



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA  
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL & BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES

## Center for Middle Eastern Studies

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Ancient & Medieval World History  
Appropriate for Grades 6-7

### **Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes: A Cooperative Group-work Mini Unit**

#### **Mini-Unit Objective:**

Students will analyze the effects of geography on and cultural interchange between Islam and West Africa by examining and creating a creative presentation using primary sources and artifacts relating to trans-Saharan trade and adaptation to the desert. Students will be assessed on their individual primary source analysis and their contributions to the group's presentation on the element of culture and/or theme of geography assigned.

#### **CA Standards:**

#### **Background:**

This unit is intended to serve as a capstone for the study of two separate units on the spread of Islam and the trans-Saharan trade empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. Alternatively, it could be used as an exploratory unit bridging those two units. Depending on the number of students and time/resources available, teachers may want to limit the number of cooperative group tasks to fewer than those offered in this unit. Also, if studying ancient history, a selection of just one or two of the cooperative group work activities related to nomadic lifestyle and adaptation to the environment might be used to culminate or begin the study of settled versus nomadic ways of life.

Cooperative groups of 4-5 students should be pre-assigned with a heterogeneous grouping intended to mix reading levels, gender, and multiple abilities to best help each other to complete the tasks. If students do not frequently use cooperative groupings, have them complete a short group skill builder, such as creating a team name or finding two commonalities between them to ease group tension and feel comfortable working as a group. Ideally, this unit will be taught after the class has already completed some group skill builders to teach important group work skills.

The unit's design is based on the work of the Program for Complex Instruction at the Stanford University School of Education.

**Unit Overview:**

**Expected Time:** The unit is expected to take 3-5 days depending on the length of class time and on how much background and content was pre-taught during the preceding units on Islam and trans-Saharan trade. More time may be needed to

review or pre-teach vocabulary and/or to give adequate time for group discussion of primary source materials. The group presentations are not meant to be polished or labor-intensive, such that giving only one to two periods to create and present them is adequate to show their learning.

**Day 1 (50 minutes)—**

Explain that students are going to be working in groups to demonstrate their knowledge of the intersection of Islamic and West African cultures through the trans-Saharan trade. Each group will be given a set of artifacts, photographs, and/or primary source texts to examine and discuss together. Then each student will complete an individual report found in the group's folder. On the second day, students will work to create the presentation described in their group's folder relating to the cultural element and/or geographic theme studied by their group the day before. On the third day, groups will present to the rest of the class. Explain that students will be judged individually and as a group and will have a chance to rate themselves and their group members.<sup>1</sup>

Break students into groups by projecting their new seating and group roles: materials manager, facilitator, summarizer, and harmonizer (if a group has 5 people, separate harmonizer and timekeeper, if only four, give the role of timekeeper to the harmonizer). Groups should be mixed heterogeneously by reading level, multiple abilities, and gender. Have the groups complete a short group skill builder, such as creating a team name or finding two commonalities between them to ease group tension and feel comfortable working as a group.

Have the materials manager open the group's folder and distribute the task card to the facilitator and enable all group members to see the primary sources and any artifacts provided. Have the facilitator read the task card to the group and facilitate having the group read and discuss their sources (on the resource cards and/or objects in the folder/box). Give the timekeeper a head's up on how much time the group will have until the end of the period and the expectation that by the end of the period the group will have read, discussed, and each completed the individual reports on their group's topic.<sup>2</sup> As groups work, your job is to check in with groups and listen to their discussions. If a group gets stuck, the harmonizer may raise his/her hand and explain the group's problem and ask for help. Try to move

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<sup>1</sup> If this is a capstone to a unit on Islam and West Africa's trans-Saharan trade, then you do not need to pre-teach any vocabulary or orient the class to the general geography of the area; however, if this is taught as an exploratory unit or if you have a large amount of English learners, you may want to pre-teach or review some key vocabulary terms that will come up for students: environment, adaptation, resource, nomad(ic), Islam, Sahara Desert, Arabic, sub-Saharan, trans-Saharan, Qu'ran, caravan, and trade route.

<sup>2</sup> Depending on the skill level of your students and their familiarity with working in groups, consider giving them an additional day to complete the discussion portion of the task.

between groups frequently and allow students to do their roles even when you are listening.

In the last five to ten minutes in the period, begin collecting the individual reports from the groups, have them put their group folder back in order, and have the summarizer report out to the rest of the class on the group's progress and/or discussion.

Make sure to read and score each individual report using the rubric (Appendix A) before the next day so that all students can get feedback on how they are doing so far and so that you can correct any misconceptions or help groups that are struggling and give them a chance to re-do any incomplete work before moving on to the presentation portion of the group task.

### **Day 2 (50 minute period)—**

Break students into their groups again, assigning new students to the group roles, so that different students get the chance to do each role. Explain that today each group will be preparing a group presentation described on their activity cards related to their group's element of culture and/or geographic theme. Show them the rubric you (and they) will be using to score their group's presentation. Make sure to explain that a key element is making sure that all group members have a role in the presentation.

The graded individual reports should be returned in the group folder. Instruct materials managers to pass out the individual reports and determine if the group needs to go back to the sources and keep working on them and revise their individual reports before moving on to the next part of the task. As groups begin working, this is your chance to help any groups that seemed to be struggling based on the quality and completeness of their individual reports from the day before.

