



CHAPTER 3

EARLY AFRICAN SOCIETIES AND THE BANTU MIGRATIONS

Before you get started: No matter how fascinating you found ancient Egyptian culture to be in middle school, it is a minimal part of the AP Exam so don't over memorize the terms. Nevertheless, it is included in the AP guidelines as one of the classical cultures that you may compare with another. As for the sub-Saharan history of Bantu Africa, our knowledge is expanding all the time. Where there was once the belief that Africa was a dark continent until discovered by Europeans, we now know that it has marvelous archaeological sites that can corroborate the essential truths in many oral history traditions. These sites demonstrate dynamic kingdoms with early technological knowledge and complex class structures. Furthermore, once Islam arrived, some so-called Arab writers have been rediscovered as educated African Muslims. The study of African history today is as dynamic as that of any region in the world.

EARLY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY IN AFRICA

While Egypt was the most prominent of early African culture, its southern neighbor, Nubia, up the Nile River, was just as complex and sophisticated if less prosperous.

Climatic Change and the Development of Agriculture in Africa *(Themes: #1 Human-Environment Interaction, #3 Politics)*

By 10,000 B.C.E., the Sahara had become a grassland with rivers and lakes that sustained Sudanic peoples. Within a thousand years they had settled down to grow sorghum, followed by the cultivation of yams, gourds, watermelons, and cotton. They took on the **domestication of sheep and goats** from the Middle East. By 5000 B.C.E. they had organized themselves into small monarchies with semi-divine kings. Their religion reflected the values of an agricultural society. Soon after, climatic change made the region hotter and drier so that people were forced to gather around the two remaining bodies of water, Lake Chad and the Nile River. When the **Nile's annual spring floods** receded, a layer of fertile soil was left that sustained agriculture in its valley.

Egypt and Nubia: "Gifts of the Nile" *(Themes: #1 Human-Environment Interaction, #4 Economic Systems)*

The lower Nile had a much larger floodplain than the upper Nile so Egyptians were able to take better advantage of the annual flooding than the Nubian people to the south. As Sudanic peoples moved north into the region, they brought cattle and donkeys, as well as African crops while the Egyptians borrowed grains like wheat and barley from the Mesopotamians. Eventually, **irrigation** methods improved and the Egyptians were able to expand their farming to higher areas away from the Nile. These fields required plowing and systems of dikes. And by 4000 B.C.E., there were large numbers of Egyptian villages along the Nile.

The Unification of Egypt *(Themes: #2 Development and Interaction of Cultures, #3 Politics)*

Both Egyptians and Nubians began as small bickering kingdoms, not unlike Mesopotamian city-states. But around 3100 B.C.E., a minor official named **Menes** unified Egypt into one large state with a centralized government. The **Old Kingdom pharaohs** were considered gods and deserving of massive tombs, so they built the pyramids to honor their remains. The Old Kingdom lasted until 2040 B.C.E. and was followed by the **Middle Kingdom**.



Part I: The Early Complex Societies, 3500 to 500 B.C.E.

Nubian states remained small and decentralized but closely intertwined with the Egyptian state. There were five military campaigns to conquer the Nubians. Pushed south by the attacks, later Nubian leaders established the strong state of Kush 700 kilometers south of Aswan. Interactions between the kingdom of Kush and Egypt became more cordial with trade, diplomatic relations, and Egyptian exploration. Nubian mercenaries became common in Egyptian armies and were assimilated into Egyptian society.

Turmoil and Empire
(Themes: #3 Politics)

Usually protected by vast deserts and the Mediterranean, Egypt was invaded once by the **Hyksos**, a Semitic people, at the end of the Middle Kingdom. Eventually the Egyptians drove them out and formed the **New Kingdom** in 1550 B.C.E. The Egyptian bureaucracy vastly expanded in complexity during this period while the new pharaohs built many temples, palaces, and statues instead of pyramids. The New Kingdom reached imperial status when it conquered the coastal regions of the Mediterranean and down through Nubia. After the New Kingdom, Egypt began to decline and the upper Nile fell to Nubian forces in 1100 B.C.E. Assyrians from Mesopotamia invaded the northern Nile valley in the seventh century B.C.E., starting a pattern of continual foreign domination.

THE FORMATION OF COMPLEX SOCIETIES AND SOPHISTICATED CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Specialized labor and social stratification emerged with the growth of cities along the Nile. Due to its advantageous location, Egypt was a very prosperous society with complex religious and writing systems.

