

SECTION 1

The Development of Civilizations in Africa

Guide to Reading

Main Ideas

- Africa's four distinct climate zones affected the development of African civilizations.
- The mastery of farming gave rise to the first civilizations in Africa: Egypt, Kush, and Axum.

Key Terms

plateau, savanna

People to Identify

Kushites, King Ezana

Places to Locate

Sahara, Great Rift Valley, Congo River, Kalahari Desert, Nubia, Ethiopia

Preview Questions

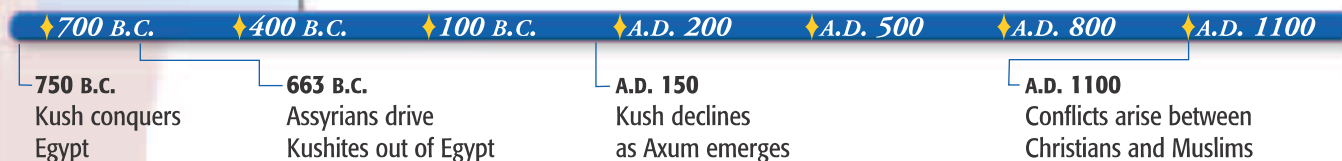
1. What were the main occupations of early Africans?
2. How did the introduction of Christianity and Islam affect African states?

Reading Strategy

Cause and Effect As you read this section, create a chart that lists a significant event that occurred (cause) and the effect this event had on early African civilization. Refer to this section's main ideas for causes.

Cause	Effect

Preview of Events



Voices from the Past



Axum stele with record of King Ezana

One king of the African state of Axum left this description of his conquest of Kush:

“With the help of the Lord of Heaven, who in heaven and earth conquers all, Ezana, king of Axum . . . by the power of the Lord of the Earth . . . burnt their towns, those with stone houses and those with straw [dwellings], and [my troops] pillaged their [crops] and bronze and iron and copper; they destroyed the [images] in their temples and also their stores of [crops] and cotton, and threw them into the river Seda . . . and the next day I sent my troops on a campaign up the Seda to the towns of stone and of straw.”

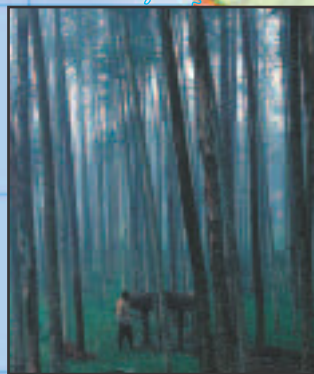
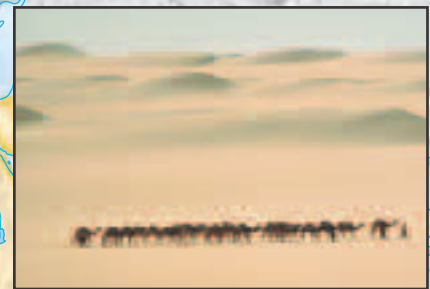
—*The Dawn of African History*, Roland Oliver, ed., 1968

After the decline of the Egyptian Empire during the first millennium B.C., the focus of social change moved to other areas of Africa.

The Land of Africa

After Asia, Africa is the largest of the continents. It stretches nearly five thousand miles (around eight thousand km) and is almost completely surrounded by two oceans and two seas.

As diverse as it is vast, Africa includes several distinct geographical zones. The northern fringe, on the coast washed by the Mediterranean Sea, is mountainous. South of the mountains lies the largest desert on Earth, the **Sahara**.



Geography Skills

Africa is divided into several distinct geographical and climatic zones that affect the way its people live.

- 1. Interpreting Maps** Using the text's descriptions of the climate zones, analyze Africa's food production capabilities relative to its total area.
- 2. Applying Geography Skills** Explain how Africa's geography would have affected its trading patterns.

Africa south of the Sahara is divided into a number of major regions. In the west is the so-called hump of Africa, which juts like a massive shoulder into the Atlantic Ocean. Here the Sahara gradually gives way to grasslands in the interior and then to tropical jungles along the coast.

Far to the east is a very different terrain of snow-capped mountains, upland plateaus, and lakes. A distinctive feature is the **Great Rift Valley**, where mountains loom over deep canyons. Much of this region is grassland populated by wild animals. Further to the south lies the Congo basin, with its dense vegetation watered by the mighty **Congo River**. The tropical rain forests of this area then fade gradually into the hills, **plateaus** (relatively high, flat land areas), and deserts of the south.

The Climate of Africa

Africa includes four distinct climate zones, which help to explain the different lifestyles of the peoples of Africa. A mild climate zone stretches across the northern coast and southern tip of Africa. Moderate rainfall and warm temperatures result in fertile land that produces abundant crops. This crop production can support large populations.

Deserts form another climate zone. The Sahara in the north and the **Kalahari** in the south are the two largest deserts. Altogether, deserts cover about 40 percent of Africa.

A third climate zone is the rain forest that stretches along the equator and makes up about 10 percent of the continent. Heavy rains and warm temperatures produce dense forests where little farming and little travel are possible. The rain forest is also home to disease-carrying insects, especially the tsetse (SET•see) fly, which infects both animals and humans with sleeping sickness. As a result, people who live in the rain forest do not raise cattle or use animals, hoping in this way to avoid the tsetse fly.

A final climate zone consists of the **savannas**, broad grasslands dotted with small trees and shrubs. Savannas stretch across Africa both north and south of the rain forest and cover perhaps 40 percent of Africa's land area. The savannas receive enough rainfall to allow for farming and the herding of animals, but the rain is unreliable.

Emerging Civilization and the Rise of Islam

About seven or eight thousand years ago, hunters and gatherers in Africa began to tame animals and grow crops. The mastery of farming gave rise to the first civilizations in Africa: Egypt (discussed in Chapter 2), Kush, and Axum. Much later, Islam became an important factor in the development of African empires.

