Name _____ Date _____

West African Kingdoms: Ghana, Mali and the Gold-Salt Trade

Directions: Read the passage about the gold-salt trade. As you answer, notice where each piece of information comes from.

The Gold-Salt Trade

Gold, Salt and Camels

In West Africa, the Sahara desert lies north of greener lands. Gold came from mines in the south. Salt was cut in slabs from mines in the Sahara. People need salt to stay healthy, especially in hot places, and the south had little.

Camel caravans carried salt south across the desert and brought gold north. They also carried goods such as cloth, copper, ivory and enslaved people. The kingdom of Ghana grew rich by taxing this trade. Ancient Ghana lay hundreds of miles northwest of the modern country of Ghana, in parts of today's Mauritania and Mali.

Much of what we know about ancient Ghana comes from Arab writers. In the 1000s CE, al-Bakri, an Arab geographer in Spain, wrote that Ghana's king taxed salt brought into his land. He also wrote that the king kept all gold nuggets and let others have only gold dust. Al-Bakri never visited West Africa. He relied on reports from merchants and travelers. Some Arab writers also described a "silent trade," in which traders swapped goods without speaking. Historians are not sure how often this really happened.

By about 1240 CE, Ghana had weakened, and the new empire of Mali took over its lands. In 1324 CE, Mali's ruler, Mansa Musa, made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Arab writers reported that he gave away so much gold in Cairo that its value there fell for years. Mansa Musa also had a great mosque built in Timbuktu, near the Niger River. Over time, Timbuktu became a famous center of trade and Muslim learning.

1. Complete the sentences about where the two main goods of the trade came from.

Word bank
Sahara • south • Niger • Mecca

Gold came from mines in the _____. Salt was cut from mines in the _____.

2. Why did people in the southern lands want salt from the Sahara?

A. They used salt to make gold nuggets.
B. Mansa Musa ordered everyone to buy salt.
C. People need salt to stay healthy, and the south had little of it.
D. Salt was the only food that camels would eat.

3. Where was the ancient kingdom of Ghana?

A. In the forests far to the south of the gold mines
B. In parts of today's Mauritania and Mali, northwest of modern Ghana
C. In the same place as the modern country of Ghana
D. On the coast of North Africa, next to Egypt

4. According to the passage, how did the kingdom of Ghana grow rich?
A. By mining all of the salt in the Sahara
B. By taxing the trade that crossed the desert
C. By sending gold to Cairo every year
D. By selling camels to traders in Spain

5. How did al-Bakri learn about Ghana?
A. He read records written by Ghana's kings.
B. He relied on reports from merchants and travelers.
C. He traveled with a camel caravan across the Sahara.
D. He lived at the court of Ghana's king for many years.

6. Which detail from al-Bakri's account shows that Ghana's king controlled the supply of gold?
A. Caravans also carried cloth, copper and ivory.
B. The king kept all gold nuggets and let others have only gold dust.
C. Ghana's king taxed salt brought into his land.
D. Al-Bakri never visited West Africa.

7. How does the passage present the story of the "silent trade"?
A. As a story told by Arab writers that historians are not sure about
B. As the only way gold was ever traded
C. As something al-Bakri saw with his own eyes
D. As a fact proven by records kept by Ghana's kings

8. Which two statements about the empire of Mali are supported by the passage?
☐ A. Mali took over Ghana's lands after Ghana weakened.
☐ B. Mali's ruler made a pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 CE.
☐ C. Mali was founded before the kingdom of Ghana.
☐ D. Mali was located in today's Spain.
☐ E. Mali's rulers stopped all trade across the Sahara.

9. According to Arab writers, what happened when Mansa Musa was in Cairo?
A. He traded all of Mali's salt for camels.
B. He gave away so much gold that its value there fell.
C. He was crowned ruler of Egypt.
D. He stopped the gold trade with North Africa.

10. Which sentence from the passage best supports the idea that Mali's ruler helped Timbuktu grow?
A. Salt was cut in slabs from mines in the Sahara.
B. Mansa Musa also had a great mosque built in Timbuktu, near the Niger River.
C. Much of what we know about ancient Ghana comes from Arab writers.
D. Historians are not sure how often this really happened.