in terms of taxes, bills, laws...etc. The first writing system was cuneiform which was developed by the Sumerians.

The development of writing was so useful during ancient times. “The Second and more important function of writing was one of control... The tablet registered 1) the items received and their quantity,2) the name of the donor and 3) the date of the delivery.” (Denise Schmandt- Besserat, 1992, 172). In addition, Writing is very important because it allows different civilizations to communicate without traveling long distances.

Cuneiform: From pictograph to Assyrian				
original pictograph	pictograph in position of later cuneiform	early Babylonian	Assyrian	original or derived meaning
				bird
				fish
				donkey
				ox
				sun, day
				grain
				orchard
				to plow, to till
				boomerang, to throw, to throw down
				to stand, to go

Courtesy of the Oriental Institute, the University of Chicago.

**Fig1.1** The development of writing (Jaan Puhvel, 2017)

Politically, there were some important contributions made by ancient civilizations. Evidently, “Code of Hammurabi, King Hammurabi’s most valuable contribution to world history is the set of laws he wrote.... this system of law brought order and unity to the old Babylonian kingdom.” (Mary Stanton, Albert Hyma, 1976, 62)

Ancient civilizations were famous of their metallurgy. Metallurgy is very important because it allows for more technological innovations. The use of iron was the main technological improvement. In the military field, they succeeded to invent and make iron weapons. Composite bow was developed and people were recruited in army. In many civilizations, metallurgy was an important advancement.

These advances prove that a civilization not only developed, but also provided contribution to surrounding area and future generations. All civilizations included a highly developed culture including the arts. Arts include creative forms of expression such as painting, architecture, literature and music.



## **2.7 Architecture**

Architecture is the ability of a society to design and build large structures. Many inventions and technologies characterized civilizations. Besides, important artistic movement was another trait of some civilizations. People had significant artistic and intellectual activities, for example monumental architectural structures. Infrastructures are structures created by a government for the good of the common people, such as schools, roads, or parks.

“The most ancient architecture in the world is found on the edge of the vast solitude of the desert; there, on a plateau of rock, stands the Great Pyramid, a monument not only the most majestic, but also the most perfectly constructed, that man has ever achieved.” (A. Bothwell Gosse, 1983, 64)

In order to conserve their heritage, civilizations built large memorials and structures. Besides, ancient civilizations marked the age of well-planned and built structures. There were many architectural designs. Evidently, the Pyramids and temples are examples of immense architecture. Likewise, arts were a way that societies used to express its values and beliefs in a creative way such as painting, dancing, or playing music.

Finally, we can conclude that civilization is an advance level of development characterized by an advanced social development, economic progress, good political organization, scientific and technological development in any society. Successful civilizations then flourish and grow, becoming larger and larger in an accelerating manner.

## **3- Evolution and the Rise of Civilizations**

All civilizations start small, establishing their origins with the creation of state systems for maintaining the elite. Civilizations then reach a limiting maximum extent, perhaps managing to hold a degree of stability for a period of time.

As civilizations developed, they continued to change over time. Some changes strengthened them and led to growth and expansion. As people started to develop more complex ways of life, and as cities began to increase in size and complexity, a new type of society emerged. These societies are known as civilizations. A civilization is a nation or people that share a common culture, common laws, a

common economy, and typically a common faith or religion. Therefore, the development of cities gave rise to the civilizations.

As cities grew, the needs of the people also grew and required leadership to rule and oversee meeting those needs. These needs included projects that required planning and organization, such as building irrigation systems. Governments were also formed to create laws and a justice system, gather taxes, and organize defense.

Geographic factors contribute a lot in the rise of civilizations. Sources of Fresh Water provide rich soil for farming. Advances in farming i.e. new methods to increase production: irrigation systems and changing economies i.e. beginning of specialization in other jobs, caused villages to grow in size and complexity, and the first cities began to appear. Cities began to emerge from farming villages. This emergence marked the beginning of civilizations.

Technological contributions of some societies also have a big role in the rise of a civilization. For instance, after the Sumerians' development of cuneiform, humankind moved from prehistory into the historical age.

Generally, conquest is considered as indignation. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that despite destructing some aspects of a civilization, conquest can play to some extent in the development and the growth of a civilization. Each conquering invader adapted aspects of its culture. Thus, the colonizer civilization continued to influence life in the colonized society.

As conclusion, there are many main factors that help in the evolution of civilizations and to the development of these civilizations.

## **Conclusion**

Civilizations are dynamic. They rise and fall. They divide and merge. Understanding the meaning of the word 'civilization' helps in understanding its uses, its implication in historical records. The term is used in many books of different fields, such as history, philosophy, sociology, literature, politics, geography, science and so on.

Scholars did not agree on the same definition of 'civilization as a concept. However, there are many different explanations of this term from different perspectives.

Different civilizations existed throughout history. As a result, each civilization had its own characteristics depending on its geography, government, economy, art, and technology.

**Chapter two: Trade  
as a Factor Behind  
the Rise of the West  
African  
Civilizations**

## Introduction

Since old times, man attempted numerous actions in the establishment of human civilizations across various parts of the world to leave its everlasting imprints in the history record. There are many works that give an unlimited history of Africa from earliest prehistory to the present day – using the social, political, and financial lenses of Africa as instruments to enlighten the world about Africans.

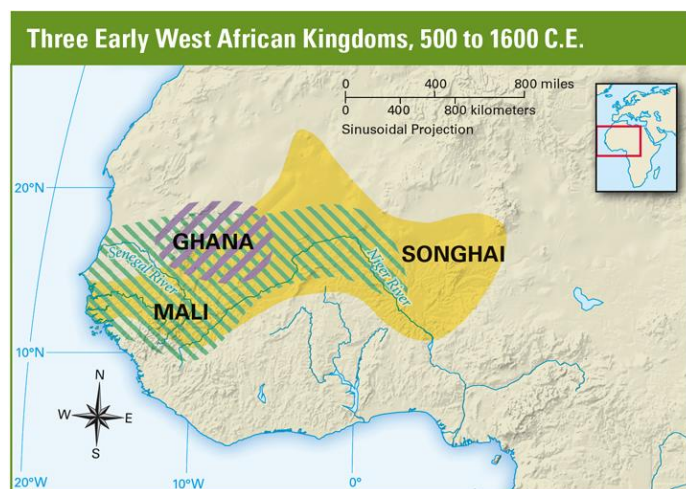
The earliest African civilizations in West Africa were developed at a time during the Dark Age that most of Europe was experiencing. For example, West Africans could use iron to make tools for warfare and agriculture.

In this chapter, I tried to focus and explain the main factors behind the rise of West African Civilizations. I dealt with the agricultural, economic and political factors that led to the growth of the West African Kingdoms in particular and the rise of West African Civilizations in general.

### 1. Factors behind the Rise of the West African Civilisations

There were numerous great civilizations that existed in the West African history. West Africa is home to many of Africa's oldest kingdoms. Rivalry for wealth and looking for independence from more powerful kingdoms created the West African societies. These empires played a significant role in the development of trade and economic growth of the region.

Scholars asserted that there were many main factors that led to the rise of these civilizations. West Africa has enjoyed many important factors that led to the birth of a very important civilization and their prosperity for centuries.



**Fig. 2.1.:** The Ancient West African kingdoms. ( Elliott Hanson, 2017)

## **1.1.Riches of West African kingdoms**

Africa is the second- largest continent in the world. It has everything from sandy deserts to flourishing tropical rain forests. West African civilizations demonstrate the richness of the African region. Geography, agriculture, an organized government led by strong rulers, overall, shaped the way to the rise of the famous powerful West African civilizations.

### **1.1.1. Geography:**

Historians and archeologists study many factors to explain where people choose to settle Natural features. For example, geographic position and rivers are so important to explain the growth of populations in different societies.

The geographical location of Africa greatly influenced the growth of three powerful West African kingdoms that emerged during Europe's "Dark Ages". Evidently, "The West African Savanna was in the past a zone that offered opportunities as well as constraints to the people who lived there. It is probably not too great an exaggeration to say that this was an optimal zone." (Graham Connah, 2001, 109)

West Africa is bordered from the north by the Sahara, from the west and south the Atlantic Ocean, and from the east the mountains of present day Cameroon. It includes the desert and the Savannah.

