

African Societies: Diversity and Similarities: Although Africans shared aspects of language and belief, their continent's vast size and number of cultures made diversity inevitable. Political forms varied from hierarchical states to "stateless" societies organized on kinship principles and lacking concentration of power and authority. Both centralized and decentralized forms existed side by side, and both were of varying size. Christianity and Islam sometimes influenced political and cultural development.

Stateless Societies: Stateless peoples were controlled by lineages or age sets. They lacked concentrated authority structures but at times incorporated more peoples than their more organized neighbors did. In the West African forest, secret societies were important in social life and could limit rulers' authority. The main weakness of stateless societies was their delayed ability to respond to outside pressures, mobilize for war, undertake large building projects, or create stability for long-distance trade.

Common Elements in African Societies: Many similarities throughout African diversity. Migration of Bantu speakers provided a common linguistic base for much of Africa. Animistic religion, belief in natural forces personified as gods, common, with well-developed concepts of good and evil. Priests guided religious practices for community benefit. African religions provided a cosmology and a guide to ethical behavior. Many Africans believed in a creator deity whose power was expressed through lesser spirits and ancestors. Families, lineages, and clans, important role in dealing with gods. Deceased ancestors link to spiritual world; they retained importance after world religions appeared. African economies were extremely diversified. North Africa integrated into world economy, but sub-Saharan regions had varying structures. Settled agriculture and ironworking were present in many areas before postclassical times, with specialization encouraging regional trade and urbanization. International trade increased in some regions, mainly toward the Islamic world. Both women and men were important in market life. In general, Africans exchanged raw materials for manufactured goods. Finally, little is known of the size of Africa's population before the twentieth century.

Arrival of Islam in North Africa: North Africa, integral part of classical Mediterranean civilization. From mid-seventh century, Muslim armies pushed westward from Egypt across regions, Ifriqiya by Romans and Maghrib (West) by Arabs. 711 they crossed into Spain. Conversion rapid, initial unity soon divided North Africa into competing Muslim states. Indigenous Berbers were an integral part of process. 11th century, reforming Muslim Berbers, the Almoravids of the western Sahara, controlled lands extending from the southern savanna and into Spain. In the twelfth century another group, the Almohads, succeeded them. Islam, with its principle of the equality of believers, won African followers. The unity of the political and religious worlds appealed to many rulers. Social disparities continued, between ethnicities and men and women, the former stimulating later reform movements.

Christian Kingdoms: Nubia and Ethiopia: Christian states were present in North Africa, Egypt, and Ethiopia before the arrival of Islam. Egyptian Christians, Copts, had a rich and independent tradition. Oppression by Byzantine Christians caused them to welcome Muslim invaders. Coptic influence spread into Nubia (Kush). Nubians resisted Muslim incursions until the thirteenth century. The Ethiopian successors to Christian Axum formed their state during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. King Lalibela in the thirteenth century built great rock churches. Ethiopia retained Christianity despite increasing pressure from Muslim neighbors.

Kingdoms of the Grasslands: Islam spread peacefully into sub-Saharan Africa. Merchants followed caravan routes across the Sahara to the regions where Sudanic states, such as Ghana, had flourished by the eighth century. By the thirteenth century, new states, Mali, Songhai, and the Hausa, were becoming important.

Sudanic States: States often were led by a patriarch or council of elders from a family or lineage. They were based on an ethnic core and conquered neighboring peoples. The rulers were sacred individuals separated from their subjects by rituals. Even though most of their population did not convert, the arrival of Islam after the tenth century reinforced ruling power. Two of the most important states were Mali and Songhay.

Empire of Mali and Sundiata, the "Lion Prince": Mali, along Senegal and Niger Rivers, formed among Malinke peoples, who broke away from Ghana in 13th century. Ruler authority was strengthened by Islam. Agriculture, combined with gold trade, was economic base of state. Ruler/mansa Sundiata (d. 1260) receives credit for Malinke expansion and for a governing system based on clan structure. Sundiata's successors in wealthy state extended Mali's control through most of Niger valley to near Atlantic coast. Mansa Kankan Musa's pilgrimage to Mecca during 14th century became legendary as of wealth distributed along way. He returned with an architect, Ishak al-Sahili, who created distinctive Sudanic architecture with beaten clay.

City Folk and Villagers: Distinctive regional towns, such as Jenne and Timbuktu, whose residents included scholars, craft specialists, and foreign merchants, developed in western Sudan. Timbuktu was famous for library and university. Military expansion of Mali and Songhay contributed to their strength. Mandinka juula traders ranged across Sudan. Most of Mali's population lived in villages and were agriculturists. Despite poor soils, primitive technology, droughts, insect pests, and storage problems, the farmers, working small family holdings, supported themselves and their imperial states.

Songhai Kingdom: Songhai people dominated middle reaches of Niger valley. Songhay became independent state in 7th century. 1010, rulers were Muslims and had a capital at Gao. Songhay won freedom from Mali by 1370 and prospered as trading state. Empire formed under Sunni Ali (1464-1492), great military leader, extended rule over entire middle Niger valley. Developed a system of provincial administration to secure conquests. Sunni Ali's successors were Muslim rulers with title of askia; by mid-sixteenth century, their state dominated central Sudan. Daily life patterns common in savanna states; Islamic and indigenous traditions combined. Men and women mixed freely; women went unveiled and young girls at Jenne were naked. Songhay

remained dominant until defeated by Moroccans in 1591. Other states that combined Muslim and pagan ways rose among Hausa of northern Nigeria. In 14th century, 1st Muslim ruler of Kano made Hausa city, center of Muslim learning. With other Hausa cities, Kano followed Islamic-indigenous amalgam present in earlier grasslands empires. Traders and other Muslims widely spread influences, even in regions without Islamic states.