Kush By 2000 B.C., a busy trade had arisen between Egypt and the area to the south known as **Nubia**. Egyptian merchants traveled to Nubia to obtain ivory, ebony, frankincense (a fragrant tree resin), and leopard skins. Although Nubia was subject to Egyptian control for many centuries, it freed itself around 1000 B.C. and became the independent state of Kush.

In 750 B.C., Kush conquered Egypt. In 663 B.C., however, the **Kushites**, who were still using bronze and stone weapons, were overwhelmed by the Assyrians, who were armed with iron spears and swords. The Kushites, driven out of Egypt, returned to their original lands in the upper Nile valley.

The economy of Kush was based at first on farming. Kush soon emerged, however, as one of the major trading states in the region, with its center at the city of Meroë (MEHR•oh•EE).

Meroë was well located at the point where a newly opened land route across the desert to the north crossed the Nile. It was also blessed with a large supply of iron ore. Having learned iron ore smelting from the Assyrians, the Kushites made iron weapons and tools.

For the next several hundred years, Kush was a major trading empire with links to other states throughout the region. Kush provided iron products and goods from central and eastern Africa to the Roman Empire, as well as to Arabia and India. Other major exports were ivory, gold, ebony, and slaves. In return, the Kushites received luxury goods, including jewelry and silver lamps from India and Arabia.

Not much is known about Kushite society. It seems likely that it was mostly urban. At first, state authorities probably controlled foreign trade. The presence of extensive luxury goods in the numerous private tombs in the area indicates that at one time material prosperity was relatively widespread. This suggests that at some point a large merchant class prospered from trade activities.



The Rise of Axum Kush flourished from about 250 B.C. to about A.D. 150, but declined because of the rise of a new power in the region. This new power, known as Axum, was located in the highlands of what is now Ethiopia. Axum was founded as a colony by Arabs from the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula. Eventually, Axum emerged as an independent state that combined Arab and African cultures.

Axum owed much of its prosperity to its location along the Red Sea, on the trade route between India and the Mediterranean. Axum exported ivory, frankincense, myrrh (another aromatic tree resin), and slaves. It imported textiles, metal goods, wine, and olive oil.

For a time, Axum competed with the neighboring state of Kush for control of the ivory trade. Probably as a result of this competition for ivory, in the fourth century A.D., **King Ezana**, the Axumite ruler, launched an invasion of Kush and conquered it.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Axumite civilization was its religion. About A.D. 330, King Ezana converted to Christianity, which was first brought to Axum by shipwrecked Syrians. The king made Christianity the official religion of Axum.



This stele is the tallest of many built for King Ezana.

When Ezana died, Axum was a flourishing kingdom. Within a few centuries, however, a new religious force—Islam—brought profound challenges to the kingdom of Axum.

The Coming of Islam The rise of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula had an impact on neighboring areas. In 641, Arab forces took control of Egypt. By the early eighth century, the entire coastal region of North Africa as far west as the Strait of Gibraltar was under Arab rule.

By the eighth century, a number of Muslim trading states had been established on the African coast of the Red Sea. For hundreds of years, relations between Christian Axum and its Muslim neighbors were relatively peaceful.

Beginning in the twelfth century, however, problems arose as the Muslim states along the coast began to move inland to gain control over the trade in slaves and ivory. Axum, which had dominated this trade, fought back. By the early fifteenth century, Axum had become deeply involved in an expanding conflict with the Muslim state of Adal, located at the point where the Indian Ocean meets the Red Sea.

Kingdoms and States of Africa

Guide to Reading

Main Ideas

- The expansion of trade led to migration and the growth of new kingdoms.
- Rulers introduced different forms of government.

Key Terms

Bantu, subsistence farming, Swahili, stateless society

People to Identify

Berbers, Sundiata Keita, Mansa Musa, Sunni Ali, Muhammad Ture, Ibn Battuta

Places to Locate

Ghana, Mali, Timbuktu, Morocco, Mogadishu, Mombasa, Kilwa, Zambezi River, Zimbabwe

Preview Questions

1. What were the accomplishments of the West African kingdoms?
2. How did Islam impact East Africa?

Reading Strategy

Categorizing Information As you read this section, complete a chart describing the rulers, government, and economy of each kingdom.

Ghana	Mali	Songhai

Preview of Events

♦ 300

♦ 500

♦ 700

♦ 900

♦ 1100

♦ 1300

♦ 1500

c. 500

Ghana emerges as a trading state

1240

Sundiata defeats Ghanaians

1300

Zimbabwe emerges as a powerful state

1312

Mansa Musa begins reign as Mali's king

1464

Kingdom of Songhai expands



Clay figure from Mali

Voices from the Past

Ibn Battuta, a fourteenth-century Arab traveler, was clearly impressed by the peace and order in Mali:

“One of [the] good features [of the people of Mali] is their lack of oppression. They are the farthest removed of people from it and their king does not permit anyone to practice it. Another is the security throughout the entire country, so that neither traveler there nor dweller there has anything to fear from robbers or men of violence.”

—*Ibn Battuta in Black Africa*, Said Hamdun and Noel King, eds., 1975

Mali, established in the mid-thirteenth century, was one of the important trading states of West Africa.

The Kingdom of Ghana

Ghana, the first great trading state in West Africa, emerged as early as A.D. 500. The kingdom of Ghana was located in the upper Niger River valley, a grassland region between the Sahara and the tropical forests along the West African coast. (The modern state of Ghana takes its name from this early state but is located in the forest region to the south.) Most of the people in the area were farmers living in villages under the authority of a local ruler. Together, the villages formed the kingdom of Ghana.

The Kings of Ghana The kings of Ghana were strong rulers who governed without any laws. They played active roles in running the kingdom, and their wealth was vast. Al-Bakri, an eleventh-century Muslim traveler, wrote of the Ghanaian king's court:

“The king sits in audience or to hear grievances against officials in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses covered with gold-embroidered materials. Behind the king stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are the sons of subordinate kings of his country wearing splendid garments and their hair mixed with gold.”

