

CHAPTER 18-STATES AND SOCIETIES OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

From about 2000 B.C.E. to about 1000 B.C.E., the Bantu and other migrants move through Sub-Saharan Africa herding and spreading agriculture. They either displaced or absorbed the native peoples and would eventually discover iron metallurgy for improved tools. They bring yams, millet and bananas and the new technology and new foods start a surge in population.

The political organization of African tribes was generally kin (extended family)-based rather than bureaucracy-based. Families, especially male family leaders, governed villages through councils. The chief was usually the head of the most prominent family. Villages were grouped into districts, and the chiefs dealt with inter-village affairs. About 1000 C.E., this system began to fall apart as increased population pressures forced conflicts over resources. Some communities organized military forces and began conquering surrounding communities. The best examples of this were Benin, Ife, and the Kingdom of the Kongo.

African religions had a creator god with lesser gods and spirits, who often were associated with natural features and intervened in people's lives. Diviners mediated between humans and the spirits, and used both rituals and medicine to solve problems. These methods reflected that African religions were practical and not theological. Christianity came to Africa in the first century and Islam in the 700s-800s. Both influenced Africa in different ways. Christianity was especially strong in Ethiopia where the kings claimed descent from the Israelite kings. In sub-Saharan Africa, Islam appealed to the elites who built mosques and schools, but did not change society significantly, especially in gender relations, where African women were more equal to men than in Islam. In African society, men did the heavy labor and women took control of the domestic sphere. However, while men controlled the political process, aristocratic women did have influence. Women were also involved in business and, unlike in many other societies at this time, the military. Slavery in Africa was similar to slavery in other regions, with the slaves being war captives, criminals, or debtors who worked as laborers.

In West Africa, the introduction of the camel after 300 C.E. made crossing the desert easier and increased trade and communication across the Sahara. The kingdom of Ghana became the most important commercial site in the region, with its capital city Koumbi-Saleh being the center for the trade in gold, slaves, ivory, horses, and salt. Exposed to Islam through trade, the kings of Ghana became Muslim but did not force conversions on their people. The kingdom declined in the early thirteenth century due to nomadic raiders.

The great kingdom in the region was Mali, built by Sundiata (c. 1230-1255) in part by controlling and taxing the trade through Mali. Mansa Musa (c. 1312-1337) expanded Mali. He also helped advance Islam by participating in the *hajj*, hiring Islamic scholars, and establishing Islamic schools in Mali. Internal factions and military pressure from its neighbors caused Mali Empire to collapse and, it was replaced in the late fifteenth century by the Songhay Empire.

The east coast of Africa, often known as the Swahili Coast, was involved in the Indian Ocean trade with both Arabic and Indian merchants. The coastal cities, such as Kilwa, become wealthy due to the trade and development into independent

city-states. Trade led to the conversion of more African kings to Islam, which helped to further both trade and political alliances with other Muslims states.

Key Concept 3.1. Expansion and Intensification of Communication and Exchange Networks

- I. Improved transportation technologies and commercial practices led to an increased volume of trade, and expanded the geographical range of existing and newly active trade networks.
- II. The movement of peoples caused environmental and linguistic effects.

Key Concept 3.3. Increased Economic Productive Capacity and Its Consequences

- III. Despite significant continuities in social structures and in methods of production, there were also some important changes in labor management and In the effect of religious conversion on gender relations and family life.