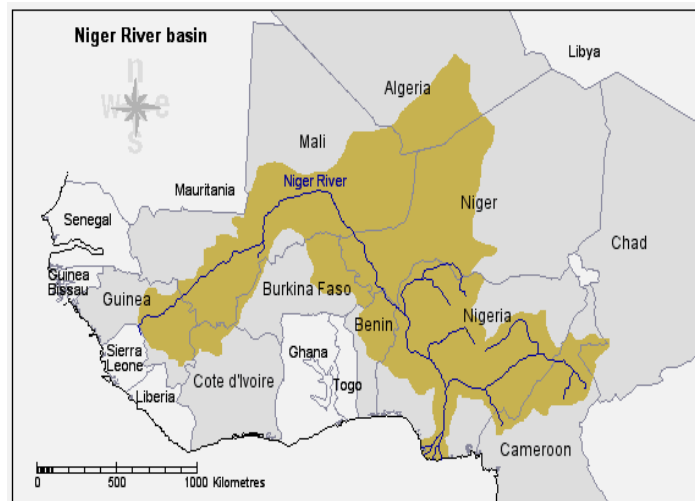
Africa was probably best known in the world for its vast Savanna that involves some animals such as birds, insects, mammals, reptiles, gazelles, jackals, cheetahs, zebra the most well known the lion. The savanna is called the tropical grasslands. It is an important incidence in Africa as a whole. The largest savanna is located in Africa. Nearly half of the continent of Africa is covered with savanna grasslands.

Clearly, "The largest geographical phenomenon is the Savannah, extensive grassland with tall grass, sometimes dotted with small wooded areas and trees. This occupies close to half the land area of Africa." (Magbaily Fyle, 1999, 8)

The empire of Ghana was located in West Africa in what is today the countries of Mauritania, Senegal, and Mali. It is mostly savanna grasslands "The land in northern Ghana is a savanna that's a grassy plain." (Lyn Larson, 2011, 6).

Besides, the West African economy was greatly impacted by the geographic position of its kingdoms importantly the Savanna. Evidently, “These geographic variations helped to largely determine the economic systems that developed in a number of areas.” (Magbaily Fyle, 1999, 8)

Sources of water are also important factor in the rise of any civilization. The Niger River is the third longest river in Africa, after the Nile and the Congo. It covers 7.5% of the continent. It extends over 10 countries. It is 2,600 miles long. It has also an importance in the rise of West African societies. The period between the 13th and 16th century, the Niger valley was the heartland of the Mali and Songhai empires. It helped in making nearby land fertile and provided fish for eating.



**Fig.2.2.** The Niger River Basin (Susan M. Pojer, 2014)

Geography was a major factor in the development of West African societies. In addition, settled societies grew south of the Sahara, where the land permitted farming. Geography, as a result, influenced the agriculture of West African societies.

### **1.1.2. Agriculture**

Scholars also worked to find out how agriculture and farming affected the growth of cities, societies, and civilizations in West Africa. Eventually, agricultural production played a role in the formation of the state. Agriculture also helped in supporting labor specialization. It led also to the formation of urban cities. “Ghana’s economy was based on agriculture and mining and its chief exports are gold and cocoa.” (Patricia Levy, 2010, 44)

Farmers in the rain forest kingdoms enjoyed many natural advantages, including fertile soil and a warm, wet climate. This helped them producing a surplus, or extra supply, of food. Food surpluses supported rulers as well as the growth of population. The number of population grew and the states were formed expanded their territory. In 800 C.E, Ghana became an empire.

“Archaeological excavations in the Sahel have revealed that the Mande people who lived there had organized themselves into small settlements by about 1000 B.C.E. By about 600 B.C.E. There were large villages, and from 400 to 900 C.E. urban centers appeared in several areas of the Sahel. One of these was a place now called Kumbi Saleh, which some archaeologists believe was the capital of the Soninke Empire of Ghana.” (Davide Conrad, 2005, 6)

Agriculture was a main factor in the growth of populations. Evidently, “There was enough grass for pasturing cattle, sheep, and goats, and fertile soil for farmers to cultivate grains such as millet, sorghum, and fonio (a type of millet). In those times, it was possible to produce enough of a food surplus to support urban populations.” (Davide Conrad, 2005, 6)

West African civilizations depended a lot on agriculture as an essence. It resulted surplus of food for people in order to survive. Items left by earlier cultures provide helpful evidences for scholars to understand the past of West African societies. For example, iron-farming tools show that agricultural methods were improved in West Africa. Farming using intensive agricultural techniques also has an important role the growth of populations and the emergence of glorious civilizations. Iron tools allowed farmers to grow food more efficiently. Iron working reached West Africa through traders who crossed the Sahara. However some scholars think that ironworking developed independently among people in the north of West Africa.

Water was a source of food too. People started to settle near bodies of water where West African civilizations could grow up along the Niger River, such as Mali, in order to practice farming and to feed their populations. Besides, Ghana (in present-day parts of Mauritania and Mali) was related with the Soninke people who lived in the area that was located between the Niger and Senegal rivers:



“This Great Ghana Empire was situated north of the upper Niger and Senegal valleys, in an area surrounded by countries today known as Guinea, Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania.” (Christiana Oware Knudsen, 2016, 19)

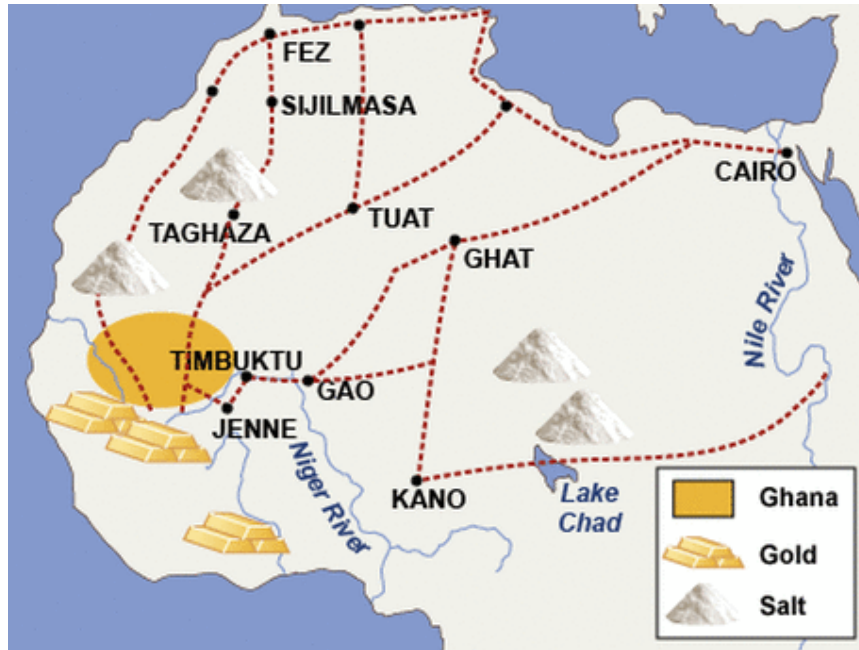
Like Ghana, Mali was situated along the upper Niger River. The area was fertile. This helped Mali to evolve and prosper.

### **1.1.3. Natural Resources**

Large communities were developed near important natural resources, such as gold, salt, ivory and iron. These empires included Ghana, Mali and Songhai. The kingdoms flourished in West Africa in the Sahel, the savanna region just south of the Sahara. They were rich in gold. They traded for it.

The main source of wealth for the Empire of Ghana was the mining of iron and gold. Iron was used to produce strong weapons and tools that made the empire strong. In addition, Gold was used to trade with other nations for needed resources like animals, tools, and cloth.

Salt was a natural resource in Mali. People used salt to stay healthy and for preserving foods. Salt was needed to survive in the Sahara Desert. In hot weather, people lose the salt in their bodies through sweating. They needed to get salt back into their bodies so this is why they traded for it. Salt was found in the Sahara Desert. Much of the salt was mined in the Sahara Desert at the city of Taghaza where slaves were used to mine salt. Salt was sometimes used as money and was as valuable as gold.



