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|  | **Ghana** | **Mali** | **Songhay** |
| **Rulers** | Descended matrilineally (through previous king’s sister)  Ruled through a council of ministers  King was supreme judge and held court regularly to hear grievances  King was seen as divinely blessed, and perhaps semi-divine  Huge, well-trained army secured royal control, enabling the kings to extend their control in late C10  992 – won Awdaaghast from Berbers  Vulnerable 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 trade  Imperial power was built largely by the Keita King Sundiata 1230-1255  He and his successors exploited their agricu;tural resources, significant population growth, and Malinke commercial skills to build a powerful empire  He extended his control west to the Atlantic coast and east beyond Timbuktu  By controlling the commercial centres of Gao, Walata and Jenne, he dominated the Saharan as well as the Niger trade  He 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 river  Many 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 1324  1325 – gained control of Gao  After 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 375  Became an imperial power under the greatest Sunni ruler, Sonni Ali (1464-1492)  The most powerful state in Africa for more than 100 years  With a strong military built around a riverboat flotilla and cavalry, Sonni Ali took Jenne and Timbuktu  He pushed the Tuareg Berbers back into the northern Sahel and Sahara and stifled threats from the southern forestland  Successor, Askia Muhammad al-Turi (1493-1528) continued his expansionist policies  The pair built an empire that stretched west nearly to the Atlantic, northwest into the Sahara, and east into the central Sudan  Muhammad 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 height  Last Askias battled the Mossi to the south and Berbers from the north  Civil war broke out over the royal succession in 1586  1591 – 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 Soninke  Hierarchical society:-   * Slaves * Farmers and draftsmen * Merchants * King, court and nobility | Core population was the Malinke, a southern Mande-speaking people of the upper Niger region  Lived in walled urban settlements typical of the western savannah region  Each walled town held 1000-15000 people and was linked to neighbouring cities by trade and intermarriage  Encompassed 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 settlement  Muslim traders were dominant at court, literate Muslims administered the government and Muslim legists advised the ruler | Keita dynasty converted to Islam around 1100  Claimed descent from Muhammad’s famous muezzin Bilal ibn Ribah  C13 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 organisation  Mansa Musa brought many Muslim scholars, artists, scientitsts and architects back from Mecca  He 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 faith  Askia Muhammad and his Askia successors were emphatically Muslim  At-Turi modelled the state on the Islamic empire of Mali  Many Muslim scholars came to Gao, Timbuktu and Jenne  He appointed Muslim judges (qadis) and made Timbuktu a major intellectual and legal training centre  Replaced native Songhais with Arab Muslim immigrants as government officials  Muhammad used his vast royal treasury to support the poor and Sufi leaders, or marabouts, and built mosques  But he failed to Islamise the empire or to ensure a strong central state for his successors  Royal patronage of the arts peaked under Askia Dawud |
| **Economy** | Capital, Kumbi, was well-sited for the Saharan and Sahelian trade networks  Tribute from chieftaincies and taxes on royal lands and crops supplemented duties levied on all incoming and outgoing trade  North-south trade between the Sahara and the savannah  East-West trade between Senegambia and trading towns like Gao  Involved imported salt, cloth, and metal goods e.g. copper from the north were exchanged for gold and kola nuts from the south  Regime 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 exchange  Controlled all trade on the upper Niger, and the Gambia and Senegal trade to the west  Used captives for plantation labour in the Niger inland delta to produce surplus food for trade  Agriculture and cattle farming were primary occupations  Rice, millet, beans, yams and other agricultural prodicts meant a plentiful food supply  Cattle, sheep and goats were plentiful  Chief craft specialitoies were metalworking (iron and gold) and cotton weaving  Connected 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 wealth  Trans-Saharan trade peaked under Askia Dawud |