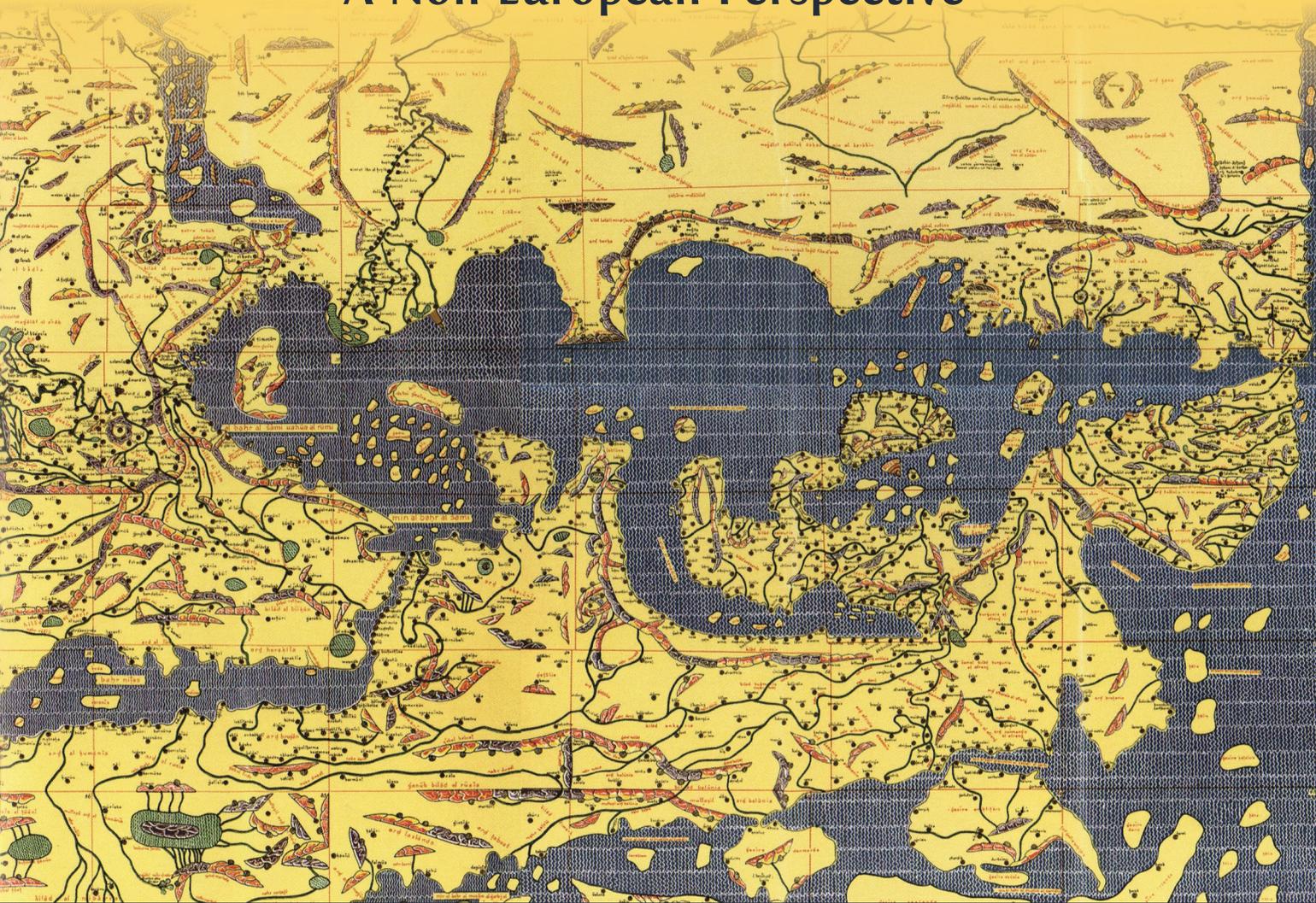


History of International Relations

A Non-European Perspective



ERIK RINGMAR



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Map of Africa from Abraham Ortelius, *Theatrum orbis terrarum* (Antverpiae: Apud Aegid. Coppenium Diesth, 1570), p. 35, <https://archive.org/details/theatrumorbister00orte>

6. Africa

All human beings are Africans. It was in today's Ethiopia, some 200,000 years ago, that the first settlements of *homo sapiens* were established. From this origin we gradually came to migrate to every corner of the planet. Africa is an enormous continent, occupying a fifth of the world's landmass. It includes a number of radically different climates and environments, from dense jungles to extensive grasslands, and it includes the Sahara, a desert the size of Europe. Africa is actually larger than we think since the Mercator projection used for most world maps under-represents the true size of territories around the equator — and Africa straddles the equator. Africa has at least a thousand languages and many more ethnic groups. In order to talk sensibly about this diversity, we have to divide the continent into regions. The most commonly-made distinction is between “North Africa” and “Sub-Saharan Africa,” with the Saharan desert dividing the two.

North Africa has a coastline along the Mediterranean Sea and from the very beginning people here have interacted with populations in the Middle East and Europe. Pharaonic Egypt, one of the world's oldest civilizations, dating back to 3000 BCE, is located in North Africa and so is Carthage, in today's Tunisia, which for hundreds of years was Rome's main adversary.

Black Athena

Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization is the name of a book by the historian Martin Bernal, which gave rise to a major controversy when it first appeared in 1987. Bernal's thesis was that much of Greek culture had been imported from Greece's African and Asian neighbors, especially from the Phoenicians and Pharaonic Egypt. His interpretation was controversial since ancient Greece has often been identified as the origin of everything we think of as “European.” If it turns out that the Greeks had borrowed most, or much, of their culture from Africa and the Middle East, the Europeans would no longer be able to be who they think they are.

Bernal himself was a scholar of contemporary China, not Greece, and it was easy for specialists to point to mistakes in his analysis. For that reason, the Black Athena thesis has often been rejected. However, ancient Greece really did borrow heavily from its neighbors, from Egypt in particular. The ancient Greeks themselves readily admitted as much. More generally, it might be a mistake to think of “Greece”

as a discrete civilization which can be easily distinguished from the societies that surrounded it. For one thing, the people we think of as Greeks were seafarers who interacted closely with everyone else around the eastern Mediterranean. Greek and non-Greek societies were not as distinct as we often believe.

It was only in the nineteenth century that German scholars, in particular, started thinking of Greece as the origin of their own society. And the choice of Greece was, at least in part, a consequence of the fact that the French — Germany's enemies in a series of wars — often retraced their own history to the Romans. In fact, the Black Athena debate may say more about us than it does about the ancients. The 1980s and 90s were a time when various "culture wars" were fought on American university campuses. Members of minority groups often complained that the academic canon contained too many "dead white males." Calling Athena "black" was a way to turn the tables on the academic establishment.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/8271bfd2>



Northern Africa was one of the first parts of the world to convert to Christianity, with an important center of scholarship being Alexandria, in Egypt. The kings of today's Ethiopia converted to Christianity in the fourth century. Later, in the seventh century, North Africa was overrun by Muslim armies. In the eleventh century, two Berber kingdoms, located in today's Morocco, invaded Spain.