**Fig. 4 :** Trade patterns(Carol Varghese, 2016)

Around 300 AD., Ghana emerged as a state. It was rich by its natural resources. Evidently: “The region I full of natural mineral resources, such as gold, diamonds, and manganese, and other resources including spices, ivory, timber and many more. It has especially beautiful tropical vegetation, an extraordinary variety of wild animal and bird species, and rivers and lakes. Because of the region’s natural wealth, there were constant migration into the area.” (Christiana Oware Knudsen, 2016, 21)

It was rich in both iron and gold. It was one of the richest gold- producing areas of all of Africa. As it was quoted by Conrad “Al-Hasan Ibn Ahmad al-Hamdani declared that the richest gold mine on earth was in Ghana. For Arab geographers such as al- Hamdani, Ghana was a mysterious place of darkness beyond the sources of “the Nile” where there were “waters that make the gold grow” (Davide Conrad, 2005, 11)

Finally, the richness of West African societies influenced greatly the rise of powerful kingdoms in the area. The economy of these civilizations was based mainly on this richness of Africa in general and West Africa in particular.

## **1.2.Economic Aspects of West African Empires**

The remarkable empires of West Africa were prosperous because of a useful infrastructure. They have depended on an effective economic system to strengthen their development. Their economy was based mainly on trade.

Ghana, Mali, and Songhai had particular things in common that helped them to flourish and to be great and prospering communities. They gained their wealth from trade. It played a key role in the growth of West African societies.

Most scholars associate the rise and the establishment of civilizations with a number of conditions. Many main factors led to the rise of civilizations. In the case of West African civilizations, it is generally asserted that the establishment of these civilizations was due to trade. In addition, the expansion of trade benefited West African kingdoms to prosper and flourish.

The Empires grew rich from the trans-Saharan trade in gold and salt. This trade produced an increasing surplus, allowing for larger urban centers. It also encouraged territorial expansion to gain control over the lucrative trade routes.

### **1.2.1. Gold –Salt Trade**

Ghana, Mali, and Songhai were located between areas of gold and salt production. They traded their gold for salt from the Muslim empires to the North. The empires were rich in gold, ivory, and many other things that were the most expensive in the world market. Trade played a key role in the growth of kingdoms and empires in West Africa. As it was mentioned: “Control of these (gold, ivory) meant control of long- distance overseas trade and control of such trade provided prestige and wealth.” (Graham Connah, 2001, 293)

Besides, the kingdoms played an important role in the development of trade and economic growth of the region. For instance, it was affirmed also that before Ghana became a state, Soninke people were involved in extensive systems of trade:

"During the Middle Ages—when most of the people of Europe suffered disease, fear, ignorance, and oppression—the Soninke people of the Empire of Ghana enjoyed a world that was rich in culture and famous as a center of learning and trade" ( Emmanuel Kwesi Boon, 2009, 241)

Traders, using camel caravans, traded salt and cloth from North Africa and the Sahara for gold and ivory from West Africa. The trade led to the growth of cities in western Africa. Eventually, rulers of these cities began to build empires. In the Middle Ages, these African empires were bigger than most European kingdoms in wealth and size. The first empire to develop was Ghana. Trade was a vital factor in the rise of Ghana. Gold trade was the chief responsible for the rise of Ghana as a centralized

powerful kingdom. Evidently, “Ghana’s power and influence were built on trade—especially trade in gold.” (Patricia Ann Lynch, 2010, 11)

Some sources estimate that until about 1350, at least two-thirds of the world’s supply of gold came from West Africa. For example, Mali represented the supply of approximately half of the world’s gold.

“There were three principal gold fields below the Sahara. One of the main ones, which had also been a source for ancient Ghana, was at Bambuk, between the Sénégal and Falémé Rivers. Another, also formerly controlled by Ghana, was at Buré above the Upper Niger in what is now northeast Guinea. The third was in Akan territory near the forest in the modern republics of Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. Mali drew on all three gold fields for the trans-Saharan trade in precious metal, for which merchants from North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe competed.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 43)

West Africans traded in gold. This made of them rich and wealthy. Therefore, others wanted to trade with them. This trade connected cities from West Africa with the other ones. For example, Timbuktu was connected to Cairo in Egypt, and Kush in the North. The trade also extended across the Mediterranean Sea to Italy.

Commerce inside the region and outside it brought prosperity and richness. Evidently, “All the goods that were traded in the regional markets of the Ghana Empire from the 10th to the 12th centuries continued to generate revenue in the markets of Mali from the 13th to the 15th centuries. The main difference was that at the height of Mali’s power it controlled far more territory than Ghana ever did, so it had more resources to exploit.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 40)

Besides, “By the mid-14th century, when Mali was at its highest point of imperial dominance, the trans-Saharan trade had greatly increased in volume. Because of Mansa Musa’s extravagant pilgrimage and the resulting publicity in Cairo, Mali became better known in North Africa and the Middle East, and even Europe.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 41)

Societies in West Africa traded the goods that they produce to obtain goods they lack or need. Both gold and salt were vital traded goods in Africa. Salt and Gold were mined and then loaded on camel caravans, then carried to the market towns of the savanna. They were the most valuable goods to cross the Sahara.

Although West African Region was rich in Gold, they needed Salt for its importance. Salt was also necessary to trade for it, especially the case of the west African kingdoms. They depended on it. Salt (sodium chloride, NaCl) is essential to human metabolism. In hot climates such as West African climate, the body particularly needs salt to replace what is lost through evaporation (sweat) and excretion (urine). People such as the nomadic herders of the savanna, whose diet is based on meat and milk, which naturally contain salt, can survive without additional salt intake. However, those who rely mostly on grains and vegetables, such as the farmers, must supplement their diet with added salt. Traditional West African societies still live without refrigeration, as they have for thousands of years, so salt is also essential for drying and preserving fish and meat.

In addition to the Gold-Salt trade, historians have pointed to a second important factor in the development of these West African Kingdoms. This was the use of iron. The use of iron to make tools and weapons helped some people to expand their control over neighboring people. These changes called for new forms of social organization, contributing to the development of centralized, powerful empires. Historians also say that the use of the horse and camel, along with iron, were important factors in how rulers were able to incorporate small farmers and herders into their empires.

### **1.2.2. Trade Routes and Trading Posts**

The vast Sahara prevented West Africans from moving into North Africa. For thousands of years, the Sahara kept North Africa isolated from the rest of the continent. Then, about 400 B.C., North African people known as the Berbers found a way to cross the Sahara to West Africa, and the trade began.

“The trade seems to have originated not with the Arabs, but with the Berber peoples of the desert. The most powerful of these were the Sanhaja, who lived in the Sahara and traded with the Soninke to the south of them. The Soninke’s early involvement with the traders of the Sahara is one reason Ghana emerged as the first great power of the medieval Sahel. The other main reason is that Ghana controlled the sources of gold.” (Davide Conrad, 2005, 23)

For hundreds of years, the Berbers transported goods on horses and donkeys, which often died in the hot Sahara. When the Romans conquered North Africa, they introduced camels from central Asia. Camels revolutionized the trade. Their broad feet did not sink in the sand, and their humps stored fat for food. In addition, they could travel many days without water.

“The most important development in the Sahel region, south of the Sahara, was the use of the camel as a means of transport. Under the influence of Islamic peoples, northern and western Africans began to use camels to transport goods across the Sahara around A.D. 750.” (Patricia Ann Lynch, 2010,11)

Obviously, camel caravans carried and transported goods traded between West African societies and others. Long caravans of camels were used to transport goods across the Sahara Desert. “The export trade in gold, slaves, ivory, civet, and gum Arabic moved over trans- Saharan Caravan route from the Niger River valley to North Africa for almost a thousand years” ( Amy McKenna, 2011, 153)



**Fig.5:** Saharan Gold- Salt trade camel caravans. (Chris Rainier, 1996)

African empires grew rich from trading gold and salt. West African people developed their own gold mining techniques and started to trade with others from other regions. For instance, Ghana rose to power thanks to trade. It was located where several trade routes came together.

There were many kingdoms along the west coast of Africa. These kingdoms grew strong by controlling the trade. One of the most famous was the ancient kingdom of Ghana. Ghana was located to control the trans-Saharan trade between

North Africa and the southern forests of West Africa. This is because Ghana handled the trade between traders to the north and traders to the south. The north had salt mines. The south had gold. Ghana was in the middle, and had a very strong army. Its advantageous setting facilitated the Soninke people to function as intermediates. Ghana became a kingdom and the rulers were getting rich by taxing the trade. The ideal position of Ghana helped it to be a trading centre. It was bordered to the North by the immense Sahara, the source of Salt.