Groups should spend the remainder of the period, working on creating their group's presentation task. This includes gathering or creating any props or other materials needed for the presentation the next day or period.<sup>3</sup> Provide a materials table or cart with supplies for this, such as markers, glue, tape, scissors, fabric, costumes, different types of paper, cardboard, etc. All materials managers are responsible for (and the only ones allowed to) getting materials from the cart and returning them in an orderly fashion. At the end of the period, make sure each group cleans up, is prepared to present on the following day (or period), and that the summarizer reports out on the progress and needs of the group and whether the group needs any more time to prepare. Based on the needs voiced, adjust the plans for the

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<sup>3</sup> If you have more than one 50 minute period with the class during the day, consider putting days two and three together so that the presentations can come immediately upon completion of the preparation for them. This will place some time pressure on the groups and allow them to clean up and not need to store any props or use time to re-prepare.

presentation period as needed, determining whether more time (or less) is needed to prepare before presenting. Consider having all group members (or groups) complete an exit slip (Appendix B) before leaving where they write what they personally accomplished that day and what their role will be in the presentation. This will allow for you to double check that all groups are ready to present and that each student in the group has a role.

**Day 3 (50 minute period)—**

Have the students break into groups, again with new roles, and give 10-15 minutes to prepare to present, including ensuring that all students in the group have a role in the presentation. Check in with all groups and have them move themselves and any props to where the presentations will take place. As each group presents, have the other students not presenting, take notes on the presentation (see provided note-taking sheet; Appendix C) and explain what they learned from the presentation. After all presentations are finished, have each individual student complete a self and group evaluation on which is room for you to give the group and individual grade and/or comments for the student (Appendix D). As each group presents, complete the group presentation rubric (Appendix E).

Spend the remainder of the class cleaning up and putting away all props and materials and getting each group's folder returned, in order, to you.

**Appendix A: Individual Report Rubric** (copy to the back of each individual report for easy grading)

	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Content</b> _____	Answers were based in evidence from the source material provided. Writer clearly demonstrated understanding of the cultural element and/or geographic theme presented. Response used quotations and/or direct reference to sources.	Answers were mainly based in evidence from the source material provided. Writer demonstrated some understanding of the cultural element and/or geographic theme presented. Response used reference to sources but may not have been exact.	Answers had some basis in source material, but much of the response was not based in reference to the evidence provided. Showed limited understanding of the cultural element or geographic theme.	Little evidence that the writer had read or used the source materials to create response. Very limited to no demonstration of understanding. Response either was missing content or was lacking in detail. Few or no details given.
<b>Quality of Response</b> _____	Each response was over 6-8 sentences long with clear response to all questions asked. Many details given.	Responded to each question with 4-5 sentences. Some details given.	Either responded with only 2-3 sentences for each question OR responded in detail to only one question. Only a few details given.	Responded with fewer than 2 sentences to each question. One question may have been skipped entirely.
<b>Readability</b> _____	Very few errors (0-1) in capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Writes in complete sentences with variety of sentence types.	A few errors (2-3) in capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Writes in complete sentences.	Some errors (3-4) in capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Some run-ons or sentence fragments.	Many errors (5+) in capitalization, spelling, punctuation, and grammar. Frequent run-ons or fragments.
<b>Original Work</b> _____	Author wrote own responses entirely with no evidence of copying between group members.	Author wrote own responses, but may have some small commonality between group responses suggestive of working together.	Response is nearly the same as other group members. Shows evidence of some copying between group members.	Responses are exactly the same amongst group members OR between 2 or more group members.
<b>Overall Score:</b>	<b>Teacher Comments:</b>			

**Appendix B: Exit Slip for Day 2**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**EXIT SLIP FOR DAY 2**

1. Describe the presentation your group worked on today:

2. Explain what your role will be in tomorrow's presentation:

3. Does your group still need to work on something? If so, what and how much time is needed?

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Group Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

**EXIT SLIP FOR DAY 2**

1. Describe the presentation your group worked on today:

2. Explain what your role will be in tomorrow's presentation:

3. Does your group still need to work on something? If so, what and how much time is needed?

## Appendix C: Presentation Note-Taking Sheet

**Directions:** For each group, list the group topic. Then in 3-4 sentences explain what the presentation was about and what you learned. Try to make a connection between the presentation and something we have already learned about related to Islam or West Africa.

**Use the following sentence starters to help you:**

The presentation was about....

I learned that...

I learned how...

I learned about...

This is similar to...

The presentation showed how...

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Group 1 Topic:

Description of Presentation, Learning, and Connections:

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Group 2 Topic:

Description of Presentation, Learning, and Connections:

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Group 3 Topic:

Description of Presentation, Learning, and Connections:

### Appendix D: Group and Self Evaluation

	<b>Score Your Group (4-1)</b>	<b>Score Yourself (4-1)</b>
<b>Presentation Content &amp; Format</b>	Our group's presentation content and format should receive a_____, because...	For the presentation content and format, I personally should receive a_____, because...
<b>Team Work</b> -	For teamwork, our group should receive a_____, because...	For teamwork, I personally should receive a_____, because...
<b>Presentation Quality</b>	Our group's presentation quality should receive a_____, because...	For presentation quality, I should receive a_____, because...
<b>Effort</b>	Our group's effort should receive a_____, because...	For effort, I should personally receive a_____, because...
<b>Overall Score Average:</b> _____	<b>For My Group:</b> _____/16 (add up!)	<b>For Me:</b> _____/16(add up!)

