Trade

This chapter will map out early trade routes in Africa and to illustrate the importance of these trade routes to the world economy and to show how this early trade helped to shape our present world all those thousands of years ago. I believe that these long established and profitable trade routes linking Africa and the East and the Far East were taken over by European monopolies such as the East Indian Company with the profits been diverted to Europe and financing the life styles of the owners rather then been re-invested into the local economies of Africa and the Far East. More research needs to be done on this but companies such as the East India Company I believe simply took over long established trade routes and transformed them into private monopolies. Gold has been a major African export since the formation of Ancient Egyptian dynasties. It was gold from the Sudan which helped to finance and economically support the long line of Egyptian dynasties.

The 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica says that the links between Ethiopia and Egypt go back to the 22nd Dynasty of Egypt and that on occasions Egypt and Ethiopia were governed by the same ruler. Piye, the ruler of the 25th Dynasty was the first pharaoh to rule over both countries. The first records of Ethiopia date back to 3,000 years BC. Traders from that period talk about a region south of Nubia or Kush which they refer to as Punt or Yam. There is a reference to Punt in the Old Testament of the Bible. Myrrh, which originated from Punt was found in Egypt as early as the first or second millennium BC. Professor Richard Pankhurst a specialist in Ethiopian history, is convinced that trade existed between the two countries from the beginning of what is now known as Ancient Egypt. These early trade routes were concentrated along the River Nile and down its many tributaries rather then on sea routes. It is river systems which may have provided the first important trade routes. The first recorded Egyptian voyage to Punt was in the 25th century BC under the command of Pharaoh Sahure. In 1495 BC Queen Hatshepsut voyaged to Punt. Records of ths epic voyage are to be found at the Temple of Deir el-Bahri at Thebes. Murals depict traders returning with cargoes of myrrh, elephant tusks, incense, gold and exotic animals from Punt or Ta-Netjuru (Land of the Gods.)

Ethiopia was an important and valuable source of incense and large quantities of this product were exported. By 1,500 BC, boats with rigging were used for trade. Trade with Egypt was thought to have been established by around 3,000 years BC. Trade routes between Egypt and the Red Sea date back to very early times at a period when there were few if any settled communities in Britain. The first trade route began at the Egyptian town of Nekheb and continued south to the Red Sea. The other route went from Nekheb via Qustal in Nubia and then down to the Red Sea. There was a road that went through Eritrea and to the port of Azab and Adule conducted trade with the Far East, Greece, Egypt and India. This trade consisted of commodities such as ivory, gold, rhino horn, hippo hides and teeth, wild animals, frankincense, Nubian emeralds and slaves. The trade was wide and varied and skills employed in the manufacture of these goods were extensive. There were imports of silk, cotton, swords, wine glasses, silver and gold which were manufactured into plates as well as the creation of large gold and bronze statues. Trade links existed with Kush, Egypt, the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean Basin, Arabia, India, Sri Lanka and China. Again the skills and knowledge employed to make these links possible was enormous. This was a world which was connected and which carved out and developed trade routes some of which still are in existence today. The Straits of Bab al-Mombeb was one of the three major shipping routes of the ancient world. Ethiopia was the first country in the world to mint a coin with a Christian symbol and the second country in the world to adopt Christianity as its state religion. Armenia was the first country to do so. During the reign of Ezana, a new Ethiopic script was introduced which influenced other scripts emanating from Armenia and Georgia which indicates that strong diplomatic and trade links existed between these regions and that even during this early historical period parts of Europe and Africa were linked. Axum's trading links in Ethiopia stretched from the Roman Empire through to China by overland and sea routes.

As a teacher I think it is important to place Africa at the centre of an extensive trading network. Many African goods flowed into this network and at this moment in time it was Britain which was an unknown quantity until the invasion by the Romans. After the invasion Britain began to play a more important economic and political role in Europe and the wider world. Goods from Africa started to arrive on its shores.

The occupation of Kush of the Berber Shendi Reach allowed the Kumi rulers access to the rich fertile agricultural lands of the Butana. This occupation also gave the occupying force access to luxury goods such as ebony, ivory, skins and incense and from this period in ancient history it is the tax from trade that these new kingdoms accrued which allowed them to remain in power and to expand their frontiers. There still is a debate today about whether the power base of the kingdom was in the Dongola-Napata Reach which expanded southwards, or whether there existed a central Sudanese state which expanded its spheres of influence northwards. Also it is highly likely that elephants originated from central Sudan and that most of the ivory exports came from this same region. During the 10th and 8th centuries BC there was an international ivory trade in operation, with highly skilled ivory craftsmen employing their skills in western Asia, in the Phoenician coastal city states and in cities in northern Syria. A certain amount of this ivory would have originated from the Indian sub-continent and exported along trade routes which passed through Babylon, but a majority of the ivory most likely came from Kush. This ivory was either bought up the Nile or was exported through ports on the Red Sea. Lower Nubia during this period was a source of gold but these mines probably became exhausted by the end of the New Kingdom while ivory continued to be a major export and source of revenue. During the Persian era the River Nile was called *'Pirava'* which when translated means *'The Tusks'* or *'Ivory River'*. Some of this ivory found its way to the Ancient Greek Empire where the chryselephantine statues of this classical period required copious amounts of ivory in their construction and production. The Athena Parthenon and Zeus of Olympia all have ivory in their bodywork and this ivory would either have been sourced in India or from the central savanna grasslands of Sudan on the African continent. It also is a further example of the expansive trading network which existed prior to the Roman Empire and the connections that existed between Africa and the rest of the known world. Africa was part of this emerging and developing culture and supplied some of the basic ingredients which helped to shape both the Greek and Roman empires. Within the classroom this is an important point to get across. Africa at that time was not seen as 'other'. Parts of Africa played a dynamic and leading role in these trading partnerships and the taxes collected helped in the expansion of a number of African states.