**Fig.6:** Trade Routes (Chimmulak, 2012)

Trade routes reached across the Sahara into North Africa and down the Niger River to kingdoms in the rain forest. Some extended all the way to Africa's east coast. In gold-salt trade, trade routes existed connecting the West African kingdoms and the Eastern Saharan Muslim civilizations. Strong kings created strong kingdoms all over West Africa by gaining control of the advantageous trade routes. The king charged the traders a tax. People had to pay a tax to enter Ghana, and a tax to leave Ghana. Ghana's army kept the trade routes protected from bandits.

This system worked for everyone. Some traders did not want to pay the tax. They tried to negotiate directly with the miners to the north and south. Nevertheless, the miners would not work with them. They knew the value Ghana's army offered. They did not trust the new traders. The traders had no choice but to trade through Ghana and pay the tax. This tax helped to make Ghana even richer than it was already.

Mali as well dominated trade routes spreading over the Sahara. Mali emerged as a major kingdom in 1235. It was located south of Ghana. The Kingdom became wealthy because of controlling trans-Saharan trade and trade routes as well. This helped Mali to obtain power.

West African region was known by its trading posts where these caravans met. There were some cities that played a key role in the development of the trans-Saharan trade. They were staging trading spots. For example, Timbuktu, Djenné, Niani and Gao. Timbuktu was Mali's important central spots on trade routes. Evidently,

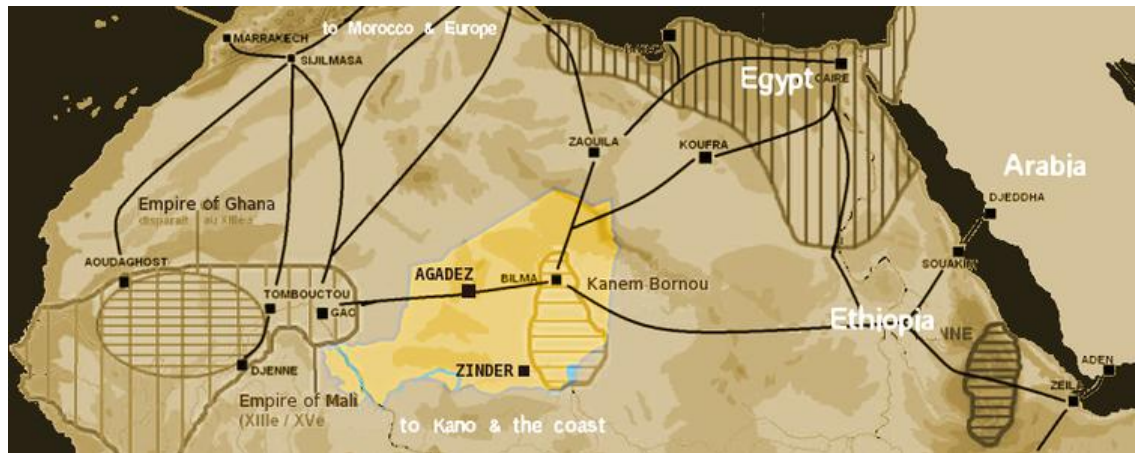
“The third most important city of the Niger bend was Jenne, which was roughly 200 miles southwest (upriver) of Timbuktu. For several centuries, during the golden age of the Mali Empire and into the period of Songhay expansion, Jenne was the key city in the Inland Niger Delta.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 54)

The ancient city of Timbuktu, once a port on the Niger River, was a center of commerce and trade for the region. Evidently, “In the days of the Mali and Songhai Empires, Timbuktu was an important market city for the trans-Saharan trade and a center of Islamic scholarship.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 41)

“Between 750 and 950, while Ancient Ghana was prospering as “the land of gold” far to the west, the trading center at Gao became an increasingly important southern terminus for trade across the Sahara Desert.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 50)

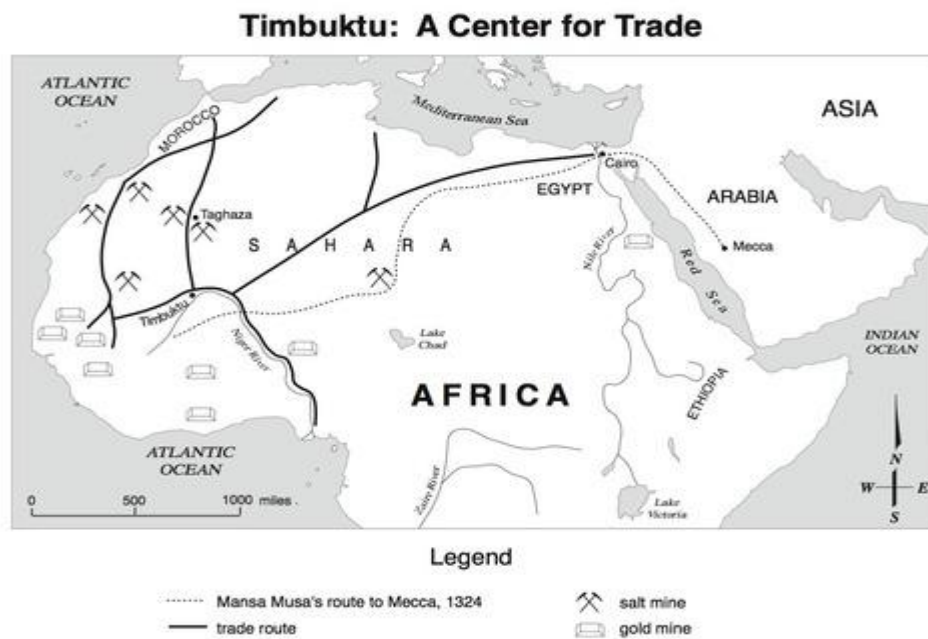
Moreover, the Trans-Saharan trade extended to the outside borders of Africa. The powerful trading empires became afterward part of the global trade network. The forest belt in West Africa was linked To Europe and Asia.





**Fig.7:** Trade Routes Network (T L Miles, 2017)

It was under Mali that the great cities of the Niger, including Gao and Djenné, prospered, in addition to Timbuktu. It became well-known across Europe for its great wealth.



**Fig. 8:** Timbuktu (a center for trade) (Kathleen Casson, 2008)

### 1.2.3. Imports and Exports

West African Kingdoms traded in gold that existed in the region. People of West Africa had independently developed their own gold mining techniques and began trading with people of other regions of Africa and later Europe as well. Gold was passed through two stages: “After the procedure of extraction and manufacturing, gold was exported northwards” (Davidson, 1965, 194-195).

Societies in Wet Africa traded the goods that they produce to obtain goods they lack or need. Mainly, gold was the most important product to be exported for other commodities. Evidently, “Ivory, slaves, salt, copper, and animal hides continued to be important in trans-Saharan trade, but gold was the most important commodity.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 42)

Arab and Berber traders crossed the desert with camel caravans loaded down with salt. They also carried cloth, weapons, and manufactured goods from ports on the Mediterranean. After a long journey, they reached the market towns of the savanna. Meanwhile, African traders brought gold north from the forest regions. Merchants met in trading cities, where they exchanged goods under the watchful eye of the king’s tax collector.

By the beginning of the 14th century, Mali was the source of almost half the World’s gold exported from mines in Bambuk, Boure and Galam. Besides, “In the Mali Empire ivory was one of the most profitable exports, along with gold, salt, and slaves.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 42). In addition, the second great element of exchange in Mali was salt. Salt was as valuable as gold in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Camel caravans transported goods from one town to the next, exchanging southern forest goods such as Kola nuts, gold, ivory, wood, smoked and salted fish, cloth, and copper. Exports were raw materials (such as gold, cotton, crude oil, or minerals) and imports were manufactured goods (such as machinery, electrical equipment, or textiles).

What eventually raised the Soninke kingdom to the level of an empire was its control of both regional trade and trade across the Sahara Desert. The regional trade involved the exchange of salt, copper, and dates from the Sahara. Products from the savanna areas included slaves, livestock, iron tools, iron weapons and utensils, animal hides, leather goods such as sandals, cushions, and bags, locally woven and dyed cloth, clay pottery, woven grass products such as baskets and sleeping mats, medicinal herbs, and foods such as dried fish, rice, various grains, spices, honey, and fruit. From farther south, nearer the forest, came gold and kola nuts. (Conrad, 2010, 30)

West African people traded cotton, ivory, metal goods and gold to the north in exchange for horses, textiles and other goods. Gold, salt, copper, and kola nuts were

important in Mali's wealth. After Sunjata, it became the world's largest producer and importer of gold.