South of the Sahara — in Sub-Saharan or "Black" Africa — most people speak Bantu languages. The Bantu speakers originated in western and central parts of the continent but started moving east and southward in the first millennium BCE, spreading their language, cultural practices and crafts. The political organization of Sub-Saharan Africa has been strongly influenced by nature and by the climate. Along much of the coast of Sub-Saharan Africa there are rainforests that can stretch up to 300 kilometers inland, and around the equator — in today's Congo — there is a continuous band of jungle. In the rainforest the climate is hot and humid, vegetation is dense and light is often blocked by trees that can grow to be up to 50 meters tall. The jungle is a generous environment that provides for its inhabitants, despite the presence of scourges such as the tsetse fly, an insect that carries disease. But the communities created here were small and they had little by way of political institutions.

Away from the coastal regions and the jungles around the equator, there is savanna, less dense woodlands and in eastern Africa also high mountains. The savanna with its grass is an ideal environment in which to raise animals and often it was possible to plant crops. Far larger societies could be established here than in the rainforest. These societies had a more elaborate division of labor, meaning that people could take up specialized tasks and professions. States on the savanna grew rich from trade and manufacturing; they taxed their subjects, and they built flourishing capitals administered by public bureaucracies and ruled by laws. In many cases, the savanna-states expanded their power over their neighbors, either by outright occupation or by

tying them together into networks of allies and tribute bearers. In this way a number of powerful states were created — including Nubia in today's Sudan; Benin, Mali, Songhai and the Asante in western Africa; Ethiopia, Bunyoro and Buganda in eastern Africa; and Zimbabwe in the south.

The Nile River Valley

The Nile is the longest river in the world. It transports the rain that falls in the jungles of tropical Africa northward, passing through eleven countries and the deserts of the Sahara, before it eventually flows into the Mediterranean. Despite the harsh climate, the Nile made it possible to make a living here from the earliest times. Since the water of the Nile periodically flooded the river banks, thereby irrigating and fertilizing the surrounding fields, the Valley provided an excellent environment for agriculture. This is one of the first places in the world where human beings took up farming.

It was here that Pharaonic Egypt emerged around 3000 BCE, quickly growing into one of the mightiest kingdoms of the ancient world. The Pharaohs built pyramids and temples and elaborate irrigation systems; they developed a writing system too, and are famous for their funeral rites, not least for their embalmed mummies. The pyramids at Giza, built in the middle of the third millennium BCE, with their iconic sphinx, were considered by the Greeks as one of the “seven wonders of the world.” Indeed, the Greeks were much impressed with everything Egyptian. This ancient African civilization had a profound influence on the subsequent development of Greek culture. [Read more: *Black Athena* at p. 127.](#)

If we had followed the Nile southward in Pharaonic times we would have arrived in the kingdom of Nubia in today's Sudan. From ancient times there were important cities here — Dongola, Nabta Playa, Napata, Meroë and others. There are engravings in rocks in the Nubian desert, dating from 5000 BCE, which show cattle, indicating that the people living here were pastoralists, possibly with the cow playing a part in their religious rites. At roughly the same time, the people living at Nabta Playa built stone constructions which may have served as astronomical observatories. It is not clear exactly how they were used, but archeo-astronomers have argued that the stones line up with particular stars. Perhaps they indicated the time of the summer and winter solstice.

Around 3500 BCE the Kingdom of Nubia was established here. The Nubians made money by selling goods from tropical Africa to the Egyptians, gold and ivory in particular. Their culture had much in common with Pharaonic Egypt, but Nubia was an independent kingdom with its own pyramids and system of writing. The Nubians were periodically invaded by the Egyptians who tried to control the lucrative trade, but the Nubians also invaded Egypt. Around one thousand years BCE there was a Pharaonic dynasty run by Nubians. The Nubians were later conquered by the Romans and by the sands of the Saharan desert. Today there are still monumental walls to be seen in their former capitals and the remnants of elaborate irrigation systems with tunnels that transported water deep under the desert.

In Khartoum, the capital of today's Sudan, the Nile divides into two separate rivers — known as the Blue and the White Nile. The Blue Nile takes you further south into the jungles of Central Africa and to the source of the river in Lake Victoria. The White Nile, on the other hand, takes you into the mountains of Ethiopia. Today Ethiopia is a landlocked country which has suffered badly both from droughts and political instability, but two thousand years ago there was a powerful kingdom here, with Aksum as its capital. The Aksumite Kingdom, 100–940, had close connections with Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula, across the Red Sea. Yemen at the time was dominated by Jewish culture and Jewish culture spread to Ethiopia too. Indeed, Ethiopians insist that the Queen of Sheba came from here.

Jews of Ethiopia

Beta Israel, the “House of Israel,” is the name of the community of Jews which existed in some 500 separate villages scattered throughout the former Kingdom of Aksum, in today's Ethiopia. This community is African, yet it has been Jewish since biblical times. Before Christianity and Islam came to be established, much of the Arabian peninsula was Jewish. There was, for example, a strong Jewish community in Yemen. They, in turn, traded with people on the other side of the Red Sea and this is how Jewish culture came to spread to Africa. *Read more: Coffee and croissants at p. 95.* The Jews of Ethiopia insist that they are the descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. After the rise of Christianity and Islam, Ethiopian Jews were cut off from other Jewish communities, but their culture and religion survived.

After the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Jews of Ethiopia obtained the right to immigrate there — a right which some took advantage of during the famines and wars of the 1980s. The Israeli government, with American support, organized two rescue operations — “Operation Moses” in 1984 and “Operation Solomon” in 1991 — in which tens of thousands of people were airlifted to Israel. At the time, some Israelis questioned their Jewishness, and the very notion of a “black Jew,” while others identified them as one of the “lost tribes of Israel.” Today there are 120,000 people in Israel who claim Ethiopian descent. Some of them complain that Israeli society is racist; many in the older generation have little education and find life in Israel difficult. A majority cannot read and write Hebrew and unemployment rates are high. But not many have decided to return. It is estimated that there are still some 8,000 people of Jewish descent living in Ethiopia. The Israeli government is officially committed to bringing them to Israel.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/3da5cc6b>



What is more certain is that the Aksumite Kingdom was heavily involved in trade both with the Arabian Peninsula and with the world beyond. The Aksumites were famous exporters of frankincense and myrrh, which together with gold were the presents said to have been given to Jesus after his birth. The Aksumites were trading across the Indian Ocean too. They are referred to as ivory merchants in *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a

Greek merchant's manual dating from the first century of the Common Era. Located at the intersection of these shipping lanes, the Aksumite Kingdom became a major player in the trade which connected India and the Roman Empire. The Aksumite kings minted their own coins in order to facilitate trade, and they erected steles, enormous stone slabs, on which they commemorated their achievements. Many of the steles are preserved to this day.

