

# WORLD HISTORY PRE-EUROPEAN AFRICAN AND AMERICAN SOCIETIES THE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA NOTES (100-1500)

These notes go over the geography of Africa and the development of some early civilizations in Africa. You may need to research some of this information on the internet. After you have read these notes, answer the series of questions that follow these notes. Be sure to keep these for your quiz.

Geographic features in Sub-Sahara Africa created a self-contained environment. It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest continent, covering 20% of earth's land surface.

## 5 DISTINCT GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS:

- Northern and Southern coasts: narrow strips of fertile land/moderate rainfall and warm temps
- Deserts: Sahara and Kalahari - 1/3 of Africa's land
- Sahara: Atlantic Ocean to Red Sea, area roughly size of U.S./Not totally arid 90. inhabited oases (oasis is place where underground water comes to the surface in a spring or well), caravans followed a fixed route
- Dry Grasslands: Too dry for farming, but suitable for grazing/delicate balance between people and animals
- Savanna: tall grass plains/during rainy seasons things come alive, farming is difficult because rains strip soil of minerals and dry season ground is hard.
- Rain Forest: damp, densely wooded region with Africa's second longest river the Zaire twisting through it. Little undergrowth due to huge mahogany and teak trees

Tsetse fly: deadliest animal which played major role in history. Its presence has kept traders and missionaries away, as well as farmers that couldn't bring livestock near

## GEOGRAPHY CONTAINED AFRICA

Dangerous rivers with rapids and falls

Smooth coastline with few harbors and bays

Tricky currents

Difficult wind conditions

Vast distances combined with deserts and rainforests limit travel and trade

## KUSH

First major kingdom of sub-Sahara Africa

Adopted Egyptian ideas/hieroglyphics/pyramid building

Ambitious traders traded their iron ore (iron tools they made) for luxury items, like jewelry, fine cotton cloth, silver lamps, and glass bottles

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Historical details about many aspects of life in Meroe are limited, and the reasons for the collapse remain unknown. Historians are certain that the rising power of Axum was a decisive cause.

#### AXUM

Capital of kingdom located in a plateau region of eastern Africa called Ethiopia. Grew rich by controlling trade between African interior and the Red Sea. Rulers became Christian in 324 AD when Islamic armies swept through they remained unconquered and unconverted. Ended the contact between kings and Christian lands of Western Europe and Byzantine Empire. 1520 Portuguese explorer journeyed into Ethiopian highlands and was amazed to find Christians worshiping in beautiful rock churches

#### COASTAL CITIES TRADED WITH ASIA (SWAHILI CITY-STATES)

East African coast city-states developed with names like Malindi, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. On coast were Arab Muslims.

Over centuries the two peoples Bantu and Arab inter-married. Their cultures blended and formed a new culture known as Swahili (from Arabic term meaning people of the coast). Spoke Swahili and major religion was Islam.

Most lived by farming, fishing, and trading. Most common ship in Swahili harbor was triangular Arab vessel called dhows (dowz). Large enough to carry profitable cargo, but sturdy enough to withstand monsoon winds of Indian Ocean. Arabs were the middleman in Indian Ocean, brought Asian luxuries to Africa and African luxuries to Asia.

The Swahili Coast of Africa consisted of independent city-states, where the leader was supreme in this time period. Swahili was a common culture of these people, and a merging of Bantu and Arabic beliefs. Kilwa was an important one of these city-states. Kilwa was the farthest south you could go in one monsoon season. People from South Africa would bring goods to Kilwa and trade with merchants participating in the Indian Ocean trade network. Kilwa grew to be a very large, cosmopolitan trading city.

The Swahili Coast city-states were affected a lot by Islam. The form of Islam that affected the Swahili Coast city states was a much more pure form of Islam than what was practiced in sub-Saharan Africa. The reason for this is that the Swahili Coast city-states were in constant contact with Arabia through trading.

One of the most important historical effects of the Swahili Coast trade network is how it nurtured the Indian Ocean trade network. Merchants would travel from the East Asian zone of the trade network with Asian spices, and wait for the next monsoon season to bring them back to Arabia and Africa. Once they arrived in Africa, they would trade their cargoes of spices for gold, ivory and slaves. The Swahili Coast states often traded with a civilization inside of Africa,

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such as Great Zimbabwe, to get these items. The merchant would then wait for the next monsoon season to bring them back to Asia.

