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Effects of Trans-Saharan Trade

The Trans-Saharan trade took place along the Western part of Africa and involved cultural and commercial exchange between the Mediterranean region and West Africa. This led to great diversity in the African cities through social, cultural, political, and lingual set ups. Social classes developed in large kingdoms, while African stateless societies developed their social conditions. In the stateless societies, social positions depended on age, sex, and kinship. Women had a better political role in Sub-Saharan Africa than in any other part in the world. Such religions as Islam and Christianity transformed societies in many African countries. Generally, the trade led to the growth of savannah states and societies of West Africa, though there were some challenges that needed to be addressed through various ways to guarantee peace between African states and societies.

Some factors, such as the geographic position, limited West Africa and their North neighbors' possibilities to have open communication and trade. Thanks to the Trans-Saharan trade, different people from different regions and cultures had a place to meet. Trading led to migration of many people to get closer to the trading regions. This led to high population growth in the West African region. During inter-mingling and settling, people adopted agriculture, and

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those who brought agricultural products taught others how to practice it along the fertile lands. The major migrating group was Bantus who migrated between 2000 BCE and 1000 CE. Herding was a major adopted practice from other merchants. Other groups adopted hunting and gathering tactics. Iron metallurgy was also a major practice adopted by the Sub-Saharan people. They used this activity to clear more lands and grow the drought resistant crops, such as yams, millets, and sorghum. Camels were the most common domesticated animals, which played a great role in market caravans. Trading was based on barter, and the goods and commodities sold at that time varied from precious stones and gold to slaves.

In trading, horses and donkeys were at first the most commonly used transport animals. Their later substitution by camels was a great positive step to improving the communication channel in Sahara. Thanks to this improvement, Islamic merchants could easily cross the desert and socialize with other tribes. The Islamic Kingdom dominated in the Trans-Saharan trade and occupied a great part of West Africa. This took place under the influence of Ghana, whose capital Koumbi-Saleh was the major controller of trading of gold in the Saharan region. Ghana was the major source of trading goods, such as gold, slaves, and ivory. They traded them for horses, manufactured goods, salt, and clothing. Later in 13th to 15th century, Mali headed by Mansa Musa dominated in the trade. Mansa Musa was a devout Muslim who was fully devoted to the religion, and this played a great role in the quick spreading of Islam. Through the Indian Ocean, the East Africans were able to participate in the trade. The slave trade included slave domestic servants and soldiers. Thanks to trading with East Africa, some new routes and trading centers were established, such as the modern Morocco, which was called Infriqua and Sijilmasa. During the period, many people were converted to Muslims. Some cities, such as Timbuktu,

were noted to be wealthy, and western trade routes led to the emergence of other trading centers, such as Mauritania and Niger.

Though there were boundaries, most African societies were stateless. Previously, stateless societies were ruled at the family level unit headed by male heads who would further form groups to form a ruling council of a village headed by a chief. The groups joined up together and formed a collective and decentralized government of the district level. Previously, such societies did not have any elaborate bureaucracy, as they governed through kinship and family groups. During the trade, the population was gradually increasing, and there were various security challenges. This led to the need for a better leadership. Many family heads formed a village council, which was headed by a prominent head of a family called the chief. The village chiefs were in charge of inter-village issues. During and after trading, there were sequential conflicts usually provoked by the deficit of resources. This made some communities in Africa form military forces to govern resources. Through this, some powerful chiefs imposed more power and authority by creating kingdoms and centralized government, for example, the Congo Kingdom. This state of affairs allowed clan members privatize agricultural land.

In conclusion, the Trans-Saharan trade encouraged barter trade between the Mediterranean region and West Africa. This trade transformed Africa greatly. The Trans-Saharan trade led to the emergence of big cities, which situated along the trading routes. Islamic religion was adopted as the major religion that most of the traders adopted. Internal trade improved, and camel caravans allowed bringing many items and finding distant markets for exchange. The system of governance changed from the stateless to the kingdom era of governance. Moreover, different regions acquired their own trading specialization. For example,

the Northern part of Sahara was known to be a major source of gold, koala nuts, and ivory, whereas in the Southern part, slaves were the major trading item.