

years, the land there grew very dry. The people had to move to different parts of Africa. As they moved, Africans formed different types of communities, kingdoms, and cities all over the continent.

Life in the African cities was more like life in an American city than you might realize. People lived busy lives, working at many different kinds of jobs. There were doctors and cooks, teachers and soldiers, shopkeepers and historians.

When Europeans (*YER-uh-PEE-ins*) and other outsiders first arrived in Africa, they discovered that parts of Africa were very rich in rubber, oils, gold, and diamonds. The Europeans began trading with the Africans for these things.

In Africa, as in most of the world at that time, some people were slaves. They were owned by other people and forced to work. But in Africa, many slaves were able to become part of the family and community.

Later, Europeans and Africans traded for African slaves to work in North and South America. African slaves were captured by force and sent in ships to the Americas.

### Historians in West Africa

Historians in West Africa are called **griots** (*GREE-ohs*). They learned by listening to stories about people and things that happened in the past. Then the griots told these stories to their own students.

A West African griot passed down this story about a boy named Sundjata (*Soon-JAH-tah*). Sundjata became a king in the 1200s. He lived in Mali (*MAH-lee*). Mali is in West Africa, which is where many **ancestors** of present-day African Americans lived.

Several years before Sundjata was born, a wise woman told the king of Mali that he would have a son. This son



*King Sundjata ruled the kingdom of Mali hundreds of years ago. This map shows Mali in West Africa in the 1990s.*