The earliest records of an African state in existence outside of Ancient Egypt was in Upper Nubia or Kush as it was sometimes referred to. The capital of this region was Kerma which was built just south of the Third Cataract on the River Nile. The surrounding countryside was the most fertile and productive of the region. A road was built which veered off from the Nile, close to the city of Kerma, and the trade which passed through this route helped to contribute to the growing wealth of Nubia. This area was populated around 2,500 years BC. Kerma was surrounded by a high defensive wall around its perimeter. Copper was widely used in the production of weapons and utensils. Royal tombs were filled with highly crafted ceramics, wood was inlaid with ivory and on occasions hundreds of people were buried alive with their dead masters, but the city of Kerma was overrun by Egypt in its last period of expansion in 1,506 years BC.

Again in the classroom get pupils to think about the skills needed to build a walled city and the skills needed to produce highly decorative pieces of ceramics and to have wood inlaid with ivory. These skills were not learnt over night. That process would have been spread over a number of generations and within this society there were structures in place to pass on these skills.

Gold mining areas in the Eastern desert played an essential part during the Late Bronze Age to help maintain Egyptian sovereignty during this period. The main gold mining areas were to be found at Wadi el-Aolaqi, at Wadi Cabgaba and on the Abri-Dolgo Reach, which is close to the 4th Cataract on the River Nile. Agriculture in Nubia was confined to a narrow alluvial strip but this land was intensively cultivated. There was a flourishing export market of harvested crops from Nubia to Egypt whilst Nubia imported other needed food products. South of the Dongola Reach there was extensive cattle farming regions. Quantities of cattle were also exported to Egypt. To keep these animals fit and healthy while en-route to Egyptian markets there must have been high standards of animal husbandry. Kush itself possessed vast quantities of mineral wealth as well as having strong links to strategic and important trade routes. The gold mined in Lower Nubia gave Egypt the economic power to maintain its political dominance of Western Asia.

Again this is another example of the influence of Africa been extended beyond its borders and having influence in a large area of Asia. This is Africa putting its stamp on the ancient world and must have left some impression and had an effect upon the culture of that time.

The annals of Thutmose 111rd provide records of the gold excavated from the mines of Wawat over a number of years. The average yearly production from these mines was 248 kilograms while the average yearly figure for gold mined in Kush was much less, standing at 15 kilograms a year. Probably the mines in Nubia were far more important economically, though these figures probably reflect only a small percentage of the actual gold mined as King Thutmose personally presented 15,000 kilograms of gold to the Temple of

Amun at Kamak. Massive quantities of precious metals were exchanged as gifts as well as other products like ivory, ebony and different types of furniture. Egypt through Lower Nubia had access to the gold mines located here while Kush had solid links southern trade routes and it is these trade networks which provided the economic and political power base for Kush.

These images are one of a vibrant, flourishing and active economy, independent and highly skilled and versatile and I believe that this continued down the centuries and was the culture in place when Europeans started to make their presence felt in Africa, partly attracted at first by the large quantities of gold which were known to exist.

Ebony and ivory were used in large quantities to make elaborately designed palace furniture. Chairs were constructed from ebony and inlaid with ivory. These items in the form of diplomatic gifts and tribute were used to help form positive international relationships. Chairs were dispatched to Babylon and skins of leopards and cheetahs which originated from the south were worn by priests. Kush received food from Egypt, clothes, manufactured goods plus military and political support as well as grain, wine and chariots.

At the beginning of the Middle Kingdom in Ancient Egypt and the reign of Mentuhotep 11nd, fleets of boats regularly sailed to Byblos, returning each time with bales of wood. The Nubian cities of Buhen and Wawat had castles with 30 ft high walls which were 16 ft thick. These forts guarded the Nubian gold mines and quarries while further east a series of forts were built and these controlled the trade routes of the Sinai. This allowed Egypt to have total control of the region’s copper and turquoise mines. The king’s palace had lapis lazuli decorations. The only known source of this mineral was from mines located in Afghanistan close to the Chinese borders. Again these facts point to the existence of inter-continental trade routes as well as societies with highly skilled and competent craftsmen as well as integrated political structures.

