

Questions – Answers: Civilisation Africaine

Question

Who exhibited Ghana as "Land of Gold" ?

Answer

The North African geographer and historian **Al-Bakri**, who lived during the 11th century, is known to have described the Ghana Empire as the "Land of Gold." In his renowned work, "Book of Highways and of Kingdoms," Al-Bakri provided detailed accounts of the West African region, including its geographical features, trade networks, and the wealth of the Ghana Empire. His writings highlighted the abundance of gold in the empire and the significant role that gold played in the region's economy and trade relations. Al-Bakri's description of the Ghana Empire as the "Land of Gold" contributed to the growing awareness of the empire's wealth and prominence in the medieval world.

Please note : You can say Arab traders also, only if you see it in a multichoice question without the historian Al-Bakri option.

Question

Explain why ancient Egypt was considered as the gift of the Nile ?

Answer

Ancient Egypt was considered the "gift of the Nile" due to the significant role the river played in the prosperity and development of the civilization. Several factors contribute to this title:

1. **Fertile soil:** The annual flooding of the Nile River deposited nutrient-rich silt along its banks, creating a fertile and arable land that was ideal for agriculture. This allowed the ancient Egyptians to cultivate a variety of crops, including wheat, barley, and flax, which formed the basis of their economy and sustenance.
2. **Water source:** The Nile River provided a reliable source of water for irrigation, enabling the ancient Egyptians to develop sophisticated irrigation systems and cultivate crops throughout the year. This access to

water was crucial in sustaining a stable food supply and supporting the growth of a flourishing agricultural society.

3. Transportation and trade: The Nile River served as a vital transportation route for trade and commerce, facilitating the movement of goods, people, and ideas between different regions within and beyond Egypt. This accessibility promoted cultural exchange, economic growth, and the establishment of trade networks that contributed to the prosperity and expansion of the ancient Egyptian civilization.

4. Natural protection: The Nile River also provided a natural barrier against external threats, offering protection from invasions and facilitating the development of a relatively stable and secure society. This geographic advantage allowed the ancient Egyptians to focus on cultural, artistic, and scientific advancements, leading to the flourishing of a rich and enduring civilization along the banks of the Nile.

Question

Why do you think historians consider the Egyptian's writing system a great contribution than the pyramids ?

Answer

Historians often consider the Egyptian writing system, particularly hieroglyphics, to be a greater contribution than the pyramids due to its profound impact on the development of human communication, language, and record-keeping. Several key reasons contribute to this perspective:

1. Communication and knowledge preservation: The invention of hieroglyphics allowed the ancient Egyptians to record and communicate complex ideas, events, and information, thus enabling the preservation of their history, culture, and societal achievements. This written language played a crucial role in the documentation of religious texts, administrative records, literature, and scientific knowledge, serving as a foundation for the development of written communication and the transmission of knowledge across generations.

2. Cultural and intellectual legacy: The Egyptian writing system, with its intricate pictorial representations and phonetic elements, laid the

groundwork for the evolution of writing and literacy in subsequent civilizations. It influenced the development of other writing systems in the ancient world and contributed to the advancement of literature, art, and intellectual discourse, making it a lasting legacy of ancient Egyptian culture and intellect.

3. Historical significance and decipherment: The study and decipherment of hieroglyphics by scholars and linguists over the centuries have provided valuable insights into ancient Egyptian society, religion, and language. The decipherment of hieroglyphics, notably the Rosetta Stone by Jean-François Champollion in the 19th century, led to a deeper understanding of ancient Egyptian history and culture, sparking renewed interest in the civilization and its contributions to human civilization.

While the pyramids are iconic symbols of ancient Egyptian engineering and architectural prowess, the development of the Egyptian writing system represented a fundamental leap in human intellectual and cultural achievement, playing a pivotal role in the advancement of human civilization and the preservation of historical knowledge and cultural heritage.

Question

Many factors contributed to the Egyptian civilisation. Besides the Nile, name three other factors. Explain.

Answer

Besides the Nile, several other factors contributed to the flourishing of the ancient Egyptian civilization. Three key factors include:

1. Geographic isolation and natural protection: The natural barriers provided by the surrounding deserts, the Red Sea, and the Mediterranean Sea offered a degree of isolation and protection against external invasions and conflicts. This geographic advantage allowed the ancient Egyptians to develop their unique culture, society, and political system with relatively limited outside interference, fostering the stability and continuity of their civilization.

2. Agricultural innovations and resource management: The ancient Egyptians developed advanced agricultural techniques, including irrigation

systems, crop rotation, and the use of the shaduf for water lifting, which significantly enhanced their agricultural productivity and crop yield. These innovations, combined with the strategic management of resources, contributed to the sustainability and prosperity of their agrarian-based economy, supporting the growth of a complex and hierarchical society.