Swahili Coast trade would continue until the early 1500's when Portuguese ships entered Indian Ocean trade. The Portuguese easily defeated the city-states, which never needed any large armies or forts before. Merchants had always been safe, so the city-states were unprepared for the Portuguese attack

### ZIMBABWE BECAME A KINGDOM

Most of gold and ivory traded came from Zimbabwe. Inland location provided protection from Muslim influence. Built impressive residence known as Great Zimbabwe, that towered proudly over surrounding savanna.

Reached peak in early 1400s. Arrival of Portuguese in 1500s shattered their kingdom.

### WEST AFRICAN EMPIRES THRIVE ON TRADE

Three powerful empires developed in Western Africa (between the Sahara and the tropical rainforest in the savannas): Ghana, Mali, and Songhai between 300 and 1600

Gold-Salt Trade - Gold came from forest region south of savanna between Niger and Senegal rivers, miners worked in secrecy. Until 1350 at least 2/3 of worlds supply of gold came from West Africa.

Although rich in gold, they lacked salt. In contrast, the Sahara contained abundant deposits of salt, even built sides of their houses with it.

Merchants from both places would travel to trading centers like Jenne (je-NAY) and Timbuktu. They would exchange goods under watchful eye of tax collector.

Some traders took part in silent trade. Arab traders would bring salt, beat drums inviting gold merchants to trade. Then ride off a few miles. Gold traders would arrive look over the salt and leave some of their gold and then hide. Arabs would come back and decide whether enough gold had been left. If they thought not would beat drums again inviting second round of trading. All of this occurred without ever speaking to each other.

Ghana: Ghana's ruler demanded taxes and gifts of chiefs from surrounding lands. As long as payments were made they were left in peace. Ghana's kingdom rose and shrank with the strength of its leader. Ghana was only one allowed to own gold nuggets to control price of gold. They were overrun by Muslim Berbers from the North, never to regain their power.

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Malithe Mandingo, controlled the gold trade. Ruthless king ruled and killed 11 of 12 of his rival's sons. This proved a huge mistake. That son grew to be strong and defeated him. He promoted agriculture and gold-salt trade and named his kingdom Mali. Influenced by Muslim traders some of Mali's next rulers became Muslims. Mansa Musa's empire became the most powerful empire that dominated West Africa.

Songhai conquered Mali. Existing mines gave out and the trade routes shifted eastward. By 1450 the Songhai (SONG-hye) people replaced the Mandingo as controllers of the trade routes. Two great kings, one a ruthless conqueror and one an excellent administrator who set up an efficient tax system. However they lacked gunpowder and cannons and were conquered by a Moroccan sultan.

### AFRICANS SHARED CULTURAL PATTERN

Families were organized in groups called lineages. This included past generations and future generations, some took place of kings or other rulers. These felt strong loyalty to one another. The society passed down values and traditions through oral history.

Status of Women: Workers who planted and harvested crops and occasionally took active part in commerce and trade. Men dominated govt., but some women could become head of state in few African kingdoms. In some societies, children traced their ancestors through their mothers rather than father's. This is known as a matrilineal system. Inherited land or wealth from mother's brothers.

Religions blended monotheism and polytheism. Most honored a large number of gods and spirits, but believed this High God or Supreme Spirit was too powerful & distant to listen to human appeals. The spirits of departed ancestors were especially important. Believed these spirits could bring trouble or good fortune. At least one member of village was trained in communicating with the spirit's "diviner." Called on spirits whenever there was an illness or crisis.

### ART FLOURISHED

Art linked religion, politics, and everyday life. Some honored the king or spirits of ancestors. Sculpture used beautifully grained woods that grew there to create works of art. Metalworking led to striking sculpture in gold and bronze. Some of most famous African sculptures were created by the Yoruba group of people in rainforest of what is now Nigeria.

Music and dance: very complex rhythms called "polyrhythmic." Often accompanied dance who wore masks to honor spirits or family ancestors. Art of carved masks; music of the drums, and dancing of the villagers shared a common purpose. They bound a community together and enable it to pass its heritage on through the centuries.

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Oral history: Most had no writing systems; instead each group handed down its history and laws by word of mouth. In many West African societies specially trained people known as griots (GREE-ohz) were the record keepers. Even after Arab traders brought Arabic writing griots remained the historians of their people.