Some of the foundations for future trading patterns were formed during the 12th Dynasty when road systems were built and trade was encouraged. Investment was made in agriculture and farming was expanded, allowing safer and more secure environments to be created. There was a flourishing gold trade with Kush at this time. Annual gold production stood at 794 kilograms. Ebony, ivory, slaves and cattle were amongst the exports from Kush. Diplomatic links were established with Asia. Through lavish gifts of gold a number of political alliances were forged. Lapiz lazuli and cedar wood were imported in return. Apart from the expansion of trade within Africa, trade links were also established with Asia Minor, Crete and Cyprus. From Syria came oils, resins, metal armoury and wines. Vases were imported from Crete, copper from Cyprus, silver from the Aegean and from Nubia and regions further south in Africa ebony, ivory, gums, leopard and panther skins, ostrich plumes and eggs, resin and other species of wild animals were traded. The caravans at this time were driven by donkeys, mules and asses. Payment was made with either silver, gold, grain or copper. 9.1 grams of gold was equal to 2 units of silver which in turn was equal to 200 units of copper or 22 bushels of grain.

I believe that the Chinese Silk Road played an important role in the development of the civilization of Ancient Egypt. This trade road linked China, India and Asia to the Mediterranean Basin. Usually goods passed from section to section along the route. It was rare for individual traders to cover the entire route. The Central Asian route was opened in 114 Years BC but prior to this date other routes had been in operation. For example, during the 4th Millennium BC, Badaksham in northeast Afghanistan was the only source of the gemstone lapis lazuli which during this period was traded with Mesopotamia and Egypt. From these mines in Afghanistan there existed a trade route which run over the Pamir mountains into China and leading to the nephrite jade mines in Yarkland and Khotan. These mines were the catalyst and impetus for this trade route. Pieces of silk dating back to 1073 Years BC have been found in Ancient Egypt. The silk either came from China, the Mediterranean region or from the Middle East. But it is proof of an extensive trade network. The Ancient World was interconnected through a series of trade systems which were part of the socio-political structure of the day.

An even earlier trade route was the Persian Royal Road constructed in the 5th Century BC by Darius 1st of Persia. The oldest harbour in the world is thought to be Lothal in India which was in use around 2400 years BC. It is known that by this date trade links had been formed between Africa and India. Pharoah Senusret who ruled during the 12th Dynasty in Ancient Egypt built a canal from Suez linking the River Nile and the Red Sea which allowed direct trade to be established with Punt. The concept of the present Suez Canal built during the 19th Century has its roots many thousands of years previously.

During the 2nd Millennium BC, Phoenician merchants from Lebanon began to colonize the North African coast. Carthage in what is now Tunisia became their economic and power base in Africa. By the year 814 BC, the city of Carthage was ruled by a rich mercantile class whose main priority was the expansion and development of trade along Africa's Mediterranean coastline. They were less inclined to forge trade links with the interior of Africa, but by the 6th Century BC had created a sphere of influence which ran 200 kilometers into the plains of northern and eastern Tunisia. The rest of North Africa was left in the control of Berbers who over the centuries became the controlling force in the trans-Saharan trade network. Trade links were also formed with the Garamantes, who trafficked in slaves and precious stones bought in from the south.

The Phoenicians were skilled master mariners. They navigated with the aid of the Pole Star. They sailed around the Cape of Good Hope, (the Cape of Storms), 2,000 years before Vasca de Gama. The Phoenicians also sailed across to India and returned with sandalwood incense from Malabar in India, spices from Arabia, linen from Egypt, ostrich plumes from the Sahara, ebony and ivory from the Sudan, copper from Cyprus, iron from Elba, steel from the Black Sea region, silver from Spain, gold from the Niger, tin from the Scilly Isles and amber from the Baltic. Permanent factories were established as these trade routes began to flourish. At the sometime caravan trade routes started to develop and to expand. Images depicted on the Nimrud Ivories also show proof that an ivory trade existed in the 9th Century BC.

A thriving international trade existed during the period when Carthage extended its influence right the way across the Mediterranean Basin. The African continent was linked and embedded into this trading network. This was in existence for around 2,000 years before becoming dislocated and broken up with the advent of European intrusion and the wholesale colonization of Africa. Gold, precious stones and local art products were exported from Cartage to Italy. The gold and precious stones would have had to have been transported across the Sahara to Cartage. Wax and honey was imported to cartage from Corsica while products from Carthage were exported to Spain. Herodutus the world's first known historian says that Guinea was a source of gold, while gold, salt, slaves and dates were purchased through existing internal African trade routes. Herodutus also says that sailors from Carthage sailed down the Atlantic coast of Africa past the entrance to the Senegal River where the locals were said to use slash and burn techniques to clear virgin land for agricultural production.

During the pre-Christian era, three major trade routes had been established between the southern and northern shores of the Sahara desert. In West Africa the route started in Morocco going through the Adar to the Middle Senegal and Upper Niger River. The second route went through the centre, starting out at Tripoli, going down through Ghadames and Ghat to Gao on the Middle Niger River. The third trade route went east from Tripoli through the towns of Murzag and Bilma and on through to N'jimi in Kanem. A majority of the traders were Berbers who helped to establish flourishing trade centres in the Sudan. Goods purchased from the Mediterranean region such as silk, mirrors, swords and paper were exchanged for salt anddates from the Sahara and gold, grain, gum, hides, skins, ostrich feathers, ivory, kola nuts and slaves from West Africa.

North Africa in the 9th and 8th Century BC was part of a thriving trade network located in the Mediterranean basin with links stretching into Asia Minor and into West and East Africa. Sea routes were controlled by Phoenician city states which never gained much inland territory because their cities were surrounded by steep and rugged mountains. From the early Bronze Age these cities became important trading centres. Wood from the forests of Lebanon was a major export and imports came to these cities from North Africa and much further a field. The Phoenician city states began to specialize in certain luxury goods while Egypt supplied raw materials. Tyre imported quality linen from Egypt and today this trade still continues with British high street stores such as Habitat using Egypt as a source for high quality curtain material for example and Austin Reed outsourcing made to measure suits to tailors in Egypt. The linen that Tyre purchased was dyed with hues obtained from local shellfish. There was a variety of dyes ranging from rose pink to blue. Furniture made from ivory, carved wooden panels based upon original Egyptian designs and papyrus was also imported from Egypt. Across the Mediterranean basin there are indications of wide spread trade. In Sicily faience vessels have been discovered and in Central Italy, Etruscan graves have been unearthed. Bates Island acted as a stocking up point for trade routes to Eastern Crete, to the Nile Delta and on to Palestine and back to Cyprus. There is a possibility that the Cretan and the Cypriots manufactured bronze weapons which then were exchanged with the Libyans. This route could also have formed part of a trade route which extended into western Asia. Trade links could also have led to the formation of diplomatic contacts as the Aramaic script replaced Akkadian as the new diplomatic language.

Pine and cedar wood from Lebanon was used in the construction of building projects in Egypt. Some of this imported timber travelled even further south to build new temples and also garrisons built to help protect merchant boats and other traders travelling from Kush to Egypt. The desert road from Meroe rejoined the Nile at Sanam Kawa and at Talas. These routes formed part of the trans-Saharan trade and created avenues of communication and of cultural influence which continued up until the 19th Century providing channels for Islam to spread its religious ideology from the 9th Century onwards. These trade routes also fed into the Chinese Silk Road at the Egyptian port of Alexandria.

In the *'Periplus of the Erythaean Sea'*, a travel book, which provided the first written account of the trading links which existed between the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. The book was written in the second half of the 1st Century AD, most probably by a Greek merchant living in Egypt during the time of the Roman Empire. The book details trade links which went as far south as Tanganyika. It describes a town called Rhapta but today its location is unknown. In the town of Rhapta, Arab merchants arrived laden with iron goods which were exchanged for ivory, palm oil, rhino horn, tortoise shell, cinnamon, frankincense and slaves. Cinnamon may have originated from India, which could indicate that trade links between India and Africa had existed from an extremely early historical period. It also could be argued that some form of a global market existed prior to the birth of Christ. Other goods for sale may have come down the coast from the north, again an indicator that there existed a thriving trade along the East African coast. The book also says that it took three days to travel from the Ethiopian city of Adulis to Koloe. The journey from Adulis to Aksum took 8 days, similar to the time taken today. This was the start of the route which went to the Red Sea, through the Nile Valley and ending up close to Meroe. There was another route which went northwest from Aksum to the Aswan region and then across the Nubian Desert. This journey took 30 days. Also there was a route south from Aksum to Lake Tana and Sasu which is said to be where Aksumite gold was to be found. This route took 50 days and there were routes branching off which went to Shoa and other regions in the Horn of Africa. Aksum itself was at the centre of a massive web of trade routes which help to channel goods from Africa's interior into the Red Sea trade.

Further inland, the trade routes which traversed the Sahara Desert linking North Africa with its interior underwent a complete transformation with the introduction of the camel by the Romans around 200 Years AD. Inhabitants of the central Sahara region responded quickly to the camel's introduction, using it either as a source of food or a source of transport. Previously, the trans-Saharan trade had been very hazardous. Traders had to slowly inch their way across the desert, moving slowly from oasis to oasis. With the formation of convoys of camel caravans, merchants were able to make the entire desert crossing in 2 months. This enabled contact on a regular basis to be established with the communities and regions around the Mediterranean Sea and that of sub-Saharan West Africa. Moving south from the Mediterranean Sea were horses, weapons and textiles while from the opposite direction came gold, slaves and animal products while large quantities of salt originated from the central Sahara.

Trade across the Sahara Desert expanded. By the 11th Century AD, ceramics, silks and beads were moving south across the desert from Europe and Asia. India and China exported ceramics and silks along these trade routes, though some of these goods would have been shipped across the Indian Ocean, landing in ports along the East African coast. Islam as previously mentioned moved along these same routes spreading its religious message. Some of the conflicts which exist in parts of Africa such as in the Sudan and Somalia are linked to the arrival of Islam and also Christianity along these trans-Saharan trade networks. Events which happened 1000 years ago are still having an effect today and with the influx recently of refugees from Somalia in Britain and Europe are changing the demographics of many of our cities. Further south due to this increase in trade cities such as Timbuktu and Gao sprung up while in the north trade centres such as Ghadames, now in Libya, grew in status and wealth. From these flourishing commercial centres a wide variety of goods were dispatched across Europe, Arabia, India and China. Muslim traders from regions in North Africa organized trade caravans and one single caravan travelling from Egypt to Sudan was known to comprise of 12,000 caravans. They transported luxury goods such as textiles, silk, beads, ceramics, ornamental weapons and utensils south and on the return journey came back with gold, ivory, slaves, wood such as ebony and agricultural products such as kola nuts which were also a stimulant and contained caffeine. Desert nomads in the Sahara traded salt and meat as well as their expertise of the desert often acting as guides. Before the discovery of the Americas, Mali was once one of the world's main suppliers of gold and ivory which was preferred to Indian ivory because it was a softer material and more malleable when used for carving. Slaves were sold to Arab courts and to Berber princes where they were employed as servants, concubines, soldiers and farm labourers.

The Saharan trade routes have probably been in existence for many thousands of years. A series of stone carvings have been found between southern Morocco and a region on the Middle Niger close to Timbuktu, which have been sculptured into what appears to resemble chariots. Prior to the introduction of camels into northwest Africa during the Roman Empire, cattle were probably used as a means of transport along these desert trade routes. During the Roman Empire precious stones were the main objects that passed along these desert trails. After the Arab Muslim invasion of North Africa in the 7th Century, gold began to be exported in large quantities. One source of gold was the Wangora gold fields in Upper Senegal, in the Upper Niger and in the Upper Volta. Nine tons per year was on average exported. In 1937, and with much more sophisticated means of transportation available the total gold exports from West Africa in that year was only 21 tons.

During the Middle Ages there was a huge demand from Europe for African gold. Gold was exchanged for high quality textiles, leather and metal work plus other luxury goods. The gold trade reached its zenith in Mali during the 14th Century when the Akan gold field was opened but by the close of the 15th Century the main mine in Azelik was closed. 200 years later salt had become the main export product from this region.

The importance of salt for the economy can be measured by the fact that there are over 50 words for salt in the Hausa language. Slaves were procured to work in the salt mines. Conditions were harsh and hazardous. Nomads such as the Tueregs transported blocks of salt south. As mentioned previously these caravan trains could be huge. They could consist of between 20,000 to 30,000 camels and cover a length of 25 kilometres. The exchange of gold for grain and salt formed the core of this north-south trans-Saharan trade. Grain, gold, slaves, cattle and kola nuts formed the basis of this trade.

The Soninke traders based in Ghana, known for their donkey caravans, mainly traded in gold, kola nuts and cloth. West Africans used pack animals to transport merchandise. A Diaspora trading network evolved which allowed for the transportation of goods to navigate the forest regions then through the desert and on to the Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean basin. Dug out canoes were used to transport goods along the river systems which then linked up with the trade caravans and major commercial centres such as Gao. On the Nile Delta there were 20 metre long trading canoes which were also capable of travelling along wider rivers and lagoons. Porters were used to carry goods through the equatorial and forest regions. All of these trade systems linked into an organized market system which operated in rotation.

The world economy of the Middle Ages was formed through trade links which existed between the Mediterranean Sea, Europe and Africa. During the 8th Century Spain and North Africa were part of an expanding Islamic empire which the Muslims called *'Dar al Islam'* or *'The House of Islam'*. Links were established by land and sea between Egypt and Syria. Between 800 Years and 1,000 Years AD, Muslims were the maritime power of the Mediterranean Sea. During the early part of the 10th Century the Fatimid Dynasty in Tunisia conquered Egypt and took control of the Egyptian port of Alexandria and formed a link with Cairo along the Nile. There was a power shift at the same time from Baghdad to Cairo and a revival of the red Sea as the main sea route to the Indian Ocean restoring the role it once had during the Ptolemaic and Roman times.

Between 909AD – 1171AD the economies of Europe had begun to recover from the Barbarian invasions which had led to the collapse of the Roman Empire. European courts began to create a demand for products which came through the Indian Ocean trading networks via Alexandria and Constantinople. Ceramics, textiles and sugar were also imported into Europe via Egypt and Syria. From the Italian ports of Amati, Pisa, Genoa and Venice these luxury goods started to arrive in Europe. By the start of the 15th Century Venice had virtually created a monopoly of this mercantile trade from the east while the port of Genoa focused on trade from Spain, North Africa and the Black sea. There were annual sailings of Venetian convoys called '*The Mude'* which departed from Venice at the end of August. Their sea route took them through the Adriatic and Aegean sea and then on to Cyprus and Alexandria. The fleet timed their arrival in Egypt with merchant vessels docking from the East, blown in on the monsoon winds from the Indian Ocean. The boats from Venice returned laden with spices and textiles. Once unloaded on the Italian mainland these were transported overland by road and along river systems to numerous trade fairs. The monsoon winds also helped to bolster sea links between India and China.

In 1204AD Venice bankrolled and led the Crusader conquest of Constantinople. A trade pact was signed between the Mamluk Sultan who ruled Egypt and between Syria and Venice. The 9/11 attack on the World trade Centre in New York and the tensions that exist today between the West and Islam could have its roots in the decision by Venice to finance the 1204 Crusade, much of it with African gold. This treaty enabled Venice to gain control of the trade between Alexandria, Tripoli and Beirut. By the mid 14th Century the Mude convoys had doubled in size and towards the end of the 13th Century in 1282, Venice had begun to mint gold ducats. Previously, up till this point, gold and silver had been the main currency of the Islamic world. Muslims believed that these precious metals must be circulated and not hoarded. Gold in the past had at times been obtained through the wholesale looting of pharaoh tombs in Egypt, but gold mining areas also existed in Africa in places such as Sofala in the south east of the continent. During the Middle Ages Africa was supplying 60% of the world's gold supplies. This figure would have dropped with the discovery of plentiful gold sources in the Americas. Much of the gold from Africa would have reached Europe overland, been transported along the trans-Saharan trade routes which probably have their origins in the Phonecian era. As mentioned previously, the introduction of camels into Africa during the period of the Roman Empire allowed for more regular and reliable routes to be established. With camels it was more easily to predict when they would arrive at their destination. Merchants there would then be able to organize their dispatch to other places and at ports boats would have a better idea of when the camel train would arrive.

The establishment of the trade caravan city of Sijimasa in Morocco in 747 Years AD allowed for the further expansion of this southern gold trade. Gold was sometimes en-route exchanged for its actual weight with blocks of salt. From Sijimasa on the Moroccan-Algeria border the route passed through the salt village of Taghaza and then on through the Sahara Desert to the gold fields of Wangara in the kingdom of Ghana. Its precise location was most likely close to the Bambuk and Bure area, near the Senegal River. A second trade route was established which ran northeast through Tunis and Cairo and south down through Egypt's interior and beyond. This trade led to the formation of a series of strong and robust African kingdoms in the south whose wealth was provided through taxes imposed and collected on this export and import trade. African gold, bought was bought in to countries as far apart as Portugal, Spain, Majorca, France and Italy. Africa was not an isolated continent but was a trading area with strong links with

Europe and other continents. Links had been developed with North African ports since the 10th Century AD, a century before the Battle of Hastings and the invasion of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror.

During the 12th Century Genoese mariners sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar and began to establish trading links with ports on the Atlantic-Moroccan coast. After 1253 AD when Florence and Genoa became the first principalities to mint the first European gold coins, trade was established with the southern Sahara regions where these European merchants would have become aware of the substantial gold fields which existed in this area. Much of the gold used in the minting of these coins came from Africa via the northern ports. Merchants channeled this African gold into Europe economies which allowed for the purchase of luxury goods coming in from the East. Awareness of these gold mines was one reason for the initial European involvement and early colonization of Africa. The Portuguese fortress built at Sao Jorge da Mina on the coast of Guinea was built in 1455. This led to between 25% - 35% of the gold that was once transported north along the trans-Saharan trade routes now been diverted to this Portuguese colony and then shipped out to Europe. It was gold and not slaves which first fuelled Europe’s interest in Africa and the vast profits which might be gained from getting a foothold on this gold.

By the first millennium AD flourishing trade centres existed in ports along the North African coast such as Alexandria. These ports did not simply emerge overnight but came about through a long historical process over thousands of years. Other centres of trade in Africa were found in dynasties such as Kanem-Bornu found on the far east of the Niger Bend, various ports along the East African coast from Mogadishu in the north and down to Sofala in the south and in places such as Great Zimbabwe located in southern Africa.