“Stories of Mali's wealth drew increasing numbers of North Africans to trading ventures across the Sahara. In the decades following Mansa Musa's pilgrimage, Egyptian traders were regular visitors to Mali, and Malian citizens in commercial centers like Walata were dressing in clothes imported from Egypt. Mansa Musa exchanged diplomatic embassies with the sultan of Morocco, which added new stimulus to trade with the Maghrib (Northwest Africa).” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 42)

Copper was also a valued commodity in Mali. Copper was traded in pieces. It was mined from Takedda in the north and traded in the south for gold. Contemporary sources claim 60 copper pieces traded for 100 dinars of gold.

Societies in Wet Africa traded the goods that they produce to obtain goods they lack or need. Both gold and salt were vital traded goods in Africa, in addition to some other products they needed in their daily lives.

#### **1.2.4. Taxation**

After mining the gold, kings controlled the caravans used to transport it. Kings of Ghana, for instance, were able to force the gold exporters from the south and the gold importers from the north to meet at their city and do business there.

For traders to meet, they had to pass through Ghana. Passage required a fee—a tax paid to Ghana's rulers. These taxes made Ghana rich. “In the gold coast, the price control is very extensive and detailed.” (P. T. Bauer, 1954, 174).

Information about the economy of Ghana comes from Al Bakri, an Andalusian Muslim geographer and historian. Al-Bakri noted that merchants had to pay a one gold dinar tax on imports of salt, and two on exports of salt. Rulers gained their wealth from trade and taxation. Evidently, “Tribute from newly subordinated kings and chiefs, and tariffs from newly controlled trade routes, enriched the government treasury.”(David C. Conrad, 2005, 40)

The leaders of the kingdoms protected the trading caravans for a price by taxing the goods that traders carried. Kings forced traders to pay taxes. Each trader entered the kingdom had to pay a special tax on the products he carried. As well, he had to pay another tax on products he carried with him from the kingdom. For

instance, in Mali, an ounce of Gold or salt was taxed. Merchants had to pay a one gold dinar tax on imports of salt, and two on exports of salt.

Merchants met in trading cities, where they exchanged goods under the observant eye of the king's tax collector. Ghana had become an empire. Because Ghana's king controlled trade and commanded a large army, he could demand taxes and gifts from the chiefs of surrounding lands. As long as the chiefs made their payments, the king left them in peace to rule their own people. In his royal palace, the king stored gold nuggets and slabs of salt (collected as taxes).

In Songhai, tax was imposed onto secondary chiefdoms and provinces to ensure the dominance of Songhai, and in return, these provinces were given almost complete independence. When a situation became unstable. Songhai rulers only intervened in the affairs of these neighboring states

Under the rule of Askia Muhammad, Songhai witnessed an increased centralization. He encouraged learning in Timbuktu by rewarding its professors with larger pensions as an motivation. He also established an order of priority and etiquette and was noted as a noble man who gave back charity to the poor. Under his policies, Muhammad brought much stability to Songhai.

Gold was mined in Bambuk, Boure, and Glam. Mali consisted of Sahelian and Saharan towns. In these places, trading centers existed for the various West African goods. Besides, there were staging posts for the long- distance caravans. For instance, in Taghaza Salt was exchanged, in Takedda copper was bartered.

### **1.3.Role of the Kingship**

West Africa witnessed three great empires under the rule of powerful kings. The kingship had an important role in the rise and progress of those kingdoms. Kings formed their empires through invasions.

“An empire is formed when one kingdom becomes more powerful than its neighbors. The more powerful king forms an empire by conquering his weaker rivals and adding their lands and commercial revenues to his domain.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 11)

The Ghana empire rose because the kings were able to make it the center of a vast trade empire. They could establish themselves at the crossroads of the gold trade.

The king of Ghana was very smart. He wanted to protect his people from the foreigners. He was concerned about invasion because they were strangers, no one knew about their honesty.

The king charged these new traders a tax. People had to pay a tax to enter Ghana, and a tax to leave Ghana. Ghana's army kept the trade routes protected from bandits. This system worked for everyone. Some traders did not want to pay the tax. They tried to negotiate directly with the miners to the north and south. But the miners would not work with them. They knew the value Ghana's army offered. They did not trust the new traders. The traders had no choice but to trade through Ghana and pay the tax. This tax helped to make Ghana even richer than she was already.

Moreover, he set up a system of silent barter. The traders from the camel trains never saw the people with whom they were trading. The west coast Africans left gold at a prearranged spot. The camel train traders took the gold and left goods in payment. If they did not leave enough well in payment, all trade stopped. So the camel traders often left more than they needed to, to make sure trade would continue. It was a very clever system. This solved the problem of speaking different languages and risking working with people they did not know or trust.

Besides, the king of Ghana set up an entire city for the foreign traders, a place to eat, sleep, relax, and worship in their own way. He did not want these strange traders to disrupt life for his people. This city was built about 6 miles away from the real city. This system worked very well in developing a powerful rich kingdom in particular and a civilization in general.

In Mali, Sundiata succeeded in developing the empire both economically and socially. Thanks to him, Mali dominated Ghana's trade Networks. It increased also its access to Ghana's rich gold mines. As a result, Succeeding in building such wealth allowed him to build the kingdoms' major cities.

“According to oral tradition, the Sahelian kingdom of Mali was founded by the legendary hero Sundiata (also called Son-Jara Keita, Sundjata Keoto, or Sunjata Kayta). Many myths are told about Sundiata's exploits.” (Patricia Ann Lynch, 2010, 11)

Other kings also could expand power and wealth of the Mali Empire. Mansa Musa was one of the greatest rulers in Mali. During his reign, Mali reached its height

of wealth and power. There was a kind of expansion in borders, growth of trade networks. Consequently, Mali became a wealthiest empire in the world. “Al-Umari was told that Musa had “conquered 24 cities, each with its surrounding district with villages and estates” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 36)

As a result, Mali’s successes depended much more on their rulers. “Through Sundiata and his successors, Mali became West Africa’s wealthiest trading empire.” (Patricia Ann Lynch, 2010, 120)

Thanks to its ruler, Mali added many important trade centers such as Timbuktu, Djenne, and Gao to its territory. Mansa Musa made Timbuktu a powerful city of trade and learning. Moreover, thanks to him, trade extended to the outside borders of Mali. “Stories of Mali’s wealth drew increasing numbers of North Africans to trading ventures across the Sahara. In the decades following Mansa Musa’s pilgrimage, Egyptian traders were regular visitors to Mali, and Malian citizens in commercial centers like Walata were dressing in clothes imported from Egypt.” (David C. Conrad, 2005, 41)

During Mansa Musa kingship, Mali marked, in addition to the expansion in trade, some advances in architecture, organized government, emphasis on education,. These made of the king the most successful ruler.

Trade existed throughout Songhai too, due to the standing army stationed in the provinces. Because of the independency of gold fields, the merchants formed partnerships with the empire to protect them and the port cities. It was a very strong trading kingdom, known for its production of useful craft.

The powerful kingdoms of West Africa did not rely only on local trade. By the time, Ghana became an important power. Trans- Saharan trade brought new wealth to west Africa from other regions. Control of trade was also a key to the power of Mali. Songhai also relied on trade with distant lands.

Several kingdoms and empires developed in West Africa. Rulers did their best in order to hold their kingdoms and empires together. Africans had to create their own governments under the rule of their strong intelligent leaders.

## **Conclusion**

With each kingdom, trade along the trans-Saharan network intensified for it was a critical factor supporting the expansion, power and establishment of each kingdom. Therefore, Many West African trading empires existed throughout West African history. The rise of West African Civilizations was due to mainly to this trade and the way in which trade was achieved.

Many main factors led to the rise of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. Economic growth played an important role in the development of these civilizations. They were prosperous because of a useful infrastructure. They have depended on an effective economic system to strengthen their development. Their economy was based mainly on trade.

From, one hand, all these factors were responsible for the establishment and the strength of West African civilization. On the other hand, there were other factors, too, such as the unifying force which was the religion of Islam although many Africans continued to practice their traditional religious beliefs as well.