To protect their kingdom and enforce their wishes, Ghanaian kings relied on a well-trained regular army of thousands of men.

Economy and Trade The people of Ghana had lived off the land for centuries. In addition they prospered from their possession of both iron and gold.

The region had an abundant supply of iron ore. The skilled blacksmiths of Ghana were highly valued because of their ability to turn ore into tools and weapons.

Ghana also had an abundance of gold. The heartland of the state was located near one of the richest gold-producing areas in all of Africa. Ghana's gold made it the center of an enormous trade empire.

Muslim merchants from North Africa brought to Ghana metal goods, textiles, horses, and salt. Salt was a highly desired item for the Ghanaians. It was used to preserve food, as well as to improve the food's taste. Salt was also important because people needed extra salt to replace what their bodies lost in the hot climate.

Ghanaians traded their abundant gold for salt and other products brought from North Africa. The exchange of goods in Ghana was done by a method of silent trade, as described by a tenth-century Arabian traveler:

“Great people of the Sudan [the Arab name for West Africa] lived [in Ghana]. They had traced a boundary which no one who sets out to them ever crosses. When the merchants reach this boundary, they place their wares and cloth on the ground and then depart, and so the people of the Sudan come bearing gold which they leave beside the merchandise and then depart. The owners of the merchandise then return, and if they were satisfied with what they had found, they take it. If not, they go away again, and the people of the Sudan return and add to the price until the bargain is concluded.”

Other exports from Ghana, including ivory, ostrich feathers, hides, and slaves, also found their way to the markets of the Mediterranean and beyond.

Much of the trade across the desert was carried by the **Berbers**, nomadic peoples whose camel caravans

Picturing History

Camel caravans made it possible for people in different regions of Africa to exchange goods and merchandise. **In what different ways was this trade advantageous for the people of Ghana?**



became known as the “fleets of the desert.” Camels became a crucial factor in trade across the Sahara. They were well adapted to conditions in the desert, since they could drink enormous quantities of water at one time and needed little food for days.

In a typical caravan trek, as many as a hundred camels would be loaded with goods and supplies for the journey across the desert. Accompanied by guards, the caravan moved at a rate of about three miles (4.8 km) per hour. A caravan might take 40 to 60 days to reach its destination.

The trading merchants of Ghana often became wealthy. Kings prospered too, because they imposed taxes on goods that entered or left the kingdom. By the eighth and ninth centuries, however, much of this trade was carried by Muslim merchants. They bought the goods from local traders, using iron or copper or items from as far away as Southwest Asia. They then sold them to Berbers, who carried them across the desert.

of new trading societies in West Africa. The greatest of these states was **Mali**, established in the mid-thirteenth century by **Sundiata Keita**.

Founding and Economy Like George Washington in the United States, Sundiata is considered the founder of his nation. Sundiata defeated the Ghanaians and captured their capital in 1240. He united the people of Mali and created a strong government.

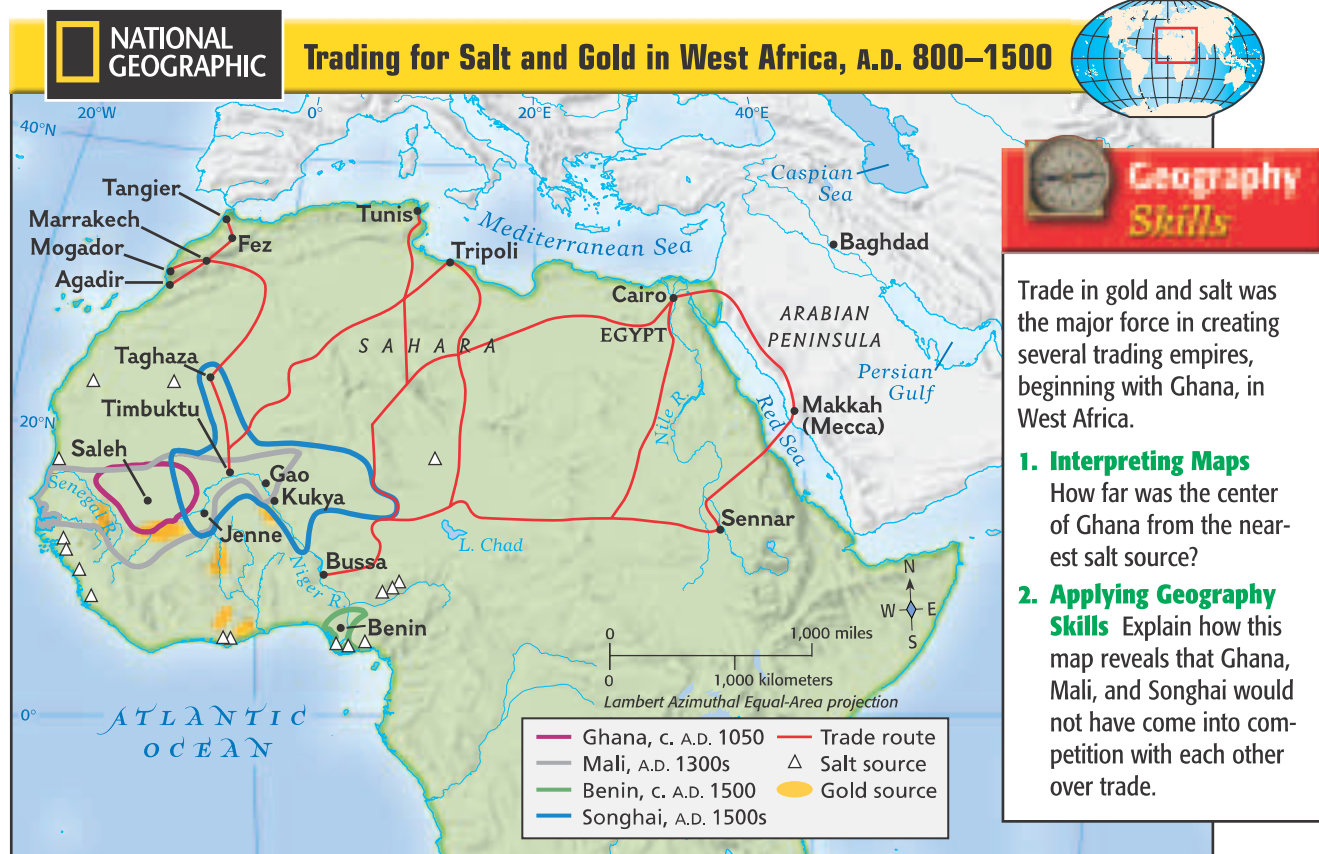
Extending from the Atlantic coast inland as far as the famous trading city of **Timbuktu** (TIHM•BUHK•TOO), Mali built its wealth and power on the gold and salt trade. Most of its people, however, were farmers who grew grains such as sorghum, millet, and rice. The farmers lived in villages with local rulers, who served as both religious and administrative leaders. The ruler was responsible for sending tax revenues from the village to the kings of Mali.

