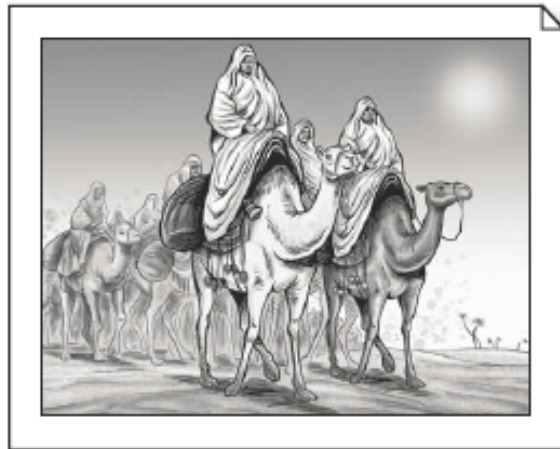


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Africa's Trading Empires

Africa has a variety of geographical features. The huge continent is made up of snowy mountains, deserts, tropical rain forests, grasslands, and coastal areas. Deserts cover almost half of Africa. On the northern coast and the southern tip, a mild climate zone provides fertile farming land. Ten percent of the continent has rain forests with heavy rains and hot temperatures. Savannahs, or grasslands that have small trees and shrubs, cover much of the rest of Africa.



The varied regions offer many valuable resources, like salt, gold, iron, copper, diamonds, and oil. These natural resources made Africa a perfect place for trading empires to develop. As early civilizations grew, trade became an important part of Africa's growth.

For example, Ghana emerged in about 500 A.D. and became one of the first great trading states. Located on the savannah of West Africa, Ghana's gold made it the center of an enormous trading empire. Ghana traded its gold for products brought from North Africa. Muslim merchants brought metal goods, cloth, horses, and salt to Ghana. Because salt was scarce in the savannah, it was worth its weight in gold. People needed salt to help prevent them from getting dehydrated. Ghana also traded ivory, ostrich feathers, animal skins, and slaves for items from other areas.

A great deal of trade was done across Africa's deserts. Muslim merchants bought goods from local traders. Then, they sold the items to the Berbers. The Berbers were nomadic traders who traveled in camel caravans. Camels were useful for desert travel because they could drink large amounts of water at one time. They could also travel for many days with little food. Camels became known as "ships of the desert."

On Africa's eastern coast, people traded up and down the coastline. Beginning in about the 600s, Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula began to settle at coastal ports. They formed a string of trading ports, including Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Kilwa. Merchants in those cities became very wealthy. They traded ivory, animal skins, iron, copper, and pearls for items from India, Southeast Asia, and China. These things included cotton cloth, silk, spices, porcelain, glassware, and swords.

Trade made Africa a prosperous continent. It also allowed for a lot of mixing of cultures. Because the Muslim traders interacted with the Africans, a mixed African-Arabian culture grew in the coastal areas. The Muslim religion and Arabic architectural styles became a part of African culture.

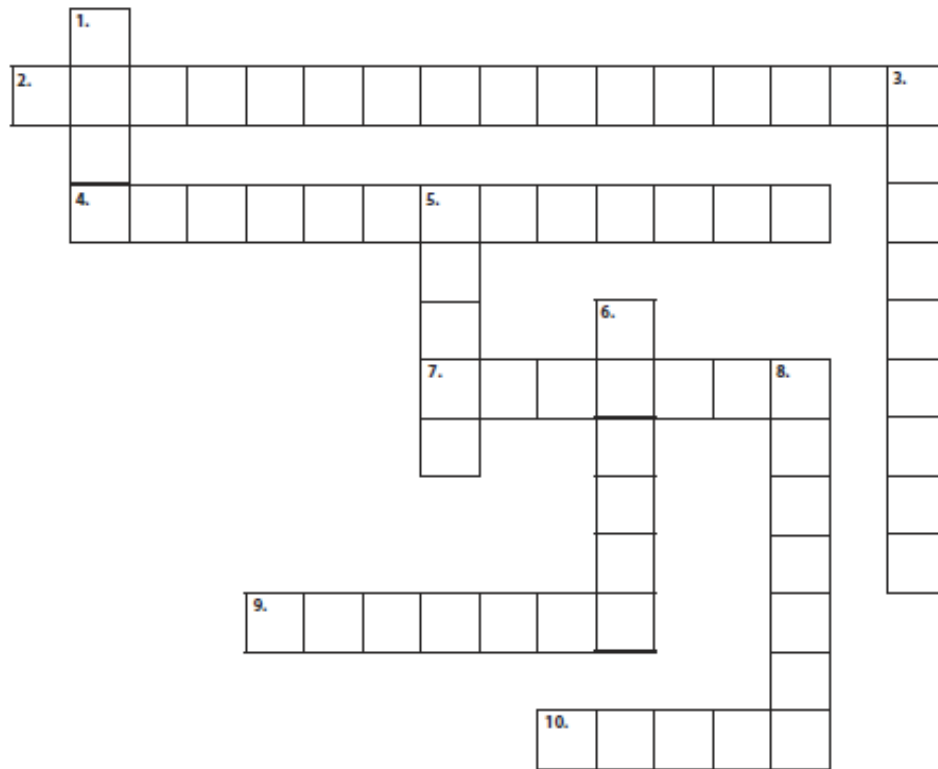
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Africa's Trading Empires

Crossword Puzzle

Write the best answer in each blank, and complete the crossword puzzle.



ACROSS

2. Africa has many _____, like salt, gold, and diamonds.
4. A/an _____ developed in West Africa.
7. The Berbers were _____ traders.
9. _____ began to settle in Africa's coastal ports.
10. _____ made Africa a prosperous continent.

DOWN

1. People needed _____ to help prevent them from getting dehydrated.
3. _____ are grasslands that have small trees and shrubs.
5. _____ was the center of West Africa's trading empire.
6. _____ were called "ships of the desert."
8. Trade allowed Africa to have a mixed _____.