

Time before the Time

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The African Cradle (7 Million BCE–700 CE)

Important Terms and Names

Sahelanthropus tchadensis

Nubia

Monogenesis

Kush

Polygenesis

Kemet

African Origins

The first Africans entered the English North American colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619, yet African history in America begins neither at the Virginia settlement, nor in 1619. The history of Africans in America is far more complex and comprehensive than is suggested by merely referring to that place and date. The varied narrative of Africans in America can only be told as a long journey of resistance and liberation, oriented toward the nobility and grace that mark the best character of a resilient people. Just as other populations have moved or been moved from one place to another, the African American today is a product of human movement from the most ancient of times until the most recent.

Mobility

Mobility marks the human species, and the earliest example of human beings moving from one place to another is found on the continent of Africa. After the origin of *Homo sapiens* somewhere in the fertile river valleys of a pristine East Africa, human beings traveled throughout our native continent, crossed into Asia and Europe, and populated the earth. In a profound sense the narrative of Africans in the Americas, South and North, might be said to transcend geography, deserts, oceans, forests, cultures, and even time. Indeed, African American history opens us up to what Winston Van Horne has termed transgenerationality, transculturality, and transcontinentality.

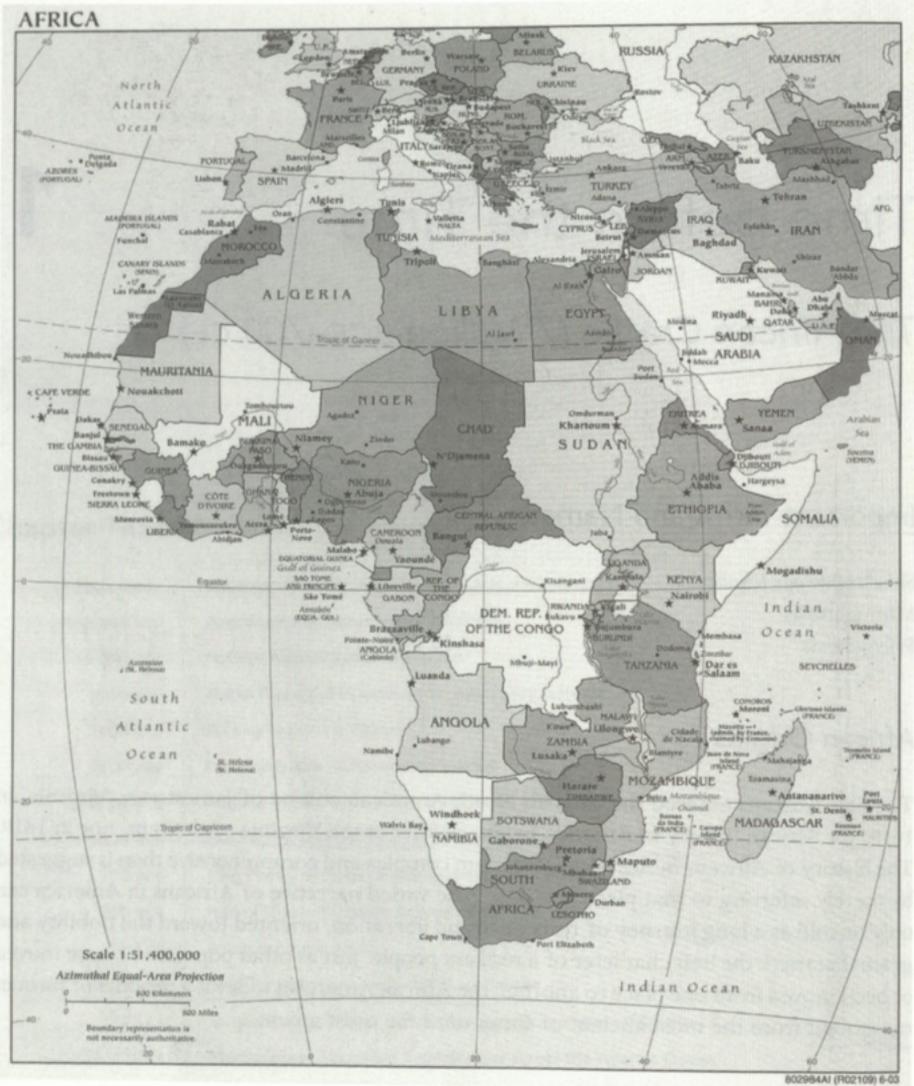


Figure 1.1 Map of Africa

The global reach of African American history starts in a unique way with the emergence on the African continent of resilient, curious, and durable ancestors. Thus, the historical narrative is not simply one that starts and ends in Africa—although that history is itself rich and vital. Rather, it moves across the globe. Humans share a common ancestry.