The Aksumite king converted to Christianity in 325 — after Armenia, in the Caucasus, but a hundred years before the Roman emperors — and from this time onward the symbol of the cross appears on their coins. Today at least half of the population of Ethiopia are Christians. The Ethiopian church follows the Coptic liturgy, first developed in Alexandria in Egypt in the first century CE. Yet links to the Arabian Peninsula have remained strong. In the sixteenth century, Ethiopia exported coffee to Yemen from where it was sent on to fashionable coffee shops all over the Ottoman Empire. [Read more: *Coffee and croissants* at p. 95.](#)

Ethiopia was never colonized by a European power and when the country was invaded by Italy in the 1930s, the emperor, Haile Selassie, made a personal appearance at the League of Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, asking for help. [Read more: *Countries that were never colonized* at p. 196.](#)

This established his reputation worldwide and many black people in the Americas, in particular, were amazed to hear about this African emperor who claimed to be the descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. In Jamaica, of all places, Haile Selassie became something of a God in the Rastafari religion practiced by some of the locals. [Read more: *The Ark of the Covenant* at p. 54.](#)

North Africa

In the seventh century, North Africa was overrun by the armies of the expanding Umayyad Caliphate. [Read more: *The Umayyads and the Abbasids* at p. 78.](#)

In 640 the Arabs conquered Egypt and continued westward. The North African terrain was easy to move across since the population was sparse and there were few proper towns. Yet the people the Arabs ran into here were in many respects similar to themselves. A majority were Berbers, and many of them were nomads too, including the Tuaregs of the Saharan desert. Instead of putting up a fight, the nomads of the desert simply moved away from the path of the invaders, while the Berbers who lived along the Mediterranean coast gradually came to be assimilated into the new elite. To this day we tend to think of the people of North Africa as Arabs but many of them would prefer to be known as Berbers. At least some still regard the Arabs as invaders and dream of establishing an independent country.

Independence for Azawad

The Berbers are an ethnic group indigenous to North Africa who live in and around the Saharan desert. The Berbers are semi-nomadic, combining the tending of goats

and sheep with farming and commerce. Two of the kingdoms that ruled Spain were run by Berbers; and the last of the four original caliphates, the Fatimid Caliphate, 909–1171, was initially dominated by Berbers. *Read more: The Muslim caliphates at p. 73.* The Tuaregs, the “blue men of the desert” — named after the color of their headgear — are Berber too. For hundreds of years, the Tuaregs were in charge of the caravans that traded with Timbuktu in the Kingdom of Mali and beyond.

Today there are between 25 and 30 million people who speak the Berber language; most are Muslims, but some are Christian and a small minority are Jews. For the past couple of decades, there has been a strong revival of Berber culture. Berber arts and crafts are taught to younger generations, together with the Berber language, and festivals such as equestrian shows attract large audiences. Berber-style rock music has received worldwide attention.

There are also demands for political rights. Some Berbers want independence for their homeland which they regard as occupied, and mismanaged, by Arabs in the north and by black Africans in the south. The political instability of countries such as Algeria and Libya has provided opportunities to realize these aims. The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in Libya in the fall of 2011 allowed some Tuaregs to escape with their weapons to Mali where they began a guerrilla war against the government. In April 2012, the guerrilla movement, the MNLA, declared independence for a country they called “Azawad,” with Gao and Timbuktu as its main cities *Read more: The libraries of Timbuktu at p. 135.* In 2013, Timbuktu was recaptured by the Malian government, supported by international troops. The dream of an independent Azawad has been postponed once again.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/c6f7fead>



The Berbers would soon reassert themselves. In the early eighth century, when the Arab armies continued their expansion into the Iberian peninsula, many Berbers went with them. Together they established a capital in Córdoba in the province they were to call al-Andalus. *Read more: The Arabs in Spain at p. 81.*

Some groups of Berbers also went southward on a mission to convert pagans living in what today is Mauritania and Ghana. In general, the Berbers seem to have taken Islam very seriously. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries two revivalist movements arose among them headed by leaders who declared themselves disgusted by the lack of religious zeal among their fellow Muslims. The first of these movements, the Almoravids, was made up of Saharan tribes who left the desert and built a capital for themselves in the city of Marrakesh, on the northern side of the Atlas Mountains. They proceeded to create an empire which included all of today’s Morocco, but also vast areas of the deserts to the south and a broad strip of land along the Mediterranean coast. The Almoravids imposed sharia laws on the territories they occupied, banning the sale of alcohol and pork and, unusually for Muslim rulers, tried to convert the members of other religions by force.

Before long the Berbers had occupied Spain too. By the middle of the eleventh century, the political power of the Caliphate of Córdoba had disintegrated and a

number of smaller Muslim kingdoms, known as the *taifa*, had made themselves independent of any central power. [Read more: *The Arabs in Spain* at p. 81.](#)

The *taifa* kingdoms were often at war with each other and with the Christian kingdoms in the north of the peninsula. In 1086, as a way to restore peace and unity, the Almoravids were invited to al-Andalus by the *taifa* kings. This is how they came to expand their African empire into Europe. Much as in North Africa, the Almoravids were appalled by the low standard of morality among the local elites and before long they had imposed strict Islamic laws in Spain too. Yet the Almoravids were unable to maintain the purity of their faith. When the original leaders died, they were replaced by rulers who had far less interest in religious matters. With the help of architects imported from Muslim Spain, the Almoravids turned Marrakesh into a fortified city filled with sumptuous palaces and mosques.

This was when the second revivalist movement, the Almohads, began gathering in opposition to them. The Almohads were not from the desert but from the high Atlas Mountains of Morocco, yet they were, if anything, even more serious about their religion than the Almoravids had originally been. From their mountain stronghold they undertook increasingly successful military campaigns and in 1147 they captured Marrakesh. In 1159 they conquered all of North Africa and in 1172 all of al-Andalus. They made Sevilla into their second capital, although they regarded Spain as little more than an outpost of their empire. In addition, the Almohads proceeded to impose strict Islamic laws on the people they had conquered. This had severe consequences for the cosmopolitan culture of cities like Córdoba. Many Christians fled northwards, and many Jews fled eastwards to Cairo. [Read more: *Mosheh ben Maimon* at p. 85.](#)

Yet the Almohads also mellowed with time, and they too became more interested in architectural projects than in imperial expansion. This was when the city of Fez was turned into a center of religious learning and scholarship. The medina of Fez — the market quarters of the city — was particularly famous. What sometimes is regarded as the oldest university in the world, the University of Al Quaraouiyine, was founded by a woman, Fatima al-Fihri, in Fez in 859. [Read more: *Nalanda, a very old university* at p. 56.](#)

In addition, the Almohads turned the city of Rabat, on the Atlantic coast, into a major port and a fortified naval base. Yet their empire began crumbling as early as the first part of the thirteenth century. In 1212, only forty years after the initial occupation, they were defeated in Spain by an alliance of Christian rulers and by 1269 it was all over for the Almohads.