The Emergence of Cities and Stratified Societies
(Themes: #5 Social Structures)

Several large cities developed in Egypt that served as political, cultural, and economic centers. Among them **Memphis** and **Thebes** were notable for their role in politics. The Egyptians recognized one supreme ruler, the Pharaoh, so unlike Mesopotamia they never developed a noble class. Instead, the military and bureaucracy took over high social positions. The society also included an urban middle class as well as peasants and slaves. Nubian society developed similarly.

Egyptian women were relegated to lesser roles at home and in public although they had more authority than Mesopotamian women. Nevertheless, some Egyptian women gained power as regents to young rulers and one, **Queen Hapshetsut**, even attained the throne as a co-ruler. But a woman as ruler was so disconcerting for Egyptians that artists depicted her with a beard. Women in Egypt also became priestesses and, in some cases, educated scribes. In Nubia, however, there appear to have been many female rulers.

Economic Specialization and Trade
(Themes: #1 Human-Environment Interaction, #4 Economic Systems)

The Egyptians were slow to adopt metal tools and weapons, and only did so after the invasion of the Hyksos. Sub-Saharan Africans independently developed techniques of iron mining and metallurgy as early as 900 B.C.E. Most travel in Egypt occurred by boat but long-distance trade routes across land also existed. Later, the Egyptians adopted wheeled vehicles from the Middle East. Thriving trade networks developed to obtain luxury goods from Nubia, the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, and down through the Red Sea to Ethiopia. Prized Egyptian goods such as cotton, pottery, and wine were traded in Nubia and Ethiopia for African ivory, ebony, animal skins, gold, and slaves. The Egyptians had to import trees from the Middle East because they had few of their own.





Chapter 3: Early African Societies and the Bantu Migrations

Early Writing in the Nile Valley (Theme: #2 Development and Interaction of Cultures)

Egyptian writing, possibly borrowed from the Mesopotamians, appeared in Egypt around 3200 B.C.E. Written on paper-like **papyrus** sheets and carved into monuments, **hieroglyphs** were so cumbersome that an abbreviated form existed for everyday records. Eventually, the Egyptians adopted the Greek alphabet. Numerous papyrus manuscripts exist because of Egypt's exceptionally dry weather. As in Mesopotamia, professional scribes had a prestigious position in society. Early Nubian writing was in hieroglyph form. Eventually, Nubian scribes developed an alphabetic script of their own.

The Development of Organized Religious Traditions (Theme: #2 Development and Interaction of Cultures)

The Egyptians were **polytheistic** although some deities such as sun gods **Amon** and **Re** became more important. The cult of **Osiris**, lord of the underworld, became associated with the Nile's annual flooding and the crop cycle of seed generation, harvest, and replanting. Massive temple complexes that employed hundreds of people supported the worship of specific gods. A brief period of monotheism occurred during the reign of Akhenaten in 1473 B.C.E. but that was quickly suppressed by later pharaohs with the guidance of the priesthood. Mummification existed to help the Egyptians into immortality. At first it was only available to the pharaohs but by the New Kingdom many wealthy families had also taken up the practice. The Nubians also worshipped multiple deities and eventually adopted some of the Egyptian gods.

BANTU MIGRATIONS AND EARLY AGRICULTURAL SOCIETIES OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Bantu-speaking peoples are presumed to have migrated into most regions of sub-Saharan Africa and established agricultural communities.

The Dynamics of Bantu Expansion (Theme: #1 Human-Environment Interaction)

The **Bantu** language originated in west Africa around 4000 B.C.E. The earliest speakers settled along rivers and cultivated **yams** and **oil palms**. With the ability to travel by canoe and a growing population due to successful agricultural practices, Bantu speakers began to spread across Africa and, by 1000 B.C.E., they inhabited most of the regions south of the equator. Their progress was not in mass migrations but rather incremental and intermittent spurts of migration. After 1000 B.C.E., **iron metallurgy** hastened the rate of migration because the Bantu had the increased technology to clear forests and prepare soil for agriculture. Today, the language itself has differentiated into more than five hundred distinct languages, each representing a different ethnic group.

Early Agricultural Societies of Sub-Saharan Africa (Themes: #2 Development and Interaction of Cultures, #3 Politics, #4 Economic Systems, #5 Social Structures)

Along with the language, Bantu methods of agriculture were spread into sub-Saharan Africa, bringing new crops and domesticated animals to wide regions of Africa. Most Bantu speakers lived in agricultural communities of several hundred individuals ruled by chiefs. Within the society, there were also **age sets**, groups of individuals about the same age, who wielded considerable political and military power.