### Appendix E: Group Presentation Rubric

	4	3	2	1
<b>Presentation Content</b> _____	Presentation was about the topic assigned. Presentation masterfully and creatively shared topic with the class.	Presentation was mainly about the topic assigned. Presentation was somewhat creative and shared most of the topic with the class.	Presentation was only partly about the topic assigned. Presentation lacked creativity OR did not share topic well with class.	Presentation had little to do with topic. Presentation both lacked creativity and class did not learn much about topic from watching it.
<b>Presentation Format</b> _____	Presentation corresponded to the format assigned extremely well. Showed cleverness and creativity in use of format. Appropriate length for format.	Presentation used the format assigned. Showed some cleverness or creativity in use of format. Adequate length but may have been a little to long or short.	Presentation was either somewhat out of format or some element of format was missing. Length of presentation did not match format.	Presentation lacked many elements of the format assigned. Extremely short presentation for format assigned.
<b>Team Work</b> _____	All team members participated in presentation. Group clearly worked well together.	All team members participated in presentation, but participation was unequal or one member may have stood out. Group worked well together.	Most team members participated in presentation but very unequally. Group did not appear to work well together.	Most of group did not participate in presentation and it was unequal. Group had many problems working together.
<b>Presentation Quality</b> _____	All members knew their roles and spoke loudly and clearly. Presentation was a finished product.	Most members knew their roles and spoke clearly. Presentation was mainly a finished product. May have still needed one or two finishing touches.	Not all members knew their role and/or spoke clearly. Presentation was somewhat incomplete.	Members did not know their roles and/or were very difficult to hear or understand. Presentation was incomplete.
<b>Overall Score:</b>	<b>Teacher Comments:</b>			

## **Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

### **HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

#### **Activity 1: Songs of Slavery Along the Trans-Saharan Trade Route**

##### **Activity Card**

**People make up songs and poetry to entertain themselves and to remember important events and social issues. Historians often turn to popular songs and poetry to find out what happened, what issues were important to people, and how different people reacted to events of the times.**

**As a team, listen to musical track 3 on the CD, look at the resource cards for translations of other Gnaouan song lyrics and examine the musical instruments used and look at the photographs of Gnaouan musicians. Discuss the questions below:**

1. Look at the instruments and match the sounds with those of the song on the CD. All of the instruments were portable (able to be carried). Why was it important to have portable instruments on the trans-Saharan trade route?
2. Who is singing the song and what is the mood of the song? How are the mood and the role of the singer related to the topic of the song?
3. What words or phrases in the song give information about events that took place on the trans-Saharan trade route? Based on the song, what was an important resource traded along these routes?
4. What do the instruments, musicians, and the song lyrics show about how musical traditions developed and intersected between West Africa and Islam along the trans-Saharan trade route?
5. How are songs about historical events different from stories about historical events?

\* \* \*

**As a team, compose a stanza or entire song that tells the story of the gold-salt trade from the perspective of an enslaved salt miner, a hard-working gold miner, or a nomadic trader. You may compose your own music or adapt a song's music that you already know. Use the musical instruments provided to create a beat or rhythm for your song that fits the mood of the topic. Share your song with the class. Be sure to explain your assignment and why you chose the mood/beat.**

## **Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

### **HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

#### **Activity 1: Songs of Slavery Along the Trans-Saharan Trade Route**

##### **Resource Card**

**The Gnaouan musical artists are black African musicians who were originally brought to Morocco as part of the slave trade and then settled in Morocco. Their music talks about historical events, religious beliefs (both Islamic and tribal), and other current cultural and social topics.**

**Musical Track 3: “Allah Ya Marhba” (Allah is the Arabic name for God)**

##### **Song Lyrics:**

**They brought us. They brought us. They brought us.  
They sold us at the market.  
The children of the Fulani.  
The children of the Hasawa.  
The children of the Niger.  
They brought us. They brought us. They brought us.**

##### **Musical Instruments Used on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes:**

**Talking Drum:** A drum held under the arm that has hide stretched on both sides and cords of palm that can be compressed by the arm to create different tones. It is tapped using a drum stick made of wood on different parts of the membrane to create varying sounds and can be made to sound as if “talking.”

**Tirint Guitar:** A three-stringed guitar with a small resonating belly and long neck. There are two male strings and one female string, which are plucked and strummed to create music.

**Hand Cymbals:** Pairs of metal cymbals worn on the thumb and middle finger are clicked together at different speeds and rhythms to create a loud percussive base.

**Two-bellied Drum:** This drum is made of two frames, one smaller and one larger, lashed together with strings of hide that pull the membrane of the drum across the frames of the drums. The drum is played by holding the drum between crossed legs and using the fingertips and the palm of the hand to hit the two membranes.

**Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**  
**HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

**Activity 2: What The Songs of Berber Nomadic Tribeswomen Tell Us**

**Activity Card**

**People make up songs and poetry to entertain themselves and to remember important events and social issues. Historians often turn to popular songs and poetry to find out what happened, what issues were important to people, and how different people reacted to events of the times.**

**As a team, look at the resource card for the translations of Berber women’s song lyrics and other tribal lyrics and listen to the musical track #3 on the CD from contemporary musician, Rokia Traore. Traditionally, these poems were sung to a beat by the bride and other women in a semi-public space, such as at a wedding. Discuss the questions below:**

1. What topics did Berber women and men sing about?
2. What can you tell about the rhymes and rhythms used in the songs?  
Considering nomadic lifestyle and lack of education, why might songs be short and need to rhyme?
3. Listen to track 3 on the CD provided. Who is singing the song and what is the mood of the song? How are the mood and the role of the singer related to the topic of the song?
4. What words or phrases in the songs give information about nomadic life?  
What resources did they value and what other things can you tell about their dress and lifestyle?
5. What do the song lyrics show about what nomadic peoples valued?
6. How are poems and songs about events and issues different from stories or articles about events and issues?

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**As a team, compose two short songs/poems (each “stanza”—the poem’s “paragraphs”—should be two lines long and rhyming, so that they can be sent as a text message). One should tell the story of an important current event or social issue in our community and the other should be a flirting poem. Just as Berber poems reference important objects, beliefs, and customs in their poems, yours should reference ones today. Put your poems to some kind of beat or music that fits the mood and topic of the subject matter. Share your poems with the class and explain why you used each beat.**

**Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**  
**HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

**Activity 2: What The Songs of Berber Nomadic Tribeswomen Tell Us**

**Resource Card**

Selections from "Poetry as a Strategy of Power: The Case of Riffian Berber Women"  
Author(s): Terri Brint Joseph Source: *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Spring, 1980), pp. 418-434  
Published by: The University of Chicago Press Stable URL:  
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173583> Accessed: 26/04/2010 17:37

**"Form and Composition of the Songs**

Extremely brief, the Berber song is made up of a single couplet. Each of the two lines is roughly twelve syllables long, although some contain only nine and others as many as fifteen. Each song is introduced by a traditional chorus which can be repeated as often as the singers wish:

**Ayah-rala boyah-ayah rala boya**  
**Ayah-rala boyah-ayah rala boya**  
**Ayah-ra (la) boyah etc.**

Most Riffians interviewed for this study regard this chorus as a series of sounds with no meaning. They say it is used because "it is the custom." Several informants, however, reported that the initial a is a vocative like the English "oh"; yah-rala was said to be a form of la la, madame, or lady, in this case the bride's mother; and boyah a form of baba, father. One anthropological account has translated the refrain as **"Oh look, oh look, look at the bride."**

Rather than use formulaic or set material ... Berber singers engage in self-conscious composition, scrutinizing their work and subjecting it to numerous revisions. Indeed, there seem to be no Berber girls who are unable to compose and perform original songs. Composing is not only a privilege but a responsibility. It is expected that each girl will be a poet just as it is expected that each woman will bake bread for her family. One Berber song uses the complaint, "I have no

songs," as a metaphor to suggest that its singer is unattractive and that no one wants to marry her:

**Madesrah wuware na-we thanen-awanu**  
**Ra-la thasherethine agmathunt sufero**  
**[I have no songs! I'm like a rock which has fallen in a well....**  
**Oh, my friend, catch the rock with a string.]**

...  
The Berbers them-selves, of course, are consciously aware of the wedding as the context for the songs, as one lyric specifically indicates:

**Eh-ham rid gazar nunkor swatad er henne**  
**Wo-men gabridan saad enesh ma tuniye.**  
**[River Nekkora has risen, bringing tea and henna**  
**When luck was divided among us, I alone was forgotten.]**

...  
Since these negotiations will lead to marriage, the singer, if she does not care for him, must discourage the young man so thoroughly in her lyrics that he will voluntarily withdraw his offer:  
**A thsib-banah-tasebnath: atsah ho fades**  
**Jemah sucarinik-nish d shik udentes**  
**[I am going to wash my fringed head scarf; I shall hang it on the bush:**  
**Take your sugar away! You and I aren't good together.]"**

## **Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

### **HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

#### **Activity 3: Nomadic Lifestyle in the Saharan Desert and Atlas Mountains**

##### **Activity Card**

**Historians often turn to art, architecture, and craftwork of the period they are studying for clues about how people lived and what they wanted to remember.**

**As a team examine the photographs and artifacts of nomadic tribal life. Discuss the questions below:**

1. What do these photographs and artifacts show you about how nomadic tribes lived? How did they survive and what did they do as part of a daily routine?
2. What does the architecture of the nomadic dwellings tell you about how nomads adapted to their environment?
3. Based on the photographs and artifacts, what resources and abilities did nomadic tribes value?
4. Why was it important for nomads to live and travel as a part of a tribe? What benefits did they gain by doing so?
5. What do you think were the roles of men and women in the tribe? What were the roles of children?

\* \* \*

**As a team, design pages of a children's book or a simple children's game to teach young children in the tribe how to be a nomad. Share your creation(s) with the class. Be sure to explain what each part teaches about nomadic life.**

**Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

**HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

**Activity 3: Nomadic Lifestyle in the Saharan Desert and Atlas Mountains**

**Resource Card**









## **Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

### **HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

#### **Activity 4: Ibn Battuta's Account of Crossing the Desert by Caravan**

##### **Activity Card**

**An important resource for historians are eye-witness accounts of historical events. Ibn Battuta was an Arab historian who traveled across the Islamic empires of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and wrote down descriptions of what he saw and experienced.**

**As a team, read the selections from Ibn Battuta's account of crossing the desert from Syria to Medina and the Saharan Desert as a part of a caravan. Examine the trade maps and routes provided as well. Discuss the questions below:**

1. What was the length of Ibn Battuta's journey and what supplies did he prepare or need to make it successfully through the desert?
2. How did geographic conditions (e.g. climate, terrain, etc.) play a role in his journey?
3. What difficulties did travelers face when crossing the Sahara?
4. Why was it important to travel as part of a group (caravan)?
5. What unusual places or resources did he encounter in the desert that you would not have expected?
6. Looking at the photographs and maps, what resources do you notice and which does the desert seem to lack?