The kingdoms of West Africa

The Saharan desert is certainly a harsh environment, but nomadic peoples have made a living here since the earliest times. In some ways the desert served more like a bridge that connected different parts of Africa than as a wall which separated them. This is why the division commonly made between “North Africa” and “Sub-Saharan Africa”

should be questioned. The Berbers were one of the peoples who traded across the Sahara. Their partners on the other side were often located in the empire of Mali. Since much of Mali, then as now, consists of sand, agriculture should really have been impossible here and we would not expect to find many settled communities. However, the presence of the Niger River changes that assumption. Much of the rain that falls in the highlands of today's Guinea, a country on Africa's Atlantic coast, flows not westward into the Atlantic but instead north and eastward, straight into the Sahara. Here the water runs through today's Mali and Niger, and eventually into the Atlantic in Nigeria, where it forms a vast delta. Yet, the Niger River forms another delta too — an inland delta, right in the deserts of Mali. Here there has been enough water to make settled agriculture possible.

This is where we find cities like Timbuktu, Gao and Djenné. It was primarily with these cities that the Berbers conducted their trade. Two commodities — gold and salt — were more important than all others, although ivory, copper and slaves were traded too. Salt was used for preserving food and it was almost as valuable as gold. Much of it was hacked out of the rocks at Targhaza, a desolate salt mine in the middle of the Saharan desert. As far as gold was concerned, it was traded by a rather mysterious guild of merchants known as the Wangarans. Although the Wangarans were reluctant to reveal the exact source of their supply, it is clear that it originated in the south, in the region of today's Ghana. This was the gold which, thanks to the trans-Saharan trade, eventually ended up in the Middle East and Europe. During this time, in the late Middle Ages, something like half of all gold in the world came from Africa.

As one would expect, the rulers of Mali were quick to take their cut of this lucrative trade. Indeed, in the first part of the thirteenth century, a powerful empire was established here, funded above all by taxes on trade. The Mali Empire had a well-trained army, comprising some 100,000 soldiers staffed and supplied by the emperor's subjects. Before long the rulers of Mali had conquered a large area stretching from the Niger River westward to the Atlantic Ocean. The founder of the empire, Sundiata Keita, was not only a ruthless military leader but also by all accounts a wise politician. In 1235, at a meeting of notables, a constitution was adopted, known as the *Kouroukan fougá*, which gave the empire a legal system and a decentralized, federal political structure. Guilds of craftsmen were granted monopolies on crafts such as the smelting of metals, woodworking, and tanning; women were protected by law and given a role in politics.

The origin of writing

In order to learn about the past, we need primary sources. Many of these are texts. In the case of Africa, however, there are relatively few texts available from the time before the Europeans arrived. Instead, historians are forced to rely on archaeological evidence or on oral traditions. The lack of writing systems has been presented as evidence of how "primitive" people in Africa are. Yet, as so often, it is all a matter of politics. Systems of writing first developed in agricultural societies with powerful

states. The state needs writing in order to keep track of tax revenue, to communicate with its officials and to lay down the law. Besides, kings like their achievements to be remembered — how much land they conquered and how many enemies they killed. From this perspective, writing is a means for the state to exercise power. People are subject to writing much as they are subject to other state-run institutions. It is consequently not surprising to find written records in parts of Africa — such as Egypt and Ethiopia — where there were powerful, agriculturally-based states.

For people who do not live in agricultural societies, and who are not subject to states, oral traditions often serve better. After all, what we need to know in order to live successful lives is above all what people like ourselves did when faced with similar situations to our own. This information does not have to be written down. Ordinary people do not need a written history as much as they need myths. Myths are taught by the elders and kept alive by the community itself. To live subject to a myth is to live subject to a shared memory of which each person is the custodian. This is not to say, of course, that writing is not a useful technology. In small, stateless societies people can communicate directly with each other, but in large societies, people communicate by means of written texts.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/f950db17>



The trade in gold and salt made the emperors of Mali enormously wealthy. The most famous among them was Mansa Musa. After having conquered some twenty-four cities and expanded the empire to three times its original size, the story has it, Mansa Musa went on a *hajj* to Mecca in 1324. People in the Arab world were astonished to see his procession which included camels, elephants and no fewer than 60,000 men and some 12,000 slaves carrying gold bars. Along the way, gold nuggets were handed out to local dignitaries and gold dust to beggars. In Cairo, Mansa Musa's lavish gifts were sufficient to cause an inflation which was said to have lasted for twelve years. When he returned to Mali, Mansa Musa rebuilt Timbuktu and established the city as a center of Muslim scholarship and learning. It was more than anything as a result of his largess and his subsequent building program that Timbuktu became known as a city of exotic wonders.

The libraries of Timbuktu

Timbuktu was established as a center of Islamic learning during the Mali Empire in the thirteenth century and the town continued to flourish well into the seventeenth century. Scholars, teachers, and students assembled at the *madrasa* — the religious school — at the Sankore mosque. In addition, Timbuktu was at the center of the book trade across the Sahara and many of the town's inhabitants were avid book collectors. The books were written in Arabic, but also in a number of indigenous languages, using Arabic script. The inhabitants of Timbuktu have remained book lovers to this day. It has been estimated that Timbuktu has some 700,000 books.

However, since the manuscripts are fragile and often in poor condition, the owners have been encouraged to deposit them in libraries where they can be better preserved and also digitized and put on the Internet.

In April 2012, Timbuktu was captured by Tuareg rebels in collaboration with Al-Qaeda forces who declared the town a part of the independent country of Azawad. *Read more: Independence for Azawad at p. 131.* They outlawed music and football and destroyed a number of shrines dedicated to Sufi saints. They also began destroying ancient books. By then, however, the vast majority of the books had already been saved thanks to the heroic efforts of a few librarians.

