

Discussion

[History](#)



The Ancient Sudanese s Trade was the driving force behind the development of the Sudanese s. It led to power and influence for traders in the courts of kings, and played a pivotal role in shaping the politics of the region. Trade routes across the Sahara existed as far back as 3000 BC. However after the first century AD when the camel began to be used to cross the sandy Sahara, a network of trade routes emerged, and the Savannah belt of Sudan, being at the center of these trade routes was greatly enriched by the trade of gold, salt and slaves that passed through it. The ancient Sudanese states of Ghana and Kanem inhabited by the Soninke and kanembu, who were the intermediaries between the gold producers in the south, and the merchants from the North African and Egyptian regions; therefore grew wealthy from the thriving trade. The ancient empire of Ghana was, as the eminent astronomer Al Fazari, refers to it a “ land of gold.” (Adu Boahen, 56) Ghana according to Al Idrisi was the country with the “ widest commercial connections,” (Adu Boahen, 57) and to consolidate her position and safeguard her trading interests, the king of Ghana conquered the Berber trading post of Awdaghost in the Sahara. At the peak of her glory Ghana seems to have been a loosely administered state, which consisted of a metropolitan area governed by the king, and a provincial area that consisted of conquered provinces, and governed by the kings of those provinces. Islam seems to have been introduced into Ghana by the Arabs who swept across North Africa between A. D 641 and 708. The missionaries who came with these Arabs, succeeded in converting a large number of Berbers of the important trading centers of Awdaghost and Tadmekket to Islam. These kings of Awdaghost and Tadmekket have been described as learned men. Gradually these Berbers along with their normal trading activities began to

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propagate their religion and won over all the vassals of the King of Ghana. The kings of Ghana also appointed many Muslims to high positions in government. By degrees the capital city was divided into two parts one inhabited by Muslims at a distance of some six to ten kilometers from the main capital. Here the Muslims were allowed complete religious freedom; to build mosques in their areas, though the people of the royal court continued to follow their traditional religious practices. Unfortunately, this peaceful spread of the religion was thwarted by a fanatic religious movement that arose among the Berbers known as the Almoravid, which aimed to spread Islam by means of Jihad or holy war. The kings of Ghana, who were pagans, and had resisted conversion to Islam, were targeted not just for religious reasons but also for commercial and political gain. The Almoravid movement gave impetus to the vassals of Ghana who saw a chance to regain their independence. This led to the downfall of the ancient Ghanaian empire. The empire of Mali that overthrew Ghana evolved from a small principality called Kangaba whose kings had converted to Islam. The king of this small principality was murdered by the powerful king Sumanguru Kante of the Susu who annexed it. The surviving son Sundiata, bided his time and when the political conditions were favorable; with the oppressed people under the reign of Sumanguru Kante waiting for a savior, and the vassal states on the verge of revolt, he struck defeating Sumanguru Kante. He occupied not just Kangaba that had been taken from his father, but also ancient Ghana. The geographical position of Mali had a great bearing on her rise to power and wealth, as did the fact that she benefitted from the literacy and systems of administration introduced by the proponents of Islam. Since Mali is situated within the Savannah belt, she had the advantage of wealth gained from an <https://assignbuster.com/discussion-admission-essay-samples-4/>

agrarian economy in addition to control over the gold trade. In a couple of decades, Sundiata had extended the frontiers of his kingdom to include Ghana in the north, Upper Senegal in the south and the gold producing districts in the east and upper Niger. The frontiers of Sundiata's empire far exceeded that of the kings of Ghana and the Susu. Sundiata's successors Mansa Musa and Mansa Sulayman strengthened the kingdom of Mali and it was known for its good governance as well as its commercial prosperity. By the first half of the fourteenth century Mali was at the zenith of her power and glory.

Mansa Musa however is well known not only for the systems of governance and justice that he put in place, but also for his work in the field of religion. He was greatly concerned about the spiritual well being of his people and he returned from a famous and extravagant pilgrimage to Mecca, determined to strengthen and purify Islam. He also vowed to promote education, and to this end began the practice of sending students for education to Morocco, and laid the foundation of Timbuktu as the educational and commercial hub of western Sudan. His brother Mansa Sulayman who succeeded him was a scholar of religious sciences and he continued the work of Mansa Musa in building mosques and minarets and encouraging the people to follow the five pillars of Islam. Scholars were impressed by the people's observance of prayer, as well as the order and racial tolerance amongst the people of Mali. The renowned Arabic scholar Ibn Batuta writes that the people of Mali " are seldom unjust and have a great abhorrence of injustice". (quoted from Adu Boahen, 67)

Religion has always played a central role in the lives of the people of Africa and the history of the continent shows the powerful effect religion has had

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on political change. This is borne out by the fall of Ghana and the meteoric rise of Mali. Although it cannot be said that religion was the key to these political developments, its influence and effect on the developments in the region cannot be ignored.

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