The Kanem-Bornu dynasty was founded in 800 Years AD and within 200 years had been transformed into an Islamic state. Its capital was Njimi built north of the shores of Lake Chad which during the Last Ice Age was a massive lake. Kanem provided the shortest route across the Sahara Desert. The route started off from the Highlands of Air which is now in north-central Niger to the Libyan region of Fezzan. Merchants travelling along this trade route were able to have access to Darfur and Kordofan plus a string of markets located along the Nile in Sudan a,d right the way through into Egypt. The Kanem Dynasty traded in slat and copper produced in desert areas. Horses were bought down south from North Africa. Ostrich feathers, ivory and slaves were moved north along these routes. By the beginning of the 13th Century a massive military and trade complex had been formed. Kanem had an army comprised of 40,000 horsemen controlling trade as far north as Fezzan. By the 16th Century a large arms trade existed between Kanem- Bornu and the Turkish Ottoman empire. This led to the creation of an even more autocratic state.

Between the first millennium AD and 1200 Years AD came the formation of the seven Hausa mercantile city states based in the savannah grasslands of Bornu. This is now in Nigeria. Each of the seven cities was a major agricultural and manufacturing centre, specializing in specific products, such as cotton cloth, dyes or leather work which were linked to one of the seven cities. The most important of these city states was Kano, Katsina, Zaria and Gobir.

Trade had been opened up in the Hausa federation around the time of the first millennium AD. A number of iron smelting sites were in operation in the region at this time. At the beginning of the 15th century a number of military operations took place whose aim was to lengthen the existing trade route to the town of Gwanja situated on the edge of the forest area. The city states of Kano and Katsina were thriving commercial centres manufacturing cotton and leather goods. They also hosted productive farming communities and played host to skilled iron smelters, weavers and dyers. Workshops produced brass, silver and glass artifacts. There were trade links with the Yoruba people who were based further south. Gold was procured from the Akan gold fields in the west and there were well established trade links with Egypt and the rest of North Africa. In 1851, 10 million sandals were exported from this region as well as millions of animal hides and sheep skins. Trade in such quantities is not built up over night. There has to be the infrastructure in place to deal with such demand. Also the quality has to be in place and to produce such a large amount of animal skins on a regular basis means that there would have been high standards of animal husbandry in place. Again this knowledge would have been built up over generations and passed down orally from one generation to the next. Books from Europe were bound with ‘Moroccan leather’ which was actually made from Nigerian goat skin. Kana had a massive market place which probably was the largest in the world and had been in operation since the beginning of the first millennium.

Another prosperous centre was Oyo. Two caravan routes ran through Oyo and these were designed for international trade. One route ran in a north by southwest direction passing through the Hausa federation and then connected into the Trans-Saharan route. From Oyo it went through Kisi, Saki and Iseyin before arriving on the coast at Ajase now called Porto Novo. The second route went in a north by southeast direction. Oyo was the pivotal city and this route went through the towns of Ilesa, Ekitland, Owo and on to the Benin Kingdom, before arriving at the coast. There were other tributary routes feeding into these 2 main ones right the way across the Yoruba Kingdom. Quite often at river junctions ferries were operated.

Trade also occurred between the Kingdom of Benin and regions in the Sahara. Products such as ivory, pepper and cotton were exported. Horses and copper were amongst the many goods imported. At a later date, dyed cotton cloth, wool, jasper, leopard skins, soap and palm oil were exported to Europe. Portugal, during the 17th Century banned the import of soap from this region in order to protect its own indigenous soap industry. Again this proves that Africa had industries capable of competing with European ones on a large scale and on equal terms. It also possessed a skilled workforce able to produce highly competitive products on an international scale.

Massive markets were often held in Africa which might last for three or four days. Often cowry shells acted as a form of currency. A wide range of products could be found on sale and in 1588 a European traveler saw jugs, red glass earrings and red velvet from Holland on sale, proof of the international nature of African trade.

The Kongo had a highly developed textile industry. It produced extremely delicate damasks, satins and other fine cloth. In Kanem-Borno, a neighbouring state there was a flourishing trade in horses, metal work, glass fabrics and copper been imported from the north and kola nuts and ivory transported in from the west with cotton goods travelling in from the south of the kingdom. Kanem exported slaves, ostrich feathers and live animals. The Knights of the Royal Garter use ostrich feathers in their headgear. These could have originated from Africa, yet another indicator of Africa’s role in an international trade system outside of slavery.

About the same time around 1,000 Years AD, Swahili trading communities had been established in the north from Mogadishu down to Mozambique and northern Madagascar. Some of these settlements printed their own copper and silver currencies and large quantities of gold were exported. Some of these towns situated in the north dealt in slaves. Many of them ended up working in the salt mines of southern Iraq. With the expansion of the gold trade came an increase Arab immigration. Trade links were expanded with India and China. During the 15th Century the Portuguese arrived on the East African coast. Many of the cities and ports along this coast were ransacked by the Portuguese who made attempts to seize control over the lucrative gold trade.