We feel and experience human kinship in many forms in a lifetime; that is our existential condition. However, the peculiarities of human interaction have from time to time produced unbearable grief, anxiety, pain, and suffering. This occurs when our journey through life is challenged by divisiveness, slavery, genocidal wars, ethnic cleansings, and other cruelties. Yet

out of these conditions emerges the incredible rise to human fulfillment and completeness that some refer to as glory.

While it is true that all humans can trace their ancestry to the African continent, perhaps the so-called Middle Passage Africans—those in the Caribbean and the Americas—hold a more recent and emotional attachment to Africa as their ancestral home than any other group of people living outside of the African continent. It is the “Mother Land,” as the name of a contemporary documentary film by Owen Shahidah reminds us. The Middle Passage Africans who entered the English colony as enslaved Africans in seventeenth-century Virginia have written a dramatic narrative across the face of the American continent and have demonstrated in every field the international reach of their influence.

Lessons of Biology and Anthropology in African Origin

The genetic mother of the mitochondrial DNA of the human race appears to have emerged in Africa about 250,000 years ago. In effect, scientists believe that this First Mother gave her genetic information to the nearly 7 billion people on the earth today.

Scientists Vincent Macaulay et al. report that both modern human mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and the male-specific part of the modern human Y chromosome have a recent origin in Africa and were dispersed throughout the rest of the world less than 100,000 years ago.¹ This conclusion substantiates the antiquity and the origins of modern humans in Africa, although recent evidence suggests that Denisovans whose remains were found in the caves of Siberia, Neanderthals found in the Neander Valley of Germany, and “hobbits”—dwarf hominids—found on Flores Island in Indonesia, existed for a while alongside modern *Homo sapiens*. However, all species of hominids are traced to the continent of Africa regardless of where their bones are found today. Mitochondrial studies have shown that everyone, inside and outside of Africa, is descended from one African mother.

To understand how scientists arrived at their conclusion about the origin of humans in Africa one must consider the time before recorded history. Historians refer to this time as prehistory. During prehistory there existed small-brained, human-like creatures called hominids. The oldest fossilized hominid is called *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* and it lived nearly 7 million years ago in what is today the African country of Chad. *Sahelanthropus* is the most recent common ancestor to humans and chimpanzees. Found in the region occupied by the Tebou people of Chad, the fossil remains of *Sahelanthropus* suggest that the archaeological evidence for the African origin of human beings is as dramatic as the biological evidence from mitochondrial DNA. Prior to the discovery of *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* scientists had found other old fossils that pointed to African origin. They referred to these remains as *Australopithecines*. The earliest example of these is *Australopithecus afarensis*, referred to by the Ethiopians as *Dinqesh* and by Americans as *Lucy*. Indeed, the Ethiopian scholar Ayele Bekerie says, “Dinqesh, we insist, and not Lucy, is a 3.1-million-year-old human-like species found in the Afar region of the Rift Valley of Ethiopia.”² Dinqesh was bipedal and much shorter than modern humans. In 1974 a team of American and Ethiopian archaeologists led by Donald Johanson found Dinqesh or Lucy’s fossilized skeleton remains—everything but her skull—curled up like a fetus in the semi-arid region of Ethiopia. According to scientists, she lived 4.2 million years ago. Her environment was rich with water, food, and natural

places for shelter and protection such as rock ledges or huge trees. In fact, archaeologists have discovered so many fossils in East Africa that they refer to it as the "cradle of the species," the original home of humankind.

Scientists believe that human beings are the result of monogenesis—one common African origin. This belief replaced an earlier theory which contended that humans developed in many places at the same time. Most scientists believe that this polygenesis theory is inaccurate, as well as the more recent conclusions of Christy G. Turner II that Africans and Europeans are derived from a more recent common Southeast Asian source, based on his identification of two basic dental clusters.³ In fact, Turner compares dental samples from North Africa with archaeologically derived Near Eastern dental samples to suggest that the temporal changes in the North African teeth were due to population replacement or admixture from the north. It is further argued that Afro-Asiatic was introduced into Africa along with the migrating immigrant farmers and herdsmen from the Near East 10,000 to 7,000 years ago. This theory has not been universally accepted by other scientists but is potentially significant in anthropological research. There is nothing in Turner's argument that displaces the emergence of *Homo sapiens* on the African continent, however. A conclusion of Turner's thesis is that humans left Africa and returned to Africa, and that this is the change reflected in the North African dental samples. Of course, Shomarka Keita, following another track, has established the fact that in the available Y chromosome data of the Afro-Asiatic language family—for which reliable genetic data exist—most Afro-Asiatic speakers share the lineage defined by Yap descendant PN2/215/M35. It was further found that that a key lineage—the M35/78—was shared between the populations in the locale of original Egyptian speakers and modern Cushitic speakers from the Horn of Africa.⁴ Even with reports by scholars such as Keita and others who explore the package of culture, biology, and language, the overwhelming biological and archaeological evidence still points to an African origin of humanity and an early human migration from Africa of people settling in other parts of the world.