The trans-Saharan trade has continued to expand. The expansion of trade has led to the rise of several new kingdoms. Through them, Islam has been brought to West Africa, and is spreading amongst the merchant and ruling classes.

Besides, there were also other factors that helped ,in a way or another, the rise of West African civilizations. Generally, conquest is considered by many scholars as a destructive factor of many civilizations. However, in addition to its negative impacts, conquest has also some positive effects that can lead to the rise of a civilization of a colonized society. The introduction of Islam through trade and conquest has also been at some extant beneficial in the rise of West African civilizations.

# **Chapter Three: The Role of Conquest in the Rise of the West African**



## **Introduction**

In the period from 400 to 1591, West Africa saw the rise and fall of the indigenous kingdoms, Ghana, Mali and Songhai. Only these three kingdoms achieved the status of full-fledged and long-lived conquest states and expansionist empires.

The rise of many powerful kingdoms such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai was due to a lot of factors. Although it is not declared or recognized by some scholars, there is another main factor also helped in the rise of these great empires. It is conquest. Conquest generally is considered destructive rather than constructive. However, there are some positive effects of conquest that should be taken into account. For example, Africa, all in all, witnessed a number of conquests and colorizations. Despite the fact that colonialism has many negative effects on this area, it has some positive ones in the development in different fields.

In West Africa, there were many types of conquest that led to the rise of civilizations in that area. Because civilization has a relationship with progress, conquests that can lead to progress and development in the colonized area can be regarded as beneficial in the rise of the civilization of that area. From internal invasions to European colonization, this marked a development in some aspects. Therefore, these conquests can be seen as a factor that helped in the rise of West African civilizations.

### **1. Constructive Conquest**

One of the more greatly debated subjects, in the history, is whether colonialism has left behind it a positive or a negative legacy. Colonialism can be seen as a curse or a blessing because it has both constructive and destructive effects. However, the number of the colonialism's destructive effects is great from that of the constructive effects. As a result, it is considered a curse rather than a blessing.

In order to recognize the legacy of colonialism, it is crucial firstly to understand the concept of colonialism. Colonialism can be defined as the position and occupation of a country by another foreign country. It deals also with the establishment of political, economic and cultural domination.

Although the colonial legacies served as obstacles to the progress, not all of these policies were terrible; the colonial masters left behind them some positive policies.

The blessings or benefits of colonialism include the construction of railways, the introduction of political party systems, the uniform civil service and the military. However, these “blessings” of colonialism are invalidated by the devastating effects. This is because the negative effects of colonialism caused devastations. In fact, it would have been better if the colonized people would have eventually created these institutions on their own, without the help of the colonial masters.

Through history, colonialism has proved to be a curse because its effects still affect the colonized countries strongly, decades after it was introduced. However, drawing conclusions is necessary not just to know what actually happened to development during the colonial period, but also to take a view on what might have happened without colonialism and to take into account the legacy of colonialism.

For instance, during the nineteenth century as well as early twentieth century, Western Civilizations dominated the world and were able to conquer regions in Africa, the Middle East, and southern Asia. Even though the French, British, and German imperialistic efforts occupied areas in Africa and southern Asia, they had an overall positive impact on the countries themselves in reality.

These imperial forces were able to introduce modern technology, communication systems, and an increase in population as well as the standard of living. Furthermore, they increased exports, and also helped support project financially. They helped, too, with the education system and with economic development by providing investments.

Colonialism have caused many effects in the whole world. It has always had a bad reputation. In essence, for the colonized people, it cannot be a good thing. It is true that the worldwide scrambled for colonies, particularly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this event had tremendous negative effects on the economic, social, and political structures. However, its positive legacy should be taken into account.

The idea of colonialism is to take resources from one country to use for the benefit of the colonizing country. Colonialism is the extension of a nation's sovereignty over territory and people outside its own boundaries, often to facilitate economic domination over their resources, labor, and markets. (Nicola Frick, 2006, 234)

One thing for sure, all colonized countries go through a period of downward fall after freedom. Nevertheless, if we look at the world today, some interesting developments appear. While some countries took what they learnt from their colonizer such as technological advancement, it is an advantage to exceed the past dictatorship.

Besides, analyzing the previous definition of colonialism is also important to prove that conquest has positive effects on the colonizer himself and the colonized one. For example, in West Africa, great kingdoms were formed by invasions of powerful areas on small weak ones such as Ghana, Mali and Songhai. Therefore, conquest is double-edged sword.

## **2. Characteristics of Conquest in the West Africa**

### **2.1. Internal Invasion and the Expansion of Territories**

Sometimes history seems to repeat itself. The rise and fall of West Africa kingdoms is an example to prove that as much as conquest and colonialism is a curse it is blessing as well.

After Ghana declined of course because of conquest and internal disputes, the empire of Mali, which dated from the early thirteenth century to the late fifteenth century, rose. Mali had been a state inside of the Ghanaian empire. After Ghana fell because of invading forces and internal disputes, Mali rose to greatness under the leadership of a legendary king named Sundiata. Later, the great leader named Mansa Musa extended the empire thanks to internal invasions in West Africa.

Years later, some conquered peoples began to rebel against Mali. In addition, nomads captured part of its territory. The Songhai people tried to form their own kingdom. Finally, they succeeded in diminishing Mali's power. As a result, Songhai asserted its independence and rose to power in the area. Songhai had been an important trade center within Mali's empire, just as Mali had once been ruled by Ghana. Great Songhai kings such as Sunni Ali and Askia Mohammed extended the Songhai kingdom farther than Ghana or Mali had before it and brought an organized system of government to the area. It was the largest and most powerful kingdom in medieval West Africa.

Moreover, looking at the city of Timbuktu, now part of the modern African state of Mali, brings this pattern of a constructive conquest in some cases and a

destructive conquest in other cases to light. In medieval times, Timbuktu was a central spot on the trade routes. During the height of ancient Mali, Timbuktu was one of its most important cities. When Mali declined, Timbuktu was taken over by the Songhai. After the decline of the Songhai Empire, Timbuktu was briefly occupied by Moroccan forces, and then taken over by the Fulani people and later by the French. Timbuktu's history mirrors the rise and decline of civilizations in the area.

An empire is formed when one kingdom becomes more powerful than its neighbors. The more powerful king forms an empire by conquering his weaker rivals and adding their lands and wealth to his kingdom. (David Conrad, 2010, 15)

Because one of the main characteristics of civilizations is a strong military forces to protect the area from invasions, conquest is beneficial in the rise of a strong civilization depending on a strong army. Conquest led to the establishment of strong military forces in order to conquer other territories to achieve expansion.

In West Africa, military achievement of the period, from 400 to 1591, pivoted the way to the emergence and mobilization of professional armies and cavalry forces. Ghana's achievement in this field was being the first to establish large professional armies for the maintenance of law and order over a vast territory.

Moreover, the kingdom of Mali contributed to the official development and mobilization of cavalry forces in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in order to control the battlefields of the savanna and Sahel regions of West Africa.

The formation of some powerful states, such as Mali and Songhay, depended more on military power. Similarly, the kingdom of Songhai employed aspects of military tactics. This entailed the use of light cavalry forces with protected armor, spear or javelins and imported swords, which proved effectiveness in the fight on the savanna. As a king conquered more territories, the kingdom grew into empire.

Evidently, "Mansa Musa's conquests ultimately led to the control and incorporation of the important mercantile centers and cities of Timbuktu and Gao, the trans-Saharan towns of Walata, and the Salt mines of Tagazah to the North." (Mendoza, Ruben, 2014, 291)

Ultimately, conquest, the development of a sophisticated army and the expansion of the territories was so beneficial to the largely rise of such powerful civilizations.

The kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhai were each great in their own right. A number of overlapping factors influenced their rise to power the wide-ranging of trade, especially in gold and salt, military competence, the establishment of taxes and a governing systems. Similarly, many factors led to the decline of some kingdoms and were important to the rise of another kingdom also intertwine.

## **2.2. The Spread of Islam and its Influence in the Rise of West African Civilisation**

The spread of Islam, in Africa as a whole and in West Africa specifically, is a subject that has continued to interest many ancient and contemporary scholars and historians as well.