Great Zimbabwe was part of an extensive trading network linked to trading centres such as Kilwa, Malindi and Mogadishu situated along the East African coast. Great Zimbabwe also had international trading links with the Gulf States, Western India and China. Gold from great Zimbabwe was transported to the coast and then channeled into the Indian Ocean trade network. During the 14th Century celadon was imported from China and Chinese porcelain has been found in the tombs of the kings of Great Zimbabwe while ivory was highly valued product in China. In the early 15th Century a number of Chinese expeditions managed to reach the East African coast and anchored off Mogadishu. Dates of these expeditions can be found in the temples of the Celestial Spouse from the Chinese port where these ships set off from.

In the 17th century the main exports from Africa were gold and slaves. Richard Bean believes that until 1650, the value of exports of gold surpassed that of slaves. He says that the average amount of gold exported from Africa between the years 1500 and 1700 was 200 pounds sterling and with the average price of an individual set at 20 pounds sterling, 10,000 slaves were needed to exceed the value of gold exports, a figure not reached until 1650. When this figure is combined with exports in cotton cloth, wax, animal hides, wood. Gum, pepper and ivory one is made to realize that Africa at this time was a rich source of many other raw materials which helped to fuel the industrial revolution in Europe. Towards the end of the 15th century and during the early part of the 16th Century, the Portuguese alone were shipping 100,000 pounds of gold annually from West Africa. This could be seen as an early example of asset stripping.

The ports of the Swahili States were spread over a 2,500 mile coastline which went all the way from Somalia in the north to Mozambique in the south. Mogadishu and Brava in Somalia, Lamu, Mombassa and Gedi in Kenya, Kilwa and Mafia, islands off Tanzania and the island ports of Pemba and Zanzibar and the ports of Sofala and Sinna in Mozambique formed this long stretch of ports and vibrant trading centres. Sinna was an island someway inland on the Zambezi River. Each port generated an income from taxes and duties on ships sailing from and arriving in these harbours. Trade was dependant upon the monsoon winds. Between November and January they blew from India via the Persian Gulf and onto East Africa. These winds created a southerly current along the East African coastline. Ships began their sea journey in the Persian Gulf or in the Red Sea. When they had loaded their cargo they sailed down the East African coast. April marked the start of the south-west monsoon winds which formed a northerly swell up the coast and out towards Asia. Arab, Asian and East African merchant vessels sailed these routes plying their trade. There were African ships with sails called *'dua la mtepe'* and those without sails were called *'mtepe'*. Some of these ships date back to the 1st century AD. Some academics believe that the African role in this region is much greater then has been presumed. Dhows were designed and constructed in East Africa. An ivory trade existed between India and China via Oman. Ivory was used in India to make dagger handles and in China to construct chairs for the nobility and for chess pieces. Ambergris, a scent obtained from whales and rhino horn were other products exported to the Far East. Rhino horn was thought to have healing powers and today rhino's are still hunted illegally for this product and the illicit market in the East still exists. Another part of this trade was iron. Steel it is thought had been manufactured in Africa from around 300Years AD and possibly even earlier. On the shores of Lake Victoria in Tanzania, 2,000 year old carbon steel furnaces have been discovered. Peter Schmidt and Donald Avery found thirteen furnaces in this region which had the capability of reaching temperatures of 1450 degrees centigrade. These furnaces were of a higher standard than European furnaces until the industrial revolution of the 19th century. The knowledge used in these furnaces could have been collected and used to help transform Britain's industrial base and transform our own landscape in the 18th and 19th Centuries. The changes which took place helped to inspire the writings of artists like William Blake, George Elliot and Charles Dickens.

Trade

Classroom Activities

1. Map out the River Nile and its tributaries.
2. Map out Queen Hatshepsut's voyage to Punt.
3. Design and draw your own mural of this voyage including the items bought back.
4. Write a diary about this voyage describing the changing landscape, the type of food eaten, the people that one met and the cargo bought back. Describe one's reaction to the animal cargo and to seeing wild animals such as elephants.
5. Map out the early trade routes in Africa and where the goods came from
6. Map out the international trade routes that Africa was a pivotal part of and where the exports and imports came from and what they were. Also map out the changing nature of these trade routes and the goods that flowed through them.
7. Create a piece of drama which shows the traders, craft people and hunters employed in their work. Working in small groups get the groups to make these different groups into real, believable characters.
8. Create some creative writing/poetry based around this early trade. Turn this into a performance piece which could also use sound and music.
9. Get the class to use Google Earth to find some of the place names mentioned and to write down as much information as possible about each place from the images of the terrain they get on Google Earth. Get pupils to write about the environment, the landscape, rivers and road systems that they can see and to think about how the landscape has changed over the centuries. What changes have occurred and state some of the reasons they think changes have occurred in the environment.
10. Compare and contrast trade in this Ancient World to the present day.
11. Map out the trans-Saharan trade routes in the Middle Ages. Label the main towns and cities. The goods transported in each direction and agricultural produce grown along these routes.
12. Working in small groups create and design a trans-Saharan board game which takes in the hazards and potential risks of each route plus the profits to be gained and the goods transported. Get groups to play

their game against other groups and to do a classroom presentation on their game.