African And Maya History
Student e Reader
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African Civilizations

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What is history?

History may seem as simply the record of the past. From this assumption many questions may arise

Why does it matter?
What it includes? When it started? What makes records meaningful?

The view that history is the past on its own is not true. It entails the involvement of humans and their decisions in changing their environments. **History is the study about the human past. It is people interacting within and with each other in a given time and space.** It is the story and study of humans and what they have done, suffered, or enjoyed. The history that we study is the record of human actions and interactions.

**History is an interpretation of the past based on the weight of the available evidence.** The facts and records are dead unless the historian breathes life into it. Creating a story from the records of human interaction is the job of the historian who breathes life into it. The historian is first curious about something (questions), and then he gathers evidence to support his answers to the questions he had. Contrary to the view that history is just a collection of facts, history is an area of study that teaches a new way of viewing the world, through analytical and critical thinking. The aim of teaching history is to create curiosity and enhance questioning.
An overview of the historical process

“History is a system of analysis, it is a process of asking questions about the past, finding and analyzing sources and drawing conclusions supported by evidence” (Mandell, and Malone, P. 3). There are three parts when doing history; questioning, gathering of evidence, and creating interpretations on history. History starts with questions, evaluating the evidence to support the answers to the question and finally creating the story behind the facts (interpretation).

1. Questioning: History is the study of human past, not the past itself. History begins with questions. The historian asks a wide range of questions about the past. As we examine these questions we can find patterns and understand history.

2. Evidence: In order to answer historical questions we need information. This information, the historical evidence, comes from secondary sources and primary sources of history.

   a. Secondary sources: information or explanation produced at the time of the event and by people who were involved in the event.

   b. Primary sources: Secondary sources: information produced after the historical event; resources that have been recovered by someone else

3. Interpretation: The final and essential step in doing history is historical interpretation. Historical interpretation answers a historical question using the reasonable available historical sources.
The African and Maya program

Have you ever sat down and wondered who am I? Why do I like dancehall or Reggae or rock music? Why do I want to dress like a rock star? Why do I think that everything that is produced in America and Europe better?

If we look and examine the things we value; we realize that almost or all the things we like are conditioned by American and European views. By this we mean that whatever we like is determined by what the Americans like and what we see in television or other media devices. Although most of us may think it is natural; it is not; these views act as extensions of colonialism. Us thinking that everything from outside is better simply fuels the effects of “mental slavery” (colonialism); that teaches us to deny the value of our own culture.

How many of you would dress in the traditional dress style of the people in your ethnicity for a party? Not many, most of us Belizean tend to deny our culture and sometimes even laugh at some of the traditional practices. Keeping the western mentality, is like a dagger into the heart of our nation since Belizeans turn a blind eye to what determines who you are.

This program has as aim to change the mentalities of Belizeans and connect them to their origins and let them appreciate who they are. By looking at the positive values of hard work, ingenuity and community that helped our ancestors to overcome various natural and man-made obstacles; can make the Belizean people realize that we can be productive as a nation.

Colonialism brought Belizeans up with a mentality of dependency whereby the people were conditioned to just work and wait for their pay. While we know that we can be productive and create our own avenues of income. The most important resources our country has is its people, our human resources.

Aims of the African and Maya program

Primary aim: “That the person acquires the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes and the capacity for lifelong learning as well as empowerment to actively participate as a productive unit in his/her society”

1. To make contributions to the development of self-identity and appreciation for self of the students.
2. To create active persons that question things and stand up to their rights.
3. To develop a strong positive Belizean identity and nationalism based on the knowledge
4. To enrich Belize’s human capital (people).
The Approach

**WHAT IS HISTORY?**

**UNIT 1**

**The Approach**

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EXCERPT: Thinking Like A Historian: Rethinking History Instruction, a Framework to Enhance and Improve Teaching and Learning by Nikki Mandell and Bobbie Malone/ Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2007

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Cause and effect is perhaps the most familiar category of historical questioning and explanation. We ask questions about the causes and consequences of past events. Not surprisingly, our answers to these questions, our historical interpretations, take the form of stories about causes and consequences.

We also ask questions about what has changed and what has remained the same over time. Answers to questions about change and continuity connect events and give meaning to the chronological sequence of events.

In some cases we wonder if the change was so dramatic that the topic of study was a historical turning point. By studying the historical record we are able to reach conclusions that some events or developments so dramatically changed a society’s ideas, choices and ways of living that some paths of development could no longer be followed and others became more likely or possible.

In other cases we look to the past as a guide to our present. We want to know about the particular course of events that shaped our present. Or, we are using the past to seek guidance in the form of “lessons of history” that can help us grapple with current problems.

We find it both necessary and fascinating to examine the ways in which people of different times, places and conditions made sense of their world. We consider how their experiences, needs and worldviews affected their actions and the course of events. We try to imagine their world through their eyes.

Recognizing the true nature of the historical discipline has significant implications not only for what we want our students to learn, but also for how we teach. Instead of overwhelming ourselves and our students with a plethora of disconnected events, “doing history” allows students to examine the past as a fascinating narrative of human passion, struggle, triumph and tragedy. We become engaged and help students find meaning in the past when we use discipline-specific skills of historical inquiry and analysis.
Darwin's Theory of Evolution - The Premise
Darwin's Theory of Evolution is the widely held notion that all life is related and has descended from a common ancestor: the birds and the bananas, the fishes and the flowers -- all related. Darwin's general theory presumes the development of life from non-life and stresses a purely naturalistic (undirected) "descent with modification". That is, complex creatures evolve from more simplistic ancestors naturally over time. In a nutshell, as random genetic mutations occur within an organism's genetic code, the beneficial mutations are preserved because they aid survival -- a process known as "natural selection." These beneficial mutations are passed on to the next generation. Over time, beneficial mutations accumulate and the result is an entirely different organism (not just a variation of the original, but an entirely different creature).

Darwin's Theory of Evolution - Natural Selection
While Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a relatively young archetype, the evolutionary worldview itself is as old as antiquity. Ancient Greek philosophers such as Anaximander postulated the development of life from non-life and the evolutionary descent of man from animal. Charles Darwin simply brought something new to the old philosophy -- a plausible mechanism called "natural selection." Natural selection acts to preserve and accumulate minor advantageous genetic mutations. Suppose a member of a species developed a functional advantage (it grew wings and learned to fly). Its offspring would inherit that advantage and pass it on to their offspring. The inferior (disadvantaged) members of the same species would gradually die out, leaving only the superior (advantaged) members of the species. Natural selection is the preservation of a functional advantage that enables a species to compete better in the wild. Natural selection is the naturalistic equivalent to domestic breeding. Over the centuries, human breeders have produced dramatic changes in domestic animal populations by selecting individuals to breed. Breeders eliminate undesirable traits gradually over time. Similarly, natural selection eliminates inferior species gradually over time.

Human evolution:
the “real Eve”

Mitochondrial DNA is passed from mother to children, both male and female, unchanged and it mutates at a predictable rate; i.e., the more the genetic mutations in the DNA, the more ancient the origin of the population.

Using these facts, some scientists are studying mitochondrial DNA to try to trace back the origins of the human race. Using this method, the scientists have traced the human race to one female in Africa several million years ago. Then they traced the migration patterns of her descendants as they spread across the earth.

The Real Eve is a fascinating documentary presenting a new and controversial theory of human evolution. It does what all good documentaries do, it makes you think, and it entertains at the same time.
About 40,000 years ago, Homo sapiens suddenly seems to have advanced by leaps and bounds, producing far more sophisticated tools and weapons, as well as outstanding works of art. Our species became far more creative, developed whole systems of social interaction, began to trade, and developed greater linguistic skills.

It is presumably the quick-wittedness and adaptability of Homo sapiens that has allowed our species to thrive. We took over the planet from other human types that had gone before. The Neanderthals faded out. The last ones lived in southern Europe, in what are now Croatia, Spain, and Portugal. Intriguingly, Joao Zilhao of Portugal’s National Institute of Archeology discovered a juvenile skeleton in 1999, which appears to come from the very end

Evolving heads (above)
These three heads suggest that the adult human face has tended to adopt a more juvenile appearance as it has evolved. The top face is Neanderthal (large jaw and nose, low cranium); the middle face is Cro-Magnon (smaller jaw and nose, higher cranium); and the bottom face is based upon an average human face of today (even smaller jaw and nose, still higher cranium).
The scientist Carl Swisher claims, after examining *Homo erectus* fossils found in Indonesia, that this species may have survived until 27,000 years ago. If so, this hominid could have lived alongside *Homo sapiens*.

Spread of modern humans (below)
What are generally accepted to be modern types of humans probably arose in Africa. Leaving Africa, they spread first to southern Asia and Australasia, then western Europe, and finally to North and South America.

of the Neanderthal period. He interprets the skeleton as a Neanderthal-human hybrid. Other scientists believe, after looking at genetic evidence, that Neanderthals were too different for interbreeding to be common, and that modern humans simply displaced Neanderthals.

It was probably in the development of social behavior that modern humans excelled compared to Neanderthals. Modern human groups may have been larger, and their language better developed. The practice of burying the dead with various kinds of “treasure” suggests that groups were more complex and organized, with leaders who merited special treatment in life and death. The modern people were physically weaker than Neanderthals, but were on average taller.

The exact figures are disputed, and subject to change as more facts are established over the years, but we can discern the outlines of the spread of modern humans. Thoroughly modern types probably arose 160,000 years ago in Africa. By about 100,000 years ago they had begun to leave Africa. By 60,000 years ago, they had reached southern Asia and Australia. By 40,000 years ago, they had reached western Europe; by 35–15,000 years ago, they had moved into North and South America.
Ice ages have happened many times in the Earth's history. There is evidence of ice age conditions some 700 million years ago, and again about 440 and 290 million years ago. The only ice age directly to affect humans is the last, Pleistocene Ice Age, which has influenced much of the last 1.7 million years. During this last period the Earth has changed back and forth from extremely cold conditions to warmer interglacials a number of times.

When the glaciations were at their height, huge areas of what is now North America, and also northern Europe and Asia, were covered with ice several miles thick. So much sea water was turned to ice that land bridges appeared where there had once been shallow seas. The dry land bridges could be crossed by migrating animals and also our ancestors. The last major glaciation began approximately 70,000 years ago, and with variations in intensity, lasted until about 12,000 years ago.

Nobody knows how these major changes in climate came about. In 1913, the Serbian scientist Milutin Milankovitch linked dramatic changes in climate occurring about every 22,000 years to alterations in the Earth's tilt. This affects the amount of sunlight reaching polar regions, and the severity of winters worldwide. A number of other factors, including circulation patterns in ocean currents, probably played a part in the development of ice ages.

During glaciations, climatic bands are shifted. Cold conditions allowed tundra (a treeless landscape with hard, frozen soil) to extend far south into Europe and America. Animals such as woolly rhinoceroses and mammoths, now extinct, lived there, as well as musk oxen, which still live in comparable areas.
today. The Sahara was wet, but the areas of true tropical rainforest diminished. As climatic bands moved back and forth, so animals and plants were forced to shift their range. Sometimes there were barriers, such as mountains, or seas. Some extinctions, and patterns of distribution of animals and plants today, can be explained by these forced shifts.

The Ice Age is the backdrop against which the later stages of our evolution took place. Neanderthals lived in the cold European climate, as well as warmer spots. The Cro-Magnons survived and hunted surprisingly far north, in some of the worst of the Ice Age areas.

Ice Age mammals
The woolly rhinoceros, now extinct, lived across much of Europe and northern Asia. The huge, extinct cave bear lived in Ice Age Europe. The musk ox ranged across Europe, northern Asia, and America in the Ice Age, but is now found only on North American tundra.
The Real Eve' explains DNA evidence that points to human origins

Friday, April 19, 2002

By John Hayes, Post-Gazette Staff Writer

About 150,000 years ago, a woman in sub-Saharan east Africa gave birth to a daughter. She was neither the only human female nor the most fertile, but through the serendipity of natural selection, her long-term progeny have been the only ones to survive to the present day.

In practical terms, the real "Eve" wasn't a biblical legend or the fossilized remains of the earliest hominid found. In a groundbreaking, two-hour Discovery Channel documentary Sunday at 9 p.m., "The Real Eve" follows a trail of genetic evidence to an actual prehistoric woman whose unique DNA signature can be found in every living human being.

Until the mid-1990s, the study of human origins relied on physical discoveries by archaeologists, anthropologists and climatologists. "The Real Eve" combines those data with new evidence from the fledgling field of genetic archaeology, which traces slight mutations in a section of human DNA which is passed only from mother to daughter. Mitochondrial DNA evolves at a constant rate of about one harmless mutation every 20,000 years, leaving markers of each mutation in nearly every human cell. Just as counting the rings in a tree helps to determine its age, researchers believe they can count markers in the cells of living humans to trace our lineage back to our common ancestor, "mitochondrial Eve."

Much of "The Real Eve" is based on the research of Oxford scholar Dr. Stephen Oppenheimer, who later this year will publish these findings in his book, "The Peopling of the World." Through the comparison of genetic samples taken from thousands of people from all parts of the globe, Oppenheimer offers evidence that challenges established theories on the routes and time periods of the human exodus out of Africa.

Some of the findings are revolutionary:

- There have been about 7,000 human generations.
- The only human group to have survived its migration out of Africa traveled in one wave about 80,000 years ago. They followed a southerly path across the Red Sea through modern day Yemen, Saudi Arabia, India, Malaysia and Australia, some 25,000 years before those in Turkey ventured north into Europe.
- Humans first crossed the land bridge from Siberia to the Americas before the last Ice Age, then repeated the process in pulses after the glaciers subsided.

Heavy, complicated stuff. But writer-director Andrew Piddington offers the information in a simple, viewer-friendly way that at times has more in common with MTV than PBS. Re-created scenes of traumatic moments in the lives of early humans are combined with a stirring score, easy-to-follow graphics, video morphing recycled from another show, and the characteristically slow and sympathetic narration of actor Danny Glover.

"The Real Eve" was filmed in nine countries on five continents and made an important stop at the Meadowcroft Rockshelter in Avella, Washington County. New genetic evidence presented in this documentary correlates with carbon-dating evidence that pushes back estimates of human habitation in this part of North America by thousands of years.

As Piddington traces human migration from mitochondrial Eve to us, the story becomes increasingly personal. Genetic archaeology provides a viable new theory on variations in human skin color, showing more genetic differences between Caucasians whose ancestors arrived in Europe at different times than between whites and blacks in general.

In one stunning segment, tissue samples taken from five people in Chicago turn up genetic indicators proving that a Greek woman and a full-blooded Cree man shared a common ancestor who probably lived in southern Siberia some 30,000 years ago. "The Real Eve's" unlikely family reunion illustrates the new belief that the human family is more closely related than we ever dreamed.
Evidence of Evolution

Scientists have discovered a wealth of evidence concerning human evolution, and this evidence comes in many forms. Thousands of human fossils enable researchers and students to study the changes that occurred in brain and body size, locomotion, diet, and other aspects regarding the way of life of early human species over the past 6 million years. Millions of stone tools, figurines and paintings, footprints, and other traces of human behavior in the prehistoric record tell about where and how early humans lived and when certain technological innovations were invented. Study of human genetics show how closely related we are to other primates – in fact, how connected we are with all other organisms – and can indicate the prehistoric migrations of our species, Homo sapiens, all over the world. Advances in the dating of fossils and artifacts help determine the age of those remains, which contributes to the big picture of when different milestones in becoming human evolved.
HUMAN EVOLUTION

UNIT 2

source: www.humanorigins.si.edu

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Human Migration

- 150,000-100,000 years ago
- 100,000-90,000 years ago
- 40,000 years ago
- 60,000-50,000 years ago
- 3,000-2,000 years ago
- 1,500 years ago
- 1,000 years ago
- 1,100 years ago
- 1,200 years ago
- 12,000 years ago

Human Migration?

- 20,000-15,000 years ago
- 30,000 years ago
- 30,000-20,000 years ago
- 200,000 years ago
- 40,000-30,000 years ago
- 100,000 years ago
- 100,000-80,000 years ago
- 20,000 years ago
- 50,000 years ago
- 10,000 years ago
- 11,000 years ago
- 12,000 years ago

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Africa, the second-largest continent, is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Atlantic Ocean. It is divided in half almost equally by the Equator. The continent includes the islands of Cape Verde, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Comoros.

Africa's physical geography, environment and resources, and human geography can be considered separately.

The origin of the name “Africa” is greatly disputed by scholars. Most believe it stems from words used by the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans. Important words include the Egyptian word Afru-ika, meaning “Motherland”; the Greek word aphrike, meaning “without cold”; and the Latin word aprica, meaning “sunny.”

Today, Africa is home to more countries than any other continent in the world.

The African continent has a unique place in human history. Widely believed to be the “cradle of humankind,” Africa is the only continent with fossil evidence of human beings (Homo sapiens) and their ancestors through each key stage of their evolution. These include the Australopithecines, our earliest ancestors; Homo habilis, our tool-making ancestors; and Homo erectus, a more robust and advanced relative to Homo habilis that was able to walk upright.

These ancestors were the first to develop stone tools, to move out of trees and walk upright, and, most importantly, to explore and migrate. While fossils of Australopithecines and Homo habilis have only been found in Africa, examples of Homo erectus have been found in the Far East, and their tools have been excavated throughout Asia and Europe. This evidence supports the idea that the species of Homo erectus that originated in Africa was the first to successfully migrate and populate the rest of the world.

This human movement, or migration, plays a key role in the cultural landscape of Africa.

Two other migration patterns, the Bantu Migration and the African slave trade, help define the cultural geography of the continent.

The Bantu Migration was a massive migration of people across Africa about 2,000 years ago. The Bantu Migration is the most important human migration to have occurred since the first human ancestors left Africa more than a million years ago.

The Bantu Migration had an enormous impact on Africa’s economic, cultural, and political practices. Bantu migrants introduced many new skills into the communities they interacted with, including sophisticated farming and industry. These skills included growing crops and forging tools and weapons from metal.

These skills allowed Africans to cultivate new areas of land that had a wide variety of physical and climatic features. Many hunter-gatherer communities were assimilated, or adopted, into the more technologically advanced Bantu culture. In turn, Bantu people adopted skills from the communities they encountered, including animal husbandry, or raising animals for food.

This exchange of skills and ideas greatly advanced Africa’s cultural landscape, especially in the eastern, central, and southern regions of the continent. Today, most of the population living in these regions is descended from Bantu migrants or from mixed Bantu-indigenous origins.

The third massive human migration in Africa was the African slave trade. Between the 15th and 19th centuries, more than 15 million Africans were transported across the Atlantic Ocean to be sold as slaves in North and South America. Millions of slaves were also transported within the continent, usually from Central Africa and Madagascar to North Africa and the European colony of South Africa.

Millions of Africans died in the slave trade. Most slaves were taken from the isolated interior of the continent. They were sold in the urban areas on the West African coast. Thousands died in the brutal process of their capture, and thousands more died on the forced migration to trading centers. Even more lost their lives on the treacherous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean.

The impacts of slavery on Africa are widespread and diverse. Computerized calculations have projected that if there had been no slave trade, the population of Africa would have been 50 million instead of 25 million in 1850. Evidence also suggests that the slave trade contributed to the long-term colonization and exploitation of Africa. Communities and infrastructure were so damaged by the slave trade that they could not be rebuilt and strengthened before the arrival of European colonizers in the 19th century.
Africa the Continent

a quick look

http://www.pbs.org/wnet/africa/explore/index_flash.html

Vegetation Regions of Africa

1. The deadliest creature lurking in rain forests is a small fly called the tsetse fly. Tsetse flies carry a disease that is deadly to livestock and can cause fatal sleeping sickness in humans.

2. Sahel means "coastline" in Arabic. African people may have named it this because the Sahara seemed like a vast ocean of sand.

3. The savannas are home to herds of animals such as giraffes, wildebeest, and antelope. They also support grain crops of millet, wheat, and maize (corn).

4. The dense trees and lack of edible vegetation in the humid rain forest make it an unwelcoming environment for most people.

GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting Maps

1. Place About what percent of Africa is desert? savanna?

2. Region If you were to fold a map of Africa in half along the equator, what do you notice about the similar vegetation zones above and below the fold?
The earliest stone toolmaking developed by at least 2.6 million years ago. The Early Stone Age includes the most basic stone toolkits made by early humans. The Early Stone Age in Africa is equivalent to what is called the Lower Paleolithic in Europe and Asia.

The oldest stone tools, known as the Oldowan toolkit, consist of at least:
• hammerstones that show battering on their surfaces;
• stone cores that show a series of flake scars along one or more edges; and
• sharp stone flakes that were struck from the cores and offer useful cutting edges, along with lots of debris from the process of percussion flaking.

By about 1.76 million years ago, early humans began to strike really large flakes and then continue to shape them by striking smaller flakes from around the edges. The resulting implements included a new kind of tool called a handaxe. These tools and other kinds of 'large cutting tools' characterize the Acheulean toolkit.

The basic toolkit, including a variety of novel forms of stone core, continued to be made. It and the Acheulean toolkit were made for an immense period of time – ending in different places by around 400,000 to 250,000 years ago.

Between about 400,000 and 200,000 years ago, the pace of innovation in stone technology began to accelerate very slightly. By the beginning of this time, handaxes were made with exquisite craftsmanship, and eventually gave way to smaller, more diverse toolkits, with an emphasis on flake tools rather than larger core tools. These toolkits were established by at least 285,000 years in some parts of Africa, and by 250,000-200,000 years in Europe and parts of western Asia.

One of the main innovations was the application of 'prepared core technique,' in which a core was carefully flaked on one side so that for a flake of predetermined size and shape could be produced in a single blow. This technique probably raised the level of standardization and predictability in stone technology.

Middle Stone Age toolkits included points, which could be hafted on to shafts to make spears. When smaller points were made, eventually, they could be attached to smaller, sleeker shafts to make darts, arrows, and other projectile weapons. Stone awls, which could have been used to perforate hides, and scrapers that were useful in preparing hide, wood, and other materials, were also typical tools of the Middle Stone Age.

Later Stone Age tools include the toolkits called ‘Upper Paleolithic’ in Europe and ‘Late Stone Age’ in Africa. These toolkits are very diverse and reflect stronger cultural diversity than in earlier times. The pace of innovations rose. Groups of Homo sapiens experimented with diverse raw materials (bone, ivory, and antler, as well as stone), the level of craftsmanship increased, and different groups sought their own distinct cultural identity and adopted their own ways of making things.

Stone tools and other artifacts offer evidence about how early humans made things, how they lived, interacted with their surroundings, and evolved over time.

Spanning the past 2.6 million years, many thousands of archeological sites have been excavated, studied, and dated. These sites often consist of the accumulated debris from making and using stone tools. Because stone tools are less susceptible to destruction than bones, stone artifacts typically offer the best evidence of where and when early humans lived, their geographic dispersal, and their ability to survive in a variety of habitats. But since multiple hominin species often existed at the same time, it can be difficult to determine which species made the tools at any given site.

Most important is that stone tools provide evidence about the technologies, dexterity, particular kinds of mental skills, and innovations that were within the grasp of early human toolmakers.
AGE OF IRON IN AFRICA

Many scientists believe that Africa was one of the first places on earth where iron and the use of iron was first "discovered". The Iron Age was the time in history when humans discovered iron and learned how to make and use iron tools. The Iron Age came quite early to the ancient Africans. No one has been able to determine precisely when this discovery occurred. There is, however, evidence of widespread use of iron after c. 500 B.C. In places like Ethiopia, the Great Lakes region, Tanzania and central Nigeria, the knowledge of how to make and use iron tools is believed to have occurred around the sixth century Before Christ (BC), or, Before the Common Era (BCE). The main evidence of early use of iron in West Africa comes from present day Nigeria where archaeologists have found evidence of iron use in the region of the Niger and Benue Rivers dating to the period 500 BC. Artefacts left behind by the people who lived here include implements and terracotta (skilfully modelled clay figurine). The name given to this early Iron Age way of life in central Nigeria is Nok Culture.

As much as the discovery of agriculture was a major breakthrough in the early history of West Africa, the discovery and use of metals, especially iron, changed the way many West Africans lived. The Bantu, according to some historians, were the first to discover and use iron in West and Central
AFRICA: Early Technology

AGE OF IRON IN AFRICA

Figure 116: Modern Blacksmiths still use age-old techniques to manufacture iron tools

Africa. Many scholars believe that the Bantu were able to expand and colonize much of West, Central, East and Southern Africa between c. B.C. 2000 and c. 100 B.C. because they possessed superior agricultural and military tools made from iron.

It appears that, the first appearance, possession and use of iron and other metals in West Africa had little impact on the peoples’ way of life. There is no evidence of large-scale movement of people in much of West Africa using iron tools and weapons as was the case with the Bantu in west-central Africa. In all probability, the early West Africans continued to combine hunting and fishing with crop-raising (agriculture) and stock-raising (animal farming).

There is evidence of people living in the middle Niger and Senegal valleys obtaining iron ore and stone from sources more than fifty (50) kilometres away from their homes from around B.C. 250-A.D. 400. Indeed, between B.C. 250 and A.D. 400, the pottery assemblage in the middle Niger and Senegal valleys comprises a limited number of forms, all with small rim diameters. However, as the population continued to increase, pottery in the form of large water storage jars and cooking pots became widespread and common.

The advantages of knowledge and possession of iron over wood included better weapons of war and tools for food production. Iron-pointed spears and arrow-heads were certainly superior to sharp sticks and stone-heads. Those who first learned to make and use iron at first were able to keep this knowledge in relative secrecy and were also able to either use such knowledge to displace or dominate their neighbours. With better tools and weapons of war, the natural barriers (forests) and predators (animals and other hostile groups) could be easily overcome. Those armed with superior iron weapons (spears and arrows) and tools (axes, hoes and cutlasses), could penetrate the deep forests, open new trails, defend themselves against other humans and wild animals, and generally move about with more safety.
The deployment of this new source of military power and surplus crop production must have overwhelmed many societies without comparable knowledge. Iron-headed hoes were certainly superior to stone and wooden ones, and iron-headed axes and cutlasses could certainly fell trees and clear the bushes better than their stone or wooden cousins. These inventions or discoveries certainly improved the quality of life as food became abundant. But as more and more food and people were being produced, the need to expand into new areas arose.

The introduction of iron transformed the African continent because it opened up potentials for agriculture. Agricultural surpluses led to population increase and this in turn led to a series of migrations. Agricultural surpluses also led to occupational specialization. In some places of the savannah such as Jenne-jeno, evidence demonstrates a gradual transformation of the society as the population continued to grow. There is evidence of trade becoming increasingly important.

Clearly, long distance trade was as important as the introduction of iron to African kingdoms. The establishment of trade routes, both inland and along the coast, offered political opportunities for enterprising individuals. Controlling markets meant control over resources and people who utilized them. Larger states developed around market centres, notably the kingdoms of the western Sudan (Ghana, Ife, Benin, Mali and Songhai) that exploited the wealth of the trans-Saharan trade. The kingdoms of south-central Africa (Great Zimbabwe) and those along the east African coast (Kilwa, Malindi, Mombassa, Bunyoro, and Buganda) controlled trade within the Indian Ocean region. In many parts of Africa, especially on the eastern coast of Africa, trade links with the east as far away as China were established. In West Africa, trade links with North Africa and Mediterranean Europe became important.

THE BANTU MIGRATIONS

The Bantu are one of the earliest and the largest groups of Africans who once lived in a homeland that straddles the borders of present day Nigeria and Cameroon. Scientists believe the Bantu lived in this homeland sometime around 3000-2000 BC. This homeland was once covered with thick tropical rainforests, bushes and grass. In this homeland there was a lot of rain and the soil was fertile and crops grew easily. Farming and hunting were the Bantu main occupations. Bantu are one of the first ancient Africans who discovered iron. They are also one of the first ancient Africans who discovered how to turn iron into farming implements like hoes and cutlasses. With the knowledge of tool-making, they were able to make houses from wood and thatch. They were also able to make large farms to feed their growing population.

The Bantu are said to be one of the earliest families of Africans to move and spread across much of the continent of Africa. In less than 3,000 years, the Bantu-speaking peoples expanded from their cradle-land and colonized virtually all of Africa south of the Sahara. The development of iron-smelting technology played an important role in this dispersal.

After c. 500 BCE/BC the north-west-south movement was virtually complete. By about 100 BC, the Bantu had successfully displaced or assimilated other ancient Africans throughout the continent of Africa, south of the Sahara. Despite the Bantu assimilation of many groups of ancient Africans, other groups of ancient Africans, including the San and the Khoi of Southern Africa, were able to maintain their identities and other aspects of cultures and traditions. These two groups still depend on hunting and gathering methods for survival.

The majority of the Bantu people organized themselves into families, age groups or age sets, compounds,
villages, and clans. Among these groups of Bantu, councils of elders, heads of families, heads of compounds, heads of villages, and heads of clans were the authorities. Age was important and the older the person, the more wisdom and authority the person had in the society. Few other Bantu groups were able to organize themselves into *chieftoms* and *kingdoms*. Among these latter groups, the ability to control people through the use of force was more important than age. However, among many Bantu, a combination of military *genius* and wisdom were cherished assets.

The Bantu were experts in making pottery and decorating their *pots*, *ceramic*, and *terracotta* with *grooves* and beautiful *patterns*. As the Bantu settled in their new homelands across West, East, Central, and Southern Africa, they began to build houses using *mud bricks*. These houses were decorated with beautiful *colors* and *patterns*. The Bantu also used fibers from tree barks, raffia, and other palm products to make beautiful cloths. By the 12th century AD, the Bantu began to use cotton and imported silks from Asia to make different types of beautiful cloths.
Between **9000 and 4000 BCE**, northern Africa and the Sahara were grass and woodland with an abundance of rainfall, rivers, lakes, fish and other aquatic life. Anthropologists speculate that from North Africa's Mediterranean coast, people migrated into the Sahara and that people migrated into the Sahara from the south. There communities raised sheep and goats, as people did along the Mediterranean coast. And communities of people **fished** in the lakes and rivers of the region, using intricately made bone harpoons and fishing hooks, some using nets with weights and other tools for harvesting aquatic creatures. Living a settled life, people began using pottery and growing food, using stone and wooden tools. To the east, along the upper Nile, including what was to be Nubia, people by 6000 BCE were **growing sorghum and millet** and a wheat believed to be of African origin. And by 4000 BCE, people in the middle of the Sahara region were raising cattle. Then around 3500 BCE the climate of North Africa began to dry, perhaps in part because of overgrazing – wetness needing vegetation as well as vegetation needing water. The Sahara started to change from grass and woodland to desert.

Meanwhile, in Africa south of the desert region many had begun small-scale farming and **raising cattle**. Those living in the continent's equatorial forests continued to rely almost exclusively on their hunting and gathering, which provided them with all they needed. It would be want and deprivation elsewhere that would mother new ways of doing things. People in the equatorial forests saw no reason to hack clearings to grow food that was already sufficient for their few numbers.

South of the Sahara, the raising of cattle was at first limited to regions without the blood sucking tsetse fly, which could spread disease fatal to both cattle and people. It took many generations for people to build immunities to local diseases, which kept migrant communities from growing in the moist valleys and thickly wooded regions where the tsetse fly thrived. In some other parts of Africa where inadequate rain or other conditions discouraged farming, people continued to gather food that grew wild. Using exquisitely hand-crafted spears, bows and arrows, animal snares and poisons, they hunted small game. And with food supply limited, the populations of these various areas remained sparse, unlike what was developing along the northern Nile.
Development of agriculture in ancient Africa
- evidence of several early centres of agricultural development
  1. Afro- Mediterranean cradle (Egypt – Morocco) – cereals = wheat + barley, lentils, olive trees
  2. Nile Abyssinian Centre – wheat, barley, sorghum + COFFEE
  3. West African Centre – sorghum, penicilliary, finger millet, fonio and rice
  4. Central African Centre – few cereals + tubers, leguminous plants and earth pea or groundnut
- agriculture developed by trial and error
- process of selection and adaptation – a gradual transition from hunting to farming
- deliberate plant productivity (agriculture) = 70,000 years – southern Africa
- earliest known organized food production = along the NILE 15,000 years ago (long before the period of the Pharaohs)
- agricultural achievements =
  o domestication of cereals
  o invention of pottery
  o domestication of rice, sorghum, millet, shea butter, oil palm, gourds, calabashes, yams
  o integration of agriculture with cattle keeping, raising and herding
  o cows, sheep and goats used for - meat + milk

CIVILIZATIONS BASED ON AGRICULTURE SURPLUSES
- Surplus: Producing more than one can consume.
- Earliest centers for civilization based on Agricultural surplus:
  1. Nile Valley
  2. Mwenemutapaplateaus (Southern Africa)
**Civilization**

/ˌsɪvəlɪˈzaʃən/  
**noun**

- the stage of human social development and organization that is considered most advanced.  
- "they equated the railroad with progress and civilization"  
- *synonyms*: human development, advancement, progress, enlightenment, culture, refinement, sophistication  
- "a higher stage of civilization"  
- the process by which a society or place reaches an advanced stage of social development and organization.  
- the society, culture, and way of life of a particular area.  
- *plural noun*: civilizations; plural noun: civilisations  
- "the great books of Western civilization"  
- *synonyms*: culture, society, nation, people  
- "ancient civilizations"  
- the comfort and convenience of modern life, regarded as available only in towns and cities.  
- "the fur traders moved further and further from civilization"  

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**Eight Features of Civilization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cities:</th>
<th>Organized Central Governments:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>As farmers settled in fertile river valleys, they began to grow surplus or extra food. This extra food increased the population of the settlements. In time, the settlements grew into cities, such as Ur in Sumer or Babylon in Mesopotamia.</td>
<td>As cities developed and expanded, the food supply and irrigation systems needed to be maintained. Governments, such as councils or religious leaders, began to oversee the business and existence of the cities.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Complex Religions:</th>
<th>Job Specialization:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious leaders would conduct elaborate ceremonies to appease the gods (polytheism) and insure a bountiful harvest. Floods and droughts were blamed on the gods’ anger so rituals were conducted in the temples.</td>
<td>As civilizations became more complex, artisans and craftsmen were needed to maintain specific items and tasks. No longer could individuals do all the work. Now some concentrated on teaching, scribing, stone-cutting, and so forth.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Social Classes:</th>
<th>Writing:</th>
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<tr>
<td>As jobs became specialized so did the status and needs of certain individuals. The need for a knowledgable and educated religious leader was more respected than an unskilled worker. Herders were needed and respected for the food, while masons were needed for building. The slave was on the lowest rung of the social ladder warriors and kings were on top.</td>
<td>Records were needed to keep accounts on trade goods and food storage. Writing was needed because the information became too great. In addition, one needed to express more complex ideas such as &quot;belief&quot; and &quot;social order&quot; where pictures and words simply would not suffice.</td>
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<th>Art and Architecture:</th>
<th>Public Works:</th>
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<tr>
<td>This expressed the beliefs and values of a civilization. Different styles were developed and copied by societies. Often the art was used to impress visitors and people about the beauty and power of a king or a community.</td>
<td>The government would order these, although costly, to aid and benefit the community. Such things as a wall to protect from attack or a canal to aid in irrigation would help insure the survival of a people.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Kush (also known as Nubia) was the empire to the south of Egypt. Kush was built at the base of the mountains, at the start of the Nile River. They didn't have to worry, as the Egyptians did, about the annual flooding of the Nile to bring good soil. They had good soil. They enjoyed plenty of rainfall all year long to keep things fresh and growing.

Kush had tremendous natural wealth. They had gold mines and ivory and iron ore. Other kingdoms wanted to conquer Kush and keep the wealth for themselves. Kush did not allow this to happen. They were known as the Land of the Bow because of their many expert archers.

Like the Kush nobles, the common people mummified their dead, and worshiped the same gods. But they did not think of themselves as Egyptians. The common people lived in villages. They were farmers. They were proud of their village. Each village had a leader, but the leader was not a king or queen or chief. The leader did not rule. Rather, the leader suggested and led discussions. The villagers decided.

There was a place in Kush where two or more villages might meet. You had to be invited, but if invited, you knew where to go, as the meeting place was always the same. Festivals were held in the meeting place.
One of Kush's natural resources was iron ore. This was the Iron Age. Everyone wanted iron weapons and iron tools. Kush was the center of the iron trade in the ancient African world. To produce iron from ore, Kush needed to burn wood. Wood was running out. Kush had to turn their attention to other trade goods to survive.

They had heard stories of the wonderful gold mines on the other side of Africa. It was a very long trip. The Sahara Desert was in the way. Around 750 CE, Kush tried using camels and camel trains to cross the sea of sand. It was dangerous. It was miserable. But as Kush traders discovered, it could be done. Kush turned their attention to the trade with West Africa. This was the beginning of the Trans-Saharan Trade Route.
WEST AFRICAN EMPIRES
Ghana, Mali and Songhay

WHERE WERE THE WEST AFRICAN KINGDOMS

West Africa stretched from the Atlantic coast eastward in a strip between the Sahara Desert to the north and the rain forest to the south. The area remained undiscovered and wrapped in mystery for centuries because it was difficult to cross such a vast ocean of sand.

Arabs called this region Sahel, meaning “shore,” since it formed a border along the Sahara Desert. The Kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and Songhay occupied an important location for trade across northern Africa. Early villages began in places where people could find water and grow crops important for survival and later for trade.

The Kingdom of Songhay had its beginnings at Gao, near the bend of the Niger River. Its borders today would include modern Mali, Niger, Benin, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Guinea, Mauritania, and Senegal.

West African kingdoms contained diverse geography, plants, animals, peoples, languages, and cultures. Dust storms were common in the hot, dry desert areas, where temperatures could fall from 100°F (38°C) during the day to 45°F (7°C) at night. Flood waters from the Niger River affected the middle of the Sahel and made it possible to grow crops. Most of the year rainfall was irregular, but 15.75 inches (40 cm) to 23.62 inches (60 cm) of rain fell during the rainy season between July and September. Droughts in the area dried the river, causing famines and the declines of empires. Southern areas contained drought-resistant tall grasses and scattered trees and bushes. A rain forest, rich with tropical wildlife, plants and crops of kola nuts and plantain, was further south. Dolphins and manatees swam along the Atlantic coast.

The Kingdom of Mali occupied all of Ghana’s borders and expanded west to the Atlantic Ocean. Its northern border included parts of the Sahara Desert, and in the south it extended down the Niger River, past the city of Djenne. To the east, the kingdom stretched to the city of Takurul. The empire covered 2,000 miles (3,200 km) from the Atlantic Ocean in the west to beyond Gao in the east, and from the southern edge of the Sahara to the forest belt in the south.

WHO WERE THE WEST AFRICANS?

Clans were very important to the structure of the West African family and village. Each person belonged to a clan, and each clan had a special job. Most people were farmers who lived in clusters of small, round houses made of mud or stone connected to each other. The homes had domed grass roofs. A short wall surrounded their homes for protection from wild animals. Inside was a cot or sleeping mat for each person, rugs to cover the dirt floors, a few wooden stools, and candles for light. Very little furniture was necessary since most activities were outside.

The Kingdom of Ghana originated with the Soninke clan and lasted from 700 C.E. until 1076 C.E. in an area approximately 500 miles (805 km) north of present-day Ghana. At the height of its power, the kingdom covered 250,000 square miles (647,450 sq km), an area about as large as the state of Texas! The kingdom was situated between the Niger and Senegal rivers and included what is now western Mali, Senegal, and southeast Mauritania.

Many houses were made of mud, and some buildings had grass roofs.
West African Empires

Ghana, Mali and Songhay

Men and women worked hard. Children learned life's skills by following their parents' footsteps. Men farmed, hunted, fished, and served in the king's army. Women weeded the gardens, tended the vegetables, prepared the family meals, and made clay pottery. Everyone joined in the harvest. West African children were raised by their mothers until they were 12 years old. Then boys went to study with their uncles, and girls married and began raising their own families.

The history of West Africans was passed down to children by village storytellers called griots. Griots kept the past alive through their storytelling since there were no written records. Griots memorized long epics and told the stories as they danced, sang, or played music. Every clan and every king had a griot. For the king, griots were official record keepers and some became advisers to the king.

Clans join together to form villages, each with its own ruler. As a ruler gained power, he united villages into kingdoms. West African leaders who were strong conquered and combined kingdoms to form even larger empires.

The Kingdom of Ghana had been ruled by more than 40 kings by 300 C.E. Early Ghanaians were peaceful and lived by farming and mining. Between 300 C.E. and 770 C.E., Berbers ruled the Kingdom of Ghana. Around 700 C.E. a group of Soninke, who lived northwest of the great bend in the Niger River, founded the state of Wagadou. This became an oasis along an important trade route where gold and ivory from the south were exchanged for salt from the desert to the north. The Soninke forced the Berbers out of the region, and the empire of Ghana expanded. This marked the beginning of trade beyond their region.

Muslim traders, lawyers, religious leaders, and teachers lived in the other town of Kumbi Saleh in two-story, mud-brick homes with flat roofs. The ground floor was used for storage, and the families lived upstairs. There were 12 mosques throughout Kumbi Saleh. A large open market bustled with activity as people gathered to trade horses, cloth, swords, books, jewelry, silk, and even rare birds.

The Kante clan, who specialized as blacksmiths, made farming tools and weapons of iron that increased Ghana's wealth and power. With the new tools, farmers could produce enough food for their families and harvest extra crops to sell or trade. Surrounding kingdoms were taken over by the Kingdom of Ghana with its huge armies of up to 200,000 men! Neighboring villages with their weapons of stone, bone, and wood were no match against warriors carrying spears tipped with iron.

The Soninke founded the capital city of Kumbi Saleh, where more than 30,000 people lived. The city was divided into two towns that were about 6 miles (9.6 km) apart. One town was for the ruler and native Western African people who still worshiped their own gods. A thick wall surrounded the king's half of Kumbi Saleh. Inside the wall, the king's large house was surrounded by smaller homes for his wives, children, and government workers.
WEST AFRICAN EMPIRES
Ghana, Mali and Songhay

Another reason for the growth of West African kingdoms was their use of camels and horses. Trade across the Sahara Desert was possible because camels could withstand the desert heat and go for days without water. Warriors with horses were superior to foot soldiers in the lands they conquered.

The Ghana king was more powerful than anyone and considered to be the father of all Soninke people. He was the religious leader, chief of the army, and highest judge. His people worshiped and served him like a god. Special drummers followed the king around. When he appeared in public, his subjects would lie on the ground and throw dust on their heads. The king controlled all the gold that was mined in his kingdom and began a system of tributes.

The great wealth of the Kingdom of Ghana weakened during a seven-year period of droughts. Crops died and famine spread throughout the kingdom. The king was no longer powerful enough to control the salt and gold trade. Areas broke up into smaller kingdoms that began to fight among each other for power.

Weakened from within, the Kingdom of Ghana was open to attack. Around 1054 C.E., Muslim warriors from Morocco called Almoravids conquered the Kingdom of Ghana. They taught Islam to the people. Arabic, the language of the Koran (Qur’an), became the common language of the traders and merchants of Ghana. Reading and writing spread throughout the country because belief in Islam required everyone to learn the Koran.

As the kingdom grew, a more organized government was needed. Three independent states called Mali, Mema, and Wagadou were formed. These were separated into 12 provinces, each with its own governor and protected by troops. Local rulers were left in charge of newly conquered lands, but their people were expected to obey the king and pay tribute to the Kingdom of Ghana.

Camels loading up on water

More than 150 years passed before the kingdoms were united again. Sundiata Keita, a Mandinka ruler, built a new empire known as the Kingdom of Mali in 1235 C.E. From the capital city of Niani on the Niger River, Sundiata expanded his kingdom to include lands in the Kingdom of Ghana plus more territory. The Kingdom of Mali was three times the size of former Ghana. Mali was so large that it took four months to travel across the kingdom by donkey or camel! With the empire close to the gold mines in West Africa and fertile interior plains of the Niger River, the Kingdom of Mali was the richest country of its day.

Islam is a religion founded by the prophet Muhammad who was born in 570 C.E. People who practice Islam are called Muslims and worship only one god, Allah. Islam is spread by those who practice the religion and by holy war, called a jihad.
Trade and military power held the empire and government together. Mali's horsemen were armed with steel armor, spears, and iron swords. The Kingdom of Mali controlled the gold trade from 1235 to 1500 C.E. and managed the salt trade in the north. Trade routes expanded, and caravans traveled as far east as Egypt to trade for copper.

King Sundiata used his armies to protect all trade routes so that Muslim traders felt safe again. In return, traders paid tariffs to Sundiata for every load of goods they carried. Armies cleared land and planted crops near the Niger River, and Mali's farms provided more food than Ghana's. Food was shipped on the Niger River from the farms to the cities.

The title of king was passed from the king to his son, or to the son of the king's sister. All kings were called mansas, which means "lord" in the Mandinka language. Like Ghana, Mali was divided into provinces with governors in charge. Advisers were in charge of specific areas such as fishing or farming and helped the Mali mansas rule.

Ideas of religion, mathematics, law, and literature were taught and exchanged. Personal libraries of the rich could contain more than 15,000 books! Courts of law applied the teachings of the Koran to everyday life. Islam was becoming well established, but native West Africans still practiced their personal religions.

Mansa Musa, who ruled for 25 years between 1312 and 1337 C.E., was Mali's most famous king. He was Muslim and a relative of Sundiata. Mansa Musa doubled the size of the Kingdom of Mali and tripled the amount of trade. His advisers regulated fishing on the Niger River and travel through the forests, as well as increased profits from agriculture, tariffs, and tributes.

Mansa Musa is remembered for his pilgrimage, or hajj, to the city of Mecca in present-day Saudi Arabia in 1325 C.E. He brought back new ideas, teachers, writers, scientists, and builders from Egypt. Large mosques, state courts of law, and famous schools were built in Timbuktu, Djenne, and Gao.

The king's overspending nearly brought Mali to an end. Mansa Musa died in 1337 C.E., and his son became king. He was not strong like his father, and individual kingdoms became self-governing again. Over the next 200 years, the empire grew smaller and smaller until only the city of Niani remained. The Kingdom of Mali had ended.

The Kingdom of Songhay had its beginnings as early as 800 C.E. when the Songhay clan built their capital city in Gao. The city was located in fertile grasslands in the heart of the Sahara Desert trade routes. These important trade routes connected North Africa and Arabia to the forest regions of the south.

The Songhay enjoyed a high standard of living. The Niger River was good for fishing and supplied water for farming. Songhay trade routes between the regions up and down the river supplied all that the people needed.
The Songhay people were divided into very distinct classes. Nobility included members of the ruling family and merchants. Next were the freemen and craftsmen, and below them were the peasants and slaves. Peasants and slaves, captured in wars, were poor, lived in the countryside, and worked on the royal estates.

Trade with the Arabs brought the teachings of Islam to the region. Around 1009 C.E. King Kossoi was the first Songhay ruler to accept Islam. He recognized that the religion of the Muslim merchants would be good for trade, and increased trade would make him more powerful. Islam helped to unite the people, and Islamic traditions and beliefs influenced governmental decisions. King Kossoi adopted other useful ideas such as the shaduf, a hoist for irrigation used on the Nile River, the use of animal waste for fertilizer on crops, and the milking of cattle.

As the Kingdom of Mali was growing weaker, Gao grew stronger. The city had been invaded by Mansa Musa in 1325 C.E. After Mansa Musa died in 1346 C.E., a Songhay prince returned home to free his people. In 1400 C.E., the Songhay raided Niani, the Mali capital.

King Sonni Ali accepted Islam and even took a Muslim name. However, he did not forget his native ways and refused to give absolute loyalty to Islam. Timbuktu and Djenné were important centers of learning and trade during the Kingdom of Mali. People from as far away as India even came to Timbuktu to study! As king, Sonni Ali seized the cities and killed Muslim scholars who did not like his native religion. He captured Djenné even though it took him seven years, seven months, and seven days.

King Sonni Ali was determined to build an empire that was peaceful and stable. He needed a system for bringing the different clans and kinships together. He placed trusted governors in the provinces and used his army to maintain law and order. Sonni also allowed local leaders to stay in power in the countries he conquered and collected tributes from them.

King Sonni Ali came to power in 1463 C.E. and is credited with founding the Kingdom of Songhay. Sonni Ali was courageous, intelligent, and insisted that his rules be obeyed. He knew the importance of the Niger River as a means of transportation, but also organized the boatmen of the Niger River to form a professional navy. With a strong army and navy, Sonni Ali built the largest empire in Africa, making the Kingdom of Songhay the most powerful state in West Africa. His kingdom included all the lands occupied by the Soninke of Ghana and the Mandinka in Mali and extended further east and north.

In 1493 C.E. Mohammed Askia, who had once been Sonni Ali's general, became king. Mohammed completely embraced Islam for himself and in all that he did as a ruler. He understood that the wealth of his kingdom depended on the activities of the Muslim traders. Rural areas may have kept their own beliefs, but the daily work of the kingdom was based on Islamic traditions and beliefs.

King Mohammed Askia appointed Islamic judges who made decisions based on Muslim law. Askia made laws against cheating in business, which were enforced by his royal officers. Muslim laws gave every member of each clan equal rights. Instead of positions being passed from father to son, now anyone could advance in government or status based on his own work.

**GREAT WARRIOR**

King Sonni Ali was known as a great warrior who was thought to have magical powers and is remembered by historians as “always the conqueror, never the conquered.” He was thought to have magic charms called korte, which made his soldiers and horses invisible and gave them the power to fly! Sonni himself was thought to be able to change into a vulture.

**TRADITIONS AND BELIEFS OF ISLAM**

Muslims pray five times each day and fast during the month of Ramadan. They are required to give offerings, which means they stay in a section of the house away from strangers and cover their heads and faces if they leave the home.
WHAT DID WEST AFRICANS EAT?

West Africans grew and ate yams, plantains, and other vegetables and fruits like pumpkins and watermelons. Common foods of their diet included grains such as millet, rice, sorghum, and monkey bread. Occasionally they ate meat from the large number of animals that roamed their land such as giraffes, lions, elephants, crocodiles, and hippopotamuses. Fish were taken from the Niger River. Many varieties of birds, nesting along the riverbanks, provided meat and eggs.

Gardeners inspecting a stalk of sorghum

The merchants, traders, and nobles who lived in the cities had more variety in their diet. Their tables were often set with beef, lamb, and chicken. They served their guests green peppers stuffed with rice, milk, fruit, and meat.

Salt was an extremely important part of the diet for West Africans since it helped them retain body moisture. Salt was also needed to preserve foods and add flavor to meals.

A woman and child at a local market in Ghana

MONKEY BREAD

African baobab trees grow very large and look like they have roots for branches. Their thick trunks provide homes for many animals. The West Africans collect rainwater from the trunks and use the leaves to make sauces for food or to heal wounds. The gourd-shaped pods of the tree have seeds that can be eaten or made into a drink. This pulp is called monkey bread since monkeys eat it too! Empty pods are used for cups and bowls.

WHAT DID WEST AFRICANS WEAR?

West Africans made their clothing by weaving plant fibers from cotton that they grew. The skins of animals also provided covering. Clothing was simple, loose, and light because of the heat. Many wore cloths over their faces for protection against dust storms.

Both men and women wrapped pieces of cotton cloth around their bodies. The women fashioned slings with their clothing in order to carry their babies. This kept their hands free for making pottery or working in the fields. Women also twisted and wrapped colorful pieces of cloth into turbans for their heads.

Children's clothing was cloth wrapped around the waist. People either went barefoot or wore simple sandals.

A woman in traditional dress (above) and young women in decorative dress (below)

Clothing indicated social status, and in the cities like Timbuktu the women dressed more luxuriously. They were fond of jewels and decorated their hair with bands of gold. Elaborate headdresses and skirts of feathers were made for special ceremonies. Kings were the only people with seven clothing, and their colorful garments were made with real gold threads!
TRADE AND COMMERCE

At first one kind of item was traded for another, but traders began to use cowrie shells as a form of money. Because salt was so valuable, it was traded pound for pound for gold. Gold dust was used to pay for goods, and eventually gold dinars made from the gold taken to Europe and Arabia replaced cowrie shells.

SECRET MINES

In order to keep the location of the gold mines secret, a separate meeting place was used in trading. Traders placed their goods on the ground, beat a drum, and then left the area. After hearing the drum, miners brought their gold, beat the drum to signal the trade, and left. The traders came back, and if there was enough gold dust there, they took it and left. If they wanted more, they beat the drum again. The miners came back and left more gold, or decided against the trade and left.

ART AND ARCHITECTURE

West Africans felt that being creative was a gift from the gods. Weavers of cloth and blacksmiths were both honored and feared. Blacksmiths were believed to have a magical skill that was passed from fathers to their sons. How else could they take a stone containing iron and apply fire and air to make tools and weapons? West Africans believed spiders were sent by the gods to teach people the magic of weaving.

Women wove fabric from cotton and made clothing, sandals, pottery, and jewelry. Men made bows, arrows, spears, hoes, axes, and other tools. Both worked to craft baskets, pots, and utensils. Pottery was decorated with geometric pictures in the shapes of animals and other symbols to show daily life and religious beliefs.
Musical instruments made of simple materials were created for ceremonies, dance, and storytelling. West Africans hollowed out gourds for an early instrument called a balaphon. They made drums from wood covered with animal skins. Even a small type of handheld piano was made by attaching metal or wooden strips to a sounding board.

Griots were responsible for any record of the past until Muslim traders and Islam brought scholars and writing. Most written records by traders show the effect of Islam on Africa in the Koran. The well-known story of Sundiata Keita, the lion king, which was passed down by griots, was finally recorded on the written page.

**THE LION KING**

The Epic of Sundiata tells the story of a small boy who overcome his health problems and enemies to become a great and powerful king. Prince Sundiata was born very sick and for years was unable to walk or even stand. Sundiata's half brother took over the throne after their father's death and forced Sundiata to leave the country. While away, Sundiata learned to walk and became a skilled warrior. He formed a large army and overthrew his cruel brother to become the king of Mali.

**BELIEFS AND GODS**

Religion shaped the early West African kingdoms. The different clans worshiped many gods, goddesses, and objects such as trees, rocks, and animals. Staying in harmony with nature and the gods was necessary to have peace, good health, and wealth. West Africans believed that natural events and animals gave them signs that allowed them to see into the future.

Ancestors played a very important part in the religion and daily lives of West Africans. It was thought that ancestors stood between gods and the living and helped them speak with each other. A very strong tradition of family meant that West Africans were never alone and were always surrounded by relatives.

The king determined the religion of his kingdom, and West Africans believed he was a god. The king did not walk directly on the ground because it was thought the king's feet would burn the earth! People were not even allowed to see their king eat.

West Africans buried their kings in a special forest where only priests could go. A huge wooden dome was built over the grave, and the king's body was carried on a covered bed and placed inside the dome. Clothing, weapons, possessions, vessels for eating and drinking, and even those who served him his food were left in the house for the king's use in the afterlife. Then the door was closed, and the dome was covered with mats and earth until it became a large burial mound.
GLOSSARY

Allah - The one god of Islam.
Balaphon - A musical instrument that uses dried gourds to increase the volume.
Berber - A member of a light-skinned, Muslim group of people from northern Africa.
Caftan - A full-length tunic or robe for men, usually made of rich fabric.
Caravan - Group of camels and traders.
C.E. - A time period beginning with the year of Christ’s birth that is also known as Common Era or Christian Era.
Clan - A group of people with a common ancestor.
Cowrie - Type of shell sometimes used as money by ancient West Africans.
Dinar - A gold coin.
Discus - A weighted disk used in track and field games by an athlete who spins with arms out to throw the disk from the flat of his or her hand.
Empire - A group of countries under one ruler.
Epic - A long story or poem about the adventures and battles of a king, god, or hero.
Faneau - A piece of cloth tied at the waist to form a skirt.
Fula - Hat (symbol) of office.
Geometric - Decorative use of simple lines and shapes, especially on pottery.
Griot - A West African storyteller who passes on the history of a people through epics.
Haji - The pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, that is required at least once in a Muslim’s lifetime.
Islam - A religion that teaches that Allah is the one God.
Javelin - A spear thrown as a weapon or in games.
Jihad - Holy war to convert others to Islam.
Kante - West African clan whose special jobs were to be blacksmiths.
Kingdom of Ghana - Ancient West African kingdom between 700-1076 C.E.
Kingdom of Mali - Ancient West African kingdom between 1235-1433 C.E.
Kingdom of Songhay - Ancient West African kingdom between 1464-1591 C.E.
Kola nut - Nut containing caffeine.
Koran - The sacred text of Islam, also spelled Qu’ran.
Korte - Magic charm.
Mandinka - People of West Africa who built the Mali Empire. They are also called Maninka, Mandingo, or Manding.
Manatee - A mammal of tropical waters with a flat, rounded tail; sometimes called a sea cow.
Mecca - The birthplace of Muhammad and holy city of Islam. Muslims believe they should travel to Mecca at least once in their lifetimes.
Minaret - Slender towers with balconies.
Monkey Bread - Gourd-shaped fruit of the baobab tree. The pulp is eaten by monkeys and humans.
Moors - A mixture of people, mostly Arabs and Berbers, who lived in northern Africa.
West African religion was celebrated with song, dance, and prayers to the gods. One of the sacred times for ceremonies was autumn, when West Africans sacrificed animals in hopes for wealth in the coming year. Also, the birth of babies, the time when boys reached manhood, and marriages were observed. For these celebrations, wonderful masks and headdresses were carved of wood, hammered of iron, and sometimes made of a combination of materials. These masks and headdresses were believed to be direct connections to the spirit world. The more powerful they looked, the more effective they were believed to be.

Between 600 and 700 C.E., Arab ways of life spread throughout the West African Kingdoms. Muslims hoped the people would give up all their gods and accept one god, Allah. Many of the kings practiced both religions to keep the peace, but West Africans outside of the cities continued their traditional beliefs.

Mosque - A Muslim building of worship.
Muslim - A person whose religion is Islam.
Nomads - People who have no fixed place to live and move from place to place within an area when the season changes or in search of food.
Oasis - Fertile ground of land in the desert where plants grow and travelers can refill their water supplies.
Pilgrimage - A trip to a holy place for a religious reason. This is called a hajj in Islam.
Plantain - A green fruit resembling a banana, eaten cooked as a staple food in many tropical countries.
Province - A division of a country controlled by an administrator.
Purdah - The traditional Muslim practice of keeping women fully covered with clothing and apart from the rest of society.
Ramadan - An annual Islamic fasting period.
Sahara - Largest desert in the world, covering nearly all of northern Africa. Total area of 3,320,000 sq miles (8,600,000 sq km).
Sahel - Region lying between the Sahara Desert and the forest lands to the south.
Shaduf - A water-raising device used in ancient Egypt.
Soninke - West African people who are known for building the Kingdom of Ghana.
Sorghum - Edible grain or cereal.
Tariff - A tax charged on goods that are brought into or carried out of a country.
Tribute - A payment made by a group of people to their ruler.
Turban - A traditional Muslim headdress consisting of a long scarf wrapped around the head.
ENDURING LEGACY

The monument of Great Zimbabwe is the most famous stone building in southern Africa. Located over 150 miles from Harare, it stands 1,100 km above sea level on the Harare Plateau in the Shashe-Limpopo basin. It is thought to have been built over a long period, beginning in 1200 and ending in 1450.

WHO WERE THEY?

Not everyone agrees who the rulers of Great Zimbabwe were; but there is evidence that they were the Karanga, a branch of the Shona-speaking people. The pottery the Karanga make is very similar to that found in Great Zimbabwe.

There is also a theory that the people of Great Zimbabwe may be descended from a community which lived on the site of Leopards Kopje, less than a hundred miles away from Great Zimbabwe, near present day Bulawayo. The remains of a prosperous iron age society, dependent for its wealth on cattle, have been discovered there.

SCOPE

In terms of political power and cultural influence, the archaeological evidence indicates Great Zimbabwe covered a huge area between the Limpopo River and the Zambezi River, spilling out into Mozambique and Botswana, as well as the Transvaal area of northern South Africa.

BUILDING

The Great Zimbabwe monument is built out of granite which is the parent rock of the region - i.e. it predominates locally. The building method used was dry-stone walling, demanding a high level of masonry expertise. Some of the site is built round natural rock formations. The actual structure comprises a huge enclosing wall some 20 metres high.

Inside there are concentric passageways, along with a number of enclosures. One of these is thought to be a royal enclosure. Large quantities of gold and ceremonial battle axes, along with other objects have been found there.

There is also what is thought to be a gold workshop, and a shrine which is still regarded as sacred today.

WEALTH

The wealth of Great Zimbabwe lay in cattle production and gold. There are a number of mines to the west of Great Zimbabwe, about 40 kilometres away. One theory is that the rulers of Great Zimbabwe did not have direct control over the gold mines, but rather managed the trade in it, buying up huge quantities in exchange for cattle.

The evidence suggests that Great Zimbabwe was at the centre of an international commercial system, which on the continent of Africa, encompassed settlements on the East African Coast such as Kilwa, Malindi and Mogadishu. But this trade network also extended to towns in the Gulf, in western parts of India, and even went as far as China.

DECLINE

There are several theories about the decline of Great Zimbabwe. One is environmental: that a combination of overgrazing and drought caused the soil on the Zimbabwe Plateau to become exhausted. It is estimated that between 5,000 to 30,000 people lived on and around the site. A decline in land productivity would easily have led to famine.

The other explanation is that the people of Great Zimbabwe had to move in order to maximise their exploitation of the gold trade network. By 1500 the site of Great Zimbabwe was abandoned. Its people had moved in two directions: North to establish the Mutapa state and South to establish the Torwa state.

Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/africa/features/storyofafrica/10chapter1.shtml