The preservation and digitization project is proceeding apace, funded by South Africa and various international organizations. However, many families are understandably reluctant to part with their treasures. So far only a fraction of the texts have been digitized. It is only when this work is completed that we will properly begin to understand the intellectual world of medieval West Africa.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/9030fd44>



Yet it was during the rulers of the Songhai Empire in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that Timbuktu really thrived. Also, Songhai had the inland delta of the Niger River as its center, and Gao, in today's Mali, was its capital. Much as the kings of Mali before them, the Songhai rulers grew rich from the gold trade and they emulated Mansa Musa's example in going on ostentatious pilgrimages. The armies of the Songhai Empire had a cavalry of horsemen and a navy made up of canoes. Gao and other towns had guilds of craftsmen, and slave labor played a prominent role in the economy. In addition to gold, the Songhai exported kola nuts and slaves and they imported textiles, horses, salt and assorted luxury goods. A traveler from Muslim Spain, Leo Africanus, who visited Gao in the early sixteenth century, was amazed at the poverty of the lower classes but also at the great wealth of its rulers. The position of Songhai came to an end in 1591 when the Moroccans invaded.

The other delta of the Niger River, where the water runs into the Atlantic Ocean, is today the center of the Nigerian petroleum industry. This is where the Yoruba people live, which together with the Igbo and the Hausa is the largest of Nigeria's more than 500 ethnic groups. It was here, some 900 years ago, that a number of flourishing city-states came to be established. There were at least sixteen such cities — including Ife, Ijebu, Katunga and Ibadan — and many smaller ones besides. Between the twelfth and the eighteenth centuries this was one of the most highly urbanized parts of the world. The largest cities among them may have had some 100,000 inhabitants. The Yoruba city-states were all organized in much the same fashion. They were built like fortresses, with high walls surrounded by moats and gates that could be closed to visitors or to approaching armies. In the case of the larger city-states, these walls could become very extensive indeed, reaching several thousands of kilometers in length.

Walls and bronzes of Benin

The Kingdom of Benin was one of the city-states in the delta created by the Niger River in today's Nigeria. The people of Benin grew rich from trade, not least in slaves, which they were happy to sell to the Europeans who began arriving in the sixteenth century. The state of Benin was surrounded by an enormous set of walls and moats, known as *iya*, constructed between the ninth and the fifteenth centuries. The walls could be as high as 10 meters and the moats just as deep. They had a combined length of some 16,000 kilometers, making this one of the largest construction projects on earth. Archaeologists have compared the walls of Benin to the Great Wall of China and complained that the former construction has received none of the attention lavished on the latter. *Read more: The Great Wall of China does not exist at p. 26.* It is not quite clear why the walls and moats were built. A project of this scale is difficult to explain as purely a military arrangement. Perhaps it was rather a question of politics — of demonstrating the extent of the *oba's* power.

The opulent lifestyle of the rulers of Benin is vividly portrayed in a remarkable collection of bronze sculptures and plaques which were cast from the thirteenth century onward. The metal was imported from Europe, but the artworks were made by local craftsmen using local techniques. Occasionally the plaques portray European merchants too — they appear as small figures in the background, wearing odd-looking hats. The bronzes were looted by the British when they occupied Benin in 1897. Many of them are now on display in the British Museum.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/e96d8419>



All Yoruba city-states had an elaborate structure of professional guilds and there were many social clubs, religious sects and secret societies. Each city-state had a leader, the *oba*, who lived in a large palace in the center of the city with a marketplace in front of it. The *obas* were elected from the often quite extensive pool of royal princes. Some of the *obas* ended up as autocratic rulers but others were restrained by the power of their councilors. Some city-states were in effect more like republics.

In the fifteenth century the *obas* of Benin grew particularly rich and powerful. During the rule of Ewuare the Great, 1440–1473, Benin expanded to become a fully-fledged empire. Ewuare taxed trade and established a military force that included a navy made up of canoes. The Benin army was also skilled in the art of siege warfare, which was crucial in this world of fortified cities. The enemies captured in these wars were turned into slaves who were employed in various construction projects, of which the very extensive system of moats and walls was the most remarkable. The court of the *Oba* of Benin is vividly depicted in a series of plaques and statues, known as the “Benin bronzes.” *Read more: Walls and bronzes of Benin at p. 137.*

Further west, in what today is Ghana and the Ivory Coast, we find the Akan people. The Akans lived in the rainforest which they, through painstaking labor, managed to control. In order to cut down the enormous trees they relied on slave labor and

the slaves were bought in gold. Akan territory was gold country, and thereby the ultimate source of much of the wealth of all of West Africa. Yet gold did not only pay for slaves, but also for soldiers, and in the year 1701, the Akan established an empire of their own, known as the Asante. The Asante was a confederacy of assorted rivaling groups skillfully unified by Osei Tutu, 1675–1717. The Asante confederacy had Kumasi, in today's Ghana, as its capital. Yet the alliance was more than anything held together by symbolic means. Osei Tutu took a stool made of gold as a symbol of the unity of the confederation. The occupant of the golden stool was to be the ruler of them all.

Golden Stool of the Asante

The Golden Stool of the Asante is the throne of the ruler of the Asante Kingdom and the ultimate symbol of power in Asante society. As legend has it, the stool descended from the sky and landed on the lap of Osei Tutu, the first Asante king. Thrones are symbols of authority in many societies; they allow the ruler to sit while his subjects are forced to kneel or bow. Yet the Golden Stool of the Asante has particular powers. It embodies the spirit of the Asante — the living members, the dead and the yet to be born. As a sacred object, it may never touch the ground and must always be placed on a blanket. It can only be handled by the ruler himself. On particularly solemn occasions the throne is itself seated on a throne.

As one would expect, the Golden Stool has been the cause of numerous conflicts. In the year 1900, when the English governor of the newly occupied colony of the Gold Coast insisted that he be allowed to sit on it, it suddenly mysteriously disappeared. It was later recovered and has been used in royal ceremonies after Ghana's independence. The power of the stool is intact and today no one but the current Asante king and his closest advisers know its whereabouts. On ritual occasions, copies of the stool are often used. Tourists can buy cheap replicas of their own in the market of Kumasi, the Asante capital.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/eed5f046>



In general the Asante kings surrounded themselves with much pomp and circumstance and they were often carried around in public procession wearing their gilded paraphernalia. A bit less symbolically, the empire was held together by drums. Although drums are common all over Africa, the drumming of the Asante is particularly famous. Asante drums were talking drums. They were not only beating out a rhythm but conveying entire messages which, with their help, were quickly transmitted from one part of the empire to the other. In the rainforest, where mobility is blocked and visibility is limited, nothing travels as quickly as sound.

As we have seen, both Benin and the Asante confederacy owned and traded in slaves. Indeed slaves, together with gold, were the main sources of wealth for both empires. Land, by contrast, was not considered as a form of private property; it

had little value since there was quite simply too much of it. Instead, what the land produced, and those who could be forced to work on it, were valuable. Thus a man would count his wealth in the number of slaves he owned, and throughout West Africa taxes were both levied on, and paid in terms of, slaves. Enslaved people were also given as tributary gifts by a subordinate state or by a neighboring state which sought to avoid occupation. In general, there was a strong connection between warfare and slavery, and prisoners of war were usually enslaved. The revenue derived from the transcontinental slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean, which began in the sixteenth century, was more than anything what helped make both Benin and the Asante rich and powerful.