Civilizations and Cultures

It is a stunning achievement of the human spirit that within the past 250,000 years early humans in Africa have created the fundamentals of the civilizations that are now shared by the world. Regardless of the simplicity or complexity of the concepts, attributes, models, rituals, inventions, sciences, or arts of humanity, scholars have clearly determined that it was on the African continent that *Homo sapiens* first conceived the thoughts and crafted the tools that have made the modern world. Although the earth is thought to be 13 billion years old, dinosaurs who ruled the earth for 175 million years disappeared about 75 million years ago, *Sahelanthropus tchadensis* walked the earth 7.2 million years ago, the prehistoric Stone Age began a mere 4 million years ago, *Australopithecus sadiba* fell into an open cave in South Africa 2 million years ago, and *Homo sapiens* appeared on earth about 250,000 years ago. We are a late species. Nevertheless, we have been as active as—or more active than—any other species in arranging the earth, as best we could, for our own happiness and expansion. On the African continent humans emerged and immediately began the process of securing their own reproduction by devising codes of conduct, social units, and kinship structures. They

also experimented with food gathering and preparation; it was not always clear what was fit to eat and what would kill you. Shelter from storms, natural fires, dangerous animals, and other humans was essential for any group that would survive. The naming of things, the memory of events and personalities, the memorializing of the dead, and the care of the young all had to become a part of the archival and active knowledge of the early communities in Africa. Out of these knowledge communities larger clusters of people would develop into mutually beneficial settlements. We often refer to these large societies as civilizations, meaning that there are common elements in their approach to achieving the ends of human happiness. These commonalities are sometimes expressed as language, spiritual beliefs, kinship styles, narratives of origin, responses to the environment, agricultural practices, gender relationships, and political structures.

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Nubia, the Land of the Bow (15,000 BCE–300 CE)

The recent book *Black Genesis: The Prehistoric Origins of Ancient Egypt* by Robert Bauval and Thomas Brophy—like the earlier book *Black Athena* by Martin Bernal—has continued along the avenue taken by the African intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop in his monumental *The African Origin of Civilization*: that the earliest civilizations were black civilizations. Bauval and Brophy argue that the discoveries at Nabta Playa and the work of earlier explorers such as Ahmed Hassanein Bey (called the greatest desert explorer of all time), Rosita Forbes, and Gerhard Rohlfs demonstrate that the black people of southern Egypt, Libya, and Sudan were the creators of the earliest cultures in the Sahara and along the Nile. Indeed, in 1921 Hassanein, accompanied by Rosita Forbes, made a journey deep into the southwest desert, where they met with the Tebu's king, Herri, and were told of the ancient sites in the area. When Bauval and Brophy journeyed to the site of Nabta Playa in 2008 they would declare it to be the source of ancient Egyptian civilization. Their argument and that of other scholars continues the uncovering of information that challenges much racist thinking as well as much *place of origin* apprehension found in many Africans in the Diaspora.

One of the earliest known African civilizations was that of Nubia, a society dating back to the middle of the New Stone Age (15,000–3400 BCE) which was the first community to make use of the special material and agricultural gifts of the Nile Valley. We now know that the age of human development in Nubia stretches back farther than we had previously thought.

In 1981 the shuttle *Columbia* carried a radar-imaging camera that could record images through the sands of the Sahara. Once NASA scientists analyzed the photographs, they discovered dried-up riverbeds, ancient settlement areas, and other evidences of human activity. Yet when Robert Bauval and Thomas Brophy traveled to the same area to study the megaliths of Nabta Playa, the place seemed to have no life whatsoever. What it does have, however, is some of the oldest megaliths in the world. They are situated about 200 miles west of Abu Simbel—at one time located in Nubia but now found in the south of the modern country of Egypt (whose recent national boundaries are the products of numerous political alignments and realignments).

