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|  | **Ghana** | **Mali** | **Songhay** |
| **Rulers** | Descended matrilineally (through previous king’s sister)Ruled through a council of ministersKing was supreme judge and held court regularly to hear grievancesKing was seen as divinely blessed, and perhaps semi-divineHuge, well-trained army secured royal control, enabling the kings to extend their control in late C10992 – won Awdaaghast from BerbersVulnerable to attack from the desert (shown by Almoravid Berber forces in 1054 when they took Awdaghast) | Mid C13 – the Keita ruling clan forged a new and lasting empire built on the monopolisation of the north-south gold tradeImperial power was built largely by the Keita King Sundiata 1230-1255He and his successors exploited their agricu;tural resources, significant population growth, and Malinke commercial skills to build a powerful empireHe extended his control west to the Atlantic coast and east beyond TimbuktuBy controlling the commercial centres of Gao, Walata and Jenne, he dominated the Saharan as well as the Niger tradeHe built his capital, Niani, into a major city – it had access to the forest trade products of gold, kola nuts and palm oil. It was easily defended because of the surrounding hills and readily reached by riverMany individual chieftanicies were independent but recognised the sovereignty of the supreme, sacred mansa or ‘emperor’Greatest king was Mansa Musa (1312-1337) – famous for his pilgrimage through Mamluk Cairo to Mecca in 13241325 – gained control of GaoAfter Musa, there were rivalries for the throne and the empire slowly withered | 1375 – rise of a dynasty in Gao known as the Sunni or Sonni around 375Became an imperial power under the greatest Sunni ruler, Sonni Ali (1464-1492)The most powerful state in Africa for more than 100 yearsWith a strong military built around a riverboat flotilla and cavalry, Sonni Ali took Jenne and TimbuktuHe pushed the Tuareg Berbers back into the northern Sahel and Sahara and stifled threats from the southern forestlandSuccessor, Askia Muhammad al-Turi (1493-1528) continued his expansionist policiesThe pair built an empire that stretched west nearly to the Atlantic, northwest into the Sahara, and east into the central SudanMuhammad went to Mecca, where he was hailed as ‘Caliph of the western Sahara’The last powerful leader was Askia Dawud (1549-1583) – prosperity and intellectual life reached its heightLast Askias battled the Mossi to the south and Berbers from the northCivil war broke out over the royal succession in 15861591 – an assay sent by the Sa’dis of Morocco used superior gunpowder weapons, coupled with the aid of disaffected Songhai princes, to defeat the last Askia of Gao |
| **Society** | Major population group was the SoninkeHierarchical society:-* Slaves
* Farmers and draftsmen
* Merchants
* King, court and nobility
 | Core population was the Malinke, a southern Mande-speaking people of the upper Niger regionLived in walled urban settlements typical of the western savannah regionEach walled town held 1000-15000 people and was linked to neighbouring cities by trade and intermarriageEncompassed three major regions and language groups:-1. Senegal region – Niger-Kongo language
2. Central Mande states between Senegal and Niger – Niger-Kongo speaking Soninke and Mandinke
3. Niger in the Gao region – spoke Songhai

Centre of a vast sphere of influence that included provinces and tribute-paying kingdoms |  |
| **Culture** | King and court did not convert to Islam but made elaborate arrangements to accommodate Muslim traders and government servants in a separate settlementMuslim traders were dominant at court, literate Muslims administered the government and Muslim legists advised the ruler | Keita dynasty converted to Islam around 1100Claimed descent from Muhammad’s famous muezzin Bilal ibn RibahC13 and C14 – kings often made the pilgrimage to Mecca – brought back military aids e.g. Barbary war horses, and new ideas about political and military organisationMansa Musa brought many Muslim scholars, artists, scientitsts and architects back from MeccaHe fostered the spread of Islam: Timbuktu became famous for its madrasas and libraries – the leading centre of sub-Saharan Islam and a major trading city | Sonni Ali maintained his people’s traditional faithAskia Muhammad and his Askia successors were emphatically MuslimAt-Turi modelled the state on the Islamic empire of MaliMany Muslim scholars came to Gao, Timbuktu and JenneHe appointed Muslim judges (qadis) and made Timbuktu a major intellectual and legal training centreReplaced native Songhais with Arab Muslim immigrants as government officialsMuhammad used his vast royal treasury to support the poor and Sufi leaders, or marabouts, and built mosquesBut he failed to Islamise the empire or to ensure a strong central state for his successorsRoyal patronage of the arts peaked under Askia Dawud |
| **Economy** | Capital, Kumbi, was well-sited for the Saharan and Sahelian trade networksTribute from chieftaincies and taxes on royal lands and crops supplemented duties levied on all incoming and outgoing tradeNorth-south trade between the Sahara and the savannahEast-West trade between Senegambia and trading towns like GaoInvolved imported salt, cloth, and metal goods e.g. copper from the north were exchanged for gold and kola nuts from the southRegime controlled the gold (and , presumably, the slave) trade that originated to the south and west | Keita kings dominated enough of the Sahel to control the flow of West African gold from the Senegal regions and the forestlands south of the Niger to the trans-Saharan trade routes and the influx of copper and salt in exchangeControlled all trade on the upper Niger, and the Gambia and Senegal trade to the westUsed captives for plantation labour in the Niger inland delta to produce surplus food for tradeAgriculture and cattle farming were primary occupationsRice, millet, beans, yams and other agricultural prodicts meant a plentiful food supplyCattle, sheep and goats were plentifulChief craft specialitoies were metalworking (iron and gold) and cotton weavingConnected to other areas of Africa through Muslim traders’ networks | Took advantage of their control of access to gold and other West African commodities to cultivate and expand the caravan trade to the North African coast – provided their major source of wealthTrans-Saharan trade peaked under Askia Dawud |