\* \* \*

**As a team, design a mural depicting the people, places, and difficulties encountered while crossing the Sahara by caravan. Use Ibn Battuta's vivid descriptions and the photographs and maps for ideas. Share your mural with the class. Be sure to explain what each part or detail shows about the caravan experience.**

## Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes

### HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?

#### Activity 4: Excerpts from Ibn Battuta's Account of Crossing the Sahara by Caravan

##### Resource Card

"At Sijilmasa [at the edge of the desert] I bought camels and a four months' supply of forage for them. Thereupon I set out on the 1st Muharram of the year 53 [AH 753, February 13, 1352] with a caravan including, amongst others, a number of the merchants of Sijilmasa.

##### **The saltworks at the oasis of Taghaza**

After twenty-five days [from Sijilmasa] we reached Taghaza, an unattractive village, with the curious feature that its houses and mosques are built of blocks of salt, roofed with camel skins. There are no trees there, nothing but sand. In the sand is a salt mine; they dig for the salt, and find it in thick slabs, lying one on top of the other, as though they had been tool-squared and laid under the surface of the earth. A camel will carry two of these slabs...

"We passed ten days of discomfort there, because the water is brackish and the place is plagued with flies. Water supplies are laid in at Taghaza for the crossing of the desert which lies beyond it, which is a ten-nights' journey with no water on the way except on rare occasions. We indeed had the good fortune to find water in plenty, in pools left by the rain. One day we found a pool of sweet water between two rocky prominences. We quenched our thirst at it and then washed our clothes. Truffles are plentiful in this desert and it swarms with lice, so that people wear string necklaces containing mercury, which kills them.

##### **Death in the desert**

At that time we used to go ahead of the caravan, and when we found a place

suitable for pasturage we would graze our beasts. We went on doing this until one of our party was lost in the desert; after that I neither went ahead nor lagged behind. We passed a caravan on the way and they told us that some of their party had become separated from them. We found one of them dead under a shrub, of the sort that grows in the sand, with his clothes on and a whip in his hand. The water was only about a mile away from him.

##### **The oasis of Tisarahla, where the caravan hires a desert guide**

We came next to Tisarahla, a place of subterranean water-beds, where the caravans halt. They stay there three days to rest, mend their waterskins, fill them with water, and sew on them covers of sackcloth as a precaution against the wind.

...

"It often happens that the "takshif"<sup>4</sup> perishes in this desert, with the result that the people of Iwalatan know nothing about the caravan, and all or most of those who are with it perish. That desert is haunted by demons; if the "takshif" be alone, they make sport of him and disorder his mind, so that he loses his way and perishes. For there is no visible road or track in these parts, nothing but sand blown hither and thither by the wind. You see hills of sand in one place, and afterwards you will see them moved to quite another place.

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<sup>4</sup> "Takshif" is a word for a desert guide.

Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes

HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC





## **Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

### **HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

#### **Activity 5: Accounts of the Gold-Salt Trade between North Africa and the Kingdom of Mali**

##### **Activity Card**

**An important resource for historians are eye-witness accounts of historical events. Ibn Battuta was an Arab historian who traveled across the Islamic empires of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and wrote down descriptions of what he saw and experienced. Al-Bakhri was a historian from a prominent Spanish-Arab trading family in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.**

**As a team, read the selections from Ibn Battuta and Al-Bakri's accounts of the gold-salt trade between North Africa and the Kingdom of Mali. Examine the trade map and routes provided as well. Discuss the questions below:**

1. Why was the city of Taghaza unusual? What resource that was a key part of the trading was obtained there?
2. Look for the locations of Sijilmasa, Taghaza, the Niger River, and Timbuktu on the trade map. Trace the route(s) that would allow traders to trade between North Africa and West Africa. What geographic difficulties (climate and terrain) did this pose to merchants and traders?
3. Why was the king of Mali so powerful and wealthy? What did he have that made him this way and how do you think he maintained his power?
4. Why do you think merchants traveled in groups as part of a caravan?
5. If you wanted to convince a fellow merchant to make this difficult journey, what would you say to make him want to go to Timbuktu and the kingdom of Mali?

\* \* \*

**As a team, write a short skit in which an experienced merchant who has traveled the trans-Saharan trade routes convinces some younger traders who are afraid of the Sahara Desert to join his caravan group about to set out for Timbuktu. Your skit should share the route they will take (where they will go), the goods they will trade, what to expect, and what is in it for them—how they will benefit from going there. Use Ibn Battuta's vivid descriptions and the maps for ideas. Perform your skit for the class.**

## Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes

### HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?

#### Activity 5: Excerpts from Ibn Battuta's Account of the Gold-Salt Trade Between North Africa and the Kingdom of Mali

##### Resource Card

**After returning to Fez, in 1352 Ibn Battuta crosses the Sahara and makes a tour of the kingdom of Mali, including the city of Timbuktu.**

##### **Ibn Battuta prepares to cross the Sahara**

At Sijilmasa [at the edge of the desert] I bought camels and a four months' supply of forage for them. Thereupon I set out on the 1st Muharram of the year 53 [AH 753, February 13, 1352] with a caravan including, amongst others, a number of the merchants of Sijilmasa.