Scientists believe that with the rising of the sea levels about 14,000 years ago, profound changes occurred in the earth, including rain and monsoon rain in parts of Africa that

are now dry as a bone. By 9000 BCE, human artifacts appear in the sediment around the megaliths. It is likely that humans occupied a fertile Sahara region for thousands of years and it is no wonder that the remnants of those settled areas hovered along the banks of the Nile in Nubia.

Several major African kingdoms developed in the vicinity of Nubia. Kush, Meroë, and Napata were the names of three key kingdoms in that region; however, Kemet—ancient Egypt—and Kush were the most significant in history. Using the Nile and the sun, a combination that would produce flourishing civilizations for thousands of years, these two civilizations would rival any in the world.

All people of Nubia lived along the fertile, narrow banks of the river as it flowed northward to the sea. Their land was blessed with a temperate climate, fertile soil, and a good supply of water. Nubia became a great kingdom in its own right and was approximately 1,100 miles long, running from a few hundred miles south of the present Khartoum (the capital of the modern country of Sudan) to Aswan (in present-day Egypt). Unfortunately, most of the area that was marked by this great civilization, and that of Kush, was flooded by the building of the Aswan High Dam. It is believed that more than 200 historical sites, many of them tombs of nobles, temples to the ancient deities of Nubia and Kush, and places of historic battles and deeds of Nubians, have been destroyed. The governments of Egypt and Sudan also forced nearly 100,000 Nubians from their homes during the building of the High Dam in the 1960s. In fact, some Nubians who had been living in Egypt were moved 28 miles away while the Sudanese Nubians were relocated 370 miles from their ancestral homes.

The Egyptian government in the 1960s was also forced by international pressure to move one of the largest Nubian temple sites in the Nile Valley, the Abu Simbel temples of Ramses and Nefertari, to a new location above the lake created by the dam. The Egyptians made an attempt to dig for artifacts in the area but the harm done to the historical record of Egypt and Nubia can never be repaired and the forced migration of the people produced a sustained anger and bitterness among them. Notwithstanding the popular images of Kemet created by the Egyptologist Zahi Hawass, the indigenous Nubian people of the Nile Valley—the original inhabitants—still insist that the Arab culture in its expansive dimension has attempted to minimize the blackness of the ancient Egyptians. They point out that Kemet was black thousands of years before the arrival of Arabs from Arabia in the seventh century of this era.

Nubian society developed from a series of scattered villages built around kinship groupings along the fertile banks of the Nile. The Nubians established farms, made mud-brick houses, planted fruit trees, and fished. The crops grown on their farms were often cassava, rice, and bananas. They mastered the technique of building houses that were cool during the hot sun of the day and warm during the cool of the night. Their building techniques did not end with houses. They constructed tool-making sites and shrines and temples where they performed religious ceremonies. They designed and made pottery, baskets, and weapons of war. All of this happened before writing appeared in Egypt, around 3400 BCE. Thus, Nubia was the one of the birthplaces of knowledge and its application to daily life.

As we know, powerful kingdoms grew up in the territory that was Nubia. One of the most important was the civilization of Kush, but other magnificent cities such as Meroë and Napata existed in the same general region. It was Kush, however, that competed with its neighbor Kemet for military and political impact for thousands of years.⁵

Kush: The Land of the Lion Warriors

Kush was a kingdom located in the territory that had been called Nubia. Many kingdoms had originated in this narrow, fertile valley, south of Kemet, along the Nile River in today's Sudan. Kush was located in an area that reached north from present-day Khartoum in Sudan to Aswan in Egypt. By the eighth century BCE Kush had created a mature civilization based upon the indigenous culture of its people. The Kushites had their own religion, an aggressive fishing enterprise, agricultural projects, and were producing beautiful art. The people, in addition to demonstrating considerable skill in the production of grain and the distribution of meats from hunt, had mastered the art of war. A combination of the ancient people of Nubia and Dinka, the multiethnic population of Kush constituted a pluralistic government noted for its use of the bow and arrow. In fact, some have argued that its name means "land of the bow"—a name given by the literate Kemetic people who had both seen the results of a Kushite attack and allied themselves to Kush during the reigns of several Kemetic kings, notably Senursert, Mentuhotep I, and Ramses II.

During the eighth and seventh centuries BCE, Kush expanded its military reach, increased the construction of ancestral tombs, paid homage to the deities with huge displays of dramatic ritual, and built, out of respect and devotion, massive temples to honor the gods and goddesses of the land.

