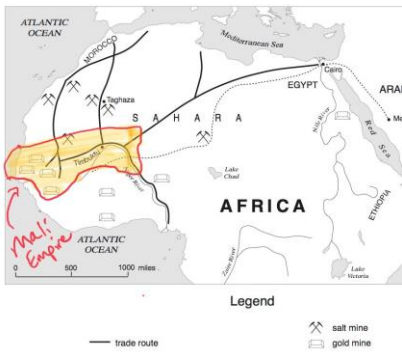


# Station 3

## Mali



Several kingdoms benefited from the increased wealth that the trans-Saharan and Indian Ocean trades brought to Africa. **Mali** The most powerful trading society in West Africa of the time was **Mali** (1200s-1400s CE).

The government of Mali profited from the gold trade across the Sahara, connecting West and North Africa through trade. It also taxed nearly all other trade entering West Africa; and, therefore, became even more prosperous. Most of Mali's residents were farmers. However, the great cities of *Timbuktu* and *Gao* accumulated the most wealth and developed into centers of Islamic life in the region. Mali became instrumental in spreading Islam throughout West Africa. Timbuktu in particular became a world-renowned center of Islamic learning. By the 1500s, books created and sold in Timbuktu brought prices higher than most

other goods.

Mali's founding ruler, King Sundiata, was a capable ruler. Most scholars believe he was a Muslim and used his connections with others of his faith to establish trade relationships with North African and Arab merchants. Sundiata cultivated a thriving gold trade in Mali.



## Hausa Kingdoms

The Hausa city-states rose to prominence in northern Nigeria in the 13th century. The prosperity of the region was based on agriculture (cotton and indigo) and trade with other states in Africa.

The Hausa had a common language, laws, and customs. By the mid-14th century, rulers of the principal Hausa cities had built fortresses and established walled towns as the enduring centers of power in Hausaland. Those cities became part of the trans-Saharan trade and subsequently became wealthy. In addition, they became enmeshed in the slave trade.

Hausaland often fell under the dominance of strong kingdoms in West Africa and was never a unified political entity.

Hausa traders came in contact with Muslim merchants from northern Africa as early as the 11th century. By the 14th century, the rulers in Hausaland area adhered at least nominally to Islam. With the introduction of Islam, many Hausa rulers adopted the new religion while also honoring traditional ways. Much of the traditional pagan ritualism persisted, however, especially among the commoner class, and it wasn't until the 1800s that a substantial portion of the Hausa had converted to Islam, although the majority still followed the traditional Hausa pantheistic religion.

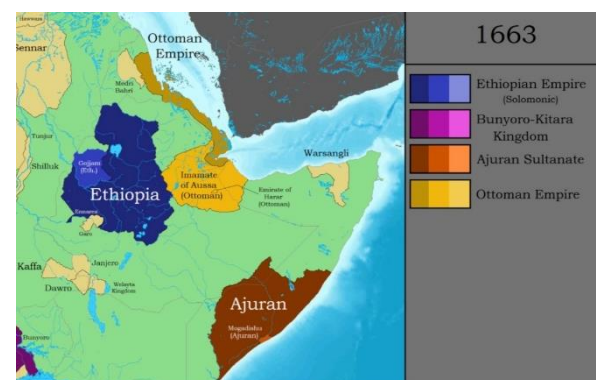


## Ethiopia

The Solomonic Dynasty of Ethiopia was from 1270 to 1520 C.E. It's names so because in 1270 the new king claimed lineage from Aksum and, hence, from King Solomon through his son with the Queen of Sheba: Menelik I. There had already been a long history of **Christianity in Ethiopia** dating to the Kingdom of Aksum, 100-940 C.E.

Given Ethiopia's terrain and difficulty of communications, the early Solomonic monarchs could not construct a bureaucratic empire. Although the court periodically moved around the country to demonstrate the emperor's might, administrative flexibility and continuity could be provided only through the regional lords. Emperor Amda Sion came to power in 1314. He consolidated the dynasty's rule over older Christian areas and encouraged the expansion of Ethiopian monasticism in order to spread Christianity.

During the Solomonic period, the state engaged in warfare on its southeastern front over religious and economic differences. The Christian highland and the Muslim coast were in constant fighting, often for the right to control trade routes. Islam was associated with merchants and commerce; while Christianity remained loyal to the feudal system.



## Swahili Coast Cities

Islam's arrival here helped to spread the new faith, and the presence of Islamic merchants influenced the developing language of Swahili, a Bantu language melded with Arabic vocabulary.

The coastal towns that formed the core of the Swahili world at its peak in the period between 1000 and 1500 CE. Around 1000, the coast seems to have become more firmly embedded in Indian Ocean trade networks and culture, especially in the Dar-al-Islam. The result was the Islamization of the coast and the expansion of the coastal villages into towns and cities.

Like many maritime trading cities, the cities of the Swahili coast were city-states. That is to say, there was no Swahili empire or any overarching political structure. Each city was self-governing. The cities were usually ruled by kings, but the powers of the kings seem to have been rather limited and in many instances were symbolic. Some towns would go for long periods of time without a king, suggesting that kingship was not central to government.

Rather, the real power lay with elite merchants, who are usually described as *waungwana* in Swahili or as "patricians" in English. Parts of each city were reserved exclusively for patricians, and it was they who chose one of their number to be king. Many of these Swahili patricians had the leisure to participate in Islamic scholarship and because of their commercial contacts with Arab merchants they often intermarried with visiting or immigrant Arab families.

The growing wealth of the patrician merchants resulted in a major transformation of Swahili cities in the middle of the 14th century. The stone houses they built were large and were meant to demonstrate their creditworthiness to potential business partners. They included guest apartments where visiting merchants could live and storage areas where their guests could keep their trade goods. Inside the houses were carved plaster niches, called *zidaka*, where imported Chinese porcelain and other signs of wealth could be displayed. By 1500 C.E. the Swahili cities were thriving commercial centers.



## Great Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe was the most powerful of all the East African kingdoms between the 1300 and 1450 C.E. Zimbabwe built its prosperity on a mixture of agriculture grazing, trade in ivory, and above all, gold. Zimbabwe had rich gold fields, and it traded with the East African coastal Swahili city states as well as with Persia, India, and China. Just as in Ghana and Mali, the kings taxed any gold that traveled through the land.

As in the Swahili cities, a testament to the kingdom's wealth can be seen through its architecture. Though most houses in the region had traditionally been constructed from wood, by the ninth century chiefs began to construct their "zimbabwes", the Bantu word for "dwellings", with stone. By the end of the thirteenth century, a massive wall of stone, 30 feet tall by 15 feet thick, surrounded the capital city, which became known as the **Great Zimbabwe**.

The stone wall was the first large one on the continent to be built without mortar. Inside the

wall, most of the royal city's buildings were made of stone. In the late fifteenth century, nearly 20,000 people resided within the Great Zimbabwe. Great Zimbabwe is believed to have served as a royal palace for the local monarch. As such, it would have been used as the seat of political power.

Great Zimbabwe was the first significant empire to emerge in South Africa. Great Zimbabwe was ruled by a hereditary monarchy. Its ruler governed with the help of a court comprising family members along with military and religious advisors, while distant regions were ruled by governors appointed by the king.

Over time, overgrazing so damaged the environment surrounding Zimbabwe that residents of the bustling capital city abandoned it by the end of the 1400s. The wall still stands in the modern country of Zimbabwe.