##### **The saltworks at the oasis of Taghaza**

After twenty-five days [from Sijilmasa] we reached Taghaza, an unattractive village, with the curious feature that its houses and mosques are built of blocks of salt, roofed with camel skins. There are no trees there, nothing but sand. In the sand is a salt mine; they dig for the salt, and find it in thick slabs, lying one on top of the other, as though they had been tool-squared and laid under the surface of the earth. A camel will carry two of these slabs.

No one lives at Taghaza except the slaves of the Massufa tribe, who dig for the salt; they subsist on dates imported from Dar'a and Sijilmasa, camels' flesh, and millet imported from the Negrolands. The negroes come up from their country and take away the salt from there. At Iwalatan a load of salt brings eight to ten mithqals; in the town of Malli [Mali] it sells for twenty to thirty, and sometimes as much as forty. The negroes use salt as a medium of exchange, just as gold and silver is used [elsewhere]; they cut it up into pieces and buy and sell with it. The business done at Taghaza, for all its meanness, amounts to an enormous figure in terms of hundredweights of gold-dust.

...

##### **Ibn Battuta reaches the Niger river, which he mistakenly believes to be the Nile**

The Nile [actually the Niger] flows from there down to Kabara, and thence to Zagha. In both Kabara and Zagha there are sultans who owe allegiance to the king of Malli. The inhabitants of Zagha are of old standing in Islam; they show great devotion and zeal for study.

Thence the Nile [Niger] descends to Tumbuktu [Timbuktoo] and Gawgaw [Gogo], both of which will be described later; then to the town of Muli in the land of the Limis, which is the frontier province of [the kingdom of] Malli; thence to Yufi, one of the largest towns of the negroes, whose ruler is one of the most considerable of the negro rulers. It cannot be visited by any white man because they would kill him before he got there.

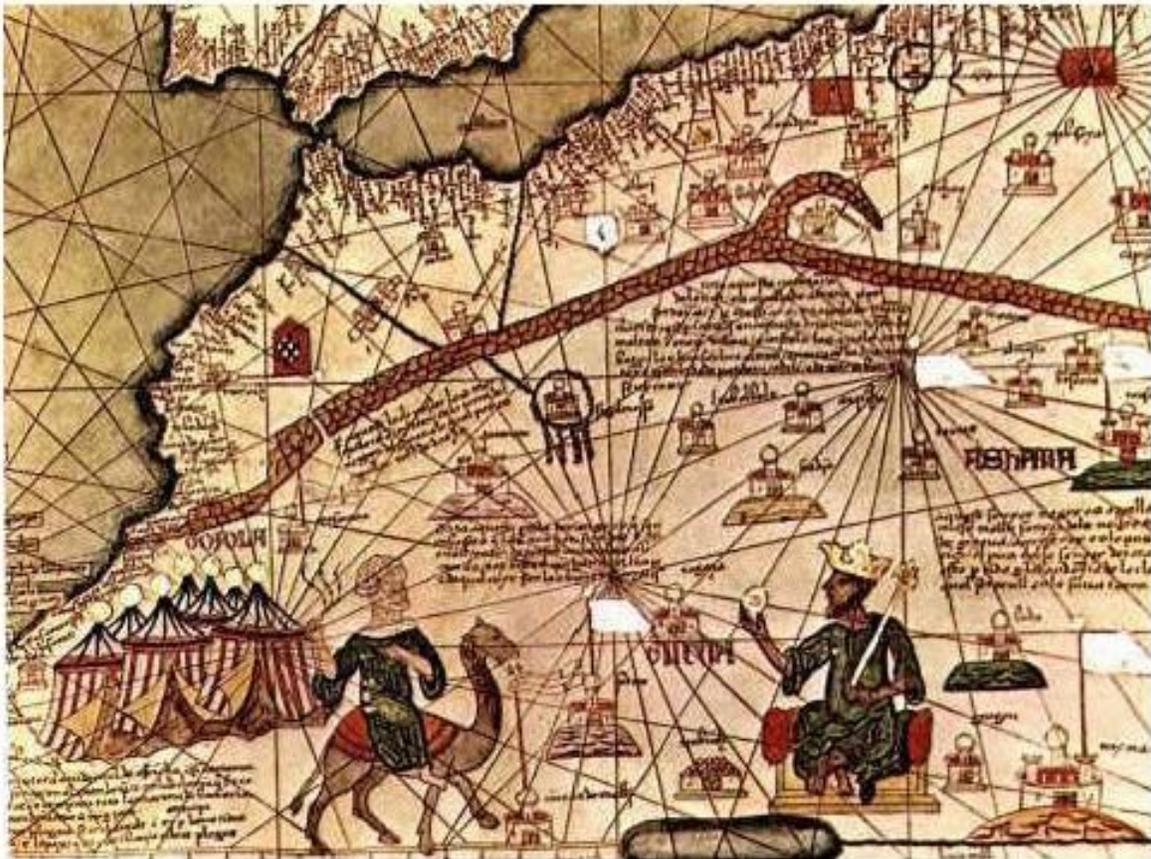
##### **The following description of the Kingdom of Ghana was written by Al-Bakri, a member of a prominent Spanish Arab family who lived during the 11<sup>th</sup> century:**

On every donkey-load of salt when it is brought into the country their king levies one golden dinar and two dinars<sup>5</sup> when it is sent out. ... The best gold is found in his land comes from the town of Ghiyaru, which is eighteen days' traveling distance from the king's town over a country inhabited by tribes of the Sudan whose dwellings are continuous...