In nearly one thousand years of existence, Kush had sixty-seven kings or queens, from King Kashta in 760 BCE to King Malequerebar in 320 CE. The early civilization of Kush placed a remarkable emphasis on revitalizing the entire Nile Valley from the south to the north. The kings and queens built numerous shrines and restored monuments from Napata to Mennefer, an area covering more than a thousand miles.

When Kemet had grown weak because of internal political squabbles among its ruling families, the kingdom of Kush under the leadership of its king, Kashta, led an invasion into Kemet in 750 BCE. The ease with which Kashta defeated the Kemetians suggests the weakness of Kemet's southern borders. Neither the cataracts nor the desert could prevent the military might of the Kushites from advancing northward. Kashta took the title of pharaoh of Upper and Lower Egypt and made Napata, his capital city, the first city of the realm. Residents of Waset, the city that had been the capital for several centuries, paid homage to Napata in Kush.

By 728 BCE, Piankhi, Kashta's son and successor, mounted a second attack on Egypt. He so utterly defeated the Egyptians, the cousins of the Kushites, that in his conquest he ended the bitter rivalries of the northern families, conquered the Libyan invaders of Egypt, built fortresses and modernized the temples, repaired the public buildings, and increased the national support for the priesthood in Waset.

Piankhi ruled from Waset itself as the first king of the twenty-fifth dynasty. His conquest of Egypt was more direct and aggressive than his father's. After twenty years as ruler of Napata, Piankhi led an army toward Waset. He marched to the city because he heard of the movement of a young prince named Tefnakhte who was threatening Upper Egypt from his base in Lower Egypt. Once in Waset, Piankhi showed his devotion to Amen, the great deity of the city, and reasserted Kushitic rule over Upper Egypt. He conquered the rebellious princes and rulers and consolidated Kushitic power over the entire valley. Piankhi's brother,

Table 1.1 Four great Kushite kings of united Kemet

Piankhi	728–716 BCE
Shabaka	716–700 BCE
Shabataka	700–690 BCE
Taharka	690–664 BCE

Shabaka, succeeded him in 716 BCE. Piankhi's sons Shabataka (700–690 BCE) and Taharka (690–664 BCE) succeeded Shabaka.

One of the most impressive of all Kushite kings was Taharka, Piankhi's son. He became ruler in 690 BCE and spent much of his time in Egypt. He was crowned in Memphis. He took his mother more than a thousand miles from Napata to Memphis to witness his installation as the king of Upper and Lower Egypt. But although Taharka restored monuments, reclaimed wastelands and made them profitable, organized the priesthood to be more effective in aiding the sick, and built obelisks and new temples, his rule was plagued by the Assyrians, an Asian people from an area that is in today's Iraq.

Miriam Maat Ka Re Monges claimed in *Kush: The Jewel of Nubia* that most people fail to give Kush the credit it deserves for bringing Egypt its last golden age. According to Monges, the revitalization of the Nile Valley civilizations provided by the Kushite kings was responsible for giving Egypt a golden age several hundred years prior to its being overcome by the Greeks in 332 BCE.⁶ This period in history, often referred to (as in the February 2008 issue of *National Geographic Magazine*) as the “Era of the Black Pharaohs” as if the majority of the African leaders of Kemet were not black, was directed by the Kushite kings, who did not see Kemet as foreign to their own country.⁷ It was in fact the gift of Nubia, the land the Kushites had inherited, and therefore their conquest of Kemet was seen by them as a way to return it to the righteousness and harmony of the ancestral wisdom.

The Idea of Monarchy

The Nubians were the earliest humans to develop the concept of *monarchy*, a form of government headed by a supreme ruler such as a king or queen. An incense burner and other relics were discovered during an expedition in 1967 conducted by archaeologists from the University of Chicago.⁸ These relics contain images of a crown, the façade of a palace, and other symbols of kingship. They existed long before similar images appear in Egypt. The idea of the divine kingship is now believed to have originated with the Nubian Africans in the fourth millennium BCE, rather than with the Egyptian Africans, thus pushing the idea of the royal crown back several hundred years. Many of the ideas that were found later in Egypt had already occurred in Nubia. There had been a constant interplay between these two ancient African communities, such was their nature; sometimes they would compete and at other times they would unite in alliance.

Kemet: The Black Land along the Nile

-Give creation narrative?
What is life & death?