Bantu speakers believed in a creator god but primarily worshipped their ancestors and local spirits. It was necessary to keep these deities happy or disaster might occur. Bantu religious beliefs were quite flexible so when Bantus encountered different religious beliefs, components were incorporated into the belief system.





Part I: The Early Complex Societies, 3500 to 500 B.C.E.

Finished reading the chapter? Be sure you can . . .

- Explain the effect of the Nile on Egyptian culture.
- Describe the social and political structures of Egypt.
- Explain the basic tenets of Egyptian polytheism and its integration into politics.
- Describe the extent of Egyptian trade and its trading partners.
- Identify Egyptian art style and subject matter.

Chapter Multiple Choice Questions

1. Egyptians viewed the Nile as a
 - a. persistent barrier to trade.
 - b. source of destructive floods.
 - c. problem that could be solved by technology.
 - d. benevolent source of a prosperous society.
 - e. protective obstacle to invaders.
2. Egypt was unified under Menes when he formed a
 - a. decentralized government.
 - b. series of city-states.
 - c. coalition with the Nubians.
 - d. defensive alliance with other Egyptian kingdoms.
 - e. centralized government born of conquest.
3. Rulers in the New Kingdom demonstrated their power and authority by
 - a. building pyramids.
 - b. constructing a network of roads.
 - c. building temples and palaces.
 - d. eliminating the nobility.
 - e. destroying all traces of earlier pharaohs.
4. Since Egypt had an all-powerful divine ruler, rather than inherited nobility, the Egyptian ruling class was comprised of
 - a. wealthy merchants.
 - b. the military and bureaucrats.
 - c. relatives of the pharaoh.
 - d. a priestly class.
 - e. civil servants.
5. Despite the frequent presence of female regents and the acceptance of women in other public roles, Queen Hapshepsut unsettled Egyptian society so much that
 - a. the military overthrew her.
 - b. priests refused to deify her.
 - c. peasants rejected her.
 - d. artists depicted her as a male.
 - e. neighboring kingdoms refused to acknowledge her.
6. Egyptians engaged in long-distance trade
 - a. well before unification by Menes.
 - b. only after the invasion of the Hyksos.
 - c. with the advent of unification.
 - d. as the pharaohs of the New Kingdom required more precious items than before.
 - e. to gain rare tools used in agriculture.





Chapter 3: Early African Societies and the Bantu Migrations

7. In what way was Egyptian writing less cumbersome than cuneiform?
 - a. Hieroglyphs are phonetic while cuneiforms are pictographs.
 - b. There are fewer symbols to learn for proficiency.
 - c. The ease of reading hieroglyphs negated the necessity for scribes.
 - d. Hieroglyphs are written on papyrus rather than clay tablets.
 - e. Hieroglyphs could be used for informal events.
8. Unlike the Hebrew beliefs in Mesopotamia, Egyptian monotheism was
 - a. a long, slow development revolving around a series of kings.
 - b. unsustainable due to its competition from the priests of other deities.
 - c. promoted by one man rather than a group of people.
 - d. borrowed from neighbors of the upper Nile in Nubia.
 - e. an adaptation of earlier beliefs that only the sun god existed.
9. The origin of the Bantu language is believed to be in
 - a. east Africa where it is a descendant of Arab languages.
 - b. the Sahara under the influence of the Egyptians.
 - c. south Africa among the hunter-gatherers of the Kalahari.
 - d. Sudanic Africa as the Nubians expanded their power.
 - e. west Africa where populations grew enough to spread out.
10. What was the pattern of the expansion of Bantu culture?
 - a. primarily through conquest of neighboring communities
 - b. primarily through trade with the regions of Sudanic Africa
 - c. by mass migrations of people escaping climate changes
 - d. in small bursts of expansion coinciding with an increased food supply
 - e. intermittently through colonization in regions of agricultural prosperity

Comprehensive Multiple Choice Questions

1. While Mesopotamia met its primary challenge by decentralizing, Egypt's response was to unify and remain so during most of its history. What was this challenge?
 - a. to satisfy increasing stratification in the social structure
 - b. the necessity of developing a large defensive military
 - c. efforts to support large scale agriculture
 - d. management of complex government bureaucracies
 - e. control of several different ethnic groups
2. Egyptian history is traditionally organized around three kingdoms. What institutional patterns changed between the three?
 - a. Government structure moved towards decentralization.
 - b. Administrations began to build enormous dams to control flooding on the Nile.
 - c. Egypt moved toward a nobility to accommodate successful bureaucrats.
 - d. Egyptian governments moved toward expansion into neighboring lands.
 - e. Art styles began to incorporate more Mesopotamian and Nubian motifs.



