**DBQ 8: Africa Before European Arrival**

**Historical Context:**

Africans had developed advanced civilizations before the Europeans arrived in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Beginning with Aksum (Ethiopia today) in East Africa in the 300's, kingdoms, empires, and cities arose and declined. In West Africa, three empires—Ghana, Mali, and Songhai—controlled the gold and salt trade. Between 1000 and 1500, cities on Africa’s east coast also gained wealth and power through trade. There were several centers of advanced civilization in Africa between 300 and 1400.

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**TASK-EVALUATE THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE THREE AFRICAN EMPIRES, KINGDOMS AND CITIES BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE EUROPEANS.**

◆ **Part A:** Examine each document carefully, and answer the questions that follow.

**Document 1**

Aksum reached its height between 325 and 360. Aksum’s location made it an important international trading center. This map shows the trade routes to and from Aksum between 300 and 700.

![Map of Africa with trade routes](image)

1. How did Aksum’s location enable it to become a trading center?

**Document 2**

Between 700 and 1067, the Kingdom of ancient Ghana rose in power and gained control of the trans-Saharan gold and salt trade. This description of the king’s court in ancient Ghana was written by the Arab scholar, Al-Bakri in 1067. (*Through African Eyes*, ed. by Leon E. Clark, Praeger Press, Inc., New York, 1970.)

The court of appeal is held in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses with gold embroidered trappings. Behind the king stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are the sons of the subordinate kings of his country, all wearing splendid garments and with their hair mixed 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...[wearing] collars of gold and silver, studded with a number of balls of the same metals.

2. What evidence of wealth is described?

3. What evidence of an advanced political structure is described?
The Arab traders of this region wanted gold as much as the Wangara wanted salt, but both had to pass through Ghana to trade. Ghana controlled the land, had military forces to maintain peace in the area, thereby assuring safe trade for the Arabs and the Wangara.

Ancient Ghana was an extremely complex empire. It possessed many of the characteristics of powerful nations today: wealth based on trade, sufficient food to feed its people, income derived from taxes, social organization that ensured justice and efficient political control, a strong army equipped with advanced weapons, and a foreign policy that led to peace and cooperation with other people.

4. Explain ancient Ghana's role in the gold-salt trade.

5. What characteristics of an advanced civilization did ancient Ghana possess?

Document 4

Mansa Musa expanded the Mali empire to twice the size of the Ghana empire it replaced. On his haj to Mecca, Mansa Musa stopped in Cairo, Egypt, and was described by an Egyptian official in this way:

This man Mansa Musa, spread upon Cairo the flood of his generosity: there was no person, officer of the court, or holder of any office of the Sultanate who did not receive a sum of gold from him.

7. What about Mansa Musa impressed the Egyptian official?

Document 5

In this excerpt, a Moroccan traveler, using the name Leo Africanus, describes the city of Timbuktu.

Here are many doctors, judges, priests, and other learned men that are well maintained at the king's costs. Various manuscripts and written books are brought here... and sold for more money than other merchandise.

8. What about Timbuktu impressed this writer?

Document 6

Ibn Battuta traveled in Mali in 1352 and wrote this description in Travels to Kingdom of Mali.

They are seldom unjust, and have a greater abhorrence [hatred] of injustice than any other people. Their sultan shows no mercy to anyone who is guilty of the least act of it. There is complete security in their country. Neither traveler nor inhabitant in it has anything to fear from robbers.

9. What two things impressed Ibn Battuta about Mali?