During the seventh century, Islam spread quickly through the Middle East and North Africa. In the eighth century, trans-Saharan trade brought Muslim merchants and traders to West Africa. Over the next few hundred years, Islam spread among West Africa.

Islam reached the Savannah region in the 8th Century C.E. The Muslim-Arab historians began to write about West Africa in the early 8th century. Muslim geographers and historians have provided excellent records of Muslim rulers and people in Africa. Among them are Al-Khwarzimi, Al-Masudi, Al-Bakri, Ibn Batutah, Ibn Khaldun and others.

Traders brought Islam to Ghana between the years 639 and 708 C.E. Arab Muslims conquered North Africa. Before long, they wanted to bring West Africa into the Islamic world. However, sending armies to conquer Ghana was not practical. Ghana was too far away, and it was protected by the Sahara.

Evidently, “From this account of Al-Bakri's we can know a little more about what had happened during earlier times. It appears that many of the North African and Berber traders of the Sahara accepted Islam after the Arab conquest of the eighth century.” (BASIL DAVIDSON, 1965, 36)

Although the Berbers who converted to Islam never tried to convert the West Africans to Islam, by the start of the 12th century, Muslim scholars and clerics started accompanying the traders. These educated Muslims advised local rulers on political matters and eventually ended up in powerful positions.

Islam first reached Ghana through Muslim traders, missionaries and conquests. Neither the king of Ghana nor the majority of the people convert to Islam. However, the king allowed Muslims to build settlements within his empire.

“The Arab conquests opened the way to contacts among Muslim Arabs and Berbers and Saharan and Sudanic people.”(Ira M. Lapidus, 2014, 452)

Although nations like Mali didn't convert immediately, the political influence eventually led to Islamic dominance of the kingdoms of the Sahel region.

Many Muslim merchants and traders settled in Kumbi, the great market city of Ghana. Over time, a flourishing Muslim community developed around the trans-Saharan trade with North Africa. The Muslims in Kumbi had 12 mosques and their own spiritual leader. Scholars studied the Qur'an.

In the 11th century, Muslims from the north, the Almoravids, invaded West Africa. In 1076, they captured Kumbi. The Almoravids did not hold power for long in Ghana, but under their rule, Islam became more widespread. In about 1240, the Mande conquered Kumbi. They took control of the trade routes to North Africa and built the empire of Mali.

Evidently, “Islam spread across the Sahara, and through the trade and conquests to west Africa.” (Khair El-Din Haseeb, 2012, 130)

The early leaders of Mali accepted Islam, but they did not follow all of its teachings. In 1312, a new leader, Mansa Musa took over Mali. He became the first West African ruler to practice Islam devoutly.

Under Mansa Musa's rule, Mali became a major crossroads of the Islamic world. Muslim merchants, traders, and scholars from Egypt and North Africa came to Mali to do business or to settle. In 1324-25 he made his famous pilgrimage to Makkah. When he returned from his pilgrimage, he brought with him a large number of Muslim scholars and architects who built five mosques for the first time with baked bricks. Thus, Islam received its greatest boost during Mansa Musa's reign. Many scholars agree that because of his attachment to Islam, Mansa Musa could introduce new ideas to his administration.

Mansa Musa's pilgrimage projected Mali's enormous wealth and potentialities which attracted more and more Muslim traders and scholars. These Muslim scholars and traders contributed to the cultural and economic development of Mali. It was

during his reign that diplomatic relations were established with Tunis and Egypt, and thus Mali began to appear on the map of the world.

Islam began to spread in the Empire of Songhay sometime in the 11th century. The early Songhai rulers did not practice Islam seriously. In the 1490s, Muslims in the Songhai Empire rebelled. They placed Askia Mohammed Toure, a devout Muslim, on the throne. He set up severe controls to be sure Islam was practiced properly. He also led a series of wars to convert non-Muslims to Islam. Under his rule, the Songhai Empire covered a territory as large as Western Europe.

Muslim traders and merchants lived side by side with the non-Muslims of West Africa. Over time, however, Islam played a growing role in West African society. Civilizations have many characteristics. Thus, the spread of Islam led to the rise of the West African Civilizations focusing on these characteristics.

Religiously, as Islam spread in West Africa, people adopted new religious practices and ethical values. They prayed in Arabic, fasted, worshiped in mosques, went on pilgrimages, and gave alms. They were taught to regard all Muslims as part of a single community

Politically, Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa developed Islamic forms of government and law. Muslim rulers in West Africa adopted some of these ideas. One important change concerned the line of succession, or inheritance of the right to rule. In West Africa, succession to the throne had traditionally been matrilineal. That is, the right to rule was traced through a woman rather than a man.

A second change affected the structure of government. Muslims believed in a highly centralized government. After West African kings converted to Islam, they started to exercise more control of local rulers. A third major change was the adoption of the Islamic laws. In many towns and cities, these laws replaced traditional law.

There was also emphasis on education. Muslims greatly value learning. In West Africa, Muslims encouraged people to become educated. They built many schools and centers of learning. One key center was the trading city of Timbuktu, on the Niger River. Under Mali and Songhai rule, Timbuktu became famous for its community of Islamic scholars. It remained an important center of learning until Songhai was conquered by Morocco in the late 1500s. Several universities were built in Timbuktu. The most famous was the University of Sankore. It became one of the

world's great universities. Sankore was made up of several small, independent schools. Each school was run by an imam, or scholar. In addition, Muslims also set up schools to educate children in the Qur'an. Timbuktu had 150 or more Qur'anic schools where children to read and interpret Islam's holy book.

Islam was rooted in Arabic culture. As Islam spread, so did the Arabic language. In West Africa, Arabic became the language of religion, learning, commerce, and government. West Africans continued to use their native languages in everyday speech.

For Muslims, Arabic was the language of religion. All Muslims were expected to read the Qur'an and memorize parts of it. As West Africans converted to Islam, more and more of them learned Arabic. Arabic also became the language of learning. The scholars who came to West Africa were mainly Arabic-speaking Muslims.

Moreover, Arabic became the language of trade and government. Arabic allowed West African traders who spoke different languages to communicate more easily. Arabic also allowed rulers to keep records and to write to rulers in other countries.

The influence of Islam brought new styles of architecture to West Africa. People designed mosques for worship. They also created a new design for homes. Traditionally, West Africans had built small shrines to the forces of nature. As they converted to Islam, they began to build mosques. The materials that were most available in the savanna were mud and wood. Using these materials, West Africans built mosques that blended Islamic architectural styles with their own traditional religious art. For example, the minaret (tower) of one mosque was designed to look like the symbol of a Songhai ancestor.





**Fig.9:** The Great Mosque of Djenné is an Islamic landmark in Mali. (Eleanor McKenzie, 1998)

As for the spread of Islam among the African tribes, the European colonial authorities did not oppose this because they realized that Islam facilitated the process of spreading modern civilization among the population. Sir Harry Johnston wrote “ Let us start with the clothes worn by Muslims that it is a national uniform and suitable for climatic conditions, more than the European dress does not wear Christian Negro, which they show in a funny way. I remember how, during my early travels in West Africa, I had respected the urea tribes in their national uniform, a feeling that outweighs the Christian or pagan couples of Lagos and Ajbaland” ( D . Kimble, 1963, 79)

At the beginning of the French occupation of Africa, there was a debate on the "Islamic threat" and the need to stop Islamic expansion in Africa. However, other thinkers argued that Islam is not a danger; it is the most important intellectual and cultural experiences in West Africa, and that France should deal with it on this basis. (Donald Cruise O'Brien, 1967, 314)

Ultimately, traders, missionaries and conquest first brought Islam to Ghana in the 8th century. It affected many areas of life in West Africa. The Islamic love of learning brought a new emphasis on education to West Africa. As a result, Islam left a deep mark on West African culture.

