

West African Objects & Artifacts

Vocabulary & Key Terms:

- Artifact
- Atlas
- Caravans
- Cartographer
- Cowries
- Djeli
- Ghana
- Islam
- Mali
- Merchant
- Mosque
- Muslim
- Praise
- Sahara
- Sahel
- Savanna
- Songhai
- Trade
- Trans-saharan

Student Context:

As evidence of the past, archeologists excavate objects, plant and animal remains, features, buildings, and sites. Archeologists study objects as historical artifacts that tell part of the story of the past. The empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai thrived in West Africa from the 6th to the 16th century in large part because they controlled a key resource-gold. From very early on, traders crossed the Sahara with camel caravans to access not only gold but to trade in other resources.

How do we know? Objects of the gold road can tell us a lot about the history of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, and how they were connected to the rest of the world through trade, and what made them so famous.

They traded across the Sahara. The Sahara means desert in Arabic. Right below (south) of the Sahara is the Sahel. The Sahel means shore in Arabic. Thus, goods were traded “from shore to shore” by people leading camel caravans across the “ocean” that is the Sahara. They did so by using camel caravans (as “ships”) and relying on the network of routes that are called

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The Gold Road. Merchants traded not only objects but with their movement, ideas and religions traveled with people, and helped contribute to the spread of Islam to Ghana, Mali and Songhai.