Reign of Mansa Musa One of the richest and most powerful kings was **Mansa Musa**, who ruled from 1312 to 1337 (*mansa* means “king”). Mansa Musa doubled the size of the kingdom of Mali. He created a strong central government and divided the kingdom into provinces ruled by governors whom he appointed. Once he felt secure, he decided—as a devout Muslim—to make a pilgrimage to Makkah.

A king, of course, was no ordinary pilgrim. Mansa Musa was joined by thousands of servants and

The Kingdom of Mali

The state of Ghana flourished for several hundred years. Eventually, it was weakened by wars, and it collapsed during the 1100s. In its place rose a number



soldiers. Accompanying the people were hundreds of camels carrying gold, as well as food, clothing, and other supplies.

Everywhere he went, Mansa Musa lavished gold gifts on his hosts and made hundreds of purchases with gold from merchants. In fact, by putting so much gold into circulation in such a short time, he caused the value of gold to fall. The caravan's route took it through Egypt, and one observer reported, "Gold was at a high price in Egypt until they came in that year. Its value fell and it cheapened in price and has remained cheap till now. . . . This has been the state of affairs for about twelve years until this day by reason of the large amount of gold which they brought into Egypt and spent there."

No doubt, Mansa Musa's great pilgrimage left people with an image of him as a great ruler of a powerful and prosperous kingdom. Mansa Musa also left another legacy. Earlier rulers of Mali had already converted to Islam, but Mansa Musa strongly encouraged the building of mosques and a palace, as well as the study of the Quran in his kingdom.

He imported scholars and books to introduce his subjects to the message of Allah. He brought architects back with him to build mosques like the ones he had seen in Cairo and Arabia. The famous Sankore mosque in Timbuktu was one of the results. Sankore also became an important center of learning.

Mansa Musa proved to be the last powerful ruler of Mali. By 1359, civil war divided Mali. Within another hundred years a new kingdom—that of Songhai—was beginning to surpass Mali.

The Kingdom of Songhai

Like the Nile, the Niger River floods and thus provides a rich soil for raising crops and taking care of cattle. East of Timbuktu, the river makes a wide bend. Along the river, south of that bend, a people known as the Songhai established themselves.

In 1009, a ruler named Kossi converted to Islam and established the Dia dynasty. This first Songhai state benefited from the Muslim trade routes linking Arabia, North Africa, and West Africa. An era of prosperity ensued with Gao as the chief trade center.

Under the leadership of **Sunni Ali**, who created a new dynasty—the Sunni—in 1464, Songhai began to expand. Sunni Ali spent much of his reign on horseback and on the march as he led his army in one military campaign after another. Two of Sunni Ali's

Sundiata Keita

c. 1210–1260—Malian ruler

The name Sundiata means the "lion prince." The lion was the symbol of the Keita clan, of which Sundiata was a member.

Sundiata belonged to a family that had ruled Mali for about two centuries. Born with a disability, he still could not walk when he was seven years old. With the aid of a blacksmith who made braces for his legs, however, Sundiata gradually and painfully learned to walk.

Although he became a Muslim, Sundiata kept his traditional African religion as well. This enabled him to maintain the support of the common people, who believed that the king had magical powers. As a powerful warrior-king and the creator of the kingdom of Mali, Sundiata Keita became revered as the father of his country.



conquests, Timbuktu and Jenne, were especially important. They gave Songhai control of the trading empire—especially trade in salt and gold—that had made Ghana and Mali so prosperous.

The Songhai Empire reached the height of its power during the reign of **Muhammad Ture**. A military commander and devout Muslim, Muhammad Ture overthrew the son of Sunni Ali and seized power in 1493, thus creating a new dynasty, the Askia. (*Askia* means "usurper.")

Muhammad Ture continued Sunni Ali's policy of expansion, creating an empire that stretched a thousand miles along the Niger River. He was an able administrator who divided Songhai into provinces. Muhammad Ture maintained the peace and security of his kingdom with a navy and soldiers on horseback. The chief cities of the empire prospered as never before from the salt and gold trade.

After Muhammad Ture's reign, Songhai entered a period of slow decline. Near the end of the sixteenth century, that decline quickened when the forces of the sultan of **Morocco** occupied much of Songhai. One observer wrote, "From that moment on, everything changed. Danger took the place of security, poverty [took the place] of wealth. Peace gave way to distress, disasters, and violence." By 1600, the Songhai Empire was little more than a remnant of its former glorious self.