3. Religious beliefs and cultural practices: Ancient Egyptian religious beliefs, centered around the worship of numerous deities and the concept of an afterlife, played a central role in shaping their cultural practices, art, and architecture. The construction of temples, tombs, and monumental structures, as well as the development of intricate burial practices and mummification techniques, reflected the significance of religion in the daily life and spiritual beliefs of the ancient Egyptians. This cultural and religious foundation fostered a sense of communal identity and unity, contributing to the cohesion and longevity of the Egyptian civilization.

These factors, along with others such as technological advancements, trade relations, and political organization, collectively contributed to the rich and enduring legacy of the ancient Egyptian civilization, leaving a profound impact on human history, culture, and intellectual development.

Question

Three great empires were developed in west africa. Name them. Where were the Empires situated ?

Answer

Three great empires that were developed in West Africa include:

1. Ghana Empire: The Ghana Empire, also known as Wagadou, was situated in the region encompassing present-day southeastern Mauritania and western Mali. It emerged around the 8th century and flourished as a prominent trading and military power in the West African Sahel region.

2. Mali Empire: The Mali Empire was located in the region that covers present-day Mali, as well as parts of Senegal, Gambia, Guinea, Niger, and Mauritania. It rose to prominence in the 13th century and became renowned for its wealth, extensive trade networks, and cultural achievements, especially during the reign of Mansa Musa in the 14th century.

3. Songhai Empire: The Songhai Empire was situated in the western Sahel region, encompassing present-day Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. It emerged as a powerful state in the 15th century and expanded its influence and territory through military conquests and the control of key trading routes along the Niger River.

These West African empires played pivotal roles in the history of the region, contributing to the development of complex societies, trade networks, and cultural achievements that left a lasting impact on the political, economic, and social landscape of West Africa.

Question

On what was based trade in those three empires ?

Answer

Trade in the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai Empires was primarily based on the exchange of valuable commodities that were abundant in the respective regions. Some of the key trade goods included:

1. Gold: West Africa was renowned for its abundant gold resources, which were highly sought after in the trans-Saharan and international trade networks. The empires controlled various gold mines and trading routes, enabling them to benefit economically from the trade of this precious metal.

2. Salt: Salt was another essential trade commodity, especially in the Sahel region where natural salt deposits were scarce. The empires facilitated the trade of salt from the Sahara Desert to regions where it was in high demand for preserving food and enhancing the diet.

3. Agricultural products: Various agricultural products such as grains, cotton, and other crops were traded within the empires and along the trans-Saharan trade routes. These products not only supported the local economy but also contributed to the development of trade relations with other regions.

4. Slaves: While controversial, the trade of enslaved individuals was unfortunately a significant part of the trans-Saharan trade. Enslaved individuals were often captured during military conquests or through local conflicts and were traded as commodities for various goods and services.

The control and trade of these valuable commodities played a pivotal role in the economic prosperity and political influence of the Ghana, Mali, and Songhai Empires, contributing to their status as major centers of commerce and power in the West African region.

Question

What are the main routes of trans-Saharan trade ?

Answer

The Western Route, The Central Route and The Eastern Route

Question

What is Civilisation ?

Answer

Civilization refers to an advanced human society with complex social and cultural organization, technological advancements, and the establishment of cities and written language.

Question

Cite two Europeans writers and their books that advocated the inferiority of the black race and the African as uncivilized individual ?

Answer

Two European writers who propagated the idea of the inferiority of the black race and portrayed Africans as uncivilized individuals in their works were:

1. Joseph Arthur de Gobineau: Gobineau, a French aristocrat and writer, expressed racial theories of white supremacy and black inferiority in his influential work "An Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races" (Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines), published in the 19th century. He promoted the concept of Aryan racial superiority and argued that the mixing of races would lead to the degeneration of civilization.

2. Georges Vacher de Lapouge: Lapouge, a French anthropologist and social scientist, espoused theories of racial hierarchy and eugenics in his writings. He promoted the idea of the "Aryan race" as superior and portrayed Africans and other non-European ethnic groups as biologically and intellectually inferior. His works contributed to the development of racial pseudoscience and the justification of colonialist ideologies during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Question

With reference to Africa, what does Sudan mean ?

Answer

The term "Sudan" in reference to Africa is derived from the Arabic phrase "Bilad as-Sudan," which translates to "Land of the Blacks." It historically referred to the region south of the Sahara Desert and encompassed the savanna and Sahel regions of West Africa. The term "Sudan" was used by Arab geographers and travelers to describe the areas inhabited by various African ethnic groups and civilizations. Over time, the term became associated with the territories of present-day countries such as Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, and Sudan, among others.

Question

Cite the two main systems of government in Mali Empire.

Answer

The central administration and the provincial administration

Question

Cite two books and their authors who proved the existence of African Civilisation before the arrival of Europeans.

