**The Kingdom of Ghana**

The Kingdom of Ghana is generally given the dates 9th to the 13th century CE by historians. It marks the beginning of a series of empires in West Africa that were involved in extensive commercial trade. You should note by looking at your map that the area of the Kingdom of Ghana during this time period is farther north than the present day country of Ghana.

Some have called the Kingdom of Ghana the "land of gold, " an excellent description since it was abounding in gold. The gold trade was largely responsible for the development of Ghana into a powerful, centralized kingdom. The peoples 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. At the time of the Kingdom of Ghana, gold was traded for salt that came down from the Sahara desert.

In addition to the gold 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 neighbouring 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.

The Ghanaian kings controlled the gold that was mined in their kingdom and implemented a system of taxation for their people. Around 1054, the Almoravid rulers came south to conquer the Kingdom of Ghana and convert the people to Islam. The authority of the king eventually diminished, which opened the way for the Kingdom of Mali to begin to gain power. The trade that had begun, however, continued to prosper.

Two important sources that have told historians about the history of the Kingdom of Ghana are the writings of a Spanish Muslim named Al-Bakri and archaeological finds. Archaeologists have worked at excavating a site that many believe to be one of the king's cities of the Kingdom of Ghana, Kumbi Saleh.