

CHAPTER FOCUS

Significance

Civilizations developed in unique ways on the continent of Africa and in the Americas. From early times, African peoples formed societies that were reflections of the physical resources that surrounded them. Trade was an important factor in how various kingdoms and empires developed in Africa.

Civilizations of the Americas, on the other hand, were isolated from contact with other parts of the world. Complex civilizations grew up in the Andes and Mesoamerica. Empires rose, grew, and fell as stronger peoples conquered weaker ones.

Terms to Define

savannas	matrilineal
tropical rain forests	adobe
jungle	tepees
linguists	chinampas
oral traditions	quipu

People to Identify

Mansa Musa	Maya
Sunni Ali	Toltec
Pueblo people	Quetzalcóatl
Hopewell culture	Aztec
Olmec	Inca
Chavín	

Places to Locate

Niger River	Mali
Congo River	Songhay
Zambezi River	Timbuktu
Sahara	Gao
Kalahari Desert	Rocky Mountains
Kerma	Andes
Napata	Tula
Meroë	Yucatán Peninsula
Kilwa	Chichén Itzá
Lake Chad	Tenochtitlán
Ghana	Cuzco

Chapter Theme Questions

- **Cross-Cultural Interaction** How might trade influence the spread of culture?
- **Geography** How might the cultures and traditions of people be influenced by the geographical area in which they live?
- **War and Diplomacy** What factors might lead to the rise and decline of civilizations?

On July 24, 1911, in the Peruvian Andes, the American archaeologist Hiram Bingham made a discovery. He uncovered the fabled lost city of the Inca—one of the greatest civilizations of the Americas. Bingham marveled at what he saw:

“Suddenly I found myself confronted with the walls of ruined houses built of the finest quality of Inca stone work. It was hard to see them for they were partly covered with trees and moss, the growth of centuries, but in the dense shadow, hiding in bamboo thickets and tangled vines, appeared here and there walls of white granite . . . carefully cut and exquisitely fitted together. . . .

Surprise followed surprise in bewildering succession. . . . Suddenly we found ourselves standing in front of the ruins of two of the finest and most interesting structures in ancient America. Made of beautiful white granite, the walls contained blocks of Cyclopean size, higher than a man. The sight held me spellbound. . . .”

Bingham's discovery, called Machu Picchu, was only one of many glorious cities built by the peoples of the Americas. African peoples created equally spectacular civilizations.

Section 1

Africa's Early History

Focus Questions

- What major geological and climatic characteristics affected Africa's early history?
- How do historians learn about people who left few, if any, written records?
- What were the predominant patterns of life in many early African societies?

Written records, surviving monuments, and ruins help to provide evidence of the great civilizations that thrived in North Africa before A.D. 1500. Equally

important developments had been taking place in the rest of Africa—the vast portion of the continent south of the Sahara known as Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Physical Setting

Most of the vast expanse of Sub-Saharan Africa rests on a plateau. Here and there, however, basins and deep valleys form depressions in this plateau.

The plateau. The great plateau of Sub-Saharan Africa straddles the equator like a giant inverted bowl, uplifted in the center and then dropping sharply to the coastal plain.

The steep shoreline contains few harbors. Most rivers, including the important Niger, Congo, and the Zambezi, are navigable only for relatively short distances into the interior because of numerous rapids. Although these rivers limited trade, they also protected many parts of Africa from invasion. The absence of good natural harbors and navigable rivers also hindered long-distance communication and contact among the peoples of Africa.

Along the northern coast of Africa, rainfall patterns produce a Mediterranean climate. Below this region, however, lies the enormous Sahara, covering more than one fourth of the continent. The southern edge of the Sahara is a region known as the Sahel, where sparse, unpredictable rainfall often results in severe droughts. South of the Sahel is a vast area of relatively dry grasslands called **savannas**, dotted with a few trees and thorny bushes. The Kalahari and Namib Deserts also cover part of southern Africa. (See map on opposite page.)

Some areas of western and central Africa south of the savanna receive more than 100 inches of rain each year. There vast forests called **tropical rain forests** thrive. People often mistakenly call these forests jungles. However, a **jungle** is a thick growth of plants found in a tropical rain forest wherever sunlight penetrates the dense umbrella of tall trees and reaches the forest floor.

The wet climate of the rain forests provides fertile breeding grounds for insects that carry deadly diseases. For example, mosquitoes transmit malaria and yellow fever, and the tsetse fly carries sleeping sickness. Although modern medicine can treat these diseases, many Africans perished from them in earlier centuries.