### **2.3. European Colonialism and its Impacts**

Colonization of Africa by European countries was a massive landmark in the development of Africa. The Africans consider the impact of colonization on them to

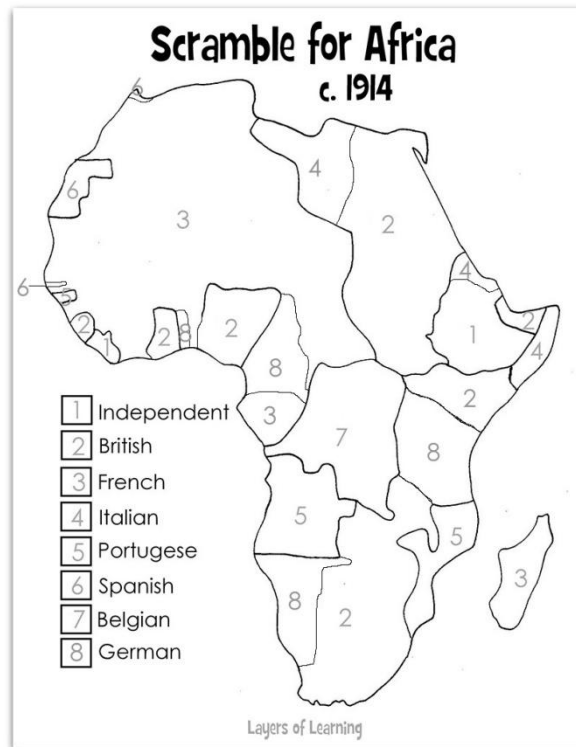
be perhaps the most important factor in understanding the present condition of the African continent and of the African people. Therefore, an inspection of the effect of colonialism is necessary to appreciate the degree in influencing both the economic and political development of Africa in addition to the African's awareness of themselves.

Evidently, "They did not always have negative connotations: European statesmen once proudly proclaimed their imperial reach, insisting that they brought economic progress to the world and relief from backwardness and despotism to Africa."(John Middleton and Joseph C. Miller,2008, 467)

The two largest colonial powers in Africa were France and Britain. The period from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s marked the peak of imperial rule in Africa. The formalization of colonial rule was accomplished at the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885 when all the European powers met and partitioned Africa.

"During the Scramble for Africa at the end of the nineteenth century, European powers stacked claims to virtually the entire continent. At meeting in Berlin, Paris, London and other capitals, European Statesmen and diplomats bargained over the separate spheres of interest they intended to establish there." (Martin Meredith, 2005, 1)

The scramble for territory in Africa by European countries led to the partition of the African continent after the Berlin Conference that took place from 1884-1885. It is important to understand the reason behind the colonization because it explains the reason behind most of the colonizer actions. The British came into some African colonies, merely for financial and political reasons. For instance, they colonized Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia and Sierra Leone because they were in need of materials to enhance their country's wealth and expand their empire.



**Fig.10:** Scramble for Africa(Karen Lutzenhizer, 2017)

Some political leaders feel that, on balance to the negative impacts of colonialism, the Africans benefited from colonial experience.

There are other leaders, notable among them, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, Ivory Coast’s founding president, who feel that Africans ought to be grateful for having been colonized, because without colonization, Africa would still be backward in many areas of human endeavor.

The prime legacy of colonialism was the integration of colonies into the international capitalist economy. It enables Africans to consume products of western civilization without having to go through the difficult and long-term process of building the productive base of their societies. From another hand exports to the Western countries increased. Furthermore, the conquest has opened to the West Afrikan region the way to deal with the whole world economically.

“New patterns of economic activity were established. African colonies became significant exporters of minerals and agricultural commodities such as groundnuts, palm oil, cotton, coffee, cocoa and sisal. By 1911, the Gold Coast had become the world’s leading exporter of cocoa.” (Martin Meredith, 2005, 7)

One important economic benefit was the provision of infrastructure of roads, railways, harbor and ports, the telegraph and telephone. Some states have not improved upon the colonial infrastructures even after independence. Development of the primary sector of Africa's economy happened during the colonial period.

It was during this period that the mineral potential of many African states were discovered and modern scientific mining introduced. Above all, it was during this period that the productions of such cash crops like cotton, peanuts, palm, cocoa became the main feature of the political economy of many African states.

In terms of urbanization, not only did pre-existing towns expand, but also completely new urban centers emerged following the establishment of the colonial system such as Takoradi in Ghana, Port Harcourt and Enugu in Nigeria. All these new urban centers recreated either as ports or harbors, mining centers, administration center.

The population of Accra jumped from 17,892 in 1901 to 135, 926 in 1948. There is no doubt the quality of life for West Africa's population was improved through the provision of piped water, hospitality, better housing and sanitary facilities. Expansion of western education during the colonial period was also noticeable.

Every modern West African state is thankful to its colonial master for introducing western education. Christianity gained far more converts and penetrated further. The spread of western education was mainly due to the action of the Christian missionaries.

Broadly speaking, there are five benefits of colonization that many scholars are likely to agree on. First is the introduction of Western medicine, which has made an incredible difference in the survival rates of the African population. In fact, the rapid growth of the African population began during the colonial era.

Second, the introduction of formal education deserves mention in helping to broaden the Africans' outlook and to unlock the hidden potential of the African people. Missionaries provided both education and health care. Nearly all leaders who emerged after World War II to lead African colonies toward independence acquired their symbolic and organizational skills from colonial education. Young political activists were able to challenge the status and to make demands for the restoration of

African dignity and freedom by using political and moral ideas deeply rooted in Western education.

“Through the efforts of Christian missionaries, literacy and primary education were slowly introduced throughout Africa south of the Sahara. By 1910 about 16000 European missionaries were stationed there. With the government support, a handful of secondary schools were established, becoming the nurseries of new African elites: Achimota College in the Gold Coast; the Ecole Normale William Ponty in Senegal...”(Martin Meredith, 2005, 7)

Third, the small infrastructure that colonial authorities established became the foundation upon which new African leaders built their new national institutions. Roads, railroads, harbors, telephones, electric power, and water and sewerage systems were all built initially to service the white colonial community or to support the very small urban settlements.

Africans acquired important skills by working for colonial bureaucracies. Later, their experience was important in helping to maintain these services during the often turbulent period of political transition and afterwards.

Fourth, the introduction of Islam and Christianity to African people greatly simplified African spirituality and created a new basis for Africans with diverse backgrounds to come together. Africans are a very spiritual people who believed in God and in life after death with ancestral spirits. It was unclear, however, what one needed to do in order to find salvation. The role of ancestral spirits was extremely significant and called for continual, elaborate rituals to pacify or supplicate them. This kind of spiritual heritage, while satisfying emotionally and spiritually, did, in many ways, arrested the development of rational thought and science.

Embracing Christianity denominations, in exchange for giving up their spiritual heritage and practice, the Africans freed themselves significantly from the uncertainties of daily sacrifices, rituals, and cleansing ceremonies that were traditionally required.

It is obvious that colonialism in West Africa had plenty of impacts, positive and negative. However, so as not to deny the gratitude, positive impacts should be declared because not everything is perfect. Considering conquest from all sides is very important because in the process of colonialism there are colonizers and

colonized people. Both have a particular point of view on colonialism. Points of views about colonialism should be objective not subjective.

## **Conclusion**

West African states gained little better than nothing from the coming colonialism. In spite of destructing some aspects of a civilization, conquest can play a lesser role in the development of a civilization.

In reality, conquest has positive effects. It allows two distant parts of the world to interchange products, ideas and cultures at a large scale. Although this interchange can mainly be one-sided in some areas, it can be beneficial.

## **General Conclusion**

History dealt a lot with factors behind the rise of Africa in general and west Africa in particular. It provides wide-ranging information of Africa from earliest prehistory to the present day – using the cultural, social, political, and economic lenses of Africa as instruments to enlighten the world about Africans.

The present work represents an attempt to investigate the impact of trade, focusing and colonization to some extent on the rise of West African civilizations. This research aims to make the world perspective to revisit and re-think about these two concepts in the history of West African kingdoms. This research also aims to broaden the perspective by providing more examples on how trade and conquest influenced the rise of the West African civilization.

The West African kingdoms played an important role in the development of trade and economic growth of the region. These early West African societies of Ghana, Mali and Songhai all created empires that gained much of their wealth from trade.

Furthermore, other main factors helped in the growth of trade. Trade was the result of the richness of West African region. The geography and the natural resources of West Africa helped a lot in the rise of the wealthiest strongest empires in West Africa.

In addition, West Africa witnessed three great empires under the rule of powerful kings. The kingship had an important role, too, in the rise and progress of those kingdoms.

Many main factors lead to the rise of many civilizations. It is true that trade played a key role in the growth of kingdoms and empires in West Africa. Nevertheless, we cannot deny that despite destructing some aspects of a civilization, conquest can play a lesser role in the development of a civilization.

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