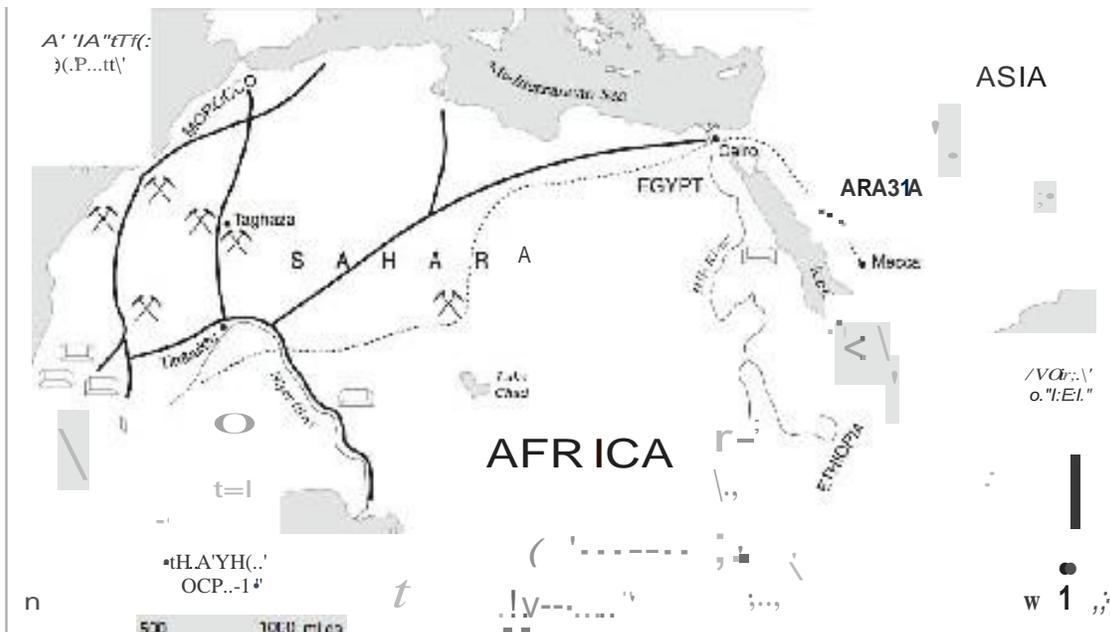
The king of Ghana when he calls up his army, can put 200,000 men into the field, more than 40,000 of them archers.

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<sup>5</sup> **Dinar**—a unit of money collected as a tax



Timbuktu : A Center for Trade



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## **Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

### **HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

#### **Activity 6: Ibn Battuta's Description of the Importance of Islam, the Qu'ran, and the Arabic Language**

##### **Activity Card**

**An important resource for historians are eye-witness accounts of historical events. Ibn Battuta was an Arab historian who traveled across the Islamic empires of North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula and wrote down descriptions of what he saw and experienced.**

**As a team, read the selections from Ibn Battuta's account of what was valued in education in West Africa. Examine the copies of the Qu'ran and the wooden slab used to learn Arabic provided as well. Discuss the questions below:**

1. Why were the children in Ibn Battuta's account chained up? What did their father want them to do? Why might memorization be an important skill?
2. Looking at both accounts, what elements of Islam were present in Ghana and Mali? How were Islamic forms of worship influenced by West Africa?
3. Examine the copies of the Qu'ran. How is it similar and different from a textbook? How is it similar or different to other holy books (like the Bible)?
4. What language is written on the wooden slab and in the Qu'ran? What does this show you about schooling in West Africa? Which religion would have promoted this type of education?
5. What does Ibn Battuta's story show about what was valued in terms of education? What did they consider it was important to know? How is this similar or different to the education you are receiving and what is taught in school now in the United States?
6. In West Africa at that time and even in the present much of the schooling is based on the religion of Islam. Do you think that education should be based on a religion or learning about religious beliefs?

\* \* \*

**As a team, write a short skit where a teacher in Timbuktu is answering children's questions about the benefits of attending a Quranic school. These students are not sure they really need to learn to read or go to school, so the teacher must convince them to attend. The teacher should explain what they are going to study and why it is important for them to study these things. Be sure to explain what books they will study from and how they will study as well as the influence of religion and language on their studies. Make sure your skit is interactive between the teacher and children and persuades the students that attending Quranic school is worthwhile.**

## Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes

### HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?

#### Activity 6: Description of the Importance of Islam, the Qu'ran, and the Arabic Language to Kingdom's in West Africa

##### Resource Card

###### Selection from Ibn Battuta's Account of the Kingdom of Mali from 1352

###### Their piety

On Fridays, if a man does not go early to the mosque, he cannot find a corner to pray in, on account of the crowd. It is a custom of theirs to send each man his boy [to the mosque] with his prayer-mat; the boy spreads it out for his master in a place befitting him [and remains on it] until he comes to the mosque. Their prayer-mats are made of the leaves of a tree resembling a date-palm, but without fruit.