Kemet rose along the Nile under the brightest of suns. It stretched along the Nile River from what is present-day Aswan north to the Mediterranean Sea and lasted from 3400 BCE to the conquest by Alexander the Great in 333 BCE. The land of Kemet, as it was called until the Greeks renamed it Egypt, was the home of the most majestic civilization of antiquity. It would transcend Nubia and thrust African achievements into the rest of the world. Here we would find the beginning of philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, geometry, architecture, and medicine. No other ancient people are credited with as many basic inventions and creations for civilization as the people of Kemet. They were the children of the Nile River.

The Nile gave life to everything that grew on its banks. Without the Nile, the country of Egypt would be nothing but a desert. The annual flooding of the Nile, which was different from the Nile in Nubia, brought silt down from the interior of Africa to the Nile Valley. It also wreaked havoc on private property boundaries and livestock. The people of Egypt came together to manage the overflowing of the Nile and in the process created responses and solutions to annual problems that advanced human sciences. For example, geometry was created when they used ropes to measure the land when the flooding of the Nile destroyed property boundaries, and the Egyptian calendar was based on the coordination of the rising of Sirius, the brightest star in the heavens, with the annual flooding of the Nile.

The Nile provided a means of transportation for the shipbuilding industry and the quarrying of stone for large building projects located downstream. Large stones could be transported down the river during the flood period. Massive carved stones used as obelisks or stelae for historical purposes were usually cut from stone at Aswan in southern (Upper) Kemet and floated along the river to various construction sites.

On the other hand, as the Nile was regular in its inundation, so the sun was a constant in its heat. It rarely rains in Egypt and so the people used their time productively in agriculture, mastery of the sciences and arts, rites and celebrations, and the constructing of temples and tombs. Even during the flooding they just moved to higher ground and continued to work. The sun was a steady reminder of stability and regularity. Some historians have suggested that this stability was a sort of stagnation, perhaps slowing their progress. Certainly stability could also be the hallmark of a civilization that has mastered the necessary requirements for maintaining order and harmony. The idea that conflict is itself the motive for civilization is vastly overstated, and the importance of stability grossly underrated.

Egypt developed a unique civilization with a centralized government that united forty-two different areas along the Nile. Menes, who is sometimes called Narmer, the king of the first *dynasty*, united the various groups of Upper Egypt to the south and Lower Egypt to the north into one nation. Before Menes united them there were only a collection of clans of various ethnicities settled along the river. These districts were referred to as *septs*; the Greeks later called them *nomes*. A leader who was called a *nomarch* headed each one of these groups. These *nomarchs* were like small kings over their own people. Menes' union in 3200 BCE marked the first time in history that such a feat had been achieved. Therefore, Menes is called the Father of the Nation for founding a multiethnic, pluralistic society that went beyond kinship bonds. Kemet would continue to produce value for humanity in epic proportions for hundreds of years.

Egypt gives us Imhotep, the first multidimensional personality in recorded history, who built the first pyramid, prescribed the first medicines, and served as an administrator for the kingdom. There are written records about many aspects of his life, including his career, his family, his parents, and even what he believed and thought on certain issues. Imhotep lived around 2600–2500 BCE. He was an architect, a prime minister, a physician, a philosopher, a scribe, and a historian. Imhotep was so great that later generations worshipped him as a god. His name comes from the root word “hotep,” which means “peace” in ancient Egyptian (or *ciKam*, the language of Kemet). Thus, his name means “he who comes in peace.”

The people of Kemet had two other names of endearment for their land. They called it *Ta-Mery*, meaning “beloved land.” The word “Ta” in ancient Egyptian meant “land” and the word “Mery” stood for “beloved”. They also called the country *Ta-Wy*, the Two Lands, referring to Upper and Lower Egypt. This indicated the two different geographical parts of the country originally united by Menes. It is sometimes argued that the two lands referred to the fertile areas near the river and the desert sands away from the river. However, the Kemetians lived mainly along the green river valley and would most likely have been referring to the kingdoms in the north and the kingdoms in the south. The king wore two crowns—the red crown of Lower Kemet, and the white crown of Upper Kemet—neither of which represented the desert.

In a global African sense, and especially for Africans in the Diaspora, often disconnected from constant and continuous contact with continental values, customs, and traditions, Kemet represents the majestic fountain from which spring many classical African concepts. Kemet is in relationship to the African continent as Greece is to Europe and China is to Asia. Indeed, one can say that each area of the globe can claim classical civilizations that produce values worthy of emulation. Africa has its Kemet and Nubia; Asia has India and China; and Europe has Greece and Rome. These are civilizations that can be studied as the source for many surrounding cultures.

