Kingdoms of the Grasslands

A. Introduction
   1. Three coasts – Atlantic, Indian, savanna on edge of Sahara
   2. Edge of desert
      1. Gold found
      2. Camels improved trade
         a. Sahel – grassland belt – best place to live – centers of trade
   3. African states emerge as trade intermediaries
   4. Location makes them open to droughts and attack
   5. 10th century Ghana rose to power through taxing salt, gold exchange

B. Sudanic States
   1. Patriarch or council of elders
      a. Power over subordinate communities
      1. Collect taxes, tribute, military support
      b. States emerge – Ghana, Mali, Songhai
   2. Rulers separated from commoners through ritual → think “mandate of heaven”

C. The Empire of Mali and Sundiata, the “Lion Prince”
   1. Mali – 13th century – Malinke broke away from Ghana
      a. Rulers supported Islam – encouraged obedience to ruler
         1. built mosques
         2. attended public prayers
         3. supported preachers
      b. juula – traders
      c. Sundiata – Sunjata – brilliant leader
         1. Lion Prince – expanded Mali
         2. Originator of social arrangements – divided into clans – caste-like
            a. 16 free to bear arms, 5 religious, 4 blacksmiths
         3. Created peace through loyalty, severely punished crimes
            a. Security of traders key to survival
            b. Ibn Batuta – Arab traveler – noted impressive security
      d. Mansa Musa – 1324 trip to Mecca – awesome, impressive
         1. passed out gold – devalued
         2. brought back Ishak al-Sahili architect – great Mosque of Jenne

D. City Dwellers and Villagers
   1. Cities flourished – Timbuktu and Jenne
      a. Mosque, library, university
      b. Book trade
      c. Difficult life – soil sandy and shallow
         1. Clearing land done communally
         2. Polygamy for the purpose of having more labor
      d. irrigation in Timbuktu

E. The Songhai Kingdom – middle Niger Valley
   1. “masters of the soil” and “masters of the waters”
   2. 1370, Songhai broke from Mali – gold trade
   3. Sunni Ali – ruthless, tactical commander
      a. Expanded borders, created administration
   4. Mid-16th century Songhai dominated Sudan
5. Familiar pattern – created unique brand of Islam
   a. pagan/Muslim beliefs both believed
      1. fusion, priests still need to work with local spirits
   b. local interpretation of Muslim law
   c. woman mixed freely in public, no veil
6. Downfall when Muslim army from Morocco came down > this led to revolts
7. Muslim role in city
   a. Came as merchants – joined communities
   b. Though minorities, became elite
      1. Located throughout West Africa, but no “Islamicized” state
   c. Intermarriage took place

F. Political and Social Life
1. Large states represented goals of elite family/group
2. Islam served many groups
   a. Common religion/law united
   b. Trust to merchants
   c. leaders took names emir/caliph to reinforce authority
   d. as advisors/scribes – Muslims helped with administration
   e. maintained theocracy – spiritual and political leader
   f. with new states came increased social differences
3. Adjustment
   a. Women
      1. Many societies matrilineal
         a. But...Sharia...Islamic law says it must be patrilineal
         b. Many visitors shocked at African women’s equality
   2. Impact of slavery – 4.8 - 7 million traded
      a. Always existed, Muslims brought it to new heights
         1. Muslims saw slavery as process in conversion
      b. Used as servants, laborers, soldiers, administrators, eunuchs, concubines
         1. Led to desire to enslave women and children
         2. Children of slave mothers freed
            a. Need for more slaves