The kingdoms of Africa grew wealthy through trade, especially through trading gold in the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. Trade was vital for these kingdoms to obtain what they did not have themselves. It resulted in links with the rest of the world as far away as China. Today, African nations still carry out much trade. Africa is an important source of natural resources such as gold, diamonds, oil, uranium, cocoa, coffee, and lumber. Look at the charts below showing the imports and exports of three modern African nations that exist near to where ancient African civilizations existed. Study the charts, then answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper.

**GHANA**
- **Chief exports:** cocoa, wood, gold, diamonds, manganese
- **Exports mainly go to:** United Kingdom, United States, Germany, France
- **Chief imports:** textiles, manufactured goods, foodstuffs, fuels
- **Imports mainly come from:** United Kingdom, United States, other European Union countries

**MALI**
- **Chief exports:** livestock, peanuts, dried fish, cotton, animal skins
- **Exports mainly go to:** European Union, western Africa
- **Chief imports:** textiles, vehicles, petroleum products, machinery
- **Imports mainly come from:** European Union countries

**TANZANIA**
- **Chief exports:** coffee, cotton, sisal, cashew nuts, meat, cloves
- **Exports mainly go to:** Germany, United Kingdom, United States
- **Chief imports:** manufactured goods, machinery, transport equipment, textiles, crude oil, foodstuffs
- **Imports mainly come from:** Germany, United Kingdom, United States, Iran (formerly Persia)

1. Who were the early African kingdoms’ major trading partners?
2. Who are the major trading partners of modern African nations?
3. Take a look at the products exported. Would you characterize them as natural and agricultural products or finished products and manufactured goods?
4. How would you characterize the imports?
5. Write a short essay comparing Africa’s ancient trade patterns with those of today. Are the products the same? The trading partners? Explain why they are or are not different.
Mineral resources—gold and salt—were the major reason for the trade that built the wealth and power of the West African kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. The locations of these kingdoms gave them access to generous supplies of both these valuable resources.

The earliest West African kingdom was Ghana. It was located just north of the gold mines in the African rain forest and just south of the salt mines in the Sahara. Muslim Arabs, living near the North African coast wanted the gold available in the south. The people of the south, living inland in the hot and saltless rain forest, needed salt to survive. As a result, a lively trade grew up between the north and south.

The trade route crossed the trackless wastes of the Sahara, which had to be navigated, almost like a sea. Surrounding the desert were inland "ports," places where camel caravans would form to travel together to a common destination. Traveling in groups was necessary as protection against robbery along the way. Some caravans had as many as 12,000 camels. Using the stars or familiar rocks, pilots would guide the caravans along routes that took them to oases, where they could replenish their water supplies. These slow-moving processions could take up to six months to reach their destination, another inland "port" across the desert.

Over the centuries, trade expanded both in types of goods traded and in ports reached. Koala nuts and slaves from the south were traded for manufactured goods, foods, and horses from the north. Trade routes were extended to seaports along the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean, opening West African trade to Europe.

This vital trade was helped by the prosperous kingdoms of West Africa. To the Arabs of the north, Ghana became known as the "Land of Gold" and its ruler, the "King of Gold." He was the richest and most powerful leader in what the Arabs called the "Land of the Blacks."

Later, Mali grew even stronger and richer than Ghana. It too amazed and impressed the Muslim Arabs. When making a pilgrimage from Timbuktu to Mecca, Mali's great leader Mansa Musa was accompanied by 60,000 people. Among the pilgrims were 500 slaves, each carrying a 4-pound (1.8 kilogram) bar of gold. Mansa Musa spent the gold freely along his route. It is said that all, this lavish spending along the route through Egypt and Arabia depressed the value of gold there for at least 12 years.

Songhai carried on Ghana's and Mali's trading tradition. In the end, though, salt and gold helped bring that kingdom down. Relations between Songhai and Morocco to the north became strained. Morocco was eager to displace Songhai as the leader in the Saharan trade and to get the gold that Songhai controlled. Furthermore, Morocco claimed sole right to a valuable Saharan salt mine that was vital to Songhai's survival. In the late 1500's, Morocco attacked Songhai and destroyed it.

Questions for Review

1. Locate Timbuktu and Gao on the map of Early African Kingdoms on page 438 of your textbook. On what river are they both located?

2. Both these cities became major inland "ports" in the Saharan trade. Find where they would be located on the Natural Regions map also on textbook page 424. How do you think their location encouraged their development as trading centers?

3. Turn to the map of Africa on page A-19 of the textbook Atlas and locate Egypt. In what direction would Mansa Musa have traveled to reach Egypt?

4. Locate Morocco on the same textbook Atlas map. Why would it need to conquer Songhai to gain control of access to gold?

5. Describe how mineral resources contributed to the growth of the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai.