Chapter 8

African Civilizations & the Spread of Islam (500 - 1450)
Kingdoms & Trading States of Africa

Despite geographic barriers, many civilizations rose and flourished in Africa. Kingdoms in the west and city-states in the east became important commercial and political centers.
Africa’s many climate zones and landforms have encouraged the development of a wide variety of cultures.
Many Peoples, Many Traditions

- The Bantu people traveled through southern Africa, and had settled most of Africa by A.D. 400.
  - They spread their language, Swahili, & culture as they traveled.
  - Africans often lived with extended families, or families made up of several generations.
  - Many African villages were matrilineal, meaning the people traced their ancestors through their mothers rather than their fathers.
  - Each family belonged to a lineage. Several lineages formed a clan.
  - One’s place in society was determined by age grades.
  - Children were valued in African culture. They were considered the link between the past and the future.
  - Some people believed ancestors could be reborn in children.
Women’s Roles

- Women’s roles were mainly as wives and mothers, but there were exceptions.
- Dahia al-Kahina was a queen who led the fight against a Muslim invasion.
- Nzinga was a queen who battled Portuguese slave traders for nearly 40 years.
Government of African Societies

- Some societies had rulers who used a hierarchy of officials to exercise control over their states.
- Others, were stateless societies, organized around kinship relationships.
- Villages were tight-knit communities.
- In most villages, power was shared among a group of elders.
- A village made decisions by consensus.
- Villages within a kingdom had to pay taxes and provide soldiers to the central government.
The Bantu Migrations

- About 2500 B.C., the Sahara began to dry out.
- Through *desertification*, the land became dry and the desert spread.
- This encouraged migration, as Bantu people were forced to seek new places to live.
- Over thousands of years, migration has contributed to the rich diversity of people and cultures in Africa.
Other Characteristics of African Societies

- The Bantu language provided enough similarities in various languages in vocabulary and linguistic structure to allow mutual understanding between different people.

- The Khoisan people adapted to harsh conditions of the Kalahari Desert by gathering roots and herbs and hunting small game.

- Along coasts and rivers, people learned to fish with nets. They traded surplus fish for other things they needed.

- In the savanna, some peoples were nomads, raising herds of cattle. To protect their herds against raiders, these peoples became skilled warriors.

- In fertile areas, farming peoples practiced slash and burn agriculture. They produced a variety of crops.
Religious Beliefs

- **Animism** and ritual worship in the form of dancing, drumming, divination, and sacrifice, characterized much of Africa.

- Africans believed that evil, disasters, and illnesses were caused by witchcraft & specialists were needed to combat these powers.

- Many shared a belief in a creator god whose powers and actions were expressed through spirits and lesser gods and through founding ancestors.

- African religious practices vary from place to place, but their beliefs served similar purposes—to help people stay in touch with their history and provide rules for living.

- Many Africans believed the spirits of dead relatives stayed with them when they died and that the spirits could talk to the supreme god.
African Religions Today

Christianity and Islam also influenced peoples in some parts of Africa.

**Religion in Africa**

- **Muslim** 40.7%
- **Christian** 46.4%
- **Traditional African Religions** 12.3%
- **Other Religions** .6%

*Source: The World Almanac and Book of Facts, 2003*
North Africa

Through warfare and trade, many outside influences helped to shape North Africa.

- Carthage, founded by Phoenician traders, dominated trade on the Western Mediterranean and North Africa from 800 B.C. to 146 B.C.
- It established outposts, distant military bases, in England and France.
- Hannibal led them into war in the Punic Wars where they eventually lost to the Romans.
Roman Rule

- The Romans built roads, dams, aqueducts, and cities across North Africa.
- Rome developed their farmlands, imported lions for gladiatorial games, and enlisted soldiers - one of them, Septimius Severus later became emperor of Rome.
- Christianity spread across North Africa.
- St. Augustine, the most influential Christian thinker of the late Roman empire was born in present-day Algeria.
Camels, Trade, and Islam

- By A.D. 200, camels were brought to North Africa from Asia, revolutionizing trade across the Sahara.
- In the 600s, Arab armies carried Islam into North Africa.
- **Berbers**, Saharan desert people, joined Arabs to conquer Spain.
- Islam replaced Christianity, Arabic replaced Latin, and Mosques and libraries were built in major cities.
- Trade in grain, wine, fruit, ivory, and gold thrived.

A Berber family crossing a ford - scene in Algeria.
African Trading States
Early Civilizations of Asia: Nubia

- The ancient kingdom of **Nubia**, also called **Kush**, was located south of Egypt in present-day Sudan.

- Nubians were influenced by the Egyptians and adapted their traditions, artwork, dress, temples, and tombs.
The Nile Kingdom of Nubia

- Nubians worshipped their own gods, including the lion-headed warrior god, Apedemak.
- Artistic styles reflected a sense of freedom.
- Nubian kings were buried in pyramids that were smaller and built at a steeper angle than those in Egypt.
There is evidence that servants of the king were buried with him in these tombs.
The Nile Kingdom of Nubia (cont.)

- In 750 B.C. Nubians conquered Egypt for 100 years.
- The Assyrians and their iron weapons forced them to retreat.
- The Nubians moved their capital from Napata to Meroë, which commanded important north-south & east-west trade routes and near rich deposits of iron ore.

- Meroë had a booming iron industry.
- They created their own writing system based on an alphabet, not hieroglyphics.
Splendor and Decline

- After the joint reign of King Natakamani and Queen Amanitere in the first century A.D. their golden age ended.
- He restored the temple of Amun.
- In A.D. 350 the kingdom of Axum, under King Ezana, conquered Nubia.
- He was the first monarch of Axum to embrace Christianity.
Kingdoms of West Africa

- Between 800 and 1600, a succession of powerful West African kingdoms controlled the rich Sahara trade route.

- **Timbuktu** stood at one end of a trade route that reached north to Cairo, then across the Mediterranean to Italy.

- Gold from West Africa was traded north across the Sahara for salt.

Caravan across the Sahara
As farming and trade prospered, several strong monarchs gained control of the most profitable trade routes and built powerful kingdoms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Songhai</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong rulers united many farming villages to create the kingdom of Ghana.</td>
<td>Mansas, or kings, expanded their influence over gold-mining regions and salt supplies. <strong>Mansa Musa</strong> pushed Mali’s borders westward and northward.</td>
<td><strong>Sonni Ali</strong> forged the largest state that had ever existed in West Africa. The kingdom gained control of trade routes and wealthy cities like Timbuktu.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Gold Wealth of Ghana

- Ghana, the first large empire to rise from trading wealth, was located where trade routes came together.

- Ghana’s rulers required traders to pay a tax to Ghana to pass through.

- Traders paid the taxes because Ghana made iron weapons and had a huge army.

- Also, the traders wanted to trade so much they would do so at almost any price.

- Ghana fell in the 1200s because of constant fighting between Ghana rulers and North African Muslims, the discovery of gold outside of Ghana’s control, and exhausted soil that was too poor for farming.
Gold Wealth of Ghana (cont.)

Ghana - Ashanti yam ceremony, 19th century by Thomas E. Bowdich
The Kingdom of Mali

- Ghana was replaced by the kingdom of Mali.
- Legend tells of a warrior-king named Sundiata Keita who seized Ghana and then won control of Timbuktu, a trading city.
- The greatest emperor of Mali was Mansa Musa, who expanded their borders, converted to Islam, & made a pilgrimage to Mecca. His caravan included thousands of people, 100 pack camels, each carrying gold.
- He convinced some of Islam’s finest architects, teachers, and writers to return to Mali.
- He used his wealth to build mosques and libraries in Timbuktu.
- After ruling for 25 years, he died in 1332.
- The kings who followed him were unable to stop the Berbers from overrunning the kingdom.
A New Empire in Songhai

- **Sunni Ali**, the leader of Songhai, drove the Berbers out of Timbuktu. Unlike rulers of Mali, he never converted to Islam.

- His army pushed west and took over the Berber salt mines.

- His empire became the largest in West Africa and lasted almost 100 years after his death in 1492.

- Soon after Sunni Ali’s death emperor **Askia Muhammad** set up a Muslim dynasty.

- In 1591, Arab soldiers from Morocco attacked the Songhai and ended their empire.
Walled City-States of the Hausa

- By the 1300s, the Hausa had built a number of clay-walled cities.
- These cities were independent of one another, but developed into thriving commercial centers.
- Cotton weavers and dyers, leatherworkers, and other artisans produced goods for sale.
- Merchants traded with Arab and Berber caravans.
- Kano, under king Muhammad Rumfa, was the most prosperous city.
- They developed a written language based on Arabic.
- Many Hausa rulers were women, such as Amina of Zaria, who conquered Kano in the 1500s.
The Forest Kingdom of Benin

- People in the rain forest built their own empires, such as Kongo and Benin.
- **King Ewuare** founded the empire of Benin around 1440.
- The rain forests provided farmers with a climate and soil suitable for farming.
- The farmers could grow plenty of food in the rain forests.
- Food surpluses supported rulers and an artisan class, skilled in making sculptures of bronze and brass.
- These empires traded surplus food, pepper, ivory, and slaves to neighboring people in the savannas for copper, salt, and leather goods.
Trade Routes of East Africa

- Indian Ocean trade routes led to the growth of prosperous city-states along the East African coast.

