

behind these invasions and wars. Religion and economic reasons were behind the Almoravid invasion of ancient Ghana beginning in 1062. The Almoravid wanted to spread Islam to the 'pagan' empire of Ghana in addition to controlling trade. The Ghana capital of Kumbi Saleh fell to the Almoravids in 1077. The Almoravid occupation of Ghana ushered in a period of instability and secession by vassal states like Tekrur, Mali, and Songhay. Geared by the obsession to find and control the gold mines that produced the gold in the trans-Saharan trade, Mawlay Ahmed al-Mansur, the sixth Saadian sultan of Morocco, commissioned Judar Pasha, a Spaniard, to invade Songhay. In 1585, the Moorish army seized control of Taghaza salt mines, breaking Songhai monopoly on the trade in salt, capturing Gao and Timbuktu in 1591, and taking control of the state. This occupation led to a period of political instability caused by internecine fighting among the Moorish army, Songhay princes for succession, vassal states fighting for their freedom, and the neighboring states such as the Fulbe and Tuareg who took advantage of the anarchic situation to expand their territory. All these affected trade and weakened the states.

Interstate wars were contributory factors to the demise of West African empires. The importation of firearms from Arab merchants and Europeans revolutionized warfare, made it bloodier, and more violent. The Hausa States suffered relentless attacks from Songhai in the west and Bornu in the east. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, interstate wars became rampant: Zamfara against Kebbi, Gobir against Zamfara, and Kano against Katsina.⁵² The Kwararafa (Jukun) from the Benue river valley raided the Hausa states and Bornu kingdom for slaves. The Uthman dan Fodio army clashed with all the Hausa states: Zaria (1804), Katsina (1805), Gobir (1808), and Bornu (1818).⁵³ These wars weakened the states and made their collapse easy.

The breakdown of economic activities contributed in no small way to the collapse of precolonial West African states. Since trade (local and long-distance or international) helped these empires and states to rise, the destruction or reduction of it affected their economies adversely, thus leading to their gradual decline. The diversion of the gold trade from Audaghost to the Niger and Taghaza through the Sahara caused the decline of the trans-Saharan trade. The intensification of the slave trade depopulated states and caused insecurity. The abolition of the slave trade in the early 1800s also diminished the livelihood and the source of wealth for most West African states like Asante, Dahomey, and the Oyo.

From the nineteenth century onwards, various European nations such as Britain, Portugal, and France begun to interfere directly in the local politics of West African states. Settling among the African people as traders and missionaries, they increasingly interfered in trade and politics, especially after the abolition of the slave trade. The British pushed into the interior of modern Ghana, upsetting the power base of the Asante. States like Dahomey and Oyo all lost their sovereignty to European countries.

CONCLUSION

States, kingdoms, and empires are not new to the African continent. Factors such as trade, religion, leadership, food production, wars of conquest, and the presence of invading groups worked interdependently to cause states, kingdoms, and empires to rise. These states and empires developed complex political organizations, sociocultural institutions, undertook complex architectural projects such as the pyramids of Egypt, stone ruins of Great Zimbabwe, and stelae and obelisks of Ethiopia, and developed their own written languages like the Ge'ez of Meroe and hieroglyphics of Egypt. All these developments were indigenous to the African continent. These states, empires, and kingdoms collapsed at different times due to a number of factors: decline in economic activities, political instability, the slave trade, foreign interference in African affairs, and ultimately the colonization of Africa by Europeans.

ENDNOTES

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