Dancing kings and female warriors of Dahomey

When the kings of Dahomey received visitors they would always put on an ostentatious display. A large contingent of soldiers would show up, brandishing their weapons and waving flag-staves decorated with human skulls and with the jawbones of their enemies. In addition, the kings of Dahomey would dance before the visitors, accompanied by drums and by singing soldiers. Afterward, the soldiers would fire their guns in a salute and the king would approach the visitors and shake hands with them.

The kings of Dahomey had an elite guard made up entirely of women, known as the *mino*. They were established in the seventeenth century, initially as a group of elephant hunters, but later they became the king's bodyguard, equipped with muskets and regular uniforms. They also participated in slave raids. The *mino* underwent rigorous physical exercises and learned survival skills, how to storm defenses and to execute prisoners. They were not allowed to have children or to marry. By the mid-nineteenth century, there were between 1,000 and 6,000 of these female warriors, making up about a third of the Dahomeyan army.

The *mino* participated in the wars against France at the end of the nineteenth century. Initially, the French soldiers found it difficult to fight female adversaries, but eventually, they overcame their scruples. In a major battle in 1890, the *mino* were slaughtered. The female battalion was disbanded after Dahomey became a French colony in 1894. Interviews with former female soldiers conducted in the 1930s indicated that many of them had problems adapting to civilian life. The *mino* guard has recently been discovered by Hollywood and popular culture in the United States. There is no doubt that they provide an image of female empowerment. Whether they really are appropriate role models for young black women today can be discussed.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/d87f3953>



East Africa and the Indian Ocean

It is the Bantu migration which will take us from West Africa to the other side of the continent. The Bantu migration is the name given to a massive movement of peoples

which took place some time in the first millennium BCE. Leaving a region in what is today eastern Nigeria and Cameroon, people speaking Bantu languages began moving southward and eastward, eventually settling in much of central and southern Africa. The migration was a spontaneous movement, not an invasion, but exactly why it took place is not clear. Some scholars suggest that it was due to overpopulation while others cite disease, or changes in the climate. The Bantu people knew how to work iron and this allowed them to make better tools and more deadly weapons. The iron tools, in turn, made it possible to cut down trees and open up new fields. The original populations of these parts of Africa were hunters and gatherers, not farmers, and they were either assimilated into the Bantu population or forced to eke out a living in more remote places.

People of the forest

Before human beings took up agriculture, we all gathered our food or we hunted it. There are small groups of hunters and gatherers throughout the world to this day — and many of them live in Africa. This includes some 900,000 Pygmies in the jungles of Central Africa, but also groups such as the San people of the Kalahari desert and the Hadza of Tanzania. The people of the forest are the remnants of the original inhabitants of Central Africa who were displaced when the Bantu people arrived. There is still a lot of tension between the two groups. The Pygmies of Congo often live in close proximity to a farmers' village, but as soon as new sources of food supply become available they disappear into the forest. The Bantu farmers often think of them as unreliable. The Pygmies, for their part, often think of the Bantu farmers as overbearing and rather gullible.

Sedentary people always look down on people who move around in order to make a living, but they also romanticize their lives. One example is the "paleolithic diet" which has recently become fashionable in Europe and North America. People who follow a paleolithic diet stay away from agricultural products like cereal and milk and eat only the kind of food that can be hunted or gathered. The presumption is that our bodies are better adjusted to the kind of food that we consumed during 95 percent of human history. Apparently, "paleolithic diet" is Google's most popular search term in the category of weight-loss methods.

Another group of people who romanticize the lives of hunters and gatherers is a brand of political activists known as "anarcho-primitivists." Agriculture, they argue, was a mistake, and so was the formation of the state and the very notion of civilization. Some anarcho-primitivists predict that a catastrophe of some kind will one day occur — perhaps as the result of a war or an ecological collapse. After that cataclysmic event, the few survivors will have to return to Africa and to the only form of human life which is sustainable in the long run. The societies of hunters and gatherers who live there today are thus not the remnants of some remote past, but rather models of our future.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/197e9c14>



The Bantu migration explains why many people in Africa speak related languages. There are today some 450 Bantu languages, and Bantu speakers make up a third of Africa's population. All Bantu people share a belief in a supreme God who is usually associated with the sky. The world was not created, they say, but it is eternal. The spirits of people who have died linger on in this world and can influence the lives of the living, at least as long as the dead are still remembered. Many Bantu folktales feature speaking animals — cunning hares, sneaky hyenas and powerful lions. “Ubuntu” is a shared political principle which African politicians still occasionally invoke in their rhetoric. It is usually translated as “humanity,” or the notion that “I am because we are.”

When the Bantu-speaking migrants eventually arrived on the shores of the Indian Ocean, they came across people and influences from entirely different parts of the world — the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, India and beyond. Arab traders had traveled up and down this coast at least since the first millennium of the Common Era and they had established themselves in places like Lamu, Mombasa and Zanzibar. Merchants from Oman played an important role in this trade too. They transported their goods on ships, known as *dhow*s. **Read more:** *A giraffe in Beijing* at p. 25.

This is not to say that the trading ports on the coast were Arabic. Rather, they were cosmopolitan hubs with a culture, and a way of life, which was uniquely their own. The main language spoken here today is Swahili, which is a Bantu language mixed with loan-words from Arabic, Hindi and assorted European languages. In fact, Swahili was not originally anyone's native tongue but was instead a lingua franca used by merchants. In the tenth century, a sultanate was established in Kilwa Kisiwani, in today's Tanzania.

Kilwa Kisiwani

Kilwa Kisiwani, just off the southern coast of today's Tanzania, was one of many trading ports along Africa's east coast and, for a while, it was the most powerful among them. In the tenth century, a Muslim sultanate was founded here by a group of explorers coming from the city of Shiraz in today's Iran. They established themselves as a ruling class and imposed their own culture and values on the community. Kilwa Kisiwani was famous for its fort which served as a residence for the sultan, but also as a place of trade. The residence had over one hundred individual rooms, reception halls, wide staircases, and an octagonal swimming pool. Kilwa's other main attraction was its mosque, constructed entirely out of coral stone. Ibn Battuta, who came here in 1331, was highly impressed with the way the city was laid out and with the generosity and religiosity of its ruler. **Read more:** *Ibn Battuta, the greatest traveler of all time* at p. 142. He also describes how the sultan went on raids to capture slaves in the interior of Africa.