- Empire of Axum (present-day Ethiopia) arose because it was the center of trade routes.

- Axum fought with neighboring Kush to control trade routes.

- Ethiopians were descendents of the Axumites.
Axum and Its Successors

- Around A.D. 300, King Ezana of Axum defeated Kush.

- King Ezana converted to Christianity and made it the official religion in A.D. 334.

- The Ethiopian kingdom that grew from Axum was the most important African Christian outpost after they were cut off from Christian Byzantium by the Muslim conquest of Egypt and the Red Sea coast.

- Despite their isolation, Ethiopian Christians kept ties with the Holy Land.

- Arabs invented triangular sails called dhow that helped them sail to Africa.

- Arab Muslim traders sailed to Africa to trade with East African city-states.

- Commercial cities, such as, Kilwa, Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Sofala, arose on the East African coast to support Arab-African trade.
The country of Ethiopia today traces its origins to Queen Makeda, who became queen of an empire called Saba or Sheba in 1005 B.C.

*Glory of Kings*, Ethiopia’s oldest written history, recounts how Makeda visited with King Solomon of Israel and became a wife of King Solomon.

When she returned to Saba, she introduced ancient Israel’s religion to her empire. As a result the kings of Ethiopia claimed to be descendents of Israelites. One group of Ethiopians, known as Falasha, practiced Judaism.

Although Saba declined, the country of Ethiopia remained strong.
East-African City-States

When Axum declined, a string of commercial cities gradually rose along the East African coast.

- Trade helped local rulers build strong states.
- Under the protection of local rulers, Arab and Persian merchants set up Muslim communities in East Africa.
- International trade created a rich and varied mix of cultures in East Africa.
The Kingdoms of Kongo & Mwene Mutapa

- By the 15th century along the lower Congo River, the civilization of the Kongo was thriving.
- While primarily agricultural, they also developed the skills of weaving, pottery, blacksmithing, and carving.
- Sharp divisions of labor existed between men and women.
- The Kongo was a confederation of smaller states each controlled by chieftains under the authority of a hereditary manikongo, or king.
- Further east, another large Bantu confederation developed among the farming and cattle-herding Shona-speaking peoples between the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers.
Great Zimbabwe

- The prosperity of Great Zimbabwe was based on a trade network reaching across the Indian Ocean and manufacturing of gold & copper jewelry, iron tools, and cloth weaving.
- During the 1400s, two kings taking the title *Mwene Mutapa*, Mutota and his son, Matope, made Zimbabwe into a large empire by dominating the sources of gold.
Art and Literary Traditions

Art and oral literature fostered common values and a sense of community among the peoples of Africa.

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<th>LITERATURE</th>
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<td>Art strengthened bonds within the community.</td>
<td>African societies preserved their histories and values through oral and written literature.</td>
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<td>Decorative patterns often identified a piece of art as the work of a particular clan.</td>
<td>Griots, or professional poets, recited ancient stories.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artwork was closely tied to religion.</td>
<td>Histories and folk tales encouraged a sense of community and common values.</td>
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Art and Literary Traditions (cont.)

- Artistic expression was an important part of African culture.
- Enslaved Africans took their culture with them when they were traded.
- The **African Diaspora** is the spreading of African people and culture around the world.
- Early African cave paintings showed daily life, told stories, and had some religious meaning or use.
- Wooden masks celebrated religious beliefs, and wooden, ivory, or bronze works showed the faces of important leaders, everyday people, and European explorers and traders.
Art and Literary Traditions (cont.)

- Music was an important aspect of almost every part of African life.
- Many African songs used musical instruments to keep a beat during the singing.
- Africans used dance in important events because they felt that dance allowed the spirits to express themselves.
- Enslaved Africans used music to remind them of their homeland.
- Their songs of hardship and religious faith grew into gospel songs.
- Jazz, blues, ragtime, rock and roll, and rap are genres also based in African musical traditions.