Another of their good qualities is their habit of wearing clean white garments on Fridays. Even if a man has nothing but an old worn shirt, he washes it and cleans it, and wears it to the Friday service. Yet another is their zeal for learning the Koran by heart. They put their children in chains if they show any backwardness in memorizing it, and they are not set free until they have it by heart. I visited the qadi in his house on the day of the festival. His children were chained up, so I said to him, "Will you not let them loose?" He replied, "I shall not do so until they learn the Koran by heart."

###### The following description of the Kingdom of Ghana was written by Al-Bakri, a member of a prominent Spanish Arab family who lived during the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

The city of Ghana consists of two towns situated on a plain. One of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims, is large and possesses twelve mosques, in which they assemble for the Friday prayer. There are salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars. In the environs are wells with sweet water, from which they drink and with which they grow vegetables. The king's town is six miles distant from this one.... Between these two towns are continuous habitations. ...In the king's town, and not far from his court of justice, is a mosque where the Muslims who arrive at his court pray. Around the king's town are domed buildings and groves and thickets where the sorcerers of these people, men in charge of the religious cult, live. In them too are their idols and the tombs of their kings. These woods are guarded and none may enter them and know what is there....

**Mosque**—Muslim house of worship

**Imam**—A Muslim religious leader of prayers

**Arabic**—the language spoken on the Arabian Peninsula and used in the Koran

**Muezzin**—The person in Islam who calls people to prayer 5 times a day

**Koran**—the Muslim holy book

## **Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes**

### **HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURAL AND GEOGRAPHIC INTERSECTIONS?**

#### **Activity 7: The Intersection of Islam and West Africa in Trans-Saharan Designs**

##### **Activity Card**

**Historians often turn to art, architecture, and craftwork of the period they are studying for clues about how people lived and what they wanted to remember.**

**As a team examine the photographs and artifacts showing clothing and designs from different parts of the trans-Saharan trade routes. Also look at the resource card explaining different design elements.**

**Discuss the questions below:**

1. Based on the photographs, map, and artifacts, what special kinds of clothing did people wear on the trans-Saharan trade routes? What elements of their clothes helped them adapt to traveling through a desert?
2. What kind of colors and patterns were worn? Most of the patterns are from West Africa, which had smaller tribes within the larger kingdom of Mali. What might the patterns tell about the person wearing them?
3. The religion of Islam began in the Arabian Peninsula which is also mainly desert. What clothing elements might they have brought to West Africa when they came to trade and had to cross the Sahara desert?
4. According to the description of the King of Ghana and his court, how did people dress? What does this show about their status/importance and how did Islam intersect with the religion already there?
5. How do these craftworks and architectural designs show the influence of Islam on West Africa?
6. Conversely, how do these craftworks and architectural designs show West Africa's influence on Islam?

\* \* \*

**As a team, use the clothing and cloth provided as well as any additional creations of your own to create a trans-Saharan fashion show. You will need to narrate each outfit and explain its utility for a desert traveler as well as how it shows the blending of Islamic, West African, and nomadic cultural and artistic traditions. Share your runway and fashion show with the class.**

## Unit: Cross-Cultural Exchange on the Trans-Saharan Trade Routes

### HOW DO HISTORIANS KNOW ABOUT CULTURE AND TRADE AND HOW DO THEY INTERSECTIONS?

#### Activity 7: The Intersection of Islam and West Africa in Trans-Saharan Designs

##### Resource Card

**The following description of the Kingdom of Ghana was written by Al-Bakri, a member of a prominent Spanish Arab family who lived during the 11<sup>th</sup> century.**

The king's interpreters, the official in charge of his treasury and the majority of his ministers are Muslims. Among the people who follow the king's religion only he and his heir apparent (who is the son of his sister) may wear sewn clothes. All other people wear robes of cotton, silk, or brocade, according to their means. All of them shave their beards, and women shave their heads. The king adorns himself like a woman (wearing necklaces) round his neck and (bracelets) on his forearms, and he puts on a high cap decorated with gold and wrapped in a turban of fine cotton. He sits in audience or to hear grievances against officials in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses covered with gold-embroidered materials. Behind the king stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are the sons of the (vassel) kings of his country wearing splendid garments and their hair plaited with gold. The governor of the city

sits on the ground before the king and around him are ministers seated likewise. At the door of the pavilion are dogs of excellent pedigree who hardly ever leave the place where the king is, guarding him. Round their necks they wear collars of gold and silver studded with a number of balls of the same metals.

**The 1375 Catalan map (part of the Mapamundi) was drawn by Abraham Crepques of Mallorca and has a section dealing with Northwest Africa. It shows the King Mansa Musa of Mali (holding a large nugget of gold) trading with the nomad on the left. The Atlas mountains are clearly visible.**

**The section top left translates as:** Through this place pass the merchants who travel to the land of the negroes of Guinea, which place they call the valley of the Dra'a.

**The section middle left translates as** All this region is occupied by people who veil their mouths; one only sees their eyes. They live in tents and have caravans of camels. There are also beasts called Lemp from the skins of which they make fine shields.

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