By the time of Ibn Battuta's visit, Kilwa had already been engaged in commerce for some thousand years. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a Greek manual for merchants compiled in the first century CE, mentions the ports along the eastern coast of Africa as excellent places to buy ivory and tortoiseshell. Coins minted in

Kilwa have been found in Great Zimbabwe, Oman, and even in Australia. [Read more: *Great Zimbabwe* at p. 127.](#) During excavations in the sultan's palace, a small flask from the Yuan dynasty was discovered together with many shards of Chinese pottery. [Read more: *Dividing it all up* at p. 112.](#) Today only ruins are left of the once-powerful sultanate.

[Read more online: https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/f8256e9b](https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/f8256e9b)



Ibn Battuta, the greatest traveler of all time

Ibn Battuta, 1304–1369, was a Moroccan explorer of Berber descent. He is a good candidate for the title of the greatest traveler of all time. His journeys began in 1325 when he set off on a *hajj* to Mecca. However, once his religious obligations were completed, he did not go home but continued instead to the Mongol Ilkhanate in Persia. He visited Baghdad in 1327 and went to Mecca for a second *hajj*, but again he refused to go home. Instead, he continued southward to Yemen, Aden, and Somalia. He then went for a third *hajj*, and this time he stayed in Mecca for a year. He then decided to seek employment with the sultan of Delhi. He traveled to India via Constantinople, the Black Sea and the trade routes of the Golden Horde. He visited Astrakan and Samarkand, and via Afghanistan and the Hindu Kush he eventually made it to Delhi. Here he worked as a judge for six years before he was dispatched as the sultan's ambassador to the Yuan dynasty in China.

On his journey to China Ibn Battuta's ship was attacked, and he ended up in the Maldive Islands where he stayed for nine months and married into the royal family. Continuing his original assignment, he set off for Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Malacca, Vietnam and eventually he arrived in the Fujian province of China. In Beijing, he introduced himself as the long-lost ambassador from India and was kindly received by the emperor. Only then did he decide to return to Morocco. Traveling along the caravan routes of Central Asia he saw the first signs of the contagious disease, the Bubonic plague, which was to kill millions of people. [Read more: *The Black Death* at p. 119.](#) Coming home in 1349, he discovered that his father and mother were dead. Restless, he decided to go on a trip to southern Spain. He then went to Timbuktu where he gives an account of an encounter with a hippopotamus.

Scholars are uncertain whether Ibn Battuta really visited all the places he describes and, in some cases, he may be recounting tales he heard from other travelers. However, Ibn Battuta himself was confident regarding his achievements. "I have indeed — praise be to God — attained my desire in this world, which was to travel through the earth, and I have attained this honor, which no ordinary person has attained."

On the beaches of Kilwa one can still find shards of pottery originating in India and China.

A state which benefited greatly from the trade conducted across the Indian Ocean was the Kingdom of Zimbabwe, 1220–1450. Although its capital, Great Zimbabwe, was located inland, on the savanna, it was connected to the sea through

well-traveled trade routes and also by the Limpopo River which flows from today's Botswana to Mozambique.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/3075aa43>



Great Zimbabwe

Great Zimbabwe is called “great” in order to distinguish it from the many smaller zimbabwes, over 200 of them, which are scattered in an area from today's country of Zimbabwe to Mozambique on the East African coast. A “zimbabwe” is a fortress built of stone which served as protection against military attacks but also as a residence for the ruling class. The zimbabwes were connected to each other as nodes in a network, and trade tied the network together. Great Zimbabwe was the greatest of them all. It was the center of a commercial network that connected inner Africa to trading communities all around the Indian Ocean. The people of Great Zimbabwe were selling all kinds of products, but mainly ivory and gold. They even traded with China. *Read more: Kilwa Kisiwani at p. 141.*

Great Zimbabwe was a strongly hierarchical society with a rigid separation between ordinary people and the ruling elite. The king lived in a fortress on top of a hill surrounded by enormous stone walls, and in the city, at the foot of the hill, lived an estimated 25,000 inhabitants. Yet we actually know very little about the people who once lived there and how the buildings were used. It seems the construction began in the eleventh century, but that it was abandoned at the end of the fourteenth century. We do not know why. Perhaps the land could not sustain such a large population, or perhaps the gold mines no longer yielded as much wealth as before.

When Europeans in the nineteenth century first came across Great Zimbabwe they wouldn't accept that it could have been constructed by Africans. The Phoenicians must have done it, they concluded, or the Egyptians or perhaps the Arabs. Between 1965 and 1980, when Zimbabwe was run by a small group of renegade white farmers, they even commissioned archaeological research designed to prove that no Africans were involved in its construction. Not surprisingly, when Zimbabwe became democratic in 1980, Great Zimbabwe quickly became a symbol of the achievements of its people. The country itself was named after the monument and it was depicted on stamps and banknotes.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/69127b74>



There are some two hundred trading-posts — smaller “zimbabwes” — scattered between Great Zimbabwe and the coast. Not all that much is known about the Zimbabwe Kingdom, but the ruins of the capital leave no doubt regarding its power and wealth. Here too there are abundant indications of a connection to lands all around

the Indian Ocean. Archaeologists have found Chinese ceramics in the ruins of Great Zimbabwe, but also coins from Arabia and glass beads from India.

Further north, in the mountains of what today is Uganda, we find Bunyoro and Buganda, two kingdoms that were rivals from the thirteenth century well into the nineteenth. The traditional economy here revolved around big game hunting but they were making money from trade too. And just as in West Africa, salt was a key commodity. To this day both Bunyoro and Buganda have royal families which take court ceremony very seriously indeed.

Bunyoro and Buganda

Bunyoro and Buganda are two ancient kingdoms in the region of the Great Lakes in eastern Africa. The two were rivals from the thirteenth well into the nineteenth century. Bunyoro's present ruler is Rukirabasajja Agutamba Solomon Gafabusa Iguru I. The kingdom has 800,000 inhabitants, some three-fourths of whom are subsistence farmers. Only about half of the population is literate. The traditional economy in this part of Africa revolved around the hunting of big game — elephants, lions, rhinos and crocodiles — the various parts of which were exported, first to the East African coast and then across the Indian Ocean. Salt was another key commodity, produced at Kibiro, on the banks of Lake Albert, controlled by Bunyoro. Today a majority of the land is still virgin forest and there are plenty of large animals.

As for the people of Buganda, they were mainly farmers, but they also had blacksmiths who were famous for producing high-quality tools and lethal weapons. Buganda eclipsed Bunyoro in the eighteenth century when it gained control of the salt trade. Nineteenth century visitors to Buganda were amazed at the wealth of the country and the elaborate ceremonies conducted at its court. The present king of Buganda is Kabaka Muwenda Mutebi II. During the period of dictatorship in Uganda — prior to 1993 — he lived in exile in England where he went to university. The king of Bunyoro maintains an active Facebook account and you can follow the Kingdom of Buganda on Twitter.

