

# The Empire of Ghana

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Ghana controlled trade and became wealthy.
2. Through its control of trade, Ghana built an empire.
3. Ghana's decline was caused by attacking invaders, overgrazing, and the loss of trade.

### The Big Idea

The rulers of Ghana built an empire by controlling the salt and gold trade.

### Key Terms and People

silent barter, *p. 386*

Tunka Manin, *p. 388*



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### TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to make a list of important events from the beginning to the end of the empire of Ghana.

## If YOU were there...

You are a trader in a caravan heading into West Africa in about 1000. The caravan carries many goods, but the most precious is salt. Salt is so valuable that people trade gold for it! The gold traders never meet you face to face, though. You wish you could talk to them to find out where they get their gold.

## Why do you think the traders are so secretive?

### BUILDING BACKGROUND

The various regions of Africa provided people with different resources. West Africa, for example, was rich in both fertile soils and minerals, especially gold and iron. Other regions had plentiful supplies of other resources, such as salt. Over time, trade developed between regions with different resources. This trade led to the growth of the first great empire in West Africa.

## Ghana Controls Trade

Among the earliest people in West Africa were the Soninke (soh-NING-kee). They lived in small groups and farmed the land along the Niger River. After AD 300, the Soninke began to band together for protection against nomadic herders who wanted to move into the area. This banding together was the beginning of Ghana.

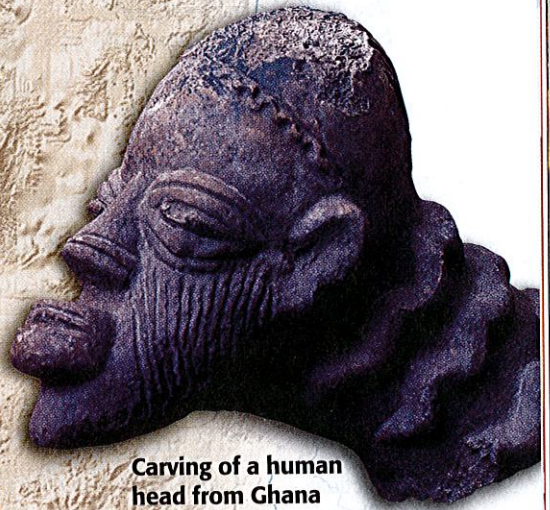
The people of Ghana gradually grew in strength. They learned how to work with iron and how to use iron tools for farming. They also herded cattle for meat and milk. Because Ghana's farmers and herders could produce plenty of food, their population increased. Towns and villages sprang up.

Ghana lay between the vast Sahara to the north and deep forests that spread out to the south. In this location, people were in a good position to trade in the region's two main resources—gold and salt. The exchange of gold and salt sometimes followed a specific process called silent barter.

**Silent barter** is a process in which people exchange goods with-



# Ghana Empire, c. 1050



out contacting each other directly. In Ghana salt traders left slabs of salt on a riverbank. In exchange, gold miners left what they thought was a fair amount of gold. The method made sure that trade was done peacefully. It also kept the location of the gold mines secret.

As trade in gold and salt increased, Ghana's rulers gained power. They built armies equipped with iron weapons that were superior to the weapons of nearby peoples. Over time, Ghana took over control of trade from the North African merchants. Then, additional goods were added to the mix of items traded. Wheat came from the north. Sheep, cattle, and honey

came from the south. Local products, such as leather and cloth, were also traded. Before long, this extensive trade made Ghana very prosperous indeed.

**READING CHECK Generalizing** How did trade help Ghana develop?

## Ghana Builds an Empire

By 800 Ghana was firmly in control of West Africa's trade routes. Nearly all trade between northern and southern Africa passed through Ghana. Ghana's army kept the trade routes safe. Trade increased, and so did Ghana's wealth.



## Taxes and Gold

With so many traders passing through their lands, Ghana's rulers looked for ways to profit from their dealings. One way was to force every trader who entered Ghana to pay a special tax on the goods he carried. Then each trader had to pay another tax on the goods he took with him when he left. The people of Ghana also had to pay taxes. In addition, Ghana forced small neighboring tribes to pay tribute.

Ghana's gold mines brought even more income into the royal treasury. Some gold was carried by traders to lands as far away as England. But not all of Ghana's gold was traded. Ghana's kings also kept huge stores of the precious metal for themselves.

The rulers of Ghana banned everyone else in Ghana from owning gold nuggets. Common people could only own gold dust, which they used as money. This ensured that the king was richer than his subjects.