Part I: The Early Complex Societies, 3500 to 500 B.C.E.

3. It is apparent from archaeological sites that sub-Saharan peoples developed iron metallurgy independently. What would possibly lead historians to the conclusion that iron metallurgy was not a borrowed technology from southwest Asia?
 - a. The remains are dated from successive time periods proving that the knowledge traveled from one region to another.
 - b. There were known trade routes through the Sudan that could have brought iron metallurgy to the region.
 - c. Early iron production sites in Africa are far beyond the Nile River valley and date to a period close to its adoption in Egypt.
 - d. The amount of iron ore and the numbers of early sites indicate spread across sub-Saharan Africa by 500 B.C.E.
 - e. Since the Egyptians obtained iron technology from the Hittites, it must have spread from Egypt to Nubia and into the Bantu-speaking regions of Africa.

Primary Source Questions

1. **Examine the funerary sculpture from Upper Egypt, 2200–2000 B.C.E., on page 67 of your textbook.**
 - a. From this painting, what can you surmise about the relationship between Egyptians and Nubians?
 - b. To what extent did Egypt tolerate foreigners?
 - c. Who may have painted this?
2. **Examine Map 3.3, Bantu Migrations, 2000 B.C.E.–1000 C.E., on page 81 of your textbook.**
 - a. Describe the pace of the origin of the Bantu.
 - b. How did the migration of the language and culture proceed?
 - c. Was this a rapid migration?

Chapter Multiple Choice Answers

1. **d:** The Egyptians had a highly productive agriculture dependent on annual flooding. Greek historian Herodotus referred to Egypt as a “Gift of the Nile.” (p. 61-62)
2. **e:** Menes, a minor official from upper Egypt, conquered the northern kingdoms of the Nile River valley and formed a centralized government from Memphis. (p. 63-64)
3. **c:** New Kingdom pharaohs did not build pyramids as Old Kingdom pharaohs had, but built other monumental structures to demonstrate strength and authority. (p. 66-68)
4. **b:** Egyptians did not have an inherited nobility but individuals could attain high status as a member of the military or the bureaucracy. (p. 71)
5. **d:** It was necessary to add a traditional male beard to her costume in paintings. (p. 72)
6. **a:** As early as 4000 B.C.E., Egyptians were trading intermittently up the Nile with the Nubians. (p. 73)
7. **d:** Papyrus is similar to paper so it could be transported and stored more easily than clay tablets. (p. 75)
8. **b:** Once Akhenaton had died, the traditional worship of Amon-Re resumed its status. (p. 77)
9. **e:** Population increase due to successful farming probably drove the expansion of Bantu peoples into other regions. (p. 81)



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10. **c:** The Bantu migration pattern resembles Indo-European expansion in its gradual spread of culture and language as groups settled into new areas. (p. 81)

Comprehensive Multiple Choice Answers

1. **c:** Both societies were dependent upon massive agricultural efforts to support burgeoning populations. Unification in Egypt allowed one authority to tighten control over its agricultural policies. The New Kingdom's elaborate bureaucracy even included separate departments to deal with agricultural affairs, while in Mesopotamia, Sumer developed into a city-state in order to protect its agricultural lands. (pp. 68, 34)
2. **d:** The Old Kingdom was focused on unification even though it invaded the Nubians on the Upper Nile several times. The Middle Kingdom expanded trade and diplomacy with cultures as far away as Syria but the New Kingdom conquered portions of the eastern Mediterranean and became an imperial power. (p. 66, 68)
3. **c:** Although the textbook does not explain why African iron production was not a borrowed technology, you can deduce that all the other answers would explain borrowing rather than independent origin. Only C posits a conclusion that time and distance count in terms of independent origin. If the distance is very great and the time is relatively short, independent origin is a more likely scenario. (p. 72-73)

Primary Source Answers

1. Painted by a professional artist, this funerary art indicates that Egypt worked closely with Nubia. Egypt appears to have been a tolerant society that allowed the intermarriage of its citizens with foreigners. It is also apparent that Egyptians afforded their foreign mercenaries the same lifestyle as their own citizens. (p. 67)
2. The origin of the Bantu is southwest of Lake Chad in west Africa. Bantu culture migrated east to the region of Lake Victoria and southward along the coasts of east and west Africa. No, this migration occurred over 3000 years. (p. 81)