Today Bunyoro and Buganda are constituent parts of Uganda. However, since the country is a republic, neither monarch has formal powers. Their mandate, according to the country's constitution, is restricted to "cultural and development advocacy matters." Yet they also engage in various projects aimed at promoting information technology and sustainable development. Both royal houses are still greatly admired by the descendants of their former subjects.

Read more online: <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12434/529e7b43>



An African international system?

The question is whether it is possible to talk about a distinct African international system and, if so, what its characteristics might be. There are good reasons to conclude that there is no such system. After all, in many parts of Africa, geography and climate

have created obstacles to the formation of the kinds of political structures which we think of as states. In the rainforest, the vegetation was usually too dense to clear and no large communities could be formed, and further inland people were often pastoralists and not that easy to organize politically. And if there are no states, there can be no inter-state system. Yet one's ecological niche is not one's fate, and Africa has been full of mighty empires, elaborate political structures and unimaginably wealthy kings. Even the most remote locations have been connected to international trading networks.

Two separate waves of expansions have served to unite the African continent — the Arab invasion and the Bantu migration. The Arab invasion connected North Africa to the caliphates in the Middle East and thereby to prosperous centers of civilization. Moreover, Islam united people behind one God and one set of religious practices. Likewise, the Bantu migration spread kindred languages throughout the continent together with cultural practices and technical know-how. Yet it was trade which more than anything brought the continent together. The trade in gold, salt and slaves was particularly brisk and it was the profits derived from these key commodities that convinced Berber merchants to cross the Sahara, and that took Arab *dhow*s down the Swahili coast. This is also what eventually brought European explorers and merchants to Africa. It was by taxing this trade that city-states grew rich and expanded into kingdoms and empires. It was also trade which more than anything allowed people to escape their ecological niches. Trade made cities spring up in the desert and gave the people of the jungles the resources they needed to cut down even the tallest of trees.

But relations were not always peaceful. The groups of people living in the rainforest often conducted raids on each other, and the states on the savanna relied on powerful armies which could subjugate and enslave their enemies. Yet wars in Africa were different from many wars fought elsewhere. Since land was an abundant resource, it was not worth fighting over; and while a salt or a gold mine would constitute a precious catch, there was little point in territorial expansion as such. The only proper exceptions to this rule are the Yoruba city-states in the Niger Delta which were very concerned indeed about territorial boundaries. For the most part, however, political leaders were content to raze the capital of the enemies they had defeated, humiliate them and include them as a subordinate partner in an alliance. That is, diplomacy would soon come to replace overt acts of warfare. By means of diplomacy the subordinate state would become a tribute bearer who brought gifts to the suzerain state. This is how the empires of Africa were created.

Often these political relations were expressed in the language of kinship. The powerful state was the "father," while the subordinate states were "children," or other, more distant, relatives. By tracing their genealogy back to a common ancestor, the unity of the alliance was strengthened. This was also how the empires expanded. If a group of people established a community at a new location, they would link their ancestry back to the original state. Thus, even while the original state was broken up, the result was an expanding alliance of related states. Alternatively, states which

shared no political genealogy might make one up in order to cement their common bonds. Similar ties helped protect the trading routes. In Central Africa long-distance traders often declared each other “brothers” and insisted on the right of safe passage and on political protection. States that traded with each other could be declared friends and relatives too and thereby exempt from acts of warfare.

But this does not amount to one, all-encompassing African international system. The continent is too vast and relations between its assorted regions not nearly strong enough to be described as integrated. Although trade connected east and west with north and south, no political relations were equally extensive. Besides, the trade routes did not only link various African locations with each other, but Africa with the rest of the world. Northern Africa had close links to the Middle East and Europe; Eastern and Southern Africa traded across the Indian Ocean; and West Africa, from the sixteenth century onward, was a partner in the trade across the Atlantic Ocean.

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Timeline

3500 BCE	The Kingdom of Nubia is established.
3000 BCE	Pharaonic Egypt is established in the Nile River Valley.
1000 BCE	Beginnings of the Bantu migration.
325	The king of the Axsumite kingdom converts to Christianity.
859	Al Quaraouiyine, a university, is founded in Fez by Fatima al-Fihri.
960	The Kilwa Sultanate is founded by settlers from Shiraz, Persia.
1054	The Almoravids capture Sijilmasa.
1086	The Almoravids are invited into Spain by the <i>taifa</i> kings.
1172	The Almohads conquer al-Andalus.
1220–1450	The Kingdom of Zimbabwe.
1235	The emperor of Mali, Sundiata Keita, calls a meeting that establishes a constitution for the empire.
1324	Mansa Musa, the richest man in the world, goes on a <i>hajj</i> to Mecca.
1440	Ewuare the Great comes to power in Benin and greatly expands the empire.
1591	Moroccan troops invade the Songhai Empire.
1675	Osei Tutu unites the Asante Confederacy, with Kumasi as its capital.

Short dictionary

<i>dhow</i> , Arabic	Generic name for sailing vessels, especially those used in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean.
<i>hajj</i> , Arabic	Pilgrimage to Mecca. A religious duty for all Muslims.
<i>iya</i> , Edo language	“Wall.” Used for the earthwork constructions making up the walls of Benin.
<i>lingua franca</i> , Latin	Literally, “the Frankish tongue.” A third language, such as Swahili, used for communication between people who do not share a native language.
<i>madrasa</i> , Arabic	“Educational institution,” traditionally school teaching the Quran, theology and Islamic law.
<i>medina</i> , Arabic	A walled part of a city in the Arab world, with markets and many narrow streets.
<i>mino</i> , Fon language	Literally “our mothers.” The all female body-guard of the king of Dahomey who also served as soldiers in the army.
<i>oba</i> , Edo language	“Ruler.” Title of the rulers of the Yoruba city-states in the Niger delta of today’s Nigeria.
<i>taifa</i> , Arabic	The small, Muslim, kingdoms that were formed all over southern Spain after the fall of the Caliphate of Córdoba in 1031.

Think about

The Nile River Valley

- Which ancient states can be found along the Nile River Valley?
- What explains the power of the Aksumite kingdom?
- Why was Ethiopia one of the first countries to convert to Christianity?

North Africa

- Who are the Berbers?
- Contrast and compare the Almoravids and the Almohads.
- Who are the Tuaregs?

The kingdoms of West Africa

- What explains the wealth of the Mali kingdom?
- Explain the importance of the Niger river.
- Give an account of the political relations of the Yoruba city-states.

East Africa and the Indian Ocean

- What was the Bantu migration?
- Describe the societies that developed on Africa's eastern coast.
- What made Great Zimbabwe great?

An African international system?

- What unites Africa? What separates it?
- What role has territory played in relations between African states?
- What role did slavery play in traditional African society?