The Earliest Golden Age (3150 BCE–2700 BCE)

The period of major achievement in construction and exploration, named for the important town of This, is referred to as the Thinite Period. During this time many significant achievements were made in the Nile Valley; for example, Imhotep built the first pyramid for King Djoser during this period. The pyramid was called the Sakkara Step Pyramid because it was constructed like giant steps, and its complex contains the oldest masonry building in the world. Following Imhotep’s example, much later, in the Thinite period, others whose names are not recorded constructed the Great Pyramids of Giza in honor of kings Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. They remain among the greatest wonders in the world because of their size, majesty, endurance, and longevity.

and donkeys traveled more than a thousand miles across the Sahara Desert to the Ituri rainforest in Central Africa, where he visited societies of small people, possibly the Mbuti or the Ituri people. It is expeditions such as Harkhuf's which clearly show that Africans explored their continent before any external explorers set foot on the desert or in the forest, and knew about areas far beyond their own region. Harkhuf went on three explorations into the interior of Africa around 2300 BCE. His explorations and journeys show the contact between ancient Egypt and other parts of the continent, but this was hardly a one-way process since many of the individuals who entered Kemet from Nubia, Congo, Punt, Axum, or other areas also made their journeys back and forth across the continent. Harkhuf's journey simply demonstrates the cultural exchange and trade that flourished among African kingdoms. In one of his diaries Harkhuf declares:

I have come here from my city,
 I have descended from my nome,
 I have built a house, set up its doors,
 I have dug a pool, planted sycamores,
 The king praised me,
 My father made a will for me.
 I was one worthy.⁹

Harkhuf made several long explorations from Kemet. During his third exploration he visited the kingdom of Yam, which was located in the southern part of contemporary Sudan. On his arrival he both gave and received gifts. On his return down to Kemet he said, "I came down with three hundred donkeys, laden with incense, ebony, oil, panther skins, elephants' tusks, throw sticks, and all sorts of good products." The products of Yam became a visa for Harkhuf when he passed through other kingdoms. For example, when the ruler of Irtjet, another kingdom in contemporary Sudan, saw the gifts from the king of Yam that he had brought with him, Harkhuf reports that he was allowed to pass through the country. In fact, he writes, "the ruler escorted me, gave me cattle and goats, and led me on the mountain paths of Irtjet—because of the excellence of the vigilance I had employed beyond that of any companion and chief of scouts who had been sent to Yam before." Apparently others had gone before Harkhuf to Yam, but returned with little or no success. Furthermore, an empty-handed traveler might not be so easily disposed to write about his adventures. Harkhuf's narrative is a statement of triumph, vision, and personal mastery.

The Middle Kingdom (2000 BCE–1786 BCE)

War between Egyptians doomed the Old Kingdom. The Middle Kingdom came into existence following the first intermediate period of warfare between Egyptians. The country was led out of confusion and internal strife by kings from Upper Egypt around 2000 BCE. A dynasty led by Mentuhotep I came to power and restored the temples, built palaces, improved administration of the agricultural lands, and established military supremacy over Egypt's neighbors to the north and to the south. The Middle Kingdom was a period of great building under the leadership of kings such as Mentuhotep I and Mentuhotep II. During this

period Senusert I and Senusert II established themselves as great conquerors, defeating nations around the Mediterranean, including Syria, and regions around the Black Sea in Southwestern Asia. In fact, Herodotus, writing in his book *Histories* nearly 1,500 years later, would refer to the physical evidence of Kemetians in what became the Abkhazian region of the Black Sea. He writes that the "Colchians must be Egyptians because like them they have black skin and wooly hair."¹⁰

As the Middle Kingdom grew weaker because of internal divisions and the growing presence of Asians, that is, people who had come from Southwest Asia to the Delta region, Kemet lost political control over the country. Numerous warlords took charge of districts they claimed as their own, weakening further the power of the central government. However, the greatest threat came from the Delta region where the Asians had flowed into Kemet from the northeast. The Hyksos, or Hekaw Khasut, a people from Southwest Asia, created a separate government around the Delta region, which is in Lower Egypt, and ruled from 1786 BCE to 1650 BCE. Like later invaders of Egypt, the Hyksos gained power by becoming part of the existing political system. They were finally defeated at the gates of the city of Avaris by King Kamose, the last king of the seventeenth dynasty and predecessor to the Ahmosian Dynasty.