African Trading Empires, 1000 B.C.–A.D. 1600

Empire	Kush (Nubia) Meroë	Axum Adulis	Ghana Saleh	Mali Timbuktu	Songhai Gao
Location	East Africa south of Egypt	East Africa (Ethiopia)	West Africa	West Africa	West Africa
Time Period	1000 B.C.–A.D. 150	A.D. 100–1400	A.D. 400–1200	A.D. 1250–1450	A.D. 1000–1600
Goods Traded	Iron products, ivory, gold, ebony, slaves	Ivory, frankincense, myrrh, slaves	Iron products, animal products, gold	Gold, salt	Gold, salt
Key Facts	Kush lost power to Axum.	Axum was founded by Arab traders; the king converted to Christianity in A.D. 324.	Ghana traded for salt from the Saharan salt mines.	Mansa Musa doubled the size of the kingdom and created a Muslim center of learning.	Songhai gained control of trade in West Africa with the conquest of Timbuktu and Jenne.

Chart Skills

For thousands of years, African states and kingdoms conducted flourishing trade with surrounding empires and with cultures throughout the Mediterranean world.

- Identifying** What was the longest lasting empire of those listed above? What were the two largest kingdoms geographically?

Societies in East Africa

TURNING POINT There is little or no evidence of ironworking in eastern and southern Africa before the arrival of the Bantu, suggesting that the new technology was spread by the migrants.

In eastern Africa, a variety of states and small societies took root. Islam strongly influenced many of them. Some became extremely wealthy as a result of trade.

Migration of the Bantus South of Axum, along the shores of the Indian Ocean and inland from the mountains of Ethiopia through the lake district of central Africa, lived a mixture of peoples. Some lived by hunting and food gathering, whereas others raised livestock.

Beginning in the first millennium B.C., new peoples began to migrate into eastern Africa from the west. Farming peoples who spoke dialects of the **Bantu** (BAN•TOO) family of languages began to move from the region of the Niger River into East Africa and the Congo River



basin. They moved slowly, not as invading hordes but as small communities.

Recent archaeological work has provided us with a better idea of the nature of Bantu society. The communities that arose as a result of these population movements were based on **subsistence farming**—growing just enough crops for personal use, not for sale. The primary crops were grains (millet and sorghum), along with yams, melons, and beans. The land was farmed with both iron and stone tools.

Within the families in the villages, men and women performed different tasks. Women tilled the fields and cared for the children. Men tended the herds or engaged in such tasks as hunting and trade. Most trade was local and involved necessities such as salt and commodities such as animal products, copper, and iron ore.

Indian Ocean Trade and Ports On the eastern fringe of the continent, the Bantu-speaking peoples gradually began to take part in the regional trade that moved by sea up and down the East African coast. With the growth in regional trade following the rise of Islam during the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., the eastern coast of Africa became an important part of the trading network along the Indian Ocean. Beginning in the eighth century, Muslims from the Arabian Peninsula and the Persian Gulf began to settle at ports along the coast.

The result was the formation of a string of trading ports that included **Mogadishu** (MAH•guh•DIH•shoo), **Mombasa**, and **Kilwa** in the south. Merchants in these cities grew very wealthy. One of the most magnificent cities of the day was Kilwa.

In the fourteenth century, two monumental buildings were constructed in Kilwa of coral cut from the cliffs along the shore. One was the Great Mosque of Kilwa. Even grander was the Husuni Kubwa palace, an enormous cliff-top building of more than a hundred rooms. Members of Kilwa's wealthy elite built their houses near the palace and the Great Mosque. With imported Chinese porcelain and indoor plumbing, these homes provided a luxurious lifestyle.

The Arab traveler **Ibn Battuta** called Kilwa, which he visited in 1331, "one of the most beautiful towns in the world." Kilwa's splendor did not last long,

Wealthy merchants in Mombasa built enormous stone houses. Note the Chinese influence in the architecture.



however. Kilwa began to decline, and the Portuguese finished the job in 1505 by sacking the city and destroying its major buildings.

As time passed, a mixed African-Arabian culture, eventually known as **Swahili** (swah•HEE•lee), began to emerge throughout the coastal area. Inter-marriage was common among the ruling groups. Gradually, the Muslim religion and Arabic architectural styles became part of a society still largely African.



Geography Skills

Trade greatly affected East Africa and created prosperous cities such as Kilwa.

- 1. Interpreting Maps** Where were the primary Swahili settlements? How was their location related to trade and the trade routes?
- 2. Applying Geography Skills** What do you think the trade routes shown in the map reveal about preferred methods of transportation?

The term *Swahili* (from *sahel*, meaning “coast” in Arabic, and thus “peoples of the coast”) was also applied to the major language used in the area. Swahili was a mixed language that combined Bantu with a number of Arabic words and phrases. Today it is the national language of **Kenya** and **Tanzania**.

States and Stateless Societies in South Africa

In the southern half of the African continent, states formed more slowly than in the north. Until the eleventh century A.D., most of the peoples in this region lived in what are sometimes called stateless societies. A **stateless society** is a group of independent villages organized by clans and led by a local ruler or clan head.

In the grassland regions south of the **Zambezi River**, a mixed economy of farming, cattle herding, and trade had developed over a period of many centuries. Villages in this area were usually built inside walls to protect the domestic animals from wild animals at night. Beginning in the eleventh century, in some parts of southern Africa, these independent villages gradually began to consolidate. Out of these groupings came the first states.

From about 1300 to about 1450, **Zimbabwe** (zihm•BAH•bwee) was the wealthiest and most powerful state in the region. It prospered from the gold trade

with the Swahili trading communities on the eastern coast of the continent. Indeed, Zimbabwe’s gold ended up in the court of Kublai Khan, emperor of China.

The ruins of Zimbabwe’s capital, known as Great Zimbabwe, illustrate the kingdom’s power and influence. The town sits on a hill overlooking the Zambezi River and is surrounded by stone walls. Ten thousand residents would have been able to live in the area enclosed by the walls. Artifacts found at the site include household implements, ornaments made of gold and copper, and porcelain imported from China.

The Great Enclosure, whose exact purpose is not known, dominated the site. It was an oval space surrounded by a wall 800 feet long, 17 feet thick, and 32 feet high (about 244 m long, 5 m thick, and 10 m high). Near the Great Enclosure were smaller walled enclosures that contained round houses built of a mudlike cement on stone foundations. In the valley below was the royal palace, surrounded by a high stone wall.

The massive walls of Great Zimbabwe are unusual. The local people stacked granite blocks together without mortar to build the walls. By the middle of the fifteenth century, however, the city was abandoned, possibly because of damage to the land through overgrazing or natural disasters such as droughts and crop failures.



African Society and Culture

Guide to Reading

Main Ideas

- Extended family units formed the basis of African villages.
- The arts were important in early African culture.

Key Terms

lineage group, matrilineal, patrilineal, diviner, griot

People to Identify

Yoruba, Ashanti

Places to Locate

Nigeria, Ife, Benin

Preview Questions

1. How were ancestors and family important to early Africans?
2. What roles did storytelling and music play in African culture?

Reading Strategy

Compare and Contrast As you read this section, use the chart below to compare and contrast the duties and rights of women and men in African society.

	Duties	Rights
Women		
Men		

Preview of Events

◆ 600 B.C. ◆ 200 B.C. ◆ A.D. 200 ◆ A.D. 600 ◆ A.D. 1000 ◆ A.D. 1400

500 B.C.

Nok culture begins to flourish along Niger River

A.D. 1300

Yoruba culture produces bronze and iron sculpture

A.D. 1490

Area south of Sahara accepts Islam



Benin brass casting honoring the king (top, center)

Voices from the Past

The Arab traveler Ibn Battuta once described an audience between an African king and his subjects:

“When [the king] calls one of [his subjects] while he is in session the man invited takes off his clothes and wears patched clothes, takes off his turban, puts on a dirty cap, and goes in raising his clothes and trousers up his legs half-way to his knees. He advances with humility looking like a beggar. He hits the ground with his elbows, he hits it hard. He stands bowed, listening to what the king says. When one of them speaks to the king and he gives him an answer, he removes his clothes from his back and throws dust on his head and back, as a person does when bathing with water. I used to wonder how they do not blind their eyes.”

—Ibn Battuta in *Black Africa*, Said Hamdun and Noel King, eds., 1975

Because most African societies did not have written languages, much of what we know about these societies comes from descriptions recorded by foreign visitors, like Ibn Battuta.

Aspects of African Society

African towns often began as fortified walled villages and gradually grew into larger communities serving several purposes. These towns were the centers of government, and the markets were filled with goods from faraway regions. The

towns were also home to artisans skilled in metalworking, woodworking, pottery making, and other crafts, as well as farmers who tilled the soil in the neighboring fields.

Although Ibn Battuta's description on the preceding page might not suggest it, the relationship of African kings to their subjects was beneficial to king and subject. Indeed, African society had several unusual features.

King and Subject In most Asian societies, the royal family and the aristocracy were largely isolated from the rest of the people. In Africa, the gulf between king and common people was not as great. Frequently, the ruler would hold an audience to allow people to voice their complaints. Nevertheless, the king was still held in a position high above all others.

The relationship between king and subject in many African states helped both sides. Merchants received favors from the king, and the king's treasury was filled with taxes paid by merchants. It was certainly to the benefit of the king to maintain law and order in the kingdom so that the merchants could practice their trade.

Family and Lineage Few Africans, of course, ever had an audience (meeting) with their kings. Most people lived in small villages in the countryside. Their sense of identity was determined by their membership in an extended family and a lineage group.

At the basic level was the extended family, made up of parents, children, grandparents, and other family dependents. They lived in small, round dwellings made of packed mud and topped with a thatch roof of plant material such as straw. These extended family units were in turn combined into larger communities known as **lineage groups**.

Lineage groups served as the basic building blocks of African society. All members of a lineage group could claim to be descended from a real or legendary common ancestor. As in China, the elders—the

leading members of the lineage group—had much power over the others in the group. A lineage group provided mutual support for all its members. Members of extended families and lineage groups were expected to take care of one another.

The Role of Women Women were usually subordinate to men in Africa, as they were in most early societies around the world. In some cases, they were valued for the work they could do or for their role in having children and thus increasing the size of the lineage group. Women often worked in the fields while the men of the village tended the cattle or went on hunting expeditions. In some communities, women were merchants.

There were some key differences between the role of women in Africa and elsewhere, however. In many African societies, lineage was based on the mother rather than the father. In other words, these were **matrilineal** societies (societies in which descent is traced through the mother) rather than **patrilineal** societies (societies in which descent is traced through the father).

One Arab traveler noted, "A man does not pass on inheritance except to the sons of his sister to the exclusion of his own sons." Women were often permitted to inherit property, and the husband was often expected to move into his wife's house.

Community Education and Initiation In a typical African village a process existed for educating young people and preparing them to become part of the community. For example, in the Congo, by the fifteenth century, both boys and girls were raised by their mothers until the age of six. From their mothers, they learned language, their family history, and the

Picturing History

A woman and child walk down a road in contemporary Africa. **What can you infer about the way they live?**



songs that gave meaning to their lives. At six, boys and girls went their separate ways. Girls went to live in the “house of the women,” boys in the “house of the men.”

Fathers then took control of their sons’ education. Boys learned how to hunt and fish, how to grow plants, and how to clear the fields for planting. By experience, young males learned how to live and survive in the natural world.

Girls continued to learn what they needed from their mothers. This included how to take care of the home and work in the fields. Girls also learned what they would need to be good wives and mothers. Marriage and motherhood would be their entry into the world of the community for females.

As the children matured, they played a larger role in the community. Boys cleared the fields, built houses, and took part in village discussions and ceremonies. Girls took over more responsibility for household tasks, took care of younger brothers and sisters, and attended village ceremonies, especially those connected to marriages and funerals.

Finally, young people reached a point in their upbringing where they were expected to enter the community fully. This transition—which occurred at the time of puberty—was marked by an initiation ceremony in which young people were kept isolated from the community. They then underwent a ritual ceremony in which they symbolically died and were reborn. Young females were then fully women; young males were fully men. Both entered completely into the life of the community.

Slavery When we use the term African slavery, we usually think of the period after 1500, when European slave ships carried millions of Africans in bondage to Europe or the Americas (see Chapter 13). Slavery, however, did not begin with the coming of the Europeans. It had been practiced in Africa since ancient times. Furthermore, as we have seen, slavery was not unique to Africa but was common in many societies throughout the world.

Berber groups in North Africa regularly raided farming villages south of the Sahara for captives. The captives were then taken northward and sold throughout the Mediterranean. Some became soldiers. Others were used as domestic servants in the homes of the wealthy.

The use of captives for forced labor or for sale was also common in African societies further south and along the coast of East Africa. Slaves included people captured in war, debtors, and some criminals. They

were not necessarily seen as inferior but rather could be trusted servants and might even be respected for their special knowledge or talents.

Life was difficult for most slaves. Those who worked on farmlands owned by the royal family or other wealthy landowners worked hard, long hours. Those enrolled as soldiers were sometimes better off. At least in Muslim societies in Southwest Asia, slaves might at some point win their freedom.

Many slaves were used in the royal household or as domestic servants in private homes. In general, these slaves usually had the best existence. Their living conditions were often decent and sometimes were almost the same as those of the free individuals in the household.

Religious Beliefs in Africa

Early African religious beliefs varied from place to place. Most African societies shared some common religious ideas. One of these was a belief in a single creator god. The **Yoruba** peoples in **Nigeria**, for example, believed that their chief god sent his son Oduduwa down from Heaven in a canoe to create the first humans. The Yoruba religion was practiced by many of the slaves transported to the Americas.



Sometimes, the creator god was joined by a whole group of lesser gods. The **Ashanti** people of Ghana, for example, believed in a supreme being called Nyame, whose sons were lesser gods. Each son served a different purpose: one was the rainmaker, and another brought sunshine. Because the Ashanti gods could not always be trusted, humans needed to appease them to avoid their anger. Some peoples believed that the creator god originally lived on Earth but left in disgust at the behavior of human beings. However, he was also merciful and could be pacified by proper behavior.

One way to communicate with the gods was through ritual. This process was usually carried out by a special class of **diviners**, people who believe they have the power to foretell events, usually by working with supernatural forces. Many diviners were employed by the king to contact the supreme god. This was done to guarantee a bountiful



This panel shows a family from the Congo at work.

harvest or otherwise protect the interests of the ruler and his subjects.

Another key element in African religion was the importance of ancestors. Each lineage group could trace itself back to a founding ancestor or group of ancestors. Ritual ceremonies dedicated to ancestors were important because the ancestors were believed to be closer to the gods. They had the power to influence, for good or evil, the lives of their descendants.

Many African religions shared a belief in an afterlife. Human life, it was thought, consisted of two stages. The first stage was life on Earth. The second stage was an afterlife in which the soul floated in the atmosphere throughout eternity. Ancestral souls would live on in the afterlife as long as the lineage group continued to perform rituals in their names.

African religious beliefs were challenged, but not always replaced, by the arrival of Islam. Islam swept rapidly across the northern coast of Africa in the wake of the Arab conquest. It was slower to penetrate the lands south of the

Sahara. The process probably began as a result of trade, as merchants introduced Muslim beliefs to the trading states in the areas south of the desert. At first, conversion took place on an individual basis. Initially, the rulers did not convert to Islam themselves, although they welcomed Muslim merchants and did not try to keep their subjects from adopting the new faith. The first rulers to convert to Islam were the royal family of Gao at the end of the tenth century. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, much of the population in the grasslands south of the Sahara had accepted Islam.

The process was even more gradual in East Africa. As Islam spread southward, it was adopted by many lowland peoples. It had less success in the mountains of Ethiopia, where, as we have seen, Christianity continued to win followers. Islam was first brought to the coast of East Africa by Muslim merchants from Arabia, but it did not win many adherents there until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At that time, Swahili culture emerged, and many members of the upper class converted to the Muslim faith.

In some ways, of course, the beliefs of Islam were in conflict with traditional African beliefs and customs. Islam's rejection of spirit worship ran counter to the beliefs of many Africans and was often ignored in practice. Likewise, Islam's insistence on distinct roles for men and women

and modesty in dress for both sexes was contrary to the relatively informal relationships that prevailed in many African societies. Thus, this practice was slow to take root. As elsewhere, in Africa imported ideas were combined with native beliefs to create a unique brand of Africanized Islam.

African Culture

In early Africa, as in much of the rest of the world at the time, the arts—whether painting, literature, or music—were a means of serving religion. A work of art was meant to express religious conviction.

The earliest art forms in Africa were rock paintings. The most famous examples are in the Tassili Mountains in the central Sahara. These paintings, some of which date back as far as 4000 B.C., show the life of the peoples of the area as they shifted from hunting to cattle herding and eventually to trade.

Some of the later paintings depict the two-horse chariots used to transport goods prior to the introduction of the camel.

Wood carvers throughout Africa made remarkable masks and statues. The carvings often represented gods, spirits, or ancestral figures and were believed to embody the spiritual powers of the subjects. Terra-cotta (clay) and metal figurines served a similar purpose. For example, impressive terra-cotta human figures and human heads found near the city of Nok in northern Nigeria are believed to have had religious significance. The Nok peoples of the Niger River produced a flourishing culture from 500 B.C. to A.D. 200. In fact, the Nok culture is the oldest known culture in West Africa to have created sculpture.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, metalworkers at **Ife** (EE•feh), the capital of the Yoruba people, in what is now southern Nigeria, produced handsome bronze and iron statues. The Ife sculptures may have influenced artists in **Benin** in West Africa, who produced equally impressive works in bronze during the same period. The Benin sculptures



CONNECTIONS Past To Present

From African Rhythms to Rock and Roll

Beginning in the 1500s, Africans were brought as slaves to the Western Hemisphere. Their music came with them and became an important ingredient in the development of musical styles in the Americas.

A strong rhythmic pattern was an important feature of African music, an effect achieved through a wide variety of instruments, including drums, bells, harps, gourds, pots, sticks beaten together, and hand clapping. Another important feature of African music was the coming

▼ *Drummers from Burundi*



▲ *Jazz saxophonist*

together of voice and instrument. A call and response pattern was common: a leader would sing a short piece and people would repeat it back to the beat of a drum.

As slaves in North America, Africans would use work songs, sung to rhythmic patterns, to make their long work days less burdensome. At rest, others sang folk songs known as spirituals to lament the loss of their homeland and their freedom. Over the years, these African musical forms developed into new forms known as blues, gospel, jazz, and ragtime. In the twentieth century, African American artists inspired new forms of music known as rock and roll and rap.

In Latin America, the beat of African drums was combined with European instruments, such as the Spanish guitar, and Native American instruments, such as the maraca and wooden rhythm sticks. From the combination of these elements came such styles as reggae, calypso, and salsa music.

Comparing Past and Present

Listen to blues, gospel, jazz, and ragtime music. Describe the similarities and the differences, then compare these types of music to contemporary, popular music.

include bronze heads, many of kings, and figures of various types of animals. These works are rivaled only by the sculptures of the Chinese.

Like wood carving and sculpture, African music and dance often served a religious purpose. African dancing, with its heavy rhythmic beat, has strongly influenced modern Western music. Dancing was “the great popular art of the African people.” The dances, however, were also a means of communicating with the spirits. The movements seen in African dance were meant to represent spirits expressing themselves through humans.

African music also served a social purpose. It was used to pass on to young people information about the history of the community. In the absence of written language, the words to songs served to transmit folk legends and religious traditions from generation to generation.

Storytelling, usually by priests or a special class of storytellers known as **griots** (GREE•OHZ), served the same purpose. These storytellers were also historians who kept alive a people’s history. For example, much of what we know about Sundiata Keita—the founder of the kingdom of Mali—has come down to us from the oral traditions of the griot.



▲ *Ife king, bronze*

▲ *Benin bronze figures*



Delicately carved bronze head of Benin, queen mother, from 1500s ▲

Task: On a separate piece of paper answer the circled questions. Use complete sentences. Submit by end of class.

Using Key Terms

1. _____ occurs when farmers only grow enough crops for their personal use.
2. The _____ were the historians of ancient Africa.
3. Farming peoples who spoke dialects of the _____ family of languages migrated into East Africa and the Congo Basin.
4. _____ refers to a mixed African-Arabian culture and a major language spoken by the peoples of coastal Africa.
5. Broad grasslands dotted with trees and shrubs are called _____.
6. A _____ consists of a group of independent villages with a local ruler.
7. A _____ society traces its descent through the mother.
8. Larger communities formed from extended families are known as _____.
9. _____ are people who communicate with the gods and possess the power to foretell the future.

Reviewing Key Facts

10. **Science and Technology** Why do people who live in the rain forest not keep cattle or animals?
11. **Culture** What was the official religion of Axum?
12. **Geography** Name at least four distinct geographic zones or geographic elements of Africa.
13. **Geography** What is the name of a major desert in Africa other than the Sahara?
14. **Economics** What made Meroë a major trading center?
15. **History** Name the major trading states of Africa south of the Sahara.
16. **Economics** What was the highly desired item that Arab traders brought to Ghana from North Africa?
17. **Culture** What was a distinctive feature of the kings of Ghana as noticed by outside observers?
18. **Government** What contributions did Sundiata Keita make to Mali?
19. **Culture** How did Mansa Musa carry on the advances begun by Sundiata?
20. **Citizenship** What caused the decline of Mali?
21. **History** List the dynasties that prevailed in the kingdom of Songhai.
22. **Economics** Name the East African ports vital to the Indian Ocean trade network.
23. **Culture** What roles did slaves play in African society?
24. **Economics** What role did Berbers play in African trade?
25. **Geography** Identify two different trade routes across Africa.

Answer in a paragraph format for each question below.

Critical Thinking

26. **Evaluating** Explain the reasons for the devaluation of gold during the reign of Mansa Musa.
27. **Analyzing** Compare the growth of Islam with the expansion of trade between Africa and its Arab neighbors.

Chapter Summary

African civilizations did not develop in a vacuum. As far back as the ancient Egyptians, African civilizations were open to contact with outside groups. Contact came about either through trade, migration, or war, and led to the introduction of new ideas, new ways of living, and the development of multicultural societies. The chart below lists major concepts associated with cultural diffusion and contact.

Trade

- Ghanaian gold is exchanged for salt from the Sahara.
- Muslim traders bring cotton, silk, and Chinese porcelain from India to East Africa.
- Malian farmers produce surplus crops for export.
- Ivory and gold from inland Africa are brought to East Africa.
- Cotton cloth, brass, copper, and olive oil are imported by Axum.
- Mali becomes rich from the profitable salt and gold trades.

Migration

- Bantu peoples slowly migrate into East Africa.
- Arab merchants settle along east coast of Africa.
- Islamic scholars move to Timbuktu, a new center for learning.

Warfare

- Kushites conquer Egyptians.
- Muslim merchants gain control of Axum's trade.
- Moroccan armies occupy Songhai's gold-trading centers.
- Assyrians drive Kushites out of Egypt.