Chapter Summary

Kingdoms and States of Medieval Africa

ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How does geography affect society, culture, and trade?

This chapter describes the geographic factors that affected the development of African civilizations, the Bantu migration, Indian Ocean trade in East Africa, aspects of African society and culture, and the growth of great trading states such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.

African Society and Culture

- Northern and southern Africa are dominated by deserts; eastern Africa is home to the Great Rift Valley with a tropical climate; and western Africa is mostly covered by grasslands and tropical forests.
- Many African societies were matrilineal and based on extended family units, with most people living in rural villages.
- Very young children were raised and taught by their mothers. As they got older, fathers took over their sons education, whereas girls continued to learn from their mothers.
- Most Africans shared common traditional religious beliefs and customs, especially the honoring of their ancestors, though these beliefs were challenged by the arrival of Islam.
- Africa’s rich culture of paintings, carvings, sculpture, music, and dance often served a religious purpose.
- Berbers and their camel caravans were crucial in trade across the Sahara.
- Sundiata Keita established the kingdom of Mali in the mid-1200s.
- Mali extended from the Atlantic coast to the city of Timbuktu.
- Mansa Mūsā doubled the size of the kingdom of Mali, created a strong central government, and established a library and university in Timbuktu, which became a cultural and intellectual capital.
- The kingdom of Songhai rose to power because it was located along major trade routes and because its rulers conquered neighboring territory.
- The migration of the Bantu resulted in the spread of their language, agricultural skills, and ironworking to South and East Africa.
- Sea trade along the East African coast became part of the Indian Ocean trading network, bringing cultural influences from Muslim traders and settlers.
- In southern Africa, independent villages organized into states, the most powerful of which was Zimbabwe.

Kingdoms and States of Africa

- Ghana had an abundance of gold, which it traded for goods brought by Muslim merchants from North Africa.