The New Kingdom (1552 BCE–1069 BCE)

The third period was called the New Kingdom. During this time Egyptian rulers from Upper Egypt reasserted the power of the central government and reunited the main centers of Egyptian authority such as the authoritative temples at On, Mennefer, Abydos, and Waset. This reunited area stretches from Cairo to Luxor in modern Egypt. The first king of the eighteenth dynasty was Ahmose. He succeeded in driving the Hyksos from Egypt and established the first dynasty of the New Kingdom (1567 BCE–1085 BCE). No more fabled dynasty exists in Egypt's history. This was the age of Hatshepsut (1503 BCE–1482 BCE), the world's first imperial queen, ruling in her own right as leader of a great empire. She sent an expedition to visit the queen of Nubia and king of Punt and received gifts of incense, animals, trees, and precious stones, all recorded on the walls of her funerary temple. Also during this period Tuthmoses III, the greatest conqueror of antiquity in terms of personally led war missions, annexed Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, and Nubia to Egypt. Tuthmoses III is credited with personally leading more military campaigns against the opponents of Kemet than any other per-aa (pharaoh in Hebrew). In fact, no ancient leader is credited with more successes than Thutmoses III.

During the New Kingdom the boy king Tutankhamen, whose tomb discovery popularized Egyptian history because it was found intact, ruled Egypt. He died when he was eighteen years of age without having made any memorable achievement in the life of Egypt. He was buried in the Valley of the Kings in Upper Egypt near the city of Waset, previously called Thebes by the Greeks, called Luxor today by the Arabs. All the tombs of the New Kingdom kings were meant to last forever. They were supposed to be secret but in actuality many of them were broken into and the gold objects stolen long before the modern era. Only the tomb of Tutankhamen, placed among sixty or more temples, remained intact until the twentieth century when the Englishman Howard Carter, an amateur archaeologist,

discovered it in 1922. Carter found that the tomb of Ramses VI was carved just above that of King Tutankhamen and the rubble from Ramses VI's tomb had for centuries covered the burial place of Tutankhamen. When it was discovered, the tomb contained golden pendants, jewelry, ivory beads, golden stools, a golden mummy case, and numerous stones. King Tutankhamen owes his place in history not to any political or social transformations, but to the remarkable artifacts and works of art found in his tomb and recovered for future generations.

Egypt would last for eleven dynasties after Tutankhamen before its glory would fade. However, other states in Africa were ready to take their walk in the bright sunlight of history. One such state had been preparing since the days when its sons defeated Egypt and annexed it to Kush, making it a united country along the Nile for more than a thousand miles. This was the Nubian Empire that ruled from Napata and Waset. It would later become the victim of the powerful Axumite kingdom to its south and east.

Axum: The Rival to Rome

Axum has often been called Ethiopia, a word that was used as a general term for Africa by some early writers. Ethiopia is a Greek word that means "burnt faces." The nation of Axum was a specific kingdom within the boundaries of today's Ethiopia but is not to be identified as the exact same country as the borders have changed through the years. Often called Abyssinia, modern Ethiopia dates its history from ancient Axum.

Historical Axum rose to become one of the most inventive kingdoms of the world by the third century CE. Indeed, its fame had spread so wide that historians and scholars in other parts of the world saw Axum as among the most organized and efficient kingdoms of its day. The prophet Mani (216–276), a Persian philosopher, teacher, and writer of importance, who became the founder of Manicheism, a belief that the flesh was evil and one had to work to conquer it at all costs, wrote in a book called *Chapters* that there were four great empires in the world: Axum, Rome, Persia, and China. Rome formed the core of modern Italy, Persia became Iran, and China has remained China for centuries. Axum morphed into the present Ethiopia.

As Axum grew into an empire it established a commercial capital called Adulis, known for its physical beauty, official residences, public buildings, and the wealth of its citizens. It was the trading center of the Axumite Empire. This city of shining buildings and intelligent citizens was the brightest jewel of the realm. While the city of Axum, the namesake of the empire, would become the most identified city within the kingdom, Adulis would rival its political capital for world attention and become the face of the empire.

There were many languages spoken in Axum by the seventh century. Among the languages were Ge'ez, Latin, Greek, Arabic, Egyptian, Farsi, Meroitic, and other African languages. The Axumites wrote about their lives and their empire in striking dramas, history, and comedy. Indeed, the ancient writings of the Axumite Empire tell their story in fascinating details. Stelae, that is, stones with writing on them, specifically erected to provide historical information, have been found throughout the area occupied by the empire. But since not everything was history, the people of Axum wrote about their feelings, their religion, and their interactions with other people.