## Expansion of the Empire

Part of Ghana's wealth went to support its powerful army. Ghana's kings used this army to conquer many neighboring areas. To keep order in their large empire, Ghana's kings allowed conquered rulers

to retain much of their power. These local rulers acted as governors of their territories, answering only to the king.

The empire of Ghana reached its peak under **Tunka Manin** (TOOHN-kah MAH-nin). This king had a lavish court where he displayed the wealth of the empire. A Spanish writer noted the court's splendor.

“The king adorns himself . . . round his neck and his forearms, and he puts on a high cap decorated with gold and wrapped in a turban of fine cotton. Behind the king stand ten pages [servants] holding shields and swords decorated with gold.”

—al-Bakri, from *The Book of Routes and Kingdoms*

**READING CHECK** Summarizing How did the rulers of Ghana control trade?

## Ghana's Decline

In the mid-1000s, Ghana was rich and powerful, but by the early 1200s, the empire had collapsed. Three major factors contributed to its end.

### Invasion

The first factor that hurt Ghana was invasion. A group of North African Muslims called the Almoravids (al-moh-RAH-vidz) attacked Ghana in the 1060s. After 14 years of fighting, the Almoravids defeated the people of Ghana. The Almoravids didn't control Ghana for long, but they weakened the empire. They cut off many trade routes and formed new trading partnerships with Muslim leaders. Without this trade, Ghana could not support its empire.

### Overgrazing

A second factor in Ghana's decline also involved the Almoravids. These invaders brought herds of animals with them. These animals ate all the grass in many pastures, leaving the soil exposed to hot desert winds.

### FOCUS ON READING

In the section titled “Ghana's Decline,” what type of structural pattern is used? How do you know?

## BIOGRAPHY

### Tunka Manin

Ruled around 1068

All we know about Tunka Manin comes from the writings of a Muslim geographer who wrote about Ghana. From his writings, we know that Tunka Manin was the nephew of the previous king, a man named Basi. Kingship and property in Ghana did not pass from father to son, but from uncle to nephew. Only the king's sister's son could inherit the throne. Once he did become king, Tunka Manin surrounded himself with finery and many luxuries.

**Contrasting** How was inheritance in Ghana different from inheritance in other societies you have studied?





### Overgrazing

Too many animals grazing in one area can lead to problems, such as the loss of farmland that occurred in West Africa.

- 1 Animals are allowed to graze in areas with lots of grass.
- 2 With too many animals grazing, however, the grass disappears, leaving the soil below exposed to the wind.
- 3 The wind blows the soil away, turning what was once grassland into desert.

These winds blew away the soil, leaving it worthless for farming or herding. Many farmers had to leave in search of new homes.

### Internal Rebellion

A third factor also helped bring about the decline of Ghana's empire. In about 1200 the people of a country that Ghana had conquered rose up in rebellion. Within a few years these rebels had taken over the entire empire of Ghana.

Once in control, however, the rebels found that they could not keep order.

Weakened, Ghana was attacked and defeated by one of its neighbors. The empire fell apart.

### READING CHECK Identifying Cause and Effect

Why did Ghana decline in the AD 1000s?

### SUMMARY AND PREVIEW

The empire of Ghana in West Africa grew rich and powerful through its control of trade routes and its gold production. The empire lasted from about 800 to 1200. In the next section, you will learn about two empires that arose after Ghana—Mali and Songhai.

## Section 2 Assessment

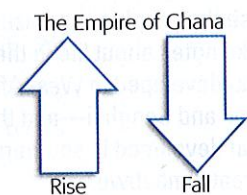
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ONLINE QUIZ

### Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and People

1. a. **Identify** What were the two major resources traded in Ghana?  
b. **Explain** How did the **silent barter** system work?
2. a. **Identify** Who was **Tunka Manin**?  
b. **Generalize** What did Ghana's kings do with the money they raised from taxes and gold mining?  
c. **Elaborate** Why did the rulers of Ghana not want everyone to have gold?
3. a. **Recall** What group invaded Ghana in the late 1000s?  
b. **Analyze** How did overgrazing help cause the fall of Ghana?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Categorizing** Look through the events you listed in your notes. Decide which contributed to Ghana's rise and which led to its fall.



Organize the events in a diagram like this one.

### FOCUS ON WRITING

5. **Reviewing Notes on Ghana** Review this section and your notes on the rise and fall of Ghana's trading empire. Keep in mind how your character's life may have been impacted by Ghana's history.