• The Trans-Saharan Trade Route
  – Linked North Africa and the Mediterranean world with the land and peoples of interior West Africa.
  – Environmental Variations
    • North African coast
      – Cloth, glassware, weapons, books, and manufactured goods
    • Sahara Desert
      – Copper and SALT
      – Sweet and nutritious dates at its oases
      – Sparse populations were most pastoral or nomadic
    • Sub-Saharan Africa
      – Agricultural with a variety of crops
      – Produced their own textiles and metal products
      – GOLD
      – Savanna grasslands = grain crops
      – Forests to the south = root and tree crops
History of Trade in this Region

- Not across the Sahara
- Mostly among agricultural peoples in the area known as the Sudan (“the land of black people”)
- Gradually expanded to boats along the Niger River and donkeys used overland
  - Urban area of Jenne-jeno was an early Niger River civilization
Camels

• The introduction of the camel to North Africa made the trek across the desert possible.

• Camel-owning people who lived in the oases initiated trans-Saharan commerce by 300-400 CE.

• Several centuries later, North African Arabs, now bringing Islam, organized trans-Saharan caravans.
Gold

• Transported by donkey from the borders between the grasslands and the forests to caravan points along the southern edge of the desert. Then transferred to camels for the longer journey.
  – African ivory, kola nuts, and slaves were also in high demand in the desert and the Mediterranean basin.
  – In return, the peoples of the Sudan received horses, cloth, dates, manufactured goods, and SALT
A New International Trade Route

- The caravans that made the desert crossing could be as many as 5,000 camels and hundreds of people.
  - Traveled mostly at night
  - Journey could take up to 70 days (15-20 miles per day)
  - Linked the interior of West Africa with land and people far to the north
  - Caravans traveled the desert for over 1,000 years
New Political Structures

• Between 500 and 1600 CE we see the creation of a series of states in western and central Sudan, including Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Kanem, and Hausa city-states
  – All were monarchies with elaborate court life and at least some administration and military forces.
    • Taxed merchants and goods
  – All had a reputation for great riches
West African Empires

Sudanese Empires, 11th-16th Centuries
- Mali
- Songhai
- Kanem-Bornu
- Ghana

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Slavery

• As in all civilizations, slavery was prevalent in West Africa.
  – At first, most slaves were women (domestic servants or concubines)
  – With the development of civilization, male slaves were used as officials, porters, craftsmen, miners, agricultural laborers
  – Most slaves came as a result of raids on non-Islamic and stateless societies farther south

• While most slaves were used in West Africa, some 5,500 slaves a year crossed the Sahara between 1100 and 1400
  – most were sold in North Africa
  – a few ended up in Europe
    • Slavic-speaking slaves (from eastern Europe) were much more common in Europe (origin of word “slave”)
    • African slaves only became common in Europe starting in 1440s (Atlantic slave trade)
• The states of Sudanic Africa developed substantial urban/commercial centers (such as Koumbi-Saleh, Jenne, Timbuktu, Gao, Gobir, and Kano)
  – Some became manufacturing centers
  – Cosmopolitan places where court officials, artisans, scholars, students, and local and foreign merchants all rubbed elbows.
  – Islam became an important element of urban culture