Political and Social Life in the Sudanic States: Larger states, ruled by a dominant group. Islam provided a universal faith and a fixed law that served common interests. Indigenous political and social patterns persisted in unified states. Rulers reinforced authority through Muslim officials and ideology, existing traditions continued to be vital, as many of their subjects were not Muslims. Fusion of traditions shows in status of women. Many Sudanic societies were matrilineal and did not seclude women. Slavery and slave trade to Islamic world lasting more than 700 years had a major effect on women and children. All individuals might become slaves, but demand for concubines and eunuchs increased demand for women and children.

Swahili Coast of East Africa: Series of trading ports, part of Indian Ocean network, developed along coast and islands between Horn of Africa and Mozambique. Town residents were influenced by Islam, but most of the general population remained tied to traditional ways.

Coastal Trading Ports: Bantu-speaking migrants had reached and mixed with indigenous Africans early in 1st millennium C.E. Immigrants from Southeast Asia had migrated to Madagascar from 2nd century B.C.E. With rise of Islam, individuals from Oman and Persian Gulf settled in coastal villages. 13th century, mixed Bantu and Islamic culture, speaking Bantu Swahili language, emerged in a string of urbanized trading ports. Exported raw materials in return for Indian, Islamic, and Chinese luxuries. As many as 30 towns flourished, their number including Mogadishu, Mombasa, Malindi, Kilwa, Pate, and Zanzibar. 13-15th century, Kilwa was most important. All tied together by coastal commerce and by an inland caravan trade.

Mixture of Cultures on the Swahili Coast: Expansion of Islamic influence in Indian Ocean facilitated commerce. It built a common bond between rulers and trading families and allowed them to operate under cover of a common culture. Apart from rulers and merchants, most of the population, even in towns, retained African beliefs. Dynamic culture developed, using Swahili as its language, incorporating African and Islamic practices. Lineage passed through maternal and paternal lines. There was not a significant penetration of Islam into the interior.

Peoples of Forest and Plains. Apart from the peoples of the savanna and eastern coast, by 1000 C.E. most Africans were following their own lines of development. Agriculture, herding, and the use of iron implements were widespread. Some large and complex states formed; most were preliterate and transmitted knowledge by oral methods.

Artists and Kings: Yoruba and Benin: In central Nigerian forests, Nok culture flourished 500 B.C.E. - 200 C.E. Its members developed a realistic art style; practiced agriculture and used iron tools. After Nok disappeared, long hiatus before reappearance of regional artistic traditions after 1000 C.E. Non-Bantu-speaking peoples, Yoruba, were highly urbanized agriculturists organized into small city-states, each controlling a radius of about 50 miles. City-states were under authority of regional divine kings presiding over elaborate courts. The kings' power was limited by other societal forces. At Oyo, for example, local lineages controlled provinces while paying tribute to the ruler. In the capital, a council of state and a secret society advised the ruler. Ile-Ife was the holiest Yoruba city; its subjects after 1200 created terra-cotta and bronze portrait heads that rank among the greatest achievements of African art. Similar organizational patterns are found among the Edo peoples to the east. They formed the city-state of Benin in the fourteenth century under the ruler Ewuare. They ruled from the Niger River to the coast near Lagos. Benin's artists are renowned for their work in ivory and cast bronze.

Central African Kingdoms. By the thirteenth century C.E., Bantu speakers were approaching the southern tip of Africa. By around 1000, they were forming states where kinship patterns were replaced by political authority based on kingship. The Luba peoples, in Katanga, created a form of divine kingship in which the ruler had powers ensuring the fertility of people and crops. A hereditary bureaucracy formed to administer the state, thus allowing the integrating of many people into one political unit.

Kingdoms of the Kongo and Mwene Mutapa: Kingdom of Kongo flourished along lower Congo River by late 15th century. It was an agricultural society whose people were skilled in weaving, pottery making, blacksmithing, and carving. There was a sharp gender division of labor: women dominated crop cultivation and domestic tasks; men cleared forest, hunted, and traded. Population resided in small, family-based villages; area around the capital, Mbanza Kongo, by 16th century included up to 100,000 people. Hereditary central kingship ruled over local non hereditary chiefs. Kongo was a federation of states grouped into 8 major provinces. East, in central Africa, Shona-speaking peoples in the region between Zambezi and Limpopo Rivers by the ninth century began building royal stone courts (zimbabwe). The largest, Great Zimbabwe, was the center of a state flourishing by the eleventh century. Massive stone buildings and walls were constructed. Its ruler, the Mwene Mutapa, controlled a large territory reaching to the Indian Ocean. Zimbabwe dominated gold sources and trade with coastal ports of the Indian Ocean network. Internal divisions split Zimbabwe during the sixteenth century.

Global Connections: Internal Development and External Contacts: Spread of Islam had brought large areas of Africa into global community. Most pronounced contacts south of Sahara were in Sudanic states and East Africa where a fusion of Islamic and African cultures created an important synthesis. Most of Africa evolved in regions free of Islamic contact. In Benin, Yoruba states, Great Zimbabwe, and the Kongo, Africans developed their own concepts of kingship and state. Many other Africans organized their lives in stateless societies.