Answer

Maurice Delafosse and Leo Frobenius were influential scholars who contributed to the recognition and documentation of African civilizations before the arrival of Europeans. Their works emphasized the cultural richness and historical significance of various African societies. Two notable books by these authors are:

1. "The Question of the Negro Race" (La Question du Negro Race) by Maurice Delafosse: This comprehensive work by Delafosse examines the history and cultural achievements of African civilizations, challenging

prevailing racial prejudices and stereotypes. Delafosse's extensive research and ethnographic studies provided valuable insights into the diverse cultural traditions, languages, and social structures of African societies, highlighting the complexity and sophistication of their civilizations.

2. "History of African Civilizations" (Geschichte der afrikanischen Zivilisationen) by Leo Frobenius: Frobenius's influential book offers a comprehensive overview of the ancient civilizations and cultural heritage of various African societies. His extensive archaeological research and exploration of African cultural artifacts provided valuable evidence of the existence of advanced civilizations in Africa prior to the colonial era. Frobenius's work emphasized the importance of recognizing the historical and cultural contributions of African civilizations to the broader narrative of human history.

Question

How did the three West African empires come into being ?

Answer

The three West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai emerged through a combination of factors, including regional trade networks, military expansion, and the establishment of centralized political authority. Each empire had its unique trajectory of rise to power:

1. The Ghana Empire: The Ghana Empire, believed to have originated around the 6th century, rose to prominence through its control of the trans-Saharan trade routes, particularly the trade of gold and salt. By monopolizing the gold-salt trade, the rulers of Ghana accumulated wealth and established a powerful centralized authority that controlled trade and levied taxes, thereby laying the foundation for a prosperous and influential empire.

2. The Mali Empire: The Mali Empire, established in the 13th century, succeeded the Ghana Empire and expanded its influence through military conquests, strategic alliances, and the control of key trading routes, particularly those along the Niger River. The legendary founder of the Mali Empire, Sundiata Keita, united several Mandé-speaking peoples and established a strong centralized administration that fostered economic

prosperity, cultural achievements, and the promotion of Islam as a unifying cultural and religious force.

3. The Songhai Empire: The Songhai Empire emerged as a dominant power in the West African Sahel region during the 15th century, succeeding the Mali Empire. Its rise to power was marked by the military conquests and political ambitions of notable rulers such as Sunni Ali and Askia Muhammad. Through military expansion and the control of vital trading routes along the Niger River, the Songhai Empire established a robust centralized administration, expanded its territorial control, and became a prominent center of commerce, Islamic scholarship, and cultural exchange in the region.

These West African empires played pivotal roles in shaping the political, economic, and cultural landscape of the region, leaving a lasting legacy of achievement and influence in the history of West Africa.

Question

When did the three West African empires reach the height of their fame ?

Answer

The three West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai reached the height of their fame and influence during specific periods in history:

1. The Ghana Empire: The Ghana Empire reached the height of its power and fame between the 9th and 13th centuries. During this period, Ghana was renowned for its control of the trans-Saharan gold and salt trade, as well as its strong centralized political authority and cultural achievements, which earned it recognition as one of the most powerful and prosperous empires in West Africa.

2. The Mali Empire: The Mali Empire reached its zenith of power and fame during the 14th century, particularly under the reign of Mansa Musa, who is known for his legendary pilgrimage to Mecca and his display of the empire's wealth and influence. The Mali Empire's reputation as a center of trade, Islamic scholarship, and cultural excellence was solidified during this period, making it one of the most significant and renowned empires in West Africa and the wider medieval world.

3. The Songhai Empire: The Songhai Empire rose to prominence during the 15th and 16th centuries, establishing itself as a dominant power in the West African Sahel region. Under the leadership of notable rulers such as Sunni Ali and Askia Muhammad, the Songhai Empire expanded its territorial control, strengthened its military might, and became a center of commerce, scholarship, and cultural exchange, solidifying its fame as one of the most powerful and influential empires in West Africa at the time.

Question

What do you understand by "trial by fetish" in Ghana Empire ?

Answer

During the Ghana Empire, the "trial by fetish" was a traditional practice used to determine the guilt or innocence of an accused individual through spiritual means. Village elders or religious authorities administered oaths or rituals invoking the power of spiritual entities, aiming to reveal the truth. This practice reflected the significance of spiritual beliefs in the Ghanaian justice system, showcasing the influence of cultural and religious practices on governance and legal proceedings at that time.

Question

How was called the West African Coast in the 15th Century ?

Answer

The West African Coast in the 15th was called the White Man's grave.

Question

Why was The West African Coast in the 15th called the White Man's grave ?

Answer

The nickname "White Man's Grave" was given to the West African Coast in the 15th century due to the harsh climate, prevalent diseases, hostile local tribes, conflicts, and challenging navigation conditions that European traders and explorers faced. The region's reputation as a perilous and deadly environment served as a warning of the significant risks and dangers associated with establishing trade and colonial presence along the coast during that period.