

Chapter 3: Early Africa and Egypt

Chapter Introduction

Egyptian Peasants

Agriculture was the foundation of Egypt's great wealth.

- Peasant farmers made the land productive and built the system of channel irrigation
 - Were the overwhelming majority of the population

Africa has several different climates and topographies that produced civilizations of various levels of sophistication

Race has been less decisive factor in history and natural environment proved to be more important

3-1 African Geography and Climates

Coastal lowlands

- Deserts (north, northwest, southwest)

Inland, plateaus, highlands, and mountains

- (east and southeast) dominate vast interior

African Continent and Egypt

Five major subdivisions of climate and vegetation

- The enormous Sahara Desert divides the continent into its North African and Sub-Saharan components
- 1. *Mediterranean and Southern Coasts*
 - a. Lie outside the tropical zones and enjoy temperate weather and good soil
- 2. *Sahelian or Sahel*
 - a. Cross Africa from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean and are dry, mainly treeless steppes (semiarid grass-covered plains)
- 3. *Deserts*
 - a. Several deserts
 - i. Sahara
 - ii. Namib (southwest)
 - iii. Kalahari (southwest)
- 4. *Rain Forests*
 - a. Extends on either side of the equator in the west and center
- 5. *The Savanna*

- a. South of the Sahara Desert, north of the rain forest in West Africa, and in most of East, Central, and South Africa. Grassland regions of interior plateaus
- Mediterranean has been closely linked to Europe and the Middle East
- Egypt was isolated in the Nile Valley
- Tsetse fly and other diseases have hindered large-scale development almost to present time
- Sahel Steppe land could only support a pastoral economy (nomadic farmers)
- Coastal strip is only sufficient place for agriculture and village life

3-2 Africa's Neolithic Revolution

Paleo climatologist's have determined that between 11,000 – 3,000 B.C.E. Africa entered a period of much higher rainfall than today

- More grassy steppes, woodlands
- Lakes and rivers covered the “wet” Sahara
- Supported a variety of foods

Historical Linguists – Scholars who reconstruct the relative chronology, as well as changes in grammar, sounds, and methods of expressing ideas, in languages and families of languages.

- These techniques enable scholars to formulate at least general ideas about how past societies developed and moved about, how they lived, the peoples they came into contact with, and the ideas they borrowed from strangers.

Africans introduced a different way of producing food in Sahara between 9,000 – 5,500 B.C.E. and have identified and categorized them into language groups who produced food in the region

1. Khoisan speakers – At one time Khoisan speakers were found throughout much of subequatorial Africa, but are now confined to the deserts of southwestern Africa
 - a. Appear to originally inhabit part of East Africa in parts of Kenya and Tanzania.
 - b. Most remained hunter and gathering throughout their history
 - c. Adopted a unique technology for fashioning microlithic stone tools for a wide variety of applications (sewing, digging, cutting, stone bowls, and net bags)
 - d. Eventually displaced by Neolithic food producers forcing them to migrate into drier regions of Southern Africa, where they survive as hunter and gatherers and cattle herders
2. Nilo-Saharan speakers – Nilo-Saharan language family
 - a. Originally inhabited regions near the Nile River valley, far south of what became Egypt
 - b. Before the wet phase they remained hunter and gatherers
 - c. After the wet phase it allowed them to spread westward and southward from the Nile valley into the Sahara

- d. Many crossed the Sinai Peninsula and became people known as Semites
- e. Those who lived along banks of rivers tended to settle down in permanent communities
- 3. Afro-Asiatic speakers – Afro-Asiatic language family
 - a. Originally inhabited regions near the Nile River valley, far south of what became Egypt
 - b. Before the wet phase they remained hunter and gatherers
 - c. After the wet phase it allowed them to spread westward and southward from the Nile valley into the Sahara
 - d. Many crossed the Sinai Peninsula and became people known as Semites
 - e. Those who lived along banks of rivers tended to settle down in permanent communities
- 4. Niger-Congo speakers – Niger-Congo language family
 - a. Originally inhabited the southern Sahara woodlands of West Africa during the wet phase
 - b. Sixth millennium converted to farming native varieties of yam and rice, supplemented with guinea fowl, and oil palm used to make palm wine
 - c. Later added black eyed peas, okra, groundnuts, and kola to their crops
 - d. After 5,500 B.C.E. people drifted southward and northward
 - e. Berbers farmed the desert fringe.
 - East African Swahili language → One out of about 800 Bantu languages

3-2a The Bantu Expansion in Subequatorial Africa

Bantu speakers – People who speak one of the member languages of the Bantu language, part of Niger-Congo subgroup

- Profited from these technologies to begin and steady expansion south and east from the general Congo Basin.
- About 1,000 B.C.E. they emerged from the forest into the drier savannas that lay to the south of the river basin and to the west of Lake Victoria. Acquired iron technology and learned to livestock and grow grain crops. These innovations helped them enlarge their numbers.
- By these means, they succeeded in establishing a series of small kingdoms that stretched across eastern, central, and southern Africa.
- By 400 C.E. they reached southern tip of the continent in present-day Africa.
- Most of what we know is inferred from archaeological and linguistic research, since they had no written language

With the spread of desert conditions, the ancient Niger-Congoans moved southward into the savannas of West Africa.

- As skilled boat builders, they could easily navigate the numerous rivers and streams of the rain forest.
- With polished stone axes, they cleared openings in the forest
- Continued living in large communities and cultivating their yam gardens

3-2b Early Civilization of the Nile Valley

1. 5,500 B.C.E. – The Afro-Asians who migrated farther down the Nile Valley towards the Mediterranean Sea, settled as farmers along its floodplain
 - a. It is they who were the ancestors of the ancient Egyptians
2. 5,000 B.C.E. – First villages appeared along the Nile
3. 4,000 B.C.E. – Floodplain cleared; completing states arose
4. 3,500 B.C.E. – Three rival states (Nekhen, Naqada, This)
5. 3,100 B.C.E. – Pharaoh of This unites the Nilotic states
 - a. Pharaoh ruled in name of falcon god Horus, symbolized forces of order
 - b. Tradition says his name was Horus-Aha or Menes

Pharaoh – the title of the god-king of ancient Egypt

Horus – the Falcon-headed god whose earthly, visible form was the reigning pharaoh in ancient Egypt

3-2c The Land and People of Egypt

Like Mesopotamia, Egypt depended on the waters of a great river system.

Egypt is and has always been the **“Valley of the Nile”**

Nile – 4,000-mile-long river originates from the far south, in the lakes of central Africa, and flows north until it empties into the Mediterranean Sea at Alexandria

Population overwhelmingly peasants

- Most free tenant farmers working estates of large landowners, government officials
- Little Mechanization, work performed by humans or animals
- Intimate knowledge of nature, environment
- Dependent on strong government for protection and regularity of seasons

Maat – goddess who personified the principle of order and balance

Nile Delta – Where Nile empties in Mediterranean Sea

Mt. Sinai and Sinai – north of Red Sea

Giza (city) – North West Side of Nile

Cairo (city) – North East Side of Nile

Lower Egypt (region) – Middle of Nile

Thebes (city) – West of red sea

Upper Egypt (region) – West of red sea

Sahara – West of Red Sea, west side of Nile

Nubia (region) – South of Red Sea, east side of Nile, where the ancient African kingdoms of Kush and Meroe were found

3-3 The Pharaoh: Egypt's God-King

Egyptians religious beliefs reflected their environment to a considerable degree and the fully developed religion had an enormous impact on the nature of their environment

3,100 B.C.E. – 1,000 B.C.E. was Egypt's foundation period

- During this centuries, the land was ruled by an unbroken line native Egyptian divine kings who apparently faced no serious threats either inside or outside their domain
- Important to note that king was not “god-like” – he or she was a god who chose to live on Earth among his favored people for a time
- From the moment the days long ceremony was completed, he was no longer a mortal man, he had become immortal, a reincarnation of the god of order, Horus
- He was surrounded by constant protocol and ceremony to protect him from profane eyes and spiritual pollution
- Pharaoh's will was law and his wisdom made him all-knowing
- What he desired was by definition correct and just
- Orders must be carried out or the gods might cease to smile on Egypt
- Family shared the celestial glory somewhat, the son who would succeed him

3-3a Government Under the Pharaohs

Government under the Pharaoh

- Nomes – administrative districts in ancient Egypt
- Governors were noble landlords and temple priests with local power
- Pharaoh directly responsible for welfare of Egypt

Two short intervals where pharaoh's powers were diminished significantly

- 1. Intermediate Period of 2,200 – 2,100 B.C.E (Loss of Control of Nomes)**
 - a. Partly result of pharaoh's loss of control over the governors of the southernmost Nomes
- 2. Intermediate Period of 1,650 – 1,570 B.C.E (Invasion of Hyksos)**

- a. Hyksos – a people who invaded the Nile Delta in Egypt and ruled it during the second Intermediate period
 - i. Crossed the Sinai Peninsula and conquered the Nile Delta

3-3b The Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, and New Kingdom

Customary to divide Egypt into dynasties (periods of monarch rule by one family)

In all, there were 31 dynasties

1. Menes is the first dynasty
2. Ended with dynasty that fell to Persian invaders in 525 B.C.E.
3. Greatest were those of the pyramid-building epoch (3,100 – 2,200 B.C.E.)
4. Greatest were also those of the Empire (1,550 – 1,250 B.C.E.)

Dynasties are grouped into three kingdoms

1. Old Kingdom (period from 3,100 to 2,200 B.C.E.)
 - a. Extended from Menes to First Intermediate Period
 - b. Was Egypt's most fertile and stable period, most successful period
 - c. Governed from Memphis, seemed to be unchallenged leaders who enjoyed loyalty and labor of their people
 - d. Art, architecture, religion, stability, prosperity
 - e. Construction of Giza Pyramids
2. Middle Kingdom (period from 2,100 – 1,650 B.C.E.)
 - a. Followed first 500 years after the First Intermediate Period, with political stability
 - b. Refinement of arts and crafts
 - c. Rule of Pharaoh was extended further up the Nile to the south
 - d. Conditions of laboring people continued to worsen
 - e. Increased trade with Mesopotamia, Phoenicia (Lebanon), Crete, and Nubia
 - f. Religion more democratic, more could gain afterlife
 - g. Small middle class appeared (merchants, officials)