

dynamism and contemporary complexity, essential for understanding subsequent chapters. We leave it to instructors to adapt the book to their syllabus—for example, moving from geography and history to livelihoods and urbanization, politics and development, religion and health, or the arts. Chapter 15, "Print and Electronic Resources," provides suggestions for further research to help keep abreast of continuing developments and new trends in Africa.

From
James Delehanty, "Africa A Global
Frame" In Maria Grosz-Ngate, John
H. Hanson, and Patrick O'Meara, eds.
Africa 4meel, 7-31 (Bloomington,
Indiana University Press, 2014).

1 Africa

A Geographic Frame

James Delehanty

Africa is a continent, the second-largest after Asia. It contains fifty-four countries, several of them vast. Each of Africa's biggest countries—Algeria, Congo, and Sudan—is about three times the size of Texas, four times that of France. Africa could hold 14 Greenlands, 20 Alaskas, 71 Californias, or 125 Britains. Newcomers to the study of Africa often are surprised by the simple matter of the continent's great size. No wonder so much else about Africa is vague to outsiders.

This chapter introduces Africa from the perspective of geography, an integrative discipline rooted in the ancient need to describe the qualities of places near or distant. The chapter begins by examining how the world's understanding of Africa has developed over time. Throughout history, outsiders have held a greater number of erroneous geographic ideas about Africa than true ones. The misunderstandings generated by these false ideas have been unhelpful and occasionally disastrous. After this survey of geographic ideas, the chapter settles into a general preference for what is true, probing, in turn, Africa's physical landscapes, its climates, its bioregions, and the way that Africans over time have used and shaped their environments. A final section outlines the difficulties Africa has confronted and the betterment Africans anticipate as they integrate ever more fully and fairly with emerging global systems.

Knowledge of geography is a frame for deeper inquiry in all fields because the qualities of place shape every human endeavor. Anyone striving to understand the challenges and potentialities that citizens of African countries have to work with in their struggle to obtain for themselves and their families the security and prosperity that is their birthright would do well to reflect regularly on Africa's geography. A map, especially one's own emerging mental map of Africa, is an excellent organizing tool. It structures information according to the fundamentally interesting question "Where?" It is a solid place to start any journey, including one's personal journey toward a more nuanced understanding of Africa.



Map 1.1. The Size of Africa.

THE IDEA OF AFRICA

Places are ideas. Consider, for example, that most significant of places, home. Every home is a physical entity—it exists concretely—but the meaning of home, its reality, is all tied up in the experiences and emotions of the people who live in that place or otherwise know it. Or consider Pittsburgh. Pittsburgh is a particular collection of buildings, roadways, rivers, people, and a great deal else occupying a defined portion of western Pennsylvania, but it also is an idea. More correctly, it is a set of ideas, because each of us has a different sense of Pittsburgh based on our views of cities in general and whatever memories and associations, accurate and false, Pittsburgh as place or word conjures in our minds when we encounter it. So too Africa. Though without doubt a continent, Africa, like all continents, also is a complex of ideas that have flowed through the human imagination, accurately and fancifully, generously and carelessly, over a great span of time, giving rise to many meanings and actions, some grounded in truth and noble, others based in error and unfortunate.

If Africa is a continent but also a product of the human imagination, the first question that must be asked is when it originated. Physical Africa, the continental landmass, is easy to date. Any basic geology text will describe how Africa took shape after the breakup and drifting apart of the pieces of the supercontinent Pangaea about

180 million years ago. As for the idea of Africa, it is somewhat more recent. The idea of Africa came into being over the last two thousand years, and it did so largely in Europe. The fact that the idea of Africa developed mostly in Europe goes a long way toward explaining how Africa is conceived worldwide, even now.

This claim—that Europeans were largely responsible for the idea of Africa—is easy to substantiate and does not discredit Africa and its people. Europeans invented America too, just as Chinese invented Taiwan and Arabs the Maghreb. All through world history, at scales ranging from the continent to the community, outsiders have given identities to places. A common way this happens is by first naming. There were no Native Americans, only hundreds of distinct peoples such as the Ojibwa of the Great Lakes and the Navajo of the western desert, until Europeans crossed the Atlantic five hundred years ago and announced the existence of a continent to be called America. Another way outsiders give identity to place is by inspiring or provoking, sometimes by threat or aggression, unity and regional loyalty where none existed before. There was no Germany until Bismarck, around 1870, convinced the German-speaking principalities of central Europe that they were one and that joining Prussia to form an entity called Germany would be in the interest of all.

Even though few early Africans knew the bounds of the continent or could imagine Africa as a whole (the same can be said of early people on all of the continents), there were exceptions. One interesting case comes down to us from the Greek historian Herodotus, who in the fifth century BCE (Before the Common Era) wrote a brief but tantalizing report of a sea journey by Phoenicians, organized by King Necho II of Egypt, around the landmass we call Africa (which Herodotus called Libya), undertaken about two hundred years before Herodotus's time. While



Map 1.2. The World According to Herodotus (ca. 450 BCE).

An African Circumnavigation of Africa 2,700 Years Ago

Here is the entirety of Herodotus's account of an African circumnavigation reported to have occurred two hundred years before his time. The charming anecdote at the end, noting the strange position of the sun, inspires confidence in the story's factuality because, unknown to Herodotus, sailors heading west at the latitude of southernmost "Libya" would see the sun on the starboard (right) side of the ship (i.e., in the northern sky) all day long, just as in Europe and most of North America the sun's daily passage from east to west occurs entirely in the southern sky.

Libya is washed on all sides by the sea except where it joins Asia, as was first demonstrated, so far as our knowledge goes, by the Egyptian king Necho, who, after calling off the construction of the canal between the Nile and the Arabian gulf, sent out a fleet manned by a Phoenician crew with orders to sail west about and return to Egypt and the Mediterranean by way of the Straits of Gibraltar. The Phoenicians sailed from the Arabian gulf into the southern ocean, and every autumn put in at some convenient spot on the Libyan coast, sowed a patch of ground, and waited for next year's harvest. Then, having got in their grain, they put to sea again, and after two full years rounded the Pillars of Heracles in the course of the third, and returned to Egypt. These men made a statement which I do not myself believe, though others may, to the effect that as they sailed on a westerly course round the southern end of Libya, they had the sun on their right—to northward of them. This is how Libya was first discovered by sea.

—Herodotus, *The Histories* 4.42 (ca. 425 BCE)

Translated by Aubrey de Selincourt

no other evidence of this expedition survives, it is pleasant and plausible to believe that it occurred. If it did, then at least one small group of Africans, probably a few Phoenician adventurers from Egypt, learned of the entirety of the African landmass as long as twenty-seven hundred years ago. This knowledge appears to have died with them. It did not lead to any mapping or broad understanding within Africa of the continent's extent. Even Herodotus knew next to nothing about what those sailors saw; he only reported the legend of their trip.

European ideas about Africa began to take shape during the period of classical antiquity. The ancient Greeks and Romans had a great deal of solid knowledge about the nearer parts of Africa. After the Roman defeat of Carthage (in present-day Tunisia) during the Punic Wars of the second century BCE, the Roman Empire expanded to encompass much of the continent's northern reaches. The cultural and economic ties between Rome and its African provinces were strong. Northern Africa quickly became known as the granary of the empire. The word "Africa" dates from this era. It possibly comes from "Afer," which in the Phoenician language was the

name for the region around Carthage. According to this theory, Roman geographers, needing a word for the landmass to the south, borrowed "Afer," Latinized it, and broadened its application to the entire continent south of the Mediterranean (much as Herodotus had used "Libya" in the same way, for the same purpose, a few hundred years before).

Commerce has linked Africa with the rest of the world for the last two thousand years. Never was Africa entirely isolated from the main currents of global interaction and trade. Roman coins and artifacts from the second and third centuries of the Common Era (CE) have been unearthed in lands south of the Sahara, evidence that Africa's great desert was traversed occasionally in early days. Sailors and settlers from Borneo and Sumatra, in present-day Indonesia, traveled to Africa beginning about 350 BCE. Their descendants and language dominate Madagascar today, and the crops that these settlers carried from Southeast Asia, such as plantain, became dietary staples all across continental Africa. As early as the seventh century CE, Persian and Arab traders established outposts up and down Africa's Indian Ocean coast, drawing commerce from the interior, linking producers in eastern and central Africa through trade with the Middle East and the wider world. There are clear records by the fourteenth century of voyages by imperial Chinese trading vessels carrying silk, porcelain, and other goods from the ports of Asia to the East African coast. The Christian kingdom of Ethiopia exchanged embassies with the courts of Europe, including the Vatican, in the fifteenth century. And many Africans traveled great distances within the continent and beyond. A good example is Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta, commonly known as Ibn Battuta, a fourteenth-century Moroccan adventurer who voyaged all across the northern third of Africa and eventually as far as China and Southeast Asia, reporting his discoveries in Arabic manuscripts read throughout the Muslim world.

These contacts of non-Africans with Africa, and the rich descriptions of portions of Africa provided to the world by outsiders and African writers such as Ibn Battuta, were elements of a partial geography of Africa. Yet an accurate cartography—a map of the continent's position, size, and proportions—awaited the voyages of European seafarers during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and their transmittal of information to European mapmakers capable of accurately rendering Africa's outline. In other words, despite early knowledge of many parts of Africa in many lands, including Europe, China, and the Middle East, and of course among every African who ever lived, the definition of Africa as a whole, its description as a geographic totality, fell to Europeans. And this made all the difference. Europe was poised in 1500 to rise to global dominance. The accurate and inaccurate ideas that Europeans began attaching to their categorical creation, Africa, spread around the world with European power.

What of these ideas? What did Africa come to mean in the European imagination? Portrayals of Africa and Africans in the literature and art of Europe before 1500 or so, though hardly widespread, were largely benign. That is, until about five hundred

An African Description of the Nile in 1326

Ibn Battuta, a fourteenth-century Moroccan adventurer, is the most celebrated and widely read African traveler of all time. He wrote in Arabic, at great length, of his travels in Africa and all over the known world.

The Egyptian Nile surpasses all rivers of the earth in sweetness of taste, length of course, and utility. No other river in the world can show such a continuous series of towns and villages along its banks, or a basin so intensely cultivated. Its course is from South to North, contrary to all the other great rivers. One extraordinary thing about it is that it begins to rise in the extreme hot weather at the time when rivers generally diminish and dry up, and begins to subside just when rivers begin to increase and overflow. The river Indus resembles it in this feature. The Nile is one of the five great rivers of the world. . . . All these will be mentioned in their proper places, if God will. Some distance below Cairo the Nile divides into three streams, none of which can be crossed except by boat, winter or summer. The inhabitants of every township have canals led off the Nile; these are filled when the river is in flood and carry the water over the fields.

—From Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta,
Travels in Asia and Africa 1325–1354

Translated and edited by H. A. R. Gibb
(London: Broadway House, 1929)

years ago European intellectuals appear to have known little about Africans (only a few people from Africa would appear now and then in the cities of Europe), and less still about Africa as a continent, but when they did consider Africa and Africans it was with a rough sort of equality. This is not to say that Europeans harbored no fantastic ideas about Africa, but their fantasies were not very much different from those constructed about many unknown lands: rumors of dragons, giants, astonishing creatures, and strange physical and cultural variations of the human family populating regions that were unbearably hot and forbidding. These were ancient motifs, long ascribed in many cultures to unfamiliar places. But Africa in Renaissance Europe was not deemed particularly backward, primitive, or frightful. In paintings Africans usually were depicted as simply another shade of human being. They were sometimes a point of interest in a picture, but no malign attention was drawn to them. Physical exaggerations or contortions were not seen. Nor in European writing of this time do we see much overt anti-African racism, only the kinds of physical and cultural speculations that were applied to unfamiliar people from all unexplored or unknown areas.

Living standards in Europe and Africa five hundred years ago were little different. On both continents nearly everyone lived off the land, most in agriculture. Diet was unvaried. Hunger was common. Life span was short. Almost no one on either

continent was well educated. Why should Europeans have considered Africans, five hundred years ago, to be in any manner inferior? There was no material reason for Europeans to stigmatize Africa and Africans in particular at this time, and generally they did not.

This changed. Increasingly in written descriptions and paintings from Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Africans took on qualities that are familiar to us now. Africans came to be defined by Europeans as poor, uneducated, technologically unsophisticated, underdeveloped, and non-Christian.

Why did this happen? Why, about five hundred years ago, did Africa in the European mind go from being a somewhat mysterious but not fundamentally different assortment of peoples and cultures to being the anti-Europe, the antithesis of everything that made Europe great?

One reason was that standards of living, technology, education, and knowledge were rising in Europe, lifting many people (though far from all) above the levels of basic subsistence that had long been their lot. People living in vibrant economies often lose interest in the rest of the world except to the extent that it can supply what they desire. Certainly Europe's economic progress is part of the story. But the main reason for Europe's emerging negative view of Africa was the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which started in a major way in the 1500s and rose to its height over the next two hundred years.

This is not the place to dwell at length on the slave trade, but this much must be said: from the 1500s to the 1800s, European slave traders transported millions of Africans from the shores of the continent to work in European colonies in the New World. Slavery was an ancient and nearly universal human institution long before the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but the world had never seen anything like this, with so many millions of people pulled from their homeland in a sustained and organized fashion and sent to the far ends of the earth purely for the economic advantage of well-off Europeans. How could this commerce possibly be justified morally and psychologically? Europeans did so by convincing themselves that Africa was populated by people who did not warrant the concern one might have for others.

As the slave trade ratcheted up, the idea spread quickly around Europe that Africans were not part of our common humanity. Did everyone in Europe during the period of the slave trade think about or firmly believe these ideas? Certainly not. Africa and Africans were quite tangential to the lives of most Europeans. But to the extent that Europeans thought at all about Africa and Africans in early modern times, racist assumptions of African inferiority became the default. Much later, in the nineteenth century, these theories of racial inferiority were elaborated and developed into a pseudoscience, but the roots of anti-African racism are here, in the rise of the slave trade in early modern Europe and the need in Europe and eventually the Americas for a moral and psychological crutch to support it. The trade endured for more than three hundred years. Ideas of inferiority, once embedded, lasted longer than that.

A whole set of negative qualities began to be attributed to Africa and Africans to set them apart from Europeans. These qualities were oppositional: if we are white, they are black; if we are good, they are bad; if we are Christian, they must be immoral; if we are sophisticated, they must be primitive; if we are enterprising, they must be lazy; if we are cerebral, they must be physical; if we are moral, they must be licentious; if we are orderly, they must be chaotic; if we are a people capable of self-governance, they must need our help. We live with this legacy. About the realities of Africa—as opposed to the imagined qualities of Africa's people, land, economies, and political geography—the West knew little until the twentieth century.

What about African ideas of Africa? When did Africans discover and begin to form thoughts about the continent? This is not an absurd question. As noted already, the geographic category of "Africa" arose in Europe, and almost no one anywhere, including Africa, had any knowledge of the extent of the African land-mass until the fifteenth century. Thus there is a history of African ideas of Africa, just as there is a history of Western ones. It starts with the slave trade.

Throughout the slave trade period and continuing after it ended, a trans-Atlantic discourse linked intellectuals in Africa to communities of African descent in the Americas. In these communities—in North America, South America, and the Caribbean—a continental perspective on Africa developed early because slaves and their descendants needed a unitary sense of Africa, a conception of Africa as a whole, for their identity and their dignity. After all, people from many corners of Africa were enslaved but as the years passed most knowledge of a family's precise roots in Africa was lost. Adult captives who survived the trans-Atlantic journey certainly knew from where in Africa they had been taken, and sometimes this knowledge persisted through a few generations, passed down from parents to children, often as a scrap of information, perhaps just a word for some now unknown village or kingdom. But even these tidbits tended naturally to fade over time. Eventually most people in the New World whose forebears had been transported as slaves knew nothing whatsoever of the origins in Africa of their various ancestors. They knew not whether they were descended from Hausa, Wolof, Yoruba, or Ewe people (or from what mix of different African ethnicities), but they did know that their people had come from Africa. It was in this context of definitional necessity, largely in the Americas after the sixteenth century, that people first began to conceive of themselves as being of essentially African origin and to think of the totality of Africa as a place, their ancestral home.

This continental understanding spread around communities of African descent all over the Atlantic world, and soon (because the Atlantic was an information highway, not a barrier) it became part of the thinking of traders, scholars, political leaders, and other cosmopolitans in Africa itself. The idea of the African continent as a generalizable place, a place inhabited by black people sharing many common-

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titles (not least the racism and bondage imposed on them for centuries by Europeans), people united in their history with slaves and the descendants of slaves in the Americas, came to be called, in the nineteenth century, Pan-Africanism.

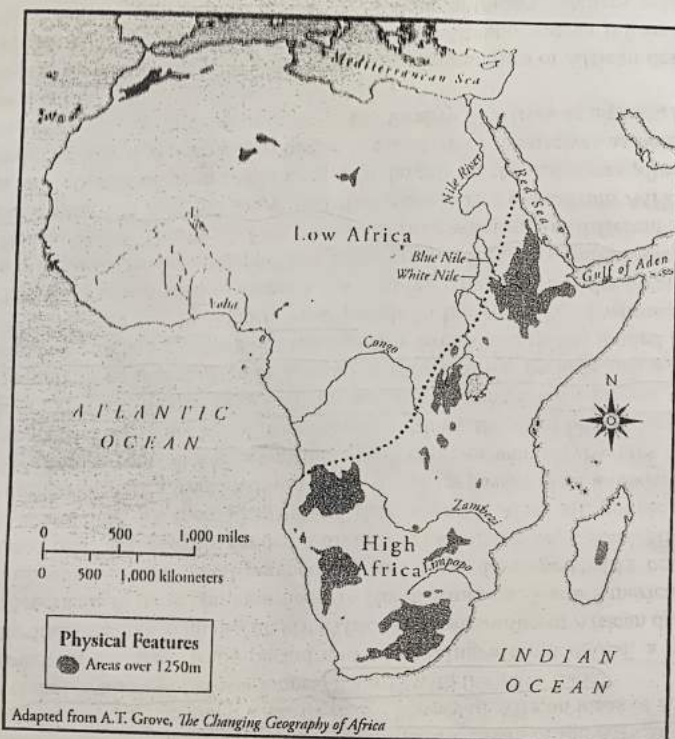
Pan-Africanism still has wide ideological currency today. It is the idea that there is an essential unity to all of Africa, a unity of race, a unity forged through the experience of racism, enslavement, and nineteenth- and twentieth-century European colonialism, a unity that binds all Africans and people of African descent around the world in a community of shared history, oppression, and liberation challenge. This discourse of Pan-Africanism shaped nineteenth-, twentieth-, and even twenty-first-century ideas within Africa about the relevance of the continent as a category of experience. Without pan-Africanism people in Africa might not have come so readily to identify themselves as, yes, Igbo, Kikuyu, or Hausa, and, yes, Nigerian, Kenyan, or Congolese, but also as African. All of this is to say that Africa may have been a European categorical creation, but people in Africa had a greater incentive than anyone else to take a continental view, and by the nineteenth century many Africans, especially the educated elite, did just this, largely in opposition to Europe.