Other geographical features. Six depressions appear in the plateau. These basins, formed around Lake Chad and Africa's five major rivers, are Sub-Saharan Africa's drainage basins.

Perhaps the most remarkable geographic feature of Sub-Saharan Africa is the Great Rift Valley. Formed thousands of years ago when a part of the plateau sank because of movements of Earth's crust, this steep-sided structural crack runs north and south near the plateau's eastern edge. Today many long, narrow lakes lie in the rift valley.

Isolated mountain peaks dot the eastern part of the African plateau. Some, such as Mount Kenya and Mount Kilimanjaro, jut thousands of feet above the plateau. Important highland regions include the Ethiopian Plateau in the northeast, the Atlas Mountains in the northwest, and the Drakensberg Mountains in the southeast. Some ranges even have active volcanoes.

Rediscovering the African Past

Scholars rely on a variety of methods to understand the African past prior to the development of writing there. For example, **linguists**—scholars who study languages—have used computers and mathematics to compare the roots of words and common vocabulary. This technique—lexicostatistics—has helped solve the mystery of how Bantu, a family of closely related languages spoken in many parts of Africa, spread. The study suggests that for centuries peoples have migrated throughout Sub-Saharan Africa.

An original "cradle land" of the Bantu language lay in the region that is today the Nigeria-Cameroon border. From there, beginning perhaps 2,000 years ago, Bantu-speaking people began to migrate eastward as well as southward into what is today the country of Gabon. These migrations continued for about 1,000 years. Over time Bantu languages spread throughout the continent south of the Cameroon bend and became one of the largest language groups on the continent.

The study of **oral traditions**—poems, songs, or stories passed by word of mouth from one generation to another—has been another source of information about specific African clans, villages, and dynasties. Africans have always had a strong sense of their own history. Individual families or villages preserved the memory of important events by incorporating them into poetry or song. People then passed these stories on from one generation to the next, with each generation adding to the tradition. Anthropologists and historians have now written down much of this oral tradition of Africans.

Other fields of scholarship have also helped unlock the secrets of Africa's past. For example,

Africa



Learning from Maps The Sahara covers most of northern Africa.

Location Through what physical features does the Tropic of Capricorn run?

Scholars who study music have discovered similarities in the design and tuning of xylophones in East Africa and Indonesia, in Southeast Asia. These similarities suggest that at some early date there was some sort of cultural exchange between Asia and Africa. The prevalence in Africa of the banana—long native to Asia—supports this suggestion.

Certain languages also provide evidence of an exchange. The Malagasy language, which is spoken on the island of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean off the east coast of Africa, has many words in common with languages spoken on the islands of Indonesia. Through study of musical instruments, plants, and language, scholars have determined that this

cultural exchange between Asia and Africa took place in perhaps the A.D. 300s or 400s.

Scholars have also discovered that the people of Sub-Saharan Africa were particularly adept at coping with their often harsh environment. Although wheat and barley could not be cultivated south of the Sahara near sea level, people there were able to domesticate a variety of crops. For example, the early people of the Sahel domesticated millet and sorghum, grains that grow well in harsh conditions. In later centuries, these grains became the staple crops of the people of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although the people of Sub-Saharan Africa domesticated various crops, changes in the climate of the Sahel soon altered patterns of agriculture. As the region became much drier, people either migrated farther south or came to rely increasingly on herding.

Archaeology has also added much to our understanding of African history. Excavation sites throughout the continent have revealed details on daily life in early Africa.

Patterns of Life

Based on scholarly studies of the African past, experts have drawn several conclusions about patterns of life in early Africa. They believe that most Africans lived in small, independent villages and were farmers, herders, or fishers. Relationships established by kinship and age provided the ties that bound the different societies together. Within this system, women played a crucial role. Unlike Europe and Asia, in Africa women were the primary farmers, although some agricultural tasks were performed by men. It is believed by scholars that societies in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa were **matrilineal**. People trace their ancestors and inherit property through their mothers rather than through their fathers in matrilineal societies.

Religion was an important part of life in many African cultures. In most of these societies, people believed that spirits populated the world. Most religious systems included a supreme creator god and other gods associated with certain aspects of nature or human activities, such as farming.

Elders usually exercised authority over the village. Life in the villages of Africa was closely bound to the agricultural cycles of planting and harvesting. Through the rise and fall of numerous kingdoms, the village survived as the basic unit of society and the economy. Its persistence makes it a vital part of the African heritage.

Section 1 Review

- ~~1. Define savannas, tropical rain forests, jungle, linguists, oral traditions, matrilineal~~
- ~~2. Locate and Explain the Significance of the Nile, Congo River, Zambezi River, