



Adult Learning Within Reach

Member Lecture – 30 September 2021

A West African empire: life in the middle ages
Kwame Gad, WEA tutor

Questions answered post-lecture

Q1 What were the traditional African beliefs?

African traditional beliefs were many and varied. A good book to find out more about this is 'An Introduction to African religion' by John S Mbiti.

Q2 Was there crime in the empires? Were criminals used as slaves?

There will have been crime in the empires but I have no specific information about crime prior to Islam. However, by the time Islam was introduced Sharia law was followed although some societies and leaders followed it more strictly than others, especially those leaders who mixed Islam with their traditional beliefs. Yes, criminals and prisoners of war were used as forced labour, for example in the salt and gold mines.

Q3 How was the gold mined?

Great question, but mining techniques are not my area of expertise. However, I am aware that it was mined virtually around the clock by teams of captives and prisoners, led by skilled specialists.

Q4 Were any of the old books you spoke of fiction? Stories, tales, poetry?

Again, this is not my area of expertise, but there was a culture of prose, stories and poetry amongst the African Moors of the middle ages, who invaded Spain from Africa during the era commonly known as the Dark Ages.

Useful links and further reading

When We Ruled – Robin Walker

Timbuctoo: The Mysterious – Felix Dubois

Precolonial Black Africa – Cheikh Anta Diop

An Introduction to African religion – John S Mbiti

The Moors of Spain – Stanley Lane Poole

Forthcoming courses by Kwame Gad

African History (C3679896) – Basic introductory course starting 4th November 2021 for 10 weeks *Note – the enrolment site currently states a start date of 5th November and this is in the process of being changed.