So places are ideas, continents are inventions, and Africa is what people have imagined it to be. History shows again and again that what people think about a place, true or not, matters more to the actions they take than does any combination of uncontested facts. Yet factual knowledge, including accurate geographic information about a place, generally produces better results.

THE PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

About Africa's physical landscapes only a little needs to be said. While the continent presents many spectacular features and splendid views, it is not, on the whole, a land of sharp transitions. A driving trip of several days in most parts of Africa impresses the traveler as would a similar trip in west Texas or Saskatchewan: the scale of the land is immense, but the landscape variations are subtle.

The major exception to Africa's general landscape regularity is the mountainous east and south. Some geographers helpfully distinguish between "high Africa," extending from Ethiopia all the way south along Africa's eastern side to the Cape of Good Hope, and "low Africa," the vast rolling plain encompassing nearly all of the rest of the continent. Africa's highest peaks—Mt. Kilimanjaro and Mt. Kenya—are in high Africa. Patterns of human livelihood in the east and south always have been strongly influenced by the height of land and the productive volcanic soils found there. The mountainousness and ancient volcanism of the east are closely related to the other prominent landscape feature of this part of Africa: rift valleys. From the Red Sea through central Ethiopia, Kenya, and into Tanzania, Malawi, and Mozambique, great fissures in the earth form long, steep-sided north-south valleys, some partly filled by waters of great lakes, all resulting from the same tectonic processes that have, over eons, thrown up the adjacent highlands.



Map 1.3. High Africa, Low Africa, and the Major Rivers.

Even low Africa has some mountains, including the Atlas range of the far northwest, and Mt. Cameroon, one of Africa's highest peaks, only a short distance from the Atlantic Ocean, in the country that bears its name. In general, though, low Africa is flat to undulating. Here are most of Africa's immense rain forests, its expansive savannas, and its greatest desert.

African soils are varied, but in general their productivity suffers from the continent's tropical position and from the absence of vast alluvial plains such as those of India, Bangladesh, and China. On other continents, where rivers rise in nutrient-rich uplands such as the Andes, the Himalayas, or the Tibetan Plateau and then cross gently sloping land to the sea, they deposit their sediments on ever-expanding alluvial plains, building up soils of great depth and fertility. With partial exceptions in Egypt, Nigeria, and Mozambique, Africa has none of this. Its great rivers—the Nile, the Volta, the Niger, the Congo, the Limpopo, and the Zambezi—rise in nutrient-

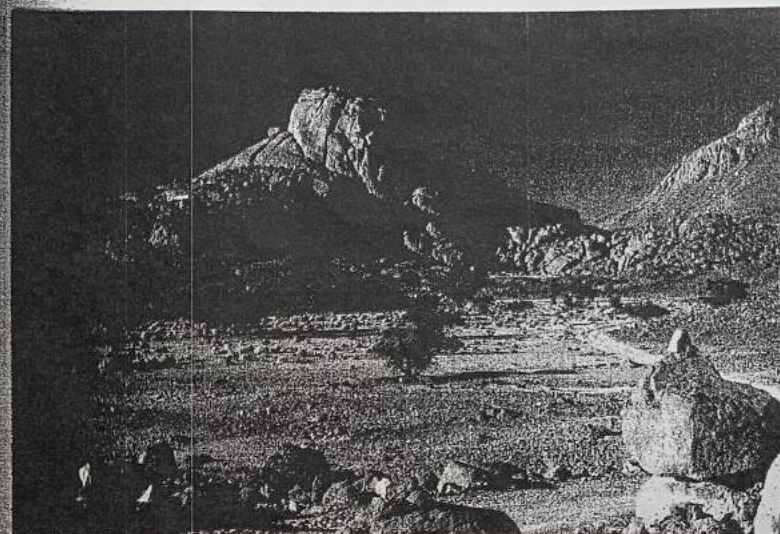


Figure 1.1. Near the Ahaggar mountains of southern Algeria.

Jeanne Tabachnick.

poor zones and thus carry relatively unproductive sediment, or flow so circuitously to the sea that much of what they do carry is deposited in dry inland regions unsuited to agriculture, or fall so steeply to the sea from the African plateau that their riches are washed to the depths (see map 1.3). As a result, Africa lacks great expanses of deep, river-deposited soils that give advantages to other lands, such as eastern China, Bangladesh, and the Indus Valley of India and Pakistan.

Fertile deltas aside, tropical regions generally contain poor soils. Africa, the most tropical of continents, bears a particular burden in this regard. In Africa's humid tropics, where it is hot year-round and moisture is abundant, thriving soil microorganisms quickly break down organic matter such as dying plants and fallen leaves and branches. Nutrients liberated by this rapid decomposition cycle without delay from the ground up through the vascular systems of trees and other long-lived plants, and there they stay—as leaves, bark, and wood—until released again to the ground by death. In other words, nutrients in humid tropical systems are plentiful but fixed in the forest canopy, not in the soil, where most agricultural crops can use them. The challenge to farmers in these systems is to get nutrients from the canopy into the earth, where their crops can benefit from them.

Large parts of Africa are tropical but seasonally dry, and here the soil challenge is different. Soil development in the drier tropics is hampered by a lack of organic

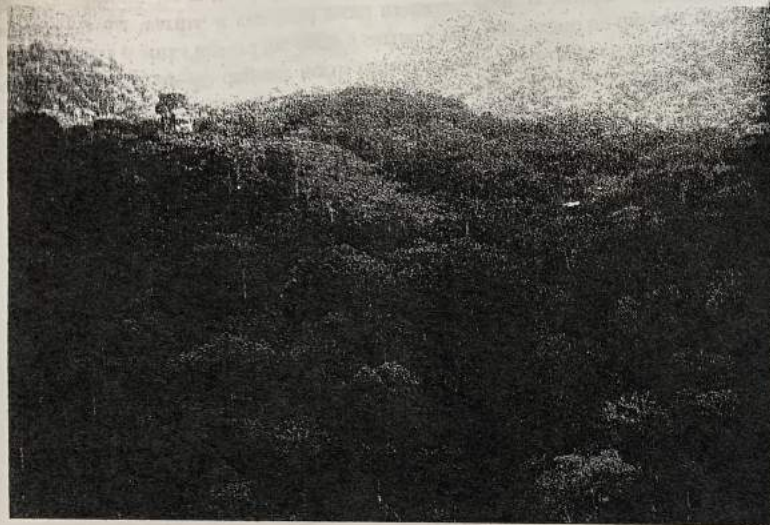


Figure 1.2. Rainforest near Mounana, Gabon.

matter (because year-round high heat and moisture deficits during a long dry season limit plant growth) and by the baking and chemical hardening of ground that occur in the seasonal absence of rain under relentless sun.

Africa does have zones of excellent soils, such as the slopes of ancient volcanoes near the rift valleys of East Africa, and nowhere is the soil situation impossible. Africans have made their living from agriculture for a very long time, longer than people have done in parts of Europe. Soil quality is a particular challenge to African food producers, but the continent's soils are by no means an insurmountable obstacle to food security and prosperity. Africa's physical endowment is more than sufficient for all Africans to thrive.

CLIMATE AND BIOGEOGRAPHY

Africa is incomprehensible without a basic understanding of climate and the patterns of life that variability in temperature and rainfall yield. Temperature is straightforward. The equator bisects Africa, and equatorial regions receive relatively direct as opposed to relatively indirect solar radiation during most of the year; thus most of Africa experiences high year-round heat.

There are exceptions to this general rule. In Africa north of the Sahara, the narrow strip of land bordering the Mediterranean Sea, temperatures are similar to those in

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Mediterranean Europe: high heat during much of the year but cooler weather from November until March. Likewise, much of southernmost Africa—the Republic of South Africa and adjacent countries—experiences a distinct cool season, but with opposite polarity: here it is cool from June until September. Some snow occurs at high elevations every year in Africa's far south, just as it does in the Atlas Mountains of the north.

A third exception to the general rule of high year-round heat is in highland areas anywhere. In high Africa—from Ethiopia through Kenya and Tanzania all the way south to the Cape—altitudes greater than 1,500 meters (5,000 ft.) above sea level are common. At this elevation, even in the tropics, air temperature is likely to be cool some of the time. The high slopes of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest mountain, are glaciated, as are those of Mt. Kenya (though global warming is rapidly diminishing these and all other tropical glaciers). Average temperatures on these peaks are close to freezing. People do not live on the heights of Africa's great mountains, but they do live in Nairobi, 1,600 meters (5,300 ft.) above sea level. In Nairobi, as in many parts of high Africa, daytime temperatures during some months hover around 20°C (68°F), far from hot.

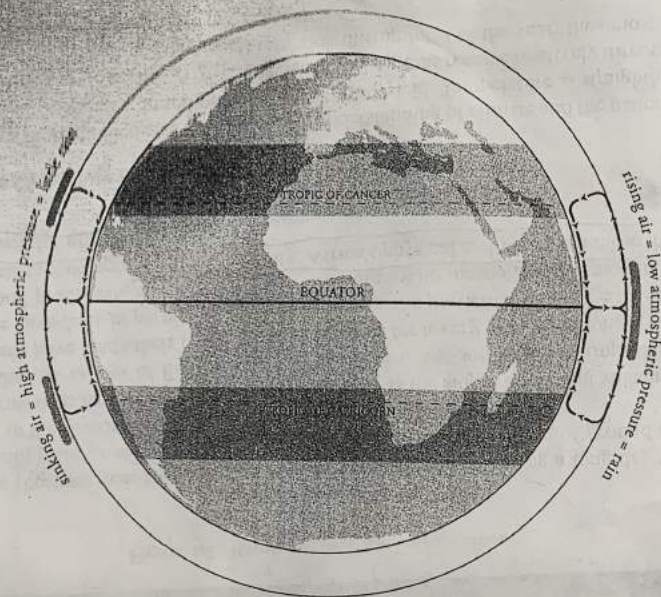
A final exception is in desert regions. Here there are great diurnal fluctuations in temperature: high heat during the day but great cooling at night. Nighttime temperatures in Africa's deserts frequently drop to 10°C (50°F) or lower.

Precipitation in Africa is much more varied than temperature. It is also more complicated and more important to understanding the realities of African life. Variability of rainfall across territory and over the course of every calendar year largely explains patterns of plant and animal types and abundance and the ecological situations that have conditioned the diversity of Africa's human cultural forms.

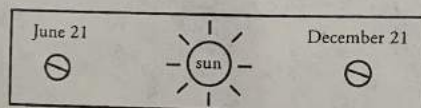
The processes responsible for rainfall patterns in Africa are complex in detail but amenable to understanding in a three-part model:

1. Equatorial low pressure Along the equator, where the daytime sun is directly overhead (or nearly so), solar radiation passes through a minimum of filtering atmosphere. Intense radiation striking the earth's surface generates a great deal of heat. The highest heat of all is along the equatorial belts of continents because the sun heats absorptive land more readily than reflective seas. Because hot air rises, all across equatorial Africa air warming near the earth's surface rises into the atmosphere. To take its place, air masses rush toward the equator from the north and south, including moist air masses from over the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. These rushing air masses also heat up and rise, becoming part of an equatorial low pressure vortex. This hot, moist air rising along the equator cools as it rises. As air cools, its capacity to hold moisture declines, and so it rains. For these reasons, equatorial Africa, except for portions of the mountainous east, is rainy nearly year-round.

2. Subtropical high pressure. Air rising at the equator and cooling in the atmosphere must flow somewhere. It does flow—at high elevation—toward the north



This diagram depicts how atmospheric circulation would influence rainfall levels in different parts of Africa if the sun were always overhead at the equator. But in fact, because the earth is tilted in its angle toward the sun (see below), the belts depicted here—along the equator and near the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn—shift north and south with the seasons.



Map 1.4. Generalized Atmospheric Circulation in the Tropics:
The Conditions That Bring Rain.

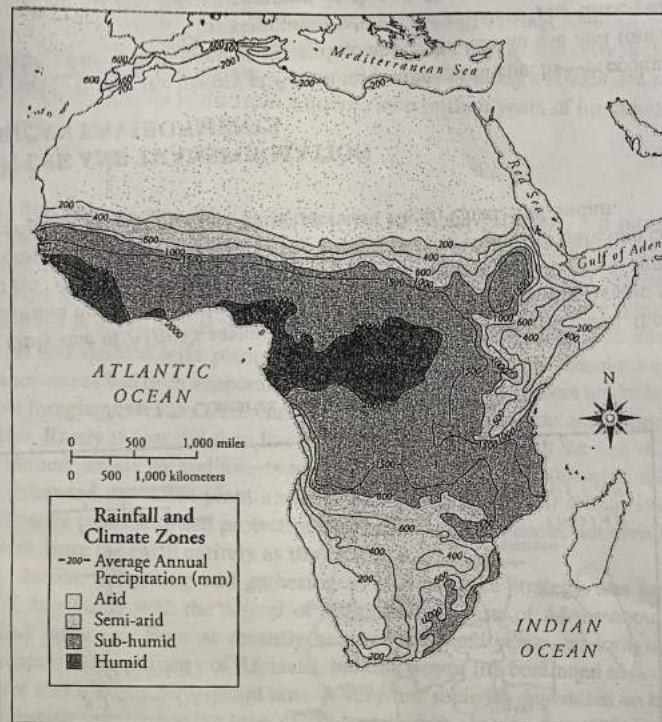
and south. This poleward-streaming air in the upper atmosphere begins to sink back toward earth at 20–40 degrees north latitude and 20–40 degrees south latitude (map 1.4). As it sinks toward the earth's surface, which is heated by the sun, this air warms. As air warms, it can hold more moisture. Rain is highly unlikely under these conditions. So in two belts influenced by this sinking air (in other words, by subtropical high pressure)—north of about 20° north latitude and south of about 20° south latitude—Africa is dry.

3. *Seasonality.* If parts 1 and 2 provided a fully accurate account, they would describe a straightforward pattern of rainfall in Africa: heavy rains in an equatorial band about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) wide, declining rain toward the north and south, and eventually, at roughly 20°–30° north and south latitude, no rain at all. However, parts 1 and 2 neglect a major complication: that the earth revolves around the sun at an angle. Only in March and September is the sun directly overhead at the equator. On June 21 it is overhead at the Tropic of Cancer and on December 21 at the Tropic of Capricorn (see the bottom of map 1.4). Thus, the low pressure belt described in part 1 as “equatorial” in fact shifts north of the equator in summer and south in winter. The two belts of subtropical high pressure shift with it. Consequently, much of Africa experiences extreme rainfall seasonality: high rainfall when the belt of low pressure centered on the equator moves seasonally in, and almost no chance of rain when it shifts out and is replaced by high pressure. The movement north and south from equatorial Africa of this rain-bearing belt of low pressure (sometimes called the “inter-tropical convergence zone,” or ITCZ) is somewhat variable from year to year but predictable in broad outline. It moves northward with the sun in the months around June and southward with the sun in the months around December. The rainy season is longest, and annual rainfall totals are highest, in areas that are under its influence for most of the year. The rainy season is shortest, and rainfall totals lowest, in areas it reaches only briefly.

Map 1.5 shows average annual rainfall totals in Africa. Though there are a few anomalous regions (notably in the east, where other processes serve as complicating factors), the model outlined above explains the map's patterns well. Where low pressure conditions prevail for most of the year, rainfall totals are high. Where the ITCZ reaches only briefly, totals are low. Northern Nigeria, for instance, receives only about 600 mm (24 in.) of rain per year because low pressure conditions bringing rain last only from about May through September. During the rest of the year, high pressure prevails and there is rarely a cloud in the sky.

Also delineated on map 1.5 are basic climate zones. In tropical Africa (which is the entire continent except the far north and far south) there are four important zones:

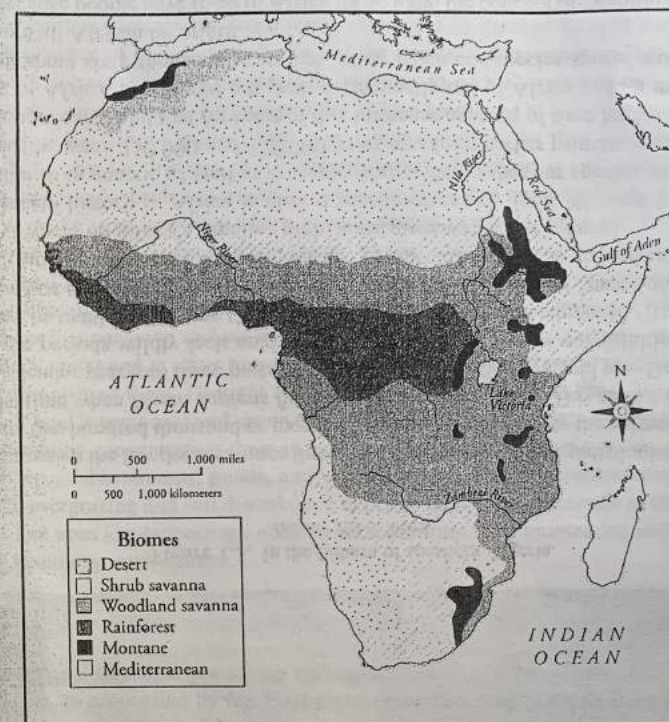
- *Humid tropical Africa.* Rain occurs nearly year-round. If there is a dry season, it lasts only a month or two. The average annual rainfall total is greater than 2,000 mm (roughly 80 in.).
- *Sub-humid tropical Africa.* The rainy season lasts six to ten months; 1,000–2,000 mm (40–80 in.) of rain falls in an average year.
- *Semi-arid tropical Africa.* There is a distinct rainy season, but it lasts less than six months, in some areas as few as two or three months. Average rainfall totals are between 200 and 1,000 mm (8–40 in.).
- *Arid tropical (or dry) Africa.* There is little to no rainy season. In the driest parts of the arid tropics, years may pass without appreciable rain. The annual average rainfall total is less than 200 mm (8 in.).



Map 1.5. Average Annual Rainfall and Climate Zones.

Map 1.6 is a map of Africa's principal biomes, or biological regions. The biomes are defined by the putative natural vegetation that would occur in the absence of agriculture and other human modifications (although, as we will see in the next section, on human use and transformation of the environment, this distinction is problematic). The close correspondence between rainfall shown in map 1.5 and vegetation shown in map 1.6 is unsurprising. Africa's humid tropical lands support rain forest. The arid tropics are desert. Between the extremes of rain forest and desert we see gradations of Africa's most characteristic biome, tropical savanna.

A savanna is a grassland studded with trees, but not all tropical savannas are alike. The savannas of sub-humid areas often are labeled "woodland savanna." Here the trees may grow quite large and are relatively closely spaced, though not so dense that they impede the growth of grasses underneath. The savannas of semi-arid Africa are often called "shrub savanna." In these zones the trees are generally

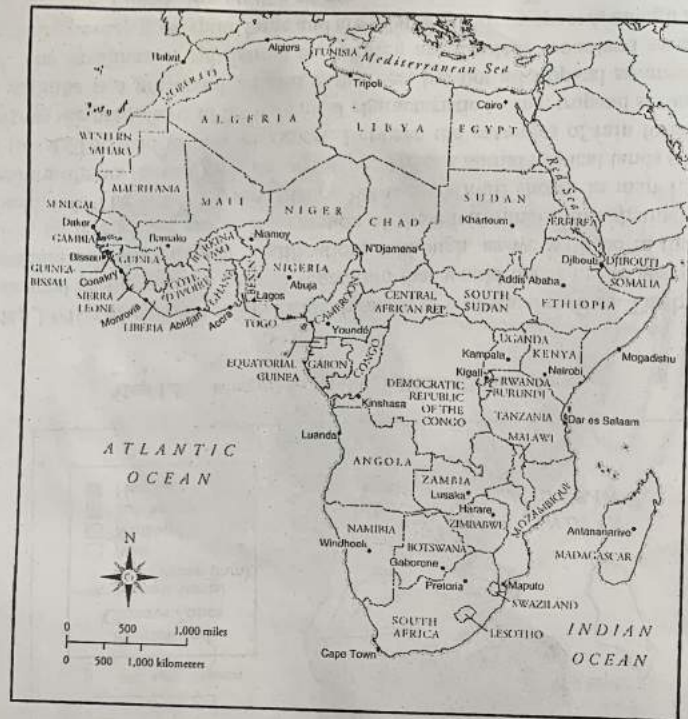


Map 1.6. Major Biomes.

smaller and more widely spaced; grasses predominate, though they typically die back during the long dry season.

As map 1.6 shows, savannas cover large parts of Africa. They encompass much of the continent's best agricultural land and many of its most populated areas. In a great many African societies, therefore, people have learned to calibrate food production calendars and myriad other aspects of cultural life to the rainfall seasonality so characteristic of tropical savanna regions—regular cycles of plenitude and parching—much as people in temperate regions such as Europe and North America adjust their production calendars and other aspects of their lives to the temperature seasonality of winter and summer.

Some of Africa's biomes have common English names. The central African rain forest is usually called just that, but by common convention we give formal names to deserts. The main deserts of Africa are the Sahara, the Kalahari, and the



Map 1.7. Countries of Africa and Selected Cities.

Namib. Only one of Africa's savanna belts has a formal name, the Sahel, the dry, shrub savanna just south of the Sahara. This name comes from the Arabic word for "margin" or "shore," in this case the southern margin of the Sahara. Countries that encompass large parts of this biome sometimes are called the Sahelian countries: Senegal, Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad, and Sudan.

HUMAN USE AND TRANSFORMATION OF AFRICAN ENVIRONMENTS

It is tempting to divide the history of Africa into three grand epochs—precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial—and to generalize about the human use and transformation of nature in each. This temptation should be resisted. The three-period view of African history, though common, is absurd. The colonial period refers to the years when most of Africa was occupied and controlled by several European powers, the 1880s until the 1970s, a span of ninety years. The postcolonial period



Figure 1.3. In the Sahara of southern Algeria.
Jeanne Tabachnick.

encompasses the few decades since then. And the first period, the precolonial period, covers two hundred thousand or more years stretching back into the primeval past, to the time when *Homo sapiens* first appeared on the planet. This is like dividing the calendar year into three parts, December 31, December 30, and pre-December 30; the periods wildly lack analytic equivalence and contort our thinking about Africa by tacitly suggesting that before colonialism not much happened. True, some of the first period could easily be labeled "prehistoric" instead of "precolonial," but relabeling does not solve the problem, and in any case there is no general agreement about where on Africa's timeline prehistoric gives way to precolonial.

Human history in Africa is almost incomprehensibly long. We now know for certain from genetic as well as archeological evidence that our species evolved in Africa between 150,000 and 250,000 years ago from earlier primate species that no longer exist, and that for most of this immense expanse of time humanity lived only in Africa. People did not push permanently out of Africa until a migration event about sixty thousand years ago, after which our species spread worldwide. We are all African by origin.

Because people have lived in Africa for so long, the concept of "natural environment" is a particular problem there. More than anywhere else, people and nature in Africa have co-evolved. Through millennia, through climate shifts that have shuffled the biomes, people have been adjusting to different African environments, molding

AFRICA

them, living, working, taking from the earth, burning, cutting, hunting, planting, nurturing, and destroying; all environments in Africa are natural only in the sense that people are a part of nature. The major biomes of today's Africa are real, but many of their qualities come from a quarter of a million years of human use.

Foraging

Our first impacts on nature in Africa were as hunter-gatherers. For most of human history the only economic activity was hunting and gathering, also known as foraging. It prevailed in all biomes, from deep forest to desert, and it persisted into the present century, though barely. Forager population densities were always low. People lived in small mobile bands, moving across the landscape to take advantage of game and desired wild plants where they were abundant, abandoning areas where resources had been temporarily depleted. Despite being sparse on the land, our African foraging ancestors were entirely capable of altering plant and animal communities. Rarely if ever did they live in benign equilibrium with the rest of nature. They burned grasslands and forests to drive game. They used poisons to take fish. They extirpated unwanted plant and animal species from their territories while intentionally promoting and protecting desirable ones. No people, not even hunter-gatherers, leave the earth entirely as they found it.

The decline of hunting and gathering as a subsistence strategy was long and gradual, beginning with the arrival of agriculture in parts of Africa about seven thousand years ago. Even as recently as three thousand years ago foraging may have supported the majority of Africans, but this way of life continued to decline to the point that it is inconsequential now. A very few societies dependent on hunting and gathering survived to the turn of the twenty-first century, many of them supplementing their foraging by trading with nearby farmers and herders, but in Africa today hunting and gathering are little different than in most of the rest of the world, including Europe and North America: an occasional pursuit enjoyed by a small number of mainly rural people who have other primary occupations, or the specialized craft of a few individuals or families living in communities whose economies are diverse.

Herding

Pastoral herding and agriculture arrived or were independently invented in the northern third of Africa about seven thousand years ago (i.e., about 5000 BCE). From the north these two economies spread across the continent, diffusing especially rapidly after about 1000 BCE. Herding economies are based on the tending of domesticated animals, in Africa mainly cattle, camels, goats, and sheep. Herding is most common in the savanna zones because cattle and sheep require grass for grazing, while camels and goats require low trees and shrubs for browsing. Any tempta-

Africa: A Geographic Frame

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tion by herders to move into forest regions was (and is) checked by poor ecological fit: the absence of grasses and shrubs and the presence of trypanosomiasis, a fatal livestock disease spread by the tsetse fly, endemic in Africa's wetter areas.

Like foragers, Africa's herding peoples always have lived in low concentrations; their economy cannot support high population densities. Yet they occupied (and still do occupy, for this way of life, though rapidly declining, is still with us) vast tracts of Africa's shrub and woodland savanna. Here they move cyclically over the course of the year, knowing where in each season to obtain water and forage for their livestock, and where to trade animal products with farmers for grain.

Pastoral herders have modified Africa's savanna landscapes by intentionally and unintentionally altering the mix of plant species in a region, sometimes following practices that conserve and encourage the growth of grasses and shrubs that their livestock prefer and at other times (especially during drought years) overusing and thus diminishing them. Drought is a particular threat to herders because so much of their land is semi-arid and prone to periods of low rain. Herders usually respond to drought by concentrating their animals for longer than normal periods near the most dependable streams, ponds, and wells. These emergency concentrations may lead to overgrazing and soil disturbance in prime pastures, an example of the many ways that even low-technology economies sometimes have unintended impacts on their sustaining environment.

Agriculture

For several thousand years crop agriculture has been rural Africa's most important mode of production by far. First about seven thousand years ago in the savanna of the northern part of the continent, then during the last two or three millennia in the rain forest and the savannas of the south, most African societies gradually conformed around farming.

Agriculture spread gradually across the continent, but it did so decisively, for it gave those who adopted it a great advantage: numbers. With a dependable food supply—far more dependable than their foraging ancestors could manage—farming peoples were able to establish permanent, sometimes very large villages on lands that under foraging or herding could support only diffuse roaming bands. Agriculture took hold especially well and led to the highest population increases where soils were relatively productive, including on most of Africa's savannas. The main crops and thus the staple foods developed by savanna farmers were grains: mainly millet, sorghum, and (after the 1500s) maize. It is logical that grains came to dominate savanna agriculture, for all the major grains were developed from graminoids, wild grasses. Grain crops thrive in grassland environments. There was a cost to the agricultural transformation of much of savanna Africa, of course: a decline in diversity as a few crop species covered more and more land that formerly had been home to multitudes of grasses and other plant types. However, nowhere is savanna Africa

farmed with anything approaching the intensity of agricultural regions in North America and Europe. Africa has nothing like Illinois's or Iowa's vast acreages of monocropped corn. Patchworks of savanna and farmland remain the norm.

Just as grains dominate savanna agriculture, tree crops and root crops have long predominated in the rain forest zone, especially plantain, yams of many kinds, and (after the 1500s) cassava. Unlike on the savannas, rain forest agriculture generally cannot support high population densities. Soils are infertile, so the land must lie idle between cropping cycles. Typically it idles long enough for the forest to regenerate, often thirty or forty years. Under this system, large tracts of land are needed to feed small numbers of rain forest farmers because at any given time most of the land is regenerating forest, not fields. A map of Africa's human population density at any time in the last several thousand years shows high concentrations of people in the most agriculturally productive savanna zones, as well as in some coastal areas where fishing and trade have supported development, but lower densities in the forested humid tropics (and also of course in the deserts).

Colonialism transformed African agriculture substantially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by superimposing on local food production and trade networks an export-oriented agricultural economy that answered to the demands of Europe and the rest of the industrializing world, forcing African producers to add export crops such as cocoa, coffee, tea, peanuts, tobacco, cotton, sisal, rubber, and palm oil to the foodstuffs they had been long accustomed to producing. The next

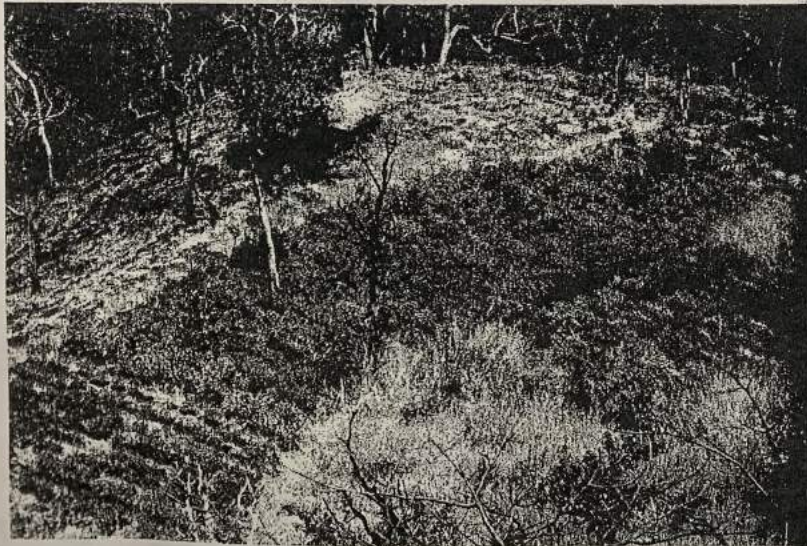


Figure 1.4. Cassava field in a tree savanna field, Angola.

section of this chapter, about Africa in global systems, outlines some of the implications of these changes.

In Africa today a smaller portion of the population is producing food because more and more rural people are moving to the cities and staying. In general, African farmers are keeping pace with the increased food demand of a growing population while also, in many areas, continuing to produce for export, though in some countries, inevitably, there are food shortfalls, especially during periods of drought or political unrest. While urban Africans depend to a considerable degree on the agricultural labors of their counterparts in the villages, they also partake in a globalized food economy and global regimes of taste, just as residents of Europe, Asia, and the Americas do. They eagerly consume not only the products of African agriculture but also imported staples and delicacies. Supermarkets and even outdoor markets in Africa's great cities feature quantities of foods produced in their hinterlands, but also rice from China, pasta from Italy, condiments from France, and sweets from England. This is to say that Africans are no different from consumers anywhere else in their eagerness to sample diverse foods and enjoy the taste and prestige of products imported from other lands.

Yet all over the world, including Africa, it is most economical and ecologically sound to obtain the largest proportion of food from local sources, and thus urban food cultures in Africa strongly reflect the productive capacities of the different African regions. Nearly everywhere in Africa people are fond of porridges made from local starchy staple crops. Residents of East African cities such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam and southern African cities such as Johannesburg, Harare, and Lusaka still enjoy as a primary food, respectively, *ugali* and *mielie-meal*, porridges made from the maize that farmers in these regions prefer to grow. The *fufu* much prized in the cities of southern Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Ghana comes from locally produced and milled cassava and yams; the *tuwo* of northern Nigeria and Niger from millet or sorghum; the *matoke* of Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, and eastern Congo from local bananas and plantains.

AFRICA IN GLOBAL SYSTEMS

Over the last several centuries humankind has remade the world as we have grown dramatically in number and come to dominate the planet. The twentieth- and twenty-first-century transformation of landscape in Africa has been substantial, not only because the number of Africans has increased but also because extractive and manufacturing economies have arisen alongside agriculture to meet external demand and to support the complex and enriched lives that people worldwide—Africans are no exception—now expect. The look of Africa remains essentially African, of course, but as mines, factories, cities, roads, and all the accoutrements of the contemporary global system have arrived in Africa, the look and feel of some African places have come to resemble those of cities and industrialized landscapes everywhere. Meanwhile, despite the beginnings of an industrial transformation,

many Africans have found it hard to achieve the material comfort that people everywhere seek for themselves and their children. They find it difficult largely because most of the continent entered the industrial and postindustrial age from a position of extreme disadvantage during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under European colonialism and in its aftermath.

Colonialism arguably brought certain foundations for economic growth to Africa—ports, roadways, schools, clinics, and the like—but it did so not with the viability of an independent Africa in mind but rather to support forms of organized resource extraction that often amounted to outright plunder. New crops introduced or promoted in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because of demand in Europe drove African farmers to try to farm more intensively and to cultivate more and more land, some of it marginal and risky for agriculture. But rapid intensification and expansion led to soil fertility decline because the fertilizers necessary for sustained intensification were unavailable and fallowing land—letting it regenerate by leaving it idle for a while—became an impossible luxury, as farmers needed all available land every year.

New export crops had the potential to generate wealth in rural Africa, and wealth allows people to afford environmental conservation measures and smarter rather than willy-nilly resource exploitation. However, when an agricultural transformation is organized so that the lion's share of its proceeds flows immediately out of the producing region (in the African case, to Europe) and is unavailable for locals to invest in the betterment of their own land and society, a dynamic of decline sets in. Not only Africa's people but also Africa's resource base and natural beauty have suffered the depredations of a colonially transformed rural economy set up in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to drain the countryside of its natural endowment—forest products, diamonds, copper, gold, ivory, skins, cotton, cocoa, oils, coffee, tea, tobacco, peanuts, vegetables, flowers—while leaving producers and the local region with just enough to keep them producing for another year.

Colonial governments largely took rural people for granted as producers of exportable primary products, neglecting rural development except for token or inadequate efforts here and there. Perversely, Africa's independent, postcolonial governments mostly did the same (though this has begun to change). Neglect of rural development is one reason—though hardly the only one—that Africans now are streaming to the cities.

Cities in Africa long predate colonialism, but the continent's great metropolises—Cairo, Lagos, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Khartoum, Abidjan, Accra, Nairobi, Kano, and others (see map 1.7)—became vast during the twentieth century and are experiencing explosive growth during the twenty-first. From all corners of rural Africa people are converging on cosmopolitan but often desperately poor cities, cauldrons of exciting cultural change and personal transformation where visions of a new Africa and new ways of being African are emerging but where lack of jobs, space, water, opportunity, health, and wealth threaten constantly to bring the whole enter-

prise down. Into the mining districts of South Africa, into the oil fields of Nigeria and other countries, and into the slums of great cities all over the continent pour greater and greater numbers of men, women, and children, seeking the betterment that all people want for themselves and their families; while they find vibrancy, excitement, change, and opportunity, they also encounter a more frenzied form of the poverty that they had hoped to leave behind in the countryside.

As cities and the medium-density periurban hinterlands that surround them claim more and more of Africa's people, they are becoming the Africa that matters most to Africans. Therefore they should matter most to outsiders who are serious about Africa. That these areas be safely habitable and that they be zones of opportunity and wealth creation, not despair, is Africa's great twenty-first-century challenge. The benefits of vibrant cities can ripple out across the land. If Africans can transform their cities into zones of opportunity, the cities will generate wealth, which can be invested—by Africans—to preserve nature and encourage sustainable production in the rural areas that fewer Africans are electing to call home.

Africa's cities tie the fifty-four countries of the continent more and more to global systems, flows, tastes, and preferences. Globalization is no threat to Africa; it is Africa's hope. Linkages—connections—are the world's future, and Africans know this and will not be left behind. Connectivity, networking, and community are core African values, glorious ones, deeply rooted in the psyches and societies of nearly all African people. As success in the world increasingly depends on communications, links, networks, and community, Africans calculate that despite the adversity that the continent so obviously faces, their time in an age of global commonweal is somehow coming.

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All maps are courtesy of University of Wisconsin Cartography Lab.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

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MYTHS OF HISTORY: A HACKETT SERIES

Seven Myths of Africa in World History

by David Northrup

Series Editors
Alfred J. Andrea and Andrew Holt

Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
Indianapolis/Cambridge

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18 17 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

her information, please address
Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
Box 44937
Indianapolis, Indiana 46244-0937

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Design by Rick Todhunter and Brian Rak
Design by Elizabeth L. Wilson
Illustration by Aptara, Inc.

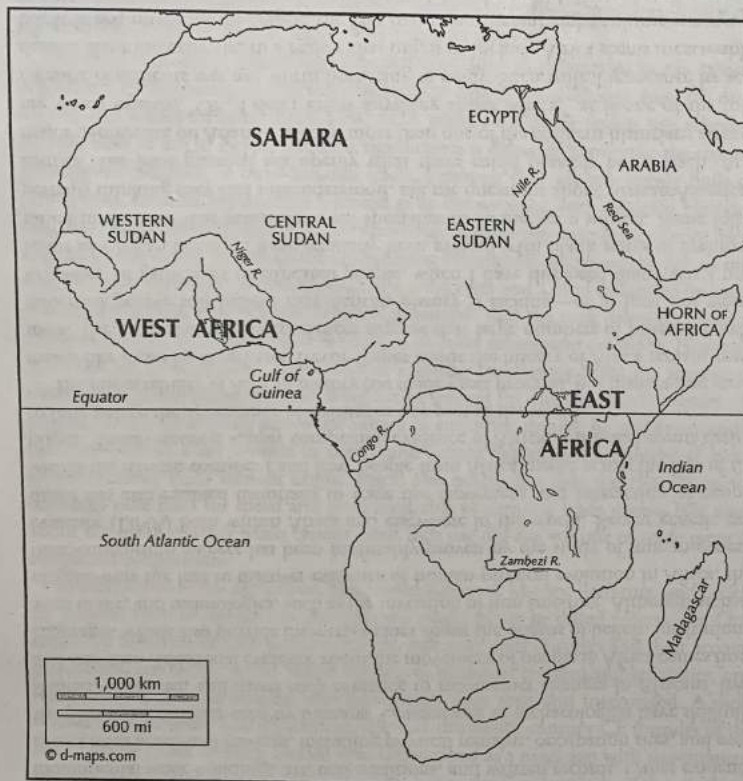
of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Northrup, David, 1941– author.
Seven myths of Africa in world history / by David Northrup.
Titles: Myths of history.
Title: Indianapolis ; Cambridge : Hackett Publishing Company, 2017. | Series:
Myths of history | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Series: LCCN 2017009573 | ISBN 9781624666391 (pbk.) | ISBN 9781624666407
(hbk.)
Classification: LCSH: Africa—History—Errors, inventions, etc. | Africa—Commerce—
History. | Africa—Civilization.
Classification: LCC DT20 .N67 2017 | DDC 960—dc23
Full text available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017009573>

Material used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American
National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library
Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984.

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African Geography and Regions.

1. NO HISTORY IN AFRICA? CAN THE OLDEST HUMANS HAVE THE SHORTEST HISTORY?

What we properly understand by Africa is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History.¹

—Georg Hegel, *German philosopher, 1830s*

Perhaps, in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of the Europeans in Africa.

The rest is largely darkness. . . . And darkness is not a subject for history.²

—Hugh Trevor-Roper, *professor of history, Oxford University, 1963*

In the 1830s, the hugely influential German philosopher Georg Hegel presented a view of Africans that was both extraordinary in its negativity and lasting in its influence. "The Negro," he asserted, "exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state," a being lacking morality, religion, a sense of individuality, or any other higher human trait. For these reasons, he argued, Africa has no history worth considering. Thirteen decades later, in 1963, Hegel's views were echoed in a celebrated public lecture by another distinguished European intellectual, Hugh Trevor-Roper, the Regius Professor of History at Oxford University. Africa below the Sahara, Trevor-Roper declared, contains only "the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe," and thus whatever history Africans had was not worth teaching, aside from the history of Europeans in Africa.³ Such remarkably negative views have not entirely disappeared despite the successful efforts of modern historians to replace willful ignorance and blatant prejudice with proven evidence. Indeed, it is now possible to argue that Africa's history is not only distinguished but also considerably longer than that of any other continent and thus provides great insight into the remarkable story of human development.

Several assumptions besides ignorance and prejudice underlie the notion of an unchanging, unprogressive Africa. One of these is the belief that true history is based on written records, especially records that focus on the deeds of great men. This belief holds that before there was writing there was only "prehistory," the domain of

1. Georg Hegel, *The Philosophy of History* (New York: Dover, 1956), 99.

2. Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965), 9.

3. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 93; Trevor-Roper, *Rise of Christian Europe*, 9.

archaeologists and folklorists. Another assumption is that meaningful history began in urban civilizations. The belief that history is impossible without written records is unsupported but still pervasive. While African history includes the deeds of many great men and women known from written records, recent African historians make use of many other kinds of evidence to reconstruct broader social and cultural themes. The rich history that scholars of Africa have crafted from different kinds of evidence and disciplines has led historians of other continents to imitate their approach.

Evidence for early African life in the different parts of the giant continent takes many forms. Africans deliberately left behind many kinds of evidence, including monumental stone buildings, art, oral traditions, and written records. Other evidence comes from accidental leavings, including physical remains, occupation sites, and even the plants and animals used by humans. Generations of archaeologists have skillfully located, excavated, and dated such evidence to reconstruct changes in Africans' lives and activities. Additional evidence about the movement of people in Africa comes from languages, which also provide important clues about the origins of beliefs, institutions, ways of life, and technologies, such as the invention of iron smelting. Although archaeologists were the first to discover evidence of human physical evolution in Africa, this once contentious subject has been irrefutably proven by the study of human genetic evidence (DNA) both within Africa and elsewhere in the world. Recent genetic evidence has also enabled historians to trace the movement and interaction of people within the African continent and how people from Africa spread across the face of the planet. These resources supply compelling evidence of African historical events dating to long before the appearance of writing in any part of the world.

The respectability of African history has made great progress, but disparaging statements like those by Hegel and Trevor-Roper about the history of Africa remain common. The present author's experiences suggest that large numbers of otherwise well-informed people still believe that African history is lacking—or at least not worth knowing. In gatherings of educated people, when I have disclosed that I was a professor of African history, I have regularly been greeted with blank stares or eyebrows raised in disbelief that someone could specialize in so meager a subject. Some folks, perhaps thinking they had misunderstood, ask me questions about African American history. The least guarded ask openly what there could possibly be to teach. At a major conference on Atlantic history, more than one of the eminent historians attending stated openly, "Oh, I don't know anything about Africa," as if one of the four Atlantic continents was not worth bothering to study. Such willful ignorance by academics claiming expertise in a region that ought to include Africa seems inexcusable, but it is not uncommon, despite the fact that two different eight-volume surveys of the African past were published in the 1980s.⁴ For those with limited time to spare

4. J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver, eds., *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975–1986); UNESCO, *General History of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981–1989).

shorter introductions to African history are common. Ignorance of the African past may have become inexcusable, but old habits of thought die hard.

Not only does Africa have a history, but also what is known and knowable about the African past has been expanding at a rapid rate. The history of Africa neither exhibits, as the German philosopher opined, "the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state," nor does it consist, as the Oxford professor asserted, of "the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe." During the first half of modern humans' existence the development of ethical standards, religious beliefs, esthetic and artistic sensibilities, music, dance, and literature took place exclusively in Africa. As Professor Roland Oliver, a pioneer in the teaching of African history in London, used to tell his students, the advantage of studying African history was that "you got to start at the beginning." An author in the first volume of the recent *Cambridge World History* begins with the simple factual statement, "Before about 48,000 BCE human history was African history."⁵ Even today there is genetic evidence of African ancestry in the bodies of every human being. Willful ignorance cannot be refuted, but the demonstrable truth is that African history is as knowable as the history of humans anywhere else on earth.

It is true that the pace of change in sub-Saharan Africa was often slow and in some African societies glacially slow. Hagel and Trevor-Roper believed in the attractive proposition that progressive change was the crowning achievement of humans, and it alone was worthy of historical explanation. In the twenty-first century, we are beginning to realize that the speed of recent change has brought frightening risks as well as benefits. The extraordinary increase in human population from one billion in the early nineteenth century to seven billion in 2012 has put unsustainable demands on the planet, especially in light of rapidly increasing per capita energy use. Even optimists concede that the notion of bigger and better deserves only two cheers (not three). Maybe it would take a different historical experience, in which continuity and sustainability were more notable, to merit three cheers.

Handprints: Deliberate Evidence

The range of evidence that historians use for reconstructing the African past can be divided into two categories. The first type is evidence Africans have intentionally left, which we can call *handprints*. Some of the oldest forms of intentional evidence are quite literally handprints, painted on the walls of caves along with other representations of people, animals, and symbols. The oldest known cave art in Africa comes from southern Africa, where paintings on rock dating to about 25,000 BCE clearly depict a rhinoceros, an antelope, and a zebra, animals that could have been hunted for their meat. More

5. Christopher Ehret, "Early Humans: Tools, Language, and Culture," in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 1, *Introducing World History, to 10,000 BCE*, ed. David Christian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 339.

mysterious in the same cave is a painting of a cat-like creature with human-looking rear legs, a reminder that evidence is not always self-explanatory. Studies of analogous images in the recent rock drawings of the Khoisan-speaking people of southern Africa, suggest that they represent mystical trances or dreams rather than realistic depictions. Interpreting these drawings and other evidence is not an exact science.⁶

Drawings of chariots incised into exposed rock faces in mountains in the central Sahara also are surprising as well as puzzling. The date of the drawings must fall during the two millennia after about 1700 BCE when such horse-drawn two-wheeled vehicles were in use in Egypt, but their significance is debated. Some take the chariot drawings as evidence of trans-Saharan trade, although they are too lightly built to carry goods. Another explanation is hinted at by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus, who writes that the Libyan people known as Garamantes were great chariot users and that some young men from the neighboring Nasamonians crossed the Sahara in a southwesterly direction until they reached a great river and a land inhabited by black people. If the great river was the Niger, it is possible that the rock drawings confirm this fifth-century BCE crossing of the Sahara or other subsequent crossings. However, this evidence is incomplete. Archaeologist Timothy Insoll argues that the absence of trade goods from Roman times in West Africa (except for one blue bead) negates the suggestion of a trade route across the Sahara in antiquity, though he readily concedes that the tomb of a tall woman in the central Sahara has yielded a number of items of fifth-century (CE) Roman origin. Insoll also points out that the chariots in the drawings were built for speed and were incapable of carrying trade goods. Not until about the ninth century when camels came into use did the volume of trade grow to significant proportions.⁷

In addition to visual depictions, oral transmissions of history, literature, and beliefs are another form of handprints, though they might better be called voiceprints. Oral traditions in Africa include myths of origin, folk tales, lists of rulers and their accomplishments, and heroic epics. While varying in historical content and reliability, oral traditions can provide insights into how events were seen and interpreted. A well-known example is the *Epic of Sundiata*, the mid-thirteenth-century CE founder of the Mali Empire in the Western Sudan, who is described as a magician with supernatural powers, even though he was (also) a Muslim. Just as the Greek epics and the teachings of Confucius, the Buddha, Jesus, and Muhammad were transmitted orally before they

6. For southern African rock art, see Peter Garlake, *Early Art and Architecture of Africa*, Oxford History of Art (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 29–49, and Peter Mitchell, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa*, Cambridge World Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 132–34, 192–226.

7. For illustrations of Saharan rock art, see Basil Davidson, *African Kingdoms* (New York: Time-Life Books, 1966), 43–57. For other evidence and interpretation, see Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), 114, 301–4, and Timothy Insoll, *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 209–12.

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Egyptian divine figures and hieroglyphs incised in stone at the Temple of Horus at Edfu, Egypt. Though built in the Ptolemaic period (273–57 BCE), the temple replicates older styles. The central figure wears the Double Crown of Upper and Lower Egypt. The male on the right wears the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and the woman on the left wears a headdress representing the solar disk between cow horns. Photo courtesy of N. R. Northrup. All rights reserved.

were written down, so too were African historical traditions passed down orally before being reduced to print (in many cases within the last century).⁸

It is a small step (but an important one) from composing a text in the mind and reciting it to preserving it in writing. Once symbols were devised to represent sounds or words, the familiar handprint known as handwriting provided a way of preserving texts on papyrus and paper or carved into stone or other surfaces. It was a notable invention. The ancient Egyptians, the first in Africa to use the process, attributed the invention of writing to their god Thoth. In use before 3000 BCE, Egyptian writing had two early forms. Hieroglyphs were formal and artistic, using some five hundred symbols, many of which are easily recognized as different animals or human body parts, such as an eye or hand. Beautifully colored inscriptions using hieroglyphs

8. Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985); Peter Schmidt, "Oral History, Oral Traditions, and Archaeology," in *The Oxford Handbook of African Archaeology*, ed. Peter Mitchell and Paul Lane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 37–47; D. T. Niane, *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*, trans. G. D. Pickett (London: Longman, 1985).

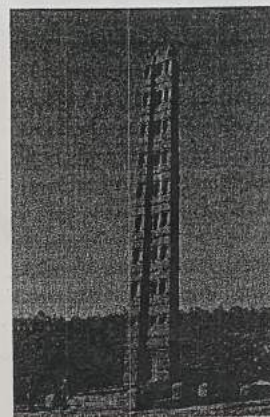
recounted the names and deeds of the pharaohs. Another sign of the supernatural aura of writing is that many early texts concern death and the afterlife. Egyptian scribes also used a more stylized form of cursive writing using ink on papyrus that could be written much more quickly than hieroglyphs. In both forms of writing the symbols stood for sounds. By the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (2050–1780 BCE) there are written literary works as well as the compilation in hieroglyphs of ritual incantations for the deceased known as *The Book of the Dead*.

Writing in ancient Africa was not confined to Egypt. From the second century BCE, writers in the Kingdom of Meroë (south of Egypt) used an alphabetic script that was influenced by Egyptian hieroglyphs. Although the script was deciphered in 1909, the language written in this Meroitic script is unknown. In the Horn of Africa, the state of Aksum, precursor to medieval Ethiopia, also developed a system of writing before the fourth century CE, which was partly borrowed from South Arabia and has remained in use (with modifications) up to this day. As Chapter 2 details, the most famous work written in it, the *Kebra Nagast* (Glory of Kings), probably dating to the thirteenth century, tells a story of supposed connections between medieval Ethiopian rulers and ancient Israel. It is written in the ancient language Ge'ez.⁹

Africans who produced written records during later centuries increasingly used languages and systems of writing that had originated outside the continent. The Egyptian city of Alexandria, named for its founder Alexander the Great, became home to the greatest library in the ancient Mediterranean world with tens or hundreds of thousands of papyrus scrolls, mostly written in Greek. After Egypt and the rest of North Africa became part of the Roman Empire, the region's writers grew famous for their contributions to literature, thought, and Christian theology, in both Greek and Latin. The incorporation of North Africa into the Islamic Empire of the Arabs in the seventh century and the movement of non-African and African Muslims below the Sahara and down the Indian Ocean coast of Africa resulted in a great many texts written in Arabic that are essential to African history. Some oral traditions in African languages were first written in Arabic script, for example, the *Kano Chronicle*, an account of the reigns of the rulers of an important Hausa city-state that goes back to the tenth century.

Writers of African origin became so numerous and will be cited so regularly in the following chapters that it would be tedious to attempt to list them here. Instead, let's mention two of Moroccan descent who authored wide-ranging and important accounts of sub-Saharan Africa between 1330 and 1550. The first was Ibn Battuta, born in the Moroccan city of Tangier in 1304, who recorded detailed descriptions of his travels in West and East Africa as well as in India and Arabia. His original Arabic texts, which have been translated into many other languages, provide significant

9. For texts see Constance Hilliard, ed., *Intellectual Traditions of Pre-Colonial Africa* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1998); *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, trans. Raymond O. Faulkner (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005); Richard Pankhurst, *The Ethiopians: A History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 24–25.



Known as the Rome Stele (or the Aksum Obelisk), this 160-foot tall granite structure has symbolic doors carved into its base and windows into the upper stories. It was removed from Ethiopia by the Italian military as war booty in 1937 and erected in Rome. After much negotiation, it was restored to Ethiopia in 2005. Source: Photo by Ondřej Žváček, 2009. Wikimedia Commons.

information about fourteenth-century life. The second, best known as Leo Africanus, was born in Muslim Spain about 1494 and originally named Hasan. He and his Berber parents soon returned to the city of Fez in their native Morocco, where he received a good education and about 1510 accompanied an uncle on a diplomatic mission across the Sahara as far as the city of Timbuktu. After visiting Cairo, Constantinople, and Mecca, Hasan was captured by a Spanish ship in 1518 and later presented to Pope Leo X. After instructing his youthful charge in Christianity, Pope Leo baptized him and conferred his own name on him. Thereafter known as Leo Africanus (Leo the African), he was put to work writing out what he knew of African history and geography. His substantial tome, published in Italian in 1550 and in English in 1600, became Christian Europe's most relied-upon source for Muslim lands on both sides of the Sahara.¹⁰

The most visible and enduring handprints in the landscape of Africa are stone buildings. In places where suitable rock is abundant, Africans have long erected monumental architecture, certainly for their own immediate purposes but also to remind future generations of their greatness. The most famous of

these are the pyramids and temples of Egypt that go back to nearly 2600 BCE. Other notable examples are found in lands to the south of Egypt. The Kushitic kingdoms of Nubia, further up the Nile in what is now northern Sudan, erected pyramids of a different style, as well as temples, during the first millennium BCE. Still further south in Aksum (northern Ethiopia) there are rich examples of stone monuments, especially tall slender shafts known as stelae erected in the fourth century CE. Several are still standing, but the biggest one, the largest object ever carved from a single block of stone and weighing over five hundred tons, lies broken on the ground, perhaps having fallen while being hoisted into place. Other examples of skilled stone carving come from the early thirteenth century, when the Christian ruler of Ethiopia named Lalibela sponsored an extensive church building project. The churches are stylistically diverse, but each was hollowed out of "living" rock, that is, rock lying in its natural site.

10. N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2000); Said Hamdun and Noël King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1994); Leo Africanus, *The History and Description of Africa*, 3 vols. (London: Hakluyt Society, 1896).

Of the many other stone buildings erected along the Indian Ocean coast of eastern Africa the most spectacular was the palace of the ruler of the city-state of Kilwa. Built of coral covered with lime plaster sometime around 1300, the extensive palace contained public and private quarters and courtyards, a pool, warehouses, and pavilions with barrel vaulted roofs and domes. Ibn Battuta, who visited Kilwa in the 1330s, judged it to be "among the most beautiful cities [of the world] and elegantly built" and said the mostly Muslim population of the city were devout and had extremely black skins. Kilwa's wealth came from its role as middleman in the trade in gold between the Zimbabwe kingdom and states around the Indian Ocean. The inland kingdom's capital city, known as Great Zimbabwe, had the largest complex of ancient stone structures in Africa south of the Nile River valley. The most monumental structures, built between the eleventh and the fifteenth centuries, are still substantially intact. They include the Great Enclosure, an oval structure the size of a football stadium, whose stone walls are over thirty-two feet high and sixteen feet thick. Inside the Great Enclosure is the Conical Tower (thirty feet high and eighteen feet in diameter). Both structures were built of layered granite stones without mortar.

Although all of these structures have been known to the outside world for many centuries, the belief in African inferiority was so strong that Europeans ascribed non-African origins to them. Ancient Egypt's magnificent structures were said to be sited on the African continent only incidentally, the product of a civilization that was Mediterranean, not African. Meroë's temples and pyramids were simply derivative of Egyptian influences. The monumental structures of Aksum and Ethiopia were dismissed as being of Arabian origin. The cities of the Swahili Coast were attributed to Arab and Persian origins, despite Ibn Battuta's eyewitness testimony that the inhabitants were not merely dark skinned but "extremely black." These tales of outside influences may have a grain of truth in them, but giving the outsiders all the credit and denying local Africans any credit is about as credible as saying the scientific breakthroughs of Copernicus, Galileo, and Isaac Newton were due to Asians because the numerals they used had first been devised in India. Great Zimbabwe posed a special challenge to such racist interpretations, not only because of its size and inland location but also because the structures and extensive artifacts showed no foreign influences. Nineteenth-century Europeans who saw Great Zimbabwe proclaimed its existence a "mystery" and speculated without any evidence that its builders were Phoenicians, Israelites, or other outsiders. The explanations shifted after archaeological excavations proved Great Zimbabwe was of local African origin. The site that had previously inspired wonder and whose carved stone birds had been looted as treasure then came to be disparaged, in terms Hegel and Trevor-Roper would have applauded, as "products of an infantile mind."¹¹

11. The stone structures south of ancient Egypt are described and illustrated in Garlake, *Early Art*, 51–88, 117–120; his statement about Zimbabwe is at 23. The quotations from Ibn Battuta are from Hamdun and King, *Ibn Battuta*, 22.

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Some of the monumental structures of eastern and northeastern Africa considered above were associated with the burials of important persons, whether as tombs, as in the case of pyramids, or monuments, or as in the case of the stelae of Aksum. As the ancient Egyptians had sadly learned, spectacular tombs had the unintended consequence of alerting thieves to the location of rich treasures interred with the departed rulers. As a result, survivors came to place memorials in a different place from the actual burial site so as to protect the graves and grave goods from looters. Nearly all the Egyptian treasures displayed in museums today come from tombs that escaped being robbed in antiquity, which is ironic because, while the monuments were meant to be enduring tributes to the lives of the departed, the grave goods were not intended to delight later generations, but were meant for the departed to enjoy in the afterlife.

In parts of Africa that lacked stone for building, the memorials erected to the memory of illustrious people are long gone because they were made of less enduring materials. Even so, chance discoveries of rich grave goods testify to similar burial practices. One of the oldest and most impressive of these is a site from the ninth century near the village of Igbo-Ukwu in southeastern Nigeria. The corpse was interred seated on a wooden throne dressed in rich garments that were decorated with more than 100,000 glass beads, along with copper armlets, anklets, and amulets beautifully fashioned by local artisans. Other grave goods included ivory tusks, a crown, a ceremonial staff, a fan, and a flywhisk. It is now beginning to be understood that the Igbo-Ukwu grave and accompanying site are part of a complex of rich burials widespread in West Africa, some of which have been destroyed by modern looters.¹²

Footprints: Evidence by Chance

Another category of historical evidence can be called *footprints* because, like tracks across the sand, they have been left behind unconsciously or inadvertently. Wind and rain normally erase actual footprints soon after they are made, but on rare occasions ancient footprints across a wet surface have survived. Kenyan archaeologist Mary Leakey, for example, discovered a series of fossilized footprints of an upright-walking adult and a child in the East African country of Tanzania that may date to 3.7 million years ago.

Just as skilled trackers can follow the footprints of people or animals, so too can history detectives uncover the distant past from many kinds of footprints unconsciously carried forward or inadvertently left behind. In recent years historians of Africa have made exceptional use of two new sorts of evidence that living people carry with them. One astonishing link between the present and the distant past is carried in human genes, which, when decoded, can be used to trace lines of descent covering the entire span of human existence and even connections with our prehuman ancestors. Living languages can also be mined to reveal forgotten pieces of history and

12. Garlake, *Early Art*, 26–27, 97–115.

previously unknown relationships among societies. In addition, specialized archaeologists can construct remarkable histories from traces of human bodies and discarded fragments of household possessions.

Archaeology has made contributions to African history so immense that they can be called revolutionary. On the one hand, archaeologists' excavations and analyses have opened up the countless millennia before the last ten thousand years that historians had traditionally considered "history." Their work in this vast period of "prehistory" has documented changes and achievements in Africa before the monuments of Egypt were imagined, and has also documented the evolution of humans over millions of years.

On the other hand, archaeologists have greatly expanded what can be known about the doings of Africans during recent millennia and extended the focus from kings and conquerors to include the lives of ordinary men and women. These days archaeologists work across a very broad spectrum of fields, and many of the best are adept at interdisciplinary fields ranging from paleobotany to linguistics, geology, and history. For world historians the accumulation of archaeological evidence has made it possible to write an African history that includes the full range of human development in Africa. What was once called "prehistory" is now a major part of history.

Other archaeologists have reconstructed the lives of ancient Africans from bits of arrowheads or jewelry, broken pieces of pottery (potsherds), and the remains of fire pits and simple dwellings. Some have looked into graveyards and sifted through debris in old wells and trash dumps. It has become possible to learn more about what people were eating by sifting a site for fossilized seeds, pollen, and excrement. The mundane findings that are found add texture to our knowledge, and occasionally something quite special is found, as was the case at Igbo-Ukwu mentioned earlier. Archaeologists have also found ways to improve the precision with which sites can be dated. One can date very old remains by noting where they are found in geological layers. Dating remains such as charcoal from more recent centuries is possible using techniques that measure the decay of the radioactive carbon isotope known as carbon 14 (C_{14}).

The many kinds of evidence available for African history work best in concert. As one archaeologist has noted, "Archaeological evidence devoid of the supporting props of [written] historical sources . . . can appear dry and lifeless. . . . However, [although] the use of historical sources in isolation . . . might provide us with the basic chronological framework[,] . . . we must also turn to archaeology to begin to construct the diverse social, political, and economic" factors.¹³ Linguistic studies have also proven very useful in framing the written, oral, and material evidence, as will be discussed below.

During the second half of the twentieth century archaeologists made some extraordinary discoveries of fossilized remains of early humans and of their pre-human ancestors, finds that supported the theory that humans evolved in Africa. As remarkable as

13. Insoll, *Archaeology of Islam*, 3.

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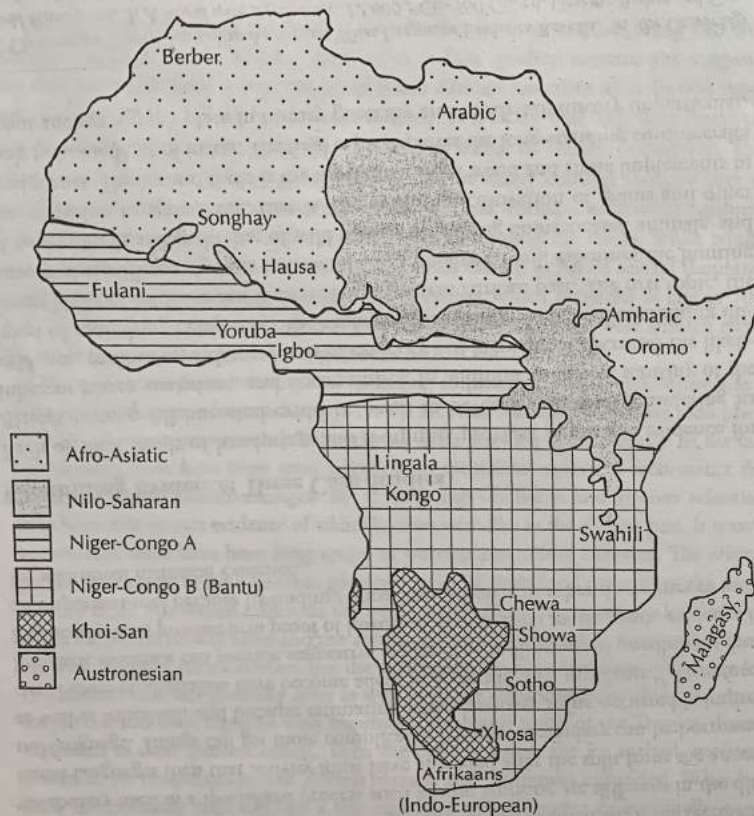
these finds were, the evidence was too limited and spread over too long a span of time to convince skeptics that Africa was the birthplace of humankind. Nor was there any real hope that sufficient new archaeological evidence might be uncovered to tip the balance more decisively in favor of a single theory. And then, an astonishing breakthrough occurred that changed everything. The breakthrough came not from new archaeological finds, but from microbiologists studying the genetic code carried by modern humans. By comparing samples of genes (DNA) collected from large numbers of humans from around the world, geneticists were able to draw firm conclusions about human evolution.

The basic conclusion was that a quite small population of human hunter-gatherers emerged in Africa between 200,000 and 100,000 years ago. Then, between 200,000 and 70,000 years ago, these ancestral humans spread and diversified within Africa, and small groups of humans from northeastern Africa colonized Asia, Europe, and the rest of the planet. While this population dispersal led to a notable increase in the number of humans and in their biological diversity, human biological diversity in Africa remains greater than the differences between Africans as a whole and all the rest of humans outside of Africa. Although these findings will no doubt be refined by new research, the broad patterns are already well established: Africa is the mother continent of humanity.¹⁴

Another place where ancient footprints hide is in language. Languages tend to change very slowly, but over long periods of time changes within a language become extensive, and dialectal differences can become significant enough to form separate new languages. Like a cell that splits to form new cells, a mother language that divides no longer exists. In time the daughter languages may also divide. Even as this linguistic fragmentation occurs, the new languages inherit words and grammatical structures from their ancestor languages, which can reveal aspects of the language family's history. Vocabulary for things that remain important to the speakers of a language tend to change less, while new things are given new names, which may be words borrowed from other languages. The speakers of a language are seldom aware of all the historical baggage their language contains. For example, how many speakers of English know from what languages English has borrowed such words as capital, raccoon, pajama, and euphoria?¹⁵ Specialists, however, can decipher the hidden historical evidence. Because linguistic evidence is passed along unconsciously, it is not subject to manipulation the way written evidence might be. Moreover, language evidence reflects the full range of human activity, not just the topics of interest to the political

14. Marta Mirazon Lahr, "Genetic and Fossil Evidence for Modern Human Origins," in Mitchell and Lane, *African Archaeology*, 326–40; Sarah A. Tishkoff, Floyd A. Reed, Françoise R. Friedlaender, et al., "The Genetic Structure and History of Africans and African Americans," *Science* 324 (2009): 1035–44.

15. Latin, Algonquin, Hindi, and Greek.



African Language Families. After a map by Mark Dingemans, Wikimedia Commons.

or intellectual elite. Among historians, those studying Africa have made the greatest use of linguistic evidence.¹⁶

There are between 1,500 and 2,000 African languages today, so making sense of their diversity can be bewildering even to specialists. However, the map of language families in Africa is strikingly simple and reveals important historical realities. Most Africans speak languages belonging to one of two families. The dominant family in North Africa, the Sahara, and the Horn of Africa is called Afrasian (or Afro-Asiatic).

16. Christopher Ehret, "Writing African History from Linguistic Evidence," in *Writing African History*, ed. John Edward Philips (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 86–111.

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As this name suggests, the family also includes languages, such as Arabic and Hebrew, spoken in parts of Asia adjacent to Africa. Within Africa this family includes the Berber languages of the Sahara and northwest Africa, the ancient languages of Egypt, and the ancient and modern languages of Somalia and Ethiopia, as well as the Hausa language of northern Nigeria and Niger, one of the most widely spoken languages in West Africa. As the result of the Arab conquest of North Africa in the seventh and eighth centuries Arabic has become widely spoken across that area as a first or second language. Additional issues about the Afrasian family are explored below in the context of the origins of the ancient Egyptians.

The second giant African family of languages is called Niger-Congo, a convenient and succinct name that describes its distribution across the vast area of West Africa through which the Niger River flows and the equally vast area of Central Africa drained by the Congo River and its branches. In fact, the Niger-Congo family stretches all the way from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, including the major languages of East and southeast Africa. Niger-Congo is one of the largest language families in the world, both in terms of the number of distinct languages it includes and the total number of people speaking these languages. Given its size, it is not surprising that the Niger-Congo family divides into two distinct sub-families with quite different histories: the languages of West Africa and the Bantu languages of Central and Eastern Africa. The West African languages are themselves highly diverse reflecting a very long history of development and differentiation. The Bantu languages, in contrast, are newer in origin, and, like the Romance languages of southern Europe, they share many common features. For example, the name "Bantu" comes from the term for person common to most of the languages of the sub-family. In the past two centuries, Swahili has become the most widely spoken Bantu language by spreading inland as a second language from its ancestral home on the Indian Ocean coast to as far as the eastern Congo.

In addition to these two giant language families, there are three smaller families. The inhabitants of the large island of Madagascar speak Malagasy, a language of the Austronesian family, whose other languages are found in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. Linguistic and other evidence support the idea that the language was brought to Madagascar by Indonesian mariners, who settled there sometime before or just after the beginning of the Common Era, at a time when the island was uninhabited. The other two smaller families, Nilo-Saharan and Khoisan, are very ancient African language families, whose present speakers now survive only in arid and semi-arid areas that later intruders did not occupy because they were too dry for farming or raising cattle. Thus, the modern language map can reveal important patterns of historical change.

Languages and entire families can also go extinct, but language extinction is not the same as population extinction. For example, the many Pygmy societies that still inhabit the great equatorial rainforests of Africa have come to speak the Bantu languages of their neighbors. The ancestral Pygmy languages are gone, but Pygmy societies and cultures live on. Other societies have blended with the populations that

intruded into their homelands. Speakers of languages known collectively as Khoi and San (or Khoisan) were once spread across much of the southern cone of Africa. In the face of the expanding Bantu-speaking populations, Khoi and San speakers either retreated or blended. The evidence is partly genetic, but the long blending of these populations shows up in the languages of the southeasternmost Bantu speakers. Over many generations speakers of Bantu languages like Xhosa and Zulu adopted click sounds from Khoisan speakers. Such click sounds have long been a normal part of Khoisan speech, but they are not found in any other Bantu-speaking areas.

As these remarks suggest, the modern map of language families reveals much about African history, but even more can be discovered by specialized linguistic studies. Through careful comparison of languages in a family, scholars can construct a family tree. If all the branches have similar words for something, such as cattle, then that vocabulary must derive from a mother language common to them all. If the technical vocabulary used in a specialized process such as iron working are different in the different languages then that activity must have appeared after the split from the ancestral language. Things can get more complicated because vocabulary can be borrowed as well as inherited, and because estimating when language splits occurred is imprecise. However, specialists have become adept in resolving such problems.¹⁷ Therefore, linguistic evidence can provide suggestive evidence or indications of possibilities, but it generally does provide firm proof of historical events. Even so, linguistic evidence is an important tool because its findings encourage scholars in other disciplines to look for additional historical evidence.

Combining Evidence: Three Case Studies

Each of these kinds of handprints and footprints provides important evidence for Africa's history. All historical evidence needs to be used critically, considering its inherent biases, omissions, and uncertainties. In addition to careful scrutiny of the evidence, combining different kinds of evidence can increase (or decrease) the likelihood of something being true. The examples that follow show how combining different kinds of evidence can illuminate the ancient African past. The first topic, the history of significant changes in how Africans obtained food, examines the hunting of wild animals and gathering of wild plants, the raising domesticated animals, and the transition to agriculture, that is, the deliberate cultivation of grains and other food plants. The second topic is the movement from wood and stone implements to tools fashioned out of metal. The final topic explores the long-standing controversies about ancient Egypt's place in history generally and in African history in particular.

17. Christopher Ehret, "Agricultural Origins: What Language Evidence Reveals," in *The Cambridge World History*, vol. 2, *A World with Agriculture, 12,000 BCE–500 CE*, ed. Graeme Barker and Candace Gaucher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 56.

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In Africa, as elsewhere, humans learned to feed themselves by exploiting the food available in particular environments. The first written evidence about African hunter-gatherer communities comes from the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama, who described the people he encountered living near the southern tip of Africa in November 1497. Those living near St. Helena Bay on the South Atlantic, he recorded, ate the meat of seals, whales, and gazelles along with "the roots of wild plants" and honey. They had domesticated dogs and hunted with wooden spears tipped with horn.

Rounding the Cape of Good Hope, the Portuguese encountered another people at Mossel Bay, pastoralists who had herds of domesticated cattle and sheep and so would not have depended so much on hunting and gathering for their food. They welcomed the Portuguese with flute music and sold them a fat ox, whose meat the visitors found tasty. As linguistic and genetic evidence attests, the hunter-gatherers near St. Helena Bay were following a way of life that had existed for many thousands of years over much of Africa. The pastoralists at Mossel Bay had added a newer and more secure source of meat, milk, and other animal products, but despite this significant change, they and the hunter-gatherers along the South Atlantic shared a long, common history.

It is not known how much these two communities were aware of their common past at the time of da Gama's visit. They certainly did not have a common name for themselves, but modern scholars have named them. At first the new names emphasized the obvious differences in how the two communities made their livings, the hunter-gatherers being called the San and the pastoralists called the Khoekhoe peoples. As linguistic evidence revealed their membership in a common language family, the two names were combined as Khoisan.¹⁸ However much these peoples had no conscious memory of their shared history, their languages retained proof of it. As historian Christopher Ehret summarizes, "the earliest Khoisan languages included at least two verbs for hunting with a bow and arrows, along with nouns for two kinds of arrows and, most informatively, a noun for arrow poison [as well as terms that indicate] that honey collection was already an important subsistence activity for these people." The words had traveled a long way geographically over a very long span of time. These early words come from ancestral languages spoken some 22,000 years ago in East Africa, a location some 2,500 miles to the northeast. The San had changed the basic structures of the ancestral way of life little, aside from adapting to quite different environments. The greatest innovation was clearly the addition of seafood. Because Europeans named Mossel Bay for the sea mussels that abound there, it is not surprising that archaeologists have found early evidence of shellfish harvesting. The whale meat mentioned by da Gama probably came from whales that had beached themselves, since the San were not great mariners. Work was gendered: men hunted; women gathered wild plants. Khoisan speakers were also artists, as the rock art mentioned earlier attests.

18. Historians and linguists do not agree on the spellings of Khoe and Khoi.

Genetic evidence carries the history even further back in time, showing that the Khoisan speakers are one of the oldest strains of fully modern humans and suggesting that they made their way to the tip of South Africa sometime after 45,000 years ago. Pastoralism developed much more recently. It is likely that first stage involved the domestication of sheep, some fifteen centuries before da Gama's description. The transition from hunting and gathering required so many cultural changes that it must have taken place over an extended period of time. Perhaps, as in other cultures, younger people were assigned the routine tasks of tending the flocks, while adults continued to hunt and gather. Domesticated cattle existed in Africa several thousand years before they reached the southern tip of Africa, which occurred as late as 700 CE. So the cattle and sheep keepers whom da Gama encountered were a much more recent innovation than the hunter-gatherers he first encountered.¹⁹

The movement from hunting and gathering to pastoralism and agriculture was a momentous change in human history. Yet the fact that this transformation took place at about the same time around the world has been puzzling until recently. In the last few decades there have been great advances in specialists' ability to reconstruct the history of global climate changes. By drilling into sea floors and glaciers scientists have been able to extract evidence of what climates were like in the distant past. It is now known that there have been long cycles of warmer and colder climates. The critical period for change in how humans obtained most of their food came after the tenth century BCE. For several millennia the world had been in the grip of the last Ice Age, when temperate rainfall froze and the accumulating ice cover led to decreased sea levels. Few places in Africa saw ice, but the vast quantities of frozen water elsewhere led to a climate that was generally drier as well as cooler. The rainforests along the equator shrank and were replaced with savannas. North and south of the Tropics, deserts expanded to their greatest extent. Then the cycle reversed: the ice melted, moisture returned, air temperatures rose, deserts shrank, and rainforests expanded. What had been exceptionally cold and dry a few centuries earlier became exceptionally warm and moist. Lake Chad, the largest lake in West Africa, grew to be almost as large as the island of Madagascar. This was when both pastoralism and farming spread.

However much the new wetter climate made agriculture easier, it did not cause pastoralism and farming to spread. So other, more particular, evidence must be considered. Until recently dating was uncertain, and it was widely assumed that Africans simply borrowed pastoralism and agriculture from Middle Eastern peoples. Some borrowing did indeed take place, but historians now believe that Africans were also innovators. They reason that most innovations in pastoralism, agriculture, and metals in Africa took place so early that borrowing is implausible.

19. Ehret, "Africa from 48,000 to 9500 BCE," in Christian, *Cambridge World History*, vol. 1, 372; Mitchell, *Archaeology of Southern Africa*, 227–48; Alvara Velho, *A Journal of the First Voyage of Vasco da Gama, 1497–1499*, ed. and trans. E. G. Ravenstein (London: Hakluyt Society, 1898), 7–10.

Pastoralism and agriculture developed separately in northern Africa, but it is widely agreed that both were essentially indigenous inventions. Archaeological and linguistic evidence suggests that wild cattle were first tamed in the far eastern Sahara during a wet period around 9000–8000 BCE. Archaeologists suggest the domestication of cattle occurred in western North Africa about 6000 BCE. Support for thinking these domestications were African innovations comes from two facts: archeological evidence shows they occurred as early as those in the Near East, and genetic evidence from the cattle shows that they had a separate lineage. As the Sahara grew drier, the practice of cattle pastoralism gradually spread south. Later, cattle domesticated in India spread into Africa and bred with African cattle. Pastoralism has remained a sustaining way of life for many Africans.

At the time that African pastoralism was emerging, early African farmers were domesticating plant species. Although archaeology has unearthed convincing evidence of the domestication and improvement of a wide range of indigenous plants, including grains, coffee, and African varieties of peanuts and rice, the physical evidence for early agriculture in Africa is scattered and incomplete, yielding dates from the third and second millennia BCE. However, historian Christopher Ehret argues from linguistic and other evidence that there were two (or perhaps three) much earlier centers of agricultural innovation in northern Africa: one in the far eastern Sahara after 8500 BCE and a second just below the Sahara in West Africa by 9500 BCE. A third independent development of agriculture may have taken place in Ethiopia.²⁰

While it may be tempting to regard the movement from hunting and gathering to farming and pastoralism as an advance, these changes were much more complex. Some African societies resisted abandoning a way of life based on hunting and gathering. Others became pastoralists but did not farm. Indeed, Africa has the largest concentration of pastoralists in the world. Those who did make transitions did so slowly and carefully, evaluating their costs and benefits. For example, the adoption of agriculture brought disadvantages as well as advantages. Cultivating crops or tending herds was a lot more work than hunting and gathering. Crops needed to be planted, fertilized, weeded, and watered. Domesticated herds needed feeding and watering. Both crops and domesticated animals had to be protected from wild predators. Moreover, both living in dense settlements so as to tend to crops and tending domesticated animals could be unhealthy because of diseases spread through exposure to human and animal waste. Studies have shown that early farmers were shorter in stature than hunter-gatherers and lived less long on average. Of course, there were advantages to the new ways of life, or else so many societies would not have adopted them.

20. Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002), 59–100; Ehret, "Agricultural Origins," 59 ff.; Fiona Marshall and Elizabeth Hildebrand, "Cattle before Crops: The Beginning of Food Production in Africa," *Journal of World Prehistory* 16 (2002), 99–143; Paul J. Lane, "Early Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa to ca. 500 CE," in *Cambridge World History*, vol. 2, 473–97.

A different sort of change was taking place in technology. Early stone tools and weapons were durable and relatively easy to fashion for a variety of uses. Stone tools and weapons remained in use for millennia, but equivalent objects made of metal gradually displaced them. The fashioning of metals had begun for decorative purposes. Pure gold had long been sought for jewelry because of its naturally attractive gleam, and polished copper has a similar sheen. Refining copper and gold was also relatively easy because they may occur in relatively pure forms and do not require unusually hot temperatures to soften for shaping or to melt for casting. However, pure gold and copper were too soft to make durable tools. Alloys of copper, known as bronze or brass, were harder than pure copper and were used to make decorative objects for the rich and powerful, such as the man buried at Igbo-Ukwu mentioned earlier. Valuable trades in copper and gold became widespread in Africa, as the next chapter will relate.

Most iron deposits were mixed with impurities and required hotter temperatures to purify. Although mixtures of relatively pure iron and nickel occurred in meteorites,²¹ such meteorites were so rare that their iron was used only to make weapons for powerful rulers, such as the pharaohs. Ordinary iron ore is abundant in Africa and elsewhere, but it took a long time for people to perfect the complex process of separating out pure iron from the slag. It was once believed that the technology of iron smelting was invented at a single center in Anatolia (now Turkey) about 1500 BCE and that the technology gradually spread from there to the rest of the world. A few years ago UNESCO supported an effort to prove that iron smelting had actually developed independently about the same time in what is now the country of Niger in West Africa. The location seemed possible because that area had been an important center of copper metallurgy several centuries earlier. As it has turned out, this effort became an exercise in mythmaking by supporters of African achievement. It is still possible to imagine that Africans could have invented iron smelting independently, but the evidence that the supporters cited for the dating of the Niger smelters did not stand up to critical examination. Not only were the charcoal samples used for radiocarbon dating contaminated, but it also turned out that individuals eager to make the case for the Niger site had selectively manipulated and exaggerated the evidence. For the present, the best consensus among scholars is that the archaeological evidence does not support a separate discovery of iron smelting in sub-Saharan Africa. Many also feel that the possibility of finding sufficient evidence is low, both because of the problems inherent in finding sites with datable evidence and because of too little effort is currently being made to locate and investigate sites in sub-Saharan Africa.

Is there another way to generate the proof? Christopher Ehret argues from linguistic and other evidence that there were multiple places in sub-Saharan Africa where

21. The largest iron meteorite in the world is the Hoba meteorite, discovered by accident in Namibia in the early twentieth century. Weighing some sixty tons, it is largely intact and lies where it was found, being too heavy to move.

people seem to have discovered how to smelt iron. The earliest African invention of iron smelting may date to before 1000 BCE in the Great Lakes region of East Africa and south of Lake Chad in West-Central Africa. From these places it could have spread to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, except for the Horn of Africa, where the technology was borrowed from the Middle East. Thus, although independent African inventions of iron smelting are possible, the intriguing linguistic evidence does not seem sufficient, by itself, to convince the scholarly community.²²

Although developments in food production and metallurgy spread slowly, they did produce some changes that in retrospect seem quite dramatic. One was a steady increase in population, due to improved nutrition. Another was transformation in the landscape as cultivation increased. The language map of Africa provides another striking perspective on the magnitude of the changes under way. Slowly but relentlessly a new group of languages known collectively as Bantu spread across most of Africa below the Equator. In the third millennium BCE, speakers of a language known as proto-Bantu began to expand out of southern Cameroon to the east and south. The proto-Bantu were Late Stone Age farmers, who initially cleared woodland for their crops using polished stone axes. By 1000 BCE, Bantu-speaking people had spread up the Congo River valley as well as along the southern edge of the great Central African rainforest. Over the course of next two millennia the frontier of advancing Bantu languages had reached the Indian Ocean and moved south of the Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers into eastern South Africa.

As they expanded generation by generation, these populations underwent many significant changes. One of the most obvious is that the ancestral proto-Bantu language gave birth to dozens and then hundreds of different languages, each language being associated with distinctive cultural features. Today there are some 350 distinct Bantu languages. A second change was the spread of iron smelting, enabling farmers to clear land more efficiently with iron tools, thus enabling their settlements to spread faster. The expansion of Bantu-speaking peoples altered the map, but the transformations occurred slowly over four thousand years. Once misleadingly called the Bantu migration or migrations, it was in reality a population drift, an oozing of people generation by generation through compatible environments. This expanding population interacted with other peoples, absorbing some of them and borrowing parts of their cultures. The driving force was population growth due the abundance of food and land. As one generation gave birth to a more numerous new generation, the surplus

22. Hamady Bascoum, ed., *Aux Origines du Fer en Afrique: Une Ancienneté Méconnue. Afrique de l'Ouest et Afrique Centrale* (Paris: Éditions UNESCO, 2002); David J. Killick, "Review Essay: What Do We Know about African Iron Working," *Journal of African Archaeology* 2.1 (2004): 97–112; Stanley B. Alpern, "Did They or Didn't They Invent It? Iron in Sub-Saharan Africa," *History in Africa* 52 (2005): 41–94; Ehret, *Civilizations*, 136–38, 159–62; Bertram B. B. Mapunda, "The Appearance and Development of Metallurgy South of the Sahara," in Mitchell and Lane, *African Archaeology*, 615–26.

population sought new lands nearby. As geographical distances multiplied, so too did cultural and linguistic differences. The map of the Romance language family in Europe corresponds to the borders of the Latin-speaking Western Roman Empire, but there was no Bantu empire to provide a cultural base. Thus, the spread of the Bantu languages involved greater cultural differentiation.

An example of this differentiation can be found in southeastern Africa where DNA evidence shows that Bantu-speaking people intermarried with Khoekhoe peoples, incorporating new genetic material into their own gene pools. Anthropological and linguistic evidence shows that the early Bantu also adopted some Khoekhoe customs. Khoekhoe influences appear to lie behind the fact that men of the southeastern Bantu devoted greater energy to cattle keeping than did other Bantu-speaking males, along with the greater role their women played in farming. As mentioned earlier, the several click sounds in some southeastern Bantu languages were one of the most obvious and persisting borrowings.²³

The final case study concerns the evidence for ancient Egypt's African origins. One of the misinformed judgments about Africa offered by the German philosopher Hegel concerned ancient Egypt, whose historical importance even he found impossible to question. One cannot exclude Egypt, he stated, from consideration "in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit." Although ancient Egypt merits a special place in human history, it did not emerge in isolation. Just as Western culture borrowed from the ancient Egyptians, Egyptians borrowed from African societies to the south. The African connection is clearly supported by linguistic, genetic, and other evidence. The ancient Egyptian language belongs to the Afrasian (or Afro-Asiatic) family and is the oldest written form of that language, going back to 3300 BCE. The prototypic Afrasian language emerged between 22,000 and 15,000 BCE in the Horn of Africa, probably in the Ethiopian highlands. Thereafter, Afrasian speakers moved northward through the hills along the western Red Sea coast into Egypt. Genetic evidence from modern Egyptians confirms the presence of a distinctive Y-chromosome deriving from that movement. Fully modern people already lived in Egypt at the time the Afrasian-speaking people arrived, but there is nowhere they could have come from except from earlier migrations originating in sub-Saharan Africa.²⁴

The fact that the language spoken and written by ancient Egyptians belonged to the Afrasian family attests to the cultural importance of the newcomers. Further migrations spread the family of Afrasian languages into the Middle East. Along with other languages, ancient and modern Hebrew and Arabic belong to the Afrasian family. The Afrasian family also spread west across North Africa, giving rise to the Berber languages, and south of the Sahara into what is now northern Nigeria, giving rise to

23. Ehret, *Civilizations*, 241–43; Pierre de Maret, "Archaeologies of Bantu Expansion," in Mitchell and Lane, *African Archaeology*, 627–43.

24. Ehret, "Africa from 48,000," 379–87.

1. No History in Africa? Can the Oldest Humans Have the Shortest History?

the important Hausa language. However, ancient Egypt was not just part of Africa; it also interacted with its neighbors, who sometimes invaded. The African kingdom of Nubia, for example, conquered ancient Egypt, and Nubians formed Egypt's twenty-fifth ruling dynasty in the eighth century BCE. Likewise, the Near Eastern states of Assyria and Persia also invaded and conquered the land of the Nile. Finally, Egypt was incorporated into the empires of Alexander the Great, Rome, and the Arab Muslims. For the most part the conquerors adopted much more from the Egyptians than the Egyptians did from them.

The linguistic evidence for Egyptians' African lineage is cultural not racial. In common with the Hebrews, Arabs, and some Berbers, the Egyptians did not regard themselves as sharing the same skin coloring as the "black" Africans further south. Nor does genetic evidence prove that Egyptians were biologically identical with the darker-skinned people of the Horn of Africa. After all, all humans have genes that can be traced back to Africa. As the Introduction warned, the Afrocentrists' claim that, because ancient Egyptians were Africans they must have been black, is a misleading oversimplification of the complexity of human biology and history.

Conclusion

It will be clear that Africa has a history that is longer than any other continent and is equally full of interesting and important events and achievements. This chapter has concentrated on the earlier events in African history; later chapters will take up more recent topics. It will also be clear that the task of uncovering the secrets of the African past requires using many distinct and specialized disciplines. Rather than relying primarily on written sources, historians of Africa must be prepared to utilize a wide range of information that Africans have deliberately left behind (handprints) as well as evidence that they have inadvertently left behind or carried forward in their genes and speech (footprints). If Georg Hegel may be partly excused for his negative views of African history because he lived before modern historians had mapped the patterns of the African past, people in more recent times have no such excuse. The outline of African history is clear, and researchers have documented many particular details. Yet history is always a work in progress, so future scholarship will emend current ideas and interpretations.

From Kapelwa Musonda File
Lusaka: Associated Printers, 1973.

while others can't shut. The conductress should not be called upon to settle disputes on whether a window has to stay open or shut.

'Sandwiches, soft drinks, beer, and cigarettes will be sold by some unauthorised vendors who will cajole and lure you to buy their goods. May I warn you that you will find their goods of a poor quality and the prices unreasonably exorbitant. The management does not condone these activities but they have always eluded our attempts to curb them. You will also find other unauthorised persons selling foodstuffs at every stop we make. With these, remember to get the food before giving out the money. These people have been known to disappear into the bush with the passengers' money. I am sure you are also aware that these people have no change.

'It shouldn't surprise any of you if at some stage during this trip we make a stop for hours on end. We shall not tell you why this is so for the simple reason that we shall not know either.

'You will also find that this train will start and stop with a big jolt throwing most of you off-balance. This is nothing to get alarmed about as it is a result of our attempt to hit 40 miles per hour in the shortest possible time to get you home quickly. Please don't jump off the train if you see a lot of smoke coming out of the engine. It does not mean that the train is catching fire.

'For those of you who wish to spend their time reading, you will find a wide variety of both national and international magazines and papers scattered on the floor.

'I am sorry that you are very crowded and most of you have no seats and are standing around the corridors. Consider this as an advantage as you will not be able to sleep. This train is always full of pick-pockets and other shady characters who are after your money and luggage.

'You will find bathrooms located at the end of each coach. Before you start complaining, remember that this train is carrying hundreds of people, some of whom might have been there before you.

'There are a number of people on the train carrying radio sets and record players and I am sure they will provide you with music, news bulletins, and other entertainment. We don't allow this sort of thing, of course, but I thought I might mention it to show you what you have to put up with.

'Would you now extinguish your cigarettes, and those with seats please get seated and if you are without one find something to give you a firm support. as we are about to start off now. I wish you a pleasant trip and good night.'

Doc #1

IF THIS IS AFRICA YOU CAN HAVE IT

Tourists can be very fickle. When they land anywhere in Africa, they expect to be accosted by savages wearing nothing but lion skins, scared out of their wits by a roaring lion two feet from their hotel window and confronted by inter-tribal warfare as they step off the plane. Unhappily for them, things are not what they seem to be.

Every underdeveloped country is doing everything possible to have a good share of the limitless tourist trade. Experts say tourists help a great deal with the balance of payments.

This has resulted in the erection of huge hotels in every African capital providing all the luxuries equal to any Hilton hotel. Every country is quietly unearthing every forgotten relic to try and attract tourists. The countries without a magnificent waterfall or game, try to promise sunshine, snow-capped mountains or good food. An Israeli airline went to extremes after the Arab-Israeli war: it put an advertisement in a New York paper which ran, 'Visit Israel and see the Pyramids.'

According to an American tourist I met recently, we are going about this fight for tourists the wrong way. Of course, it's difficult to imagine what the American was hoping to see at this time of year. But, who knows, he might have been an F.B.I. agent tracking down some international gang of narcotics smugglers. Anyhow he claimed to be a tourist.

'How do you like it here?' I asked him after we had introduced ourselves.

'Now that you ask,' he said, 'I hope you won't mind if I say I have been very disappointed. This is not the Africa I had in mind.'

'Well, you don't have to blame anybody for this but yourself. If you have seen a lot of Tarzan films, obviously you are bound to have the wrong picture of Africa altogether.'

'You have a point there,' he said, 'at least about Tarzan pictures. But even our history books are not up-to-date. I don't know what I will say to the folks back home. They will want to know if I was attacked by some spear-waving savages, or if I ever encountered a charging buffalo, but up to now, I haven't even been bitten by a mosquito.'

I sympathised deeply with the man. I could see him wishing to be invited here and there for cocktails and dinners during which he would enthral

his listeners with strange tales of how his canoe was attacked by a hippo in a river full of crocodiles and how he reached safety with the help of a pen knife.

But, alas such days are long gone now. So I tried to comfort him. 'If you have visited any of our game parks or the Victoria Falls, I am sure your friends will be delighted, especially if you took some pictures.'

'You don't know what you are talking about,' he cried. 'I could see more game and take pictures at close range if I went to any zoo in America. This is a wasted vacation, as all I have seen is a carbon copy of what I left at home: instant coffee, instant lunch, same television films, same clothes, and worst of all these Coca-Cola signs. The fact is I don't see anything that would be of interest to my friends.'

'Well,' I said after a long silence during which I was thinking of something that would be of interest to his friends. 'If you have tried to use any of our phones, or buses, there is something there that would intrigue your drinking pals.'

There is something in your phones that is worth talking about. I booked a call to Lusaka this morning. They told me that there would be a two-hour delay. Later they said four hours delay, and six hours later they said there was an indefinite delay. Yesterday I tried to call my folks in Columbus, Ohio. I was told that there might be a two-year delay, but I have a feeling he meant two days. But you see, people back home do not think you have telephones. They think you still use tom-toms to transmit messages. You people could make yourselves a lot of money if you went about this tourist business the right way. All you have to do is not to destroy the tourist impression of Africa, the Dark Continent.

'All you have to do,' he continued, 'is to arrange a few tribal wars for the tourist to witness and while you are taking him around the bushes you could have some non-poisonous snake bite him. It would help a great deal if you let him get captured by some cannibal tribe and have him rescued by a big game hunter in a white helmet. When such stories get around you would have all the tourists you need, and so much money would flow into this country that you wouldn't know what to do with it. A friend of mine was in Nigeria when they overthrew the late Sir Abubakar. He woke up in the middle of the night to find himself staring at four machine-guns. They thought he was a C.I.A. agent. When he went back to America he did not buy his own dinner for a whole year. You see, what we tourists want is some action.'

'I am afraid,' I said, 'our pride is too great to permit such things. Above all, your history books have greatly exaggerated these things. What would happen if it was found out that what you have suggested was all a put-on?'

Just then a hotel security guard came along to report to him that he had forgotten to lock his room and some night marauders had ransacked it, taking all he had.

'Oh, jolly good!' he shouted. 'This might just be the break I have been waiting for. With my passport and other travelling documents gone, I am in for some action.'

Topics in World History
Edited by Patricia W. Romero

EASTERN AFRICAN HISTORY

VOL. II of African History:
Text and Readings

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 Markus Wiener Publishing
New York

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acquaint him as to his coming, and sent as "the mouth" two hundred bracelets and a machira. When he came to him, he gave him a further six hundred bracelets. Muzura likewise sent this Cafre a hundred bracelets, and a machira, and a black girl, so that he might make the roads through his lands free to Bocarro. He (sc. Manhanga) gave Bocarro a tusk of ivory and sent to Muzura a present of garments, which had come there from the coast of Melinde,¹⁴ because this Cafre is obedient to Muzura. Here Muzura's three guides returned, and also the three guides of Inhamocumba, the governor of Moramba, and also Chicoave's son. From here Bocarro travelled onwards with guides, who were given to him by Manhanga and to whom he gave forthwith twenty bracelets. They made their way for seven days through country, which was uninhabited, because it had been destroyed by the Zimbas, who passed that way making war. At the end of seven days they reached the village of Chiponda, brother of Manhanga, to whom he gave fifty bracelets and a machira; and he (sc. Chiponda) gave him a small tusk of ivory; and he also gave him another Cafre to act as his guide and to accompany him on the road from there to the seashore, to whom Bocarro gave twenty bracelets. From there they made their way for four days through desert lands, and at the end of that time came to the village of Ponde, to whom they gave a few beads. Thence they went to the village of Morengue, to whom they gave a machira and a few beads. Thence they travelled through desert land for four days and came to Bucury, a village of

¹⁴ Probably from Kilwa Kisiwani.

Eastern Africa

Moors,¹⁷ where they slept. The next day they came to the shore of the salt sea at the hour of midday. From there they embarked and passed over to the island of Quiloa,¹⁸ which is opposite to the shore, where were the factor and other Portuguese, who made Bocarro their guest.

The inhabited lands along this road abound in foodstuffs, that is to say, millet, rice, fruits, hens, sheep, cows and goats, all of which are cheap. Gaspar Bocarro spent fifty three days on the road and also spent more than one hundred and fifty cruzados in presents and for his own food and for the food which he gave to the people who accompanied him on the road. Though Gaspar Bocarro spent fifty three days on the road with all his servants, they (sc. the servants) were able to return from Quiloa to Tete, travelling light, in no more than twenty-five days.

At Quiloa Bocarro took ship for his voyage to Ormuz. On reaching Mombaça he heard that the roads in Persia were being obstructed by the Shah, and the land was at war. Therefore he decided to return to Moçambique and thence to the rivers of Cuama, where he arrived safely.

I have written all the details of this journey, the names of the villages and the lands, and their lords, and the expenses incurred by Gaspar Bocarro, because, if any one in time to come wishes to make this journey, the adventurer, who makes it, may know about the road and the expense.

¹⁷ Like other Portuguese chroniclers Bocarro used the word Moor (Mouro) to distinguish the coast inhabitant of mixed Arab and African blood from the pure Arab from Asia.

¹⁸ Kilwa Kisiwani was at this date ruled by a "Moorish" Sultan, who was independent of the Portuguese, but was on friendly terms with them.

Father Lobo

11 FATHER LOBO PORTUGUESE MISSIONARIES IN ETHIOPIA

Father Jeronimo Lobo (1593-1678) left Portugal for Goa, India, in 1622. After residing in India for a year, during which he completed his studies in divinity, he received letters from Ethiopia proclaiming that the Emperor of Ethiopia had been converted to the Church of Rome and desired Roman Catholic missionaries. Father Lobo was among the eight Jesuit priests who were selected to go to Ethiopia and administer to the emperor. At the time, Ethiopia was in constant revolt; after an appropriate flirtation with Roman Catholicism, the emperor returned to the Coptic (Egyptian Christian) Church in 1632.

I continued two years at my residence in Tigre [in northern Ethiopia—ed.], entirely taken up with the duties of the mission, preaching, confessing, baptising, and enjoying a longer quiet and repose than I had ever done since I left Portugal. During this time one of our fathers, being always sick, and of a constitution which the air of Abyssinia was very hurtful to, obtained a permission from our superiors to return to the Indies. I was willing to accompany him through part of his way, and went with him over a desert, at no great distance from my residence, where I found many trees loaded with a kind of fruit, called by the natives Anchoy, about the bigness of an apricot, and very yellow, which is much eaten without any ill effect. I therefore made no scruple of gathering and eating it, without knowing that the inhabitants always peeled it, the rind being a violent purgative; so that, eating the fruit and skin together, I fell into such a disorder as almost brought me to my end. The ordinary dose is six of these rinds, and I had devoured twenty.

I removed from thence to Debaroa, fifty-four miles nearer the sea, and crossed in my way the desert of the province of Saraoe. The country is fruitful, pleasant, and populous. There are greater numbers of Moors in these parts than in any other province of Abyssinia; and the Abyssins of this country are not much better than the Moors.

From Father Jerome Lobo, *A Voyage to Abyssinia*, translated by Samuel Johnson (London: A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, 1735), pp. 125-131.

I was at Debaroa when the persecution was first set on foot against the Catholics. Sultan Segued, who had been so great a favourer of us, was grown old, and his spirit and authority decreased with his strength. His son, who was arrived at manhood, being weary of waiting so long for the crown he was to inherit, took occasion to blame his father's conduct, and found some reason for censuring all his actions; he even proceeded so far as to give orders sometimes contrary to the emperor's. He had embraced the Catholic religion, rather through complaisance than conviction or inclination; and many of the Abyssins, who had done the same, waited only for an opportunity of making public profession of the ancient erroneous opinions, and of re-uniting themselves to the church of Alexandria. So artfully can this people dissemble their sentiments, that we had not been able hitherto to distinguish our real from our pretended favours; but as soon as this prince began to give evident tokens of his hatred, even in the life-time of the emperor, we saw all the courtiers and governors, who had treated us with such a shew of friendship, declare against us, and persecute us as disturbers of the public tranquillity; who had come into Ethiopia with no other intention than to abolish the ancient laws and customs of the country, to sow divisions between father and son, and preach up a revolution.

After having borne all sorts of affronts and ill-treatments, we retired to our house at Fremona, in the midst of our country

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men, who had been settling round about us a long time, imagining we should be more secure there, and that, at least during the life of the emperor, they would not come to extremities, or proceed to open force. I laid some stress upon the kindness which the viceroy of Tigre had shown to us, and in particular to me; but was soon convinced that those hopes had no real foundation, for he was one of the most violent of our persecutors. He seized upon all our lands, and advancing with his troops to Fremona, blocked up the town. The army had not been stationed there long before they committed all sorts of disorders; so that one day a Portuguese, provoked beyond his temper at the insolence of some of them, went out with his four sons, and wounding several of them, forced the rest back to their camp.

We thought we had good reason to apprehend an attack; their troops were increasing, our town was surrounded, and on the point of being forced. Our Portuguese therefore thought, that without staying till the last extremities, they might lawfully repel one violence by another; and sallying out, to the number of fifty, wounded about threescore of the Abyssins, and had put them to the sword, but that they feared it might bring too great an odium upon our cause. The Portuguese were some of them wounded, but happily none died on either side.

Though the times were by no means favourable to us, every one blamed the conduct of the viceroy; and those who did not commend our action, made the necessity we were reduced to of self-defence an excuse for it. The viceroy's principal design was to get my person into his possession, imagining, that if I was once in his power, all the Portuguese would pay him a blind obedience. Having been unsuccessful in his attempt by open force, he made use of the arts of negotiation, but with an event not more to his satisfaction. This viceroy being recalled, a son-in-law of the emperor's succeeded, who treated

us even worse than his predecessor had done.

When he entered upon his command, he loaded us with kindnesses, giving us so many assurances of his protection, that, while the emperor lived, we thought him one of our friends; but no sooner was our protector dead, than this man pulled off his mask; and quitting all shame, let us see that neither the fear of God nor any other consideration was capable of restraining him, when we were to be distressed. The persecution then becoming general, there was no longer any place of security for us in Abyssinia; where we were looked upon by all as the authors of all the civil commotions; and many councils were held to determine in what manner they should dispose of us. Several were of opinion, that the best way would be to kill us all at once; and affirmed, that no other means were left of re-establishing order and tranquillity in the kingdom.

Others, more prudent, were not for putting us to death with so little consideration; but advised, that we should be banished to one of the isles of the lake of Dambia, an affliction more severe than death itself. These alledged, in vindication of their opinions, that it was reasonable to expect, if they put us to death, that the viceroy of the Indies would come with fire and sword to demand satisfaction. This argument made so great an impression upon some of them, that they thought no better measures could be taken than to send us back again to the Indies. This proposal, however, was not without its difficulties; for they suspected, that when we should arrive at the Portuguese territories, we would levy an army, return back to Abyssinia, and under pretence of establishing the Catholic religion, revenge all the injuries we had suffered.

While they were thus deliberating upon our fate, we were imploring the succour of the Almighty with fervent and humble supplications, intreating him, in the midst of our sighs and tears, that he would not

suffer his own cause to miscarry; and that however it might please him to dispose of our lives, which we prayed he would assist us to lay down with patience and resignation, worthy of the faith for which we were persecuted, he would not permit our enemies to triumph over the truth.

Thus we passed our days and nights in prayers, in affliction and tears, continually crowded with widows and orphans that subsisted upon our charity, and came to us for bread, when we had not any for ourselves.

While we were in this distress, we received an account that the viceroy of the Indies had fitted out a powerful fleet against the king of Mombaza, who, having thrown off the authority of the Portuguese, had killed the governor of the fortress, and had since committed many acts of cruelty. The same fleet, as we were informed, after the king of Mombaza was reduced, was to burn and ruin Zeila, in revenge of the death of two Portuguese Jesuits who were killed by the king in the year 1604. As Zeila was not far from the frontiers of Abyssinia, they imagined that they already saw the Portuguese invading their country.

The viceroy of Tigre had enquired of me, a few days before, how many men one India ship carried; and being told that the compliment of some was a thousand men, he compared that answer with the report then spread over all the country, that there were eighteen Portuguese vessels on

the coast of Adel; and concluded, that they were manned by an army of eighteen thousand men. Then considering what had been achieved by four hundred, under the command of Don Christopher de Gama, he thought Abyssinia already ravaged, or subjected to the king of Portugal. Many declared themselves of his opinion, and the court took its measures with respect to us from these uncertain and ungrounded rumours. Some were so infatuated with their apprehensions, that they undertook to describe the camp of the Portuguese, and affirmed that they had heard the report of their cannons.

All this contributed to exasperate the inhabitants, and reduced us often to the point of being massacred. At length they came to a resolution of giving us up to the Turks, assuring them that we were masters of a vast treasure; in hope, that after they had inflicted all kinds of tortures on us, to make us confess where we had hid our gold, or what we had done with it, they would at length kill us in rage for the disappointment. Nor was this their only view, for they believed that the Turks would, by killing us, kindle such an irreconcilable hatred between themselves and our nation, as would make it necessary for them to keep us out of the Red sea, of which they are entirely masters: so that their determination was as politic as cruel. Some pretend, that the Turks were engaged to put us to death as soon as we were in their power.

12 JAMES BRUCE SHEIK ADLAN AND THE BLACK HORSE CAVALRY OF SENNAR

James Bruce of Kinnaird (1730-1794) spent the early part of his life in study and travel. He was appointed British Consul in Algiers, but determined to seek the source of the Nile, which had baffled men for centuries, he visited Ethiopia in 1769. Here he found the origins of the Blue Nile. Although Pedro Paez had arrived at the same source over 150 years before in 1618 and although that source was but the beginning of one branch of the Nile River,

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THE GHANA EMPIRE IN 1068

This description of the Ghana Empire was written by the geographer Al-Bakri in 1068. He never left his home region in Muslim Spain, but he collected information from merchants and other travelers who crossed the Sahara Desert on the caravan routes. The geographical term Sudan comes from the Arabic Bilad al-Sudan, which means "the land of the blacks."

The city of Ghana consists of two towns situated on a plain. One of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims, is large and possesses twelve mosques, in one of which they assemble for the Friday prayer. There are salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars. In the environs are wells with sweet water, from which they drink and with which they grow vegetables. The king's town is six miles distant from this one and bears the name of Al-Ghaba [The Forest]. Between these two towns there are continuous habitations. The houses of the inhabitants are of stone and acacia wood. The king has a palace and a number of domed dwellings all surrounded with an enclosure like a city wall. In the king's town, and not far from his court of justice, is a mosque where the Muslims who arrive at his court pray. Around the king's town are domed buildings and groves and thickets where the sorcerers of these people, men in charge of the religious cult, live. In them too are their idols and the tombs of their kings. These woods are guarded and none may enter them and know what is there. . . .

On every donkey-load of salt when it is brought into the country their king levies one golden dinar, and two dinars when it is sent out. From a load of copper the king's due is five mithqals, and from a load of other goods ten mithqals. The best gold found in his land comes from the town of Ghiyaru, which is eighteen days' travelling distant from the king's town over a country inhabited by tribes of the Sudan whose dwellings are contiguous.

The nuggets found in all the mines of his country are reserved for the king, only this gold dust being left for the people. But for this the people would accumulate gold until it lost its value. The nuggets may weigh from an ounce to a pound. It is related that the king owns a nugget as large as a big stone. . . .

The king of Ghana, when he calls up his army, can put 200,000 men into the field, more than 40,000 of them archers. The horses in Ghana are very small.

1. Why was the capital of Ghana arranged in the form of two separate towns?
2. What arrangements facilitated the coexistence of Ghanaian religious cults and Islam?

Source: *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, translated by J. F. P. Hopkins, edited and annotated by N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 77-81.

From Robert Harms, *Africa in Global History with Sources* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2018), 158-161.

THE MALI EMPIRE

Al-Umari was born in Damascus in 1301, but spent many years in Cairo as an official of the Mamluk sultanate. He was in Damascus at the time of Mansa Musa's visit to Cairo, but upon his return to Cairo he obtained information about the Mali Empire from Egyptian officials and merchants. As in the previous reading, the geographical term Sudan, as used here, means "the land of the blacks."

This kingdom [of Mali] lies to the south of the extreme west and adjoins the Atlantic Ocean. The king's capital there is the town of BTTY. This country is very hot. The means of subsistence are exiguous, the varieties of food few. The people are tall, with jet black complexion and crinkly hair.

This king is the greatest of the Muslim kings of the Sudan. He rules the most extensive territory, has the most numerous army, is the bravest, the richest, the most fortunate, the most victorious over his enemies, and the best able to distribute benefits.

The truthful and trustworthy shaykh Abu Uthman Sa'id al-Dukkali, who lived at BTTY for 35 years and went to and fro in this kingdom, related to me that it is square, its length being four or more months' journey and its width likewise. It lies to the south of Marrakech and the interior of Morocco and is not far from the Atlantic Ocean. It extends in longitude from Muli to Tura on the ocean. It is all inhabited with few exceptions. Under the authority of the sultan of this kingdom is the land of Mafazat al-Tibr. They bring gold dust (*tibr*) to him each year. They are uncouth infidels. If the sultan wished he could extend his authority over them, but the kings of this kingdom have learned by experience that as soon as one of them conquers one of the gold towns and Islam spreads and the muezzin calls to prayer,

there the gold there begins to decrease and then disappears, while it increases in the neighboring heathen countries. When they had learned the truth of this by experience they left the gold countries under the control of the heathen people and were content with their vassalage and the tribute imposed on them.

On Mansa Musa's visit to Cairo in 1324.

Gold was at a high price in Egypt until they came in that year. The mithqal did not go below 25 *dirhams* and was generally above, but from that time its value fell and it cheapened in price and has remained cheap till now. The mithqal does not exceed 22 *dirhams* or less. 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.

The king of this country imports Arab horses and pays high prices for them. His army numbers about 100,000, of whom about 10,000 are cavalry mounted on horses and the remainder infantry without horses or other mounts.

1. Why did the kings of Mali fail to establish direct control over the goldfields?
2. Why did the price of gold in Cairo diminish after 1324?

Source: *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History*, translated by J. F. P. Hopkins, edited and annotated by N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 261-271.

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TIMBUKTU AND THE SONGHAY EMPIRE

Al-Hasan ibn Muhammad al-Wazzan al-Zayyati was a Berber who was educated in Fez, Morocco. Sometime between 1506 and 1510, he accompanied his uncle on a diplomatic mission to the Songhay Empire. In 1518, while returning from a pilgrimage to Mecca, he was captured by Sicilian pirates and presented to Pope Leo X. The following year he was baptized and became known as *Leo Africanus*. His *Description of Africa*, written in 1526, was published in Italian in 1550 and subsequently translated into Latin, French, and English. In this excerpt, he describes Timbuktu.

The houses of Timbuktu are huts made of stakes daubed with clay, and with straw roofs. In the middle of the town there is a temple built with masoned stones and limestone mortar by an architect of the Béticos [a mountain range in southern Spain], a native of the town of al-Mana, and a large palace built by the same master builder, where the king stays. There are numerous artisans' workshops, merchants, and in particular, weavers of cotton cloths. The cloths of Europe reach Timbuktu, brought by Barbary merchants.

The women of the town still have the custom of veiling their faces, except for the slaves, who sell all the foodstuffs. The inhabitants are very rich, especially the resident strangers, to the extent that the present king has given two of his daughters in marriage to two merchant brothers, because of their wealth. There are several sweet water wells in Timbuktu. In addition, during the flood season of the Niger, water reaches the town by canals. There is great abundance of cereals and livestock, and hence the consumption of milk and butter is considerable. But salt is in short supply because it is brought from Taghaza, which is about five hundred miles distant from Timbuktu. . . . The king possesses great treasure in coin and gold ingots. One of these ingots weighs 1,300 pounds.

The royal court is very well organized and magnificent. When the king goes

from one town to another with his courtiers, he rides a camel, and the horses are led by grooms. . . . When anyone wants to address the king, he kneels before him, takes a handful of dust and sprinkles it over his head and shoulders. . . . The king has some three thousand cavalry, and a huge number of infantry armed with bows made of wild fennel. They fire poisoned arrows. This king only makes war on those neighbors of his who are enemies, and on those who refuse to pay him tribute. When victorious, he has those captured in combat sold in Timbuktu, even the children. . . .

In Timbuktu there are numerous judges, scholars and priests, all well paid by the king. Many manuscript books coming from Barbary are sold. Such sales are more profitable than any other goods.

Instead of coined money they use pieces of pure gold, and for small purchases cowries, that is to say shells brought from Persia, of which four hundred are worth one ducat. . . .

The people of Timbuktu have a light-hearted nature. It is their habit to wander in the town at night between 10 p.m. and 1 a.m., playing musical instruments and dancing. The citizens have many slaves to serve them, both male and female.

1. What were the main industries in Timbuktu?
2. Explain why Timbuktu became a major center for Islamic learning and scholarship.

Source: Giovan Leone Africano, *Della descrizione dell'Africa*, in G. B. Ramusio, *Delle navigationi e viaggi* (Venice, 1550), reprinted in *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*.

IBN BATTUTA SAILS TO KILWA

The Moroccan-born traveler Ibn Battuta visited the East African coast in 1330-1332 after spending 3 years as a Muslim pilgrim in Mecca and Medina. In this excerpt, he describes his trip down the coast to the port of Kilwa, which marked the southernmost reach of the monsoon winds. He noted that Kilwa was a major emporium for the gold trade and also that sharifs (descendants of the Prophet Muhammad) came to Kilwa from as far away as Iraq to enjoy the sultan's largess.

Then I set off by sea from the town of Mogadishu for the land of the Swahili and the town of Kilwa, which is in the land of Zanj. We arrived at Mombasa, a large island two days' journey from the land of the Swahili. The island is quite separate from the mainland. It grows bananas, lemons, and oranges. The people also gather a fruit which they call *jammun*, which looks like an olive. It has a nut like an olive, but its taste is very sweet. The people do not engage in agriculture, but import grain from the Swahili. The greater part of their diet is bananas and fish. They follow the Shafi'i rite, and are devout, chaste, and virtuous. Their mosques are very strongly constructed of wood.

We spent a night on the island and then set sail for Kilwa, the principal town on the coast, the greater part of whose inhabitants are Zanj of very black complexion. Their faces are scarred, like the Limin at Janada. A merchant told me that Sofala is half a month's march from Kilwa, and that between Sofala and Yufi in the country of the Limin is a month's march. Powdered gold is brought from Yufi to Sofala.

Kilwa is one of the most beautiful and well-constructed towns in the world. The whole of it is elegantly built. The roofs are built with mangrove poles. There is very much rain. The people are engaged in a holy war, for their country lies beside that of pagan Zanj. The chief qualities are devotion and piety: they follow the Shafi'i rite.

When I arrived, the Sultan was Abu al-Muzaffar Hasan surnamed Abu al-Mawahib [the Father of Gifts] on account of his numerous charitable gifts. He frequently makes raids into the Zanj country, attacks them and carries off booty, of which he reserves a fifth, using it in the manner prescribed by the Quran. That reserved for the kinsfolk of the Prophet is kept separate in the Treasury, and, when Sharifs come to visit him, he gives it them. They come to him from Iraq, the Hijaz, and other countries.

1. Explain the relationship between the towns of Kilwa and Sofala.
2. Why did pilgrims come to Kilwa from distant countries?

Source: *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century*, compiled by G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp. 31-32.

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Descriptions of Euro-Africans

✱✱ All passages gtd from Brooks, Euro-Africans in Western Africa. ✱✱

Father Alvares railed against lançados and tangomaos for their collusion with Dutch and French "pirates":

These names properly apply only to those who, not content with cooperating with the idolatrous heathen in the practices and sacrifices of their false religion, erect huts and build pedestals for their infernal idols. The *lançados* are truly "run-aways," and not only from the lord's grace, a precious jewel their

souls are as far from as they are close to divine justice. These are truly *tangomaos*, for at the repast of guilt they not only snatch the dish but fill themselves like starving dogs, yet they remain famished for the Word of God. . . . By the bad example of their lives they discredit the purity of the Gospel faith in the eyes of the heathen. . . . They are evil itself, they are idolaters, perjurers, defiers of God, homicides, libertines, thieves who steal reputation, credit and good name from innocents as well as property, and also traitors — for they run away in order to help pirates, leading their ships to those places where our vessels are in the habit of anchoring and trading. They are people without understanding of right and wrong, without respect for anything other than their own appetites, and are the very spawn of hell. (Hair 1990, chapter 4: 4–5)

degraded
convict

Jobson was a shrewd observer and wrote down what he learned concerning Luso-Africans along the Gambia River. He characterized them as "dwelling, or rather lurking" among Mandinka:

They call themselves, *Portingals*, and some few of them seeme the same; others of them are *Molanes*, betwene blacke and white, but the most part are blacke, as the naturall inhabitants: they are scattered, some two or three dwellers in a place, and are all married, or rather keepe with them the country blackewomen, of whom they beget children, howbeit they have amongst them, neither Church, nor Frier, nor any other religious order. . . . They doe generally employ themselves in buying such commodities the country affords, wherein especially they covet the country people, who are sold unto them, when they commit offences. . . . The conditions they live subject unto, under the blacke Kings, makes it appeare, they have litle comfort in any Christian country, or else themselves are very careless what becometh of their posterity; for whensoever the husband, father, or maister of the familie

dies, if hee be of any worth, the King seizeth upon what hee hath, without respect, either to wife, children, or servant, except they have warning to provide before, or are capable of themselves, to look out for the future time; whereby we finde in some those few places we trade with them, poore distressed children left, who as it were exposed to the charitie of the country, become in a matter naturalized, and as they grow up, apply themselves to buy and sell one thing for another as the whole country doth, still reserving carefully the use of the *Portingall* tongue, and with a kinde of an affectionate zeale, the name of Christians, taking it in a great disdain, be they never so blacke, to be called a *Negro*. (Gamble and Hair 1999, 134–35, 196)

2

The Cabo Verdean shipmaster Francisco de Lemos Coelho described circumstances during his visits in the 1640s and 1650s. The trade season began in "winter," that is, after the rainy season ended in October:

Unless illness prevents them, the Portuguese who live here are obliged to visit the king of the land once a year and take him a very fine present, according to their means. This can sometimes cost more than 100 *mil-reis*, as it comprises very fine pieces of silver, brandy in barrels or flasks, fine coral, scarlet cloth, and other goods depending on what the donor possesses. The king thanks him for the gift and very often gives him back more than what he took was worth, but this depends on the king's attitude and his finances. The king's gift comprises blacks, hides, horses, and camels. The whites regularly use camels to transport the hides, and they buy more hides inland if they have the capital. A camel carries 40–50 hides. The blacks are very friendly towards the Portuguese, and more friendly to them than to any other nation. The coastal blacks, or most of them, speak our language, and also Dutch and French. A settler living here will have (as servants) (only) a few *grumetes*, this being what they call liberated blacks, since the local blacks will themselves do anything he orders them to do, provided they are paid; and as the land has so much trade, what is given them is hardly noticed. This land has very good tobacco, and a large quantity of the sort of cloth called jalofo cloth, and also

some other cloths called *hamans*, those obtained from this kingdom being the best (of this sort). (Coelho 1684/1985, chap. 1: 6–7)

Among those living at Rufisque in 1669 was a "Portuguese" known as Seignior Dom Joan (Juan), who entertained visiting Frenchmen in May 1669.

[He] regal'd us with Rice, Palm Wine, meat & fish. He had several wives, by whom he had mulatto children. He pray'd two Missionaries, who were with us, to baptize his children, which they promis'd to do the next day. They warn'd him that, being a Christian, he ought to content himself with one wife, & that he ought not to have several like the natives of the country; that whosoever he might choose he ought to marry in the face of the Church, in order not to live in sin: he promised to do so. I was astonish'd to see that this man was devout, having always a large Rosary in his hands, & several Images of Our Saviour, of the Virgin, & of the Saints, around his bed. The same with his wives or concubines, who carry'd also large Rosaries round their necks. For all that, this man could not be ignorant that he offended God in having so many wives. (Oliver 1897, 13)

Elite Women Euro-African Traders

③

One Luso-African woman living in the Gambia, a contemporary of Bibiana Vaz, was known to Europeans by several sobriquets: Marie Mar (in 1682), La Belinguerie (in 1686), and Maguimar (in 1687). The daughter of a former ruler, she was considered the most influential person in Niumi after from the mansa and reputedly possessed a fortune worth more than forty thousand lives in gold, slaves, and cattle. She was renowned for her openhanded hospitality to European traders.

"Belinguerie" apparently was a Wolof title of respect applied to this influential Luso-African woman. In Cayor, the bur's mother (or in some instances his sister) held the title of "linger." She controlled a number of villages whose inhabitants cultivated her lands and paid tribute to her and members of her personal entourage. A linger presided at her own court, which dealt with women's matters, such as cases concerning adultery (Gamble 1967, 58). The title "belinguerie" was found in James Fort's "Accounts and Charges for 1734," which recorded two payments made to "Belinger, Queen of Barra, a person of power and a good friend" (170/1451, 232-58; Wright, personal communication).

Michel Jajolet de La Courbe, the director of the Compagnie du Sénégal who visited the Gambia in June 1686, characterized La Belinguerie as the "reef" on which numerous whites from different countries had "shipwrecked" (François de Paris 1682, cited in Thilmans 1976, 26; Cultru 1913, 196-98). That La Courbe and his colleagues were enthralled by her is evident from his account of a banquet served on mats on the verandah of her Luso-African-type dwelling.

[The meal] included two boiled chickens and rice that was very well prepared with a considerable amount of *pinent*, which is a type of red and green fruit shaped like a small cucumber having a taste very similar to pepper; next, we were brought *galine peccade*, which is to say a fowl cut up and seasoned and put back in its skin for boiling, giving it a taste something like spiced cervelas sausage. I ate, also for the first time, *batangue*, which is a bread made from millet flour, round and flat like a very thin cake, which is served very hot, and is not at all bad. We were also served a dessert which I had never previously

eaten: it was a pineapple, an excellent fruit which has a taste somewhat like a sugared rennet apple, but much better; it is, however, very dangerous, and if you insert a knife in one for two days it completely corrodes the blade; to prevent this, it is consumed with wine and sugar. We were also served bananas, which is a yellow fruit shaped like a cucumber, except it is thinner; it has strong flesh, is very sweet, and extremely good. For drink, we were served palm wine and we had brought brandy, of which the lady drank a little. She was garbed in a very elegant man's shirt and a small Portuguese-style corset which emphasized her figure, and for a skirt she wore a beautiful African cloth which they call a *pagne* also, that is to say a prestige cloth which comes from Sao Tiago in the Cape Verde Islands. She had a very fine muslin coiled around her head in the shape of a turban raised a little in front. She had a gracious manner and a gift for conversation, and spoke Portuguese, French, and English well, indicative of the extensive commerce she carries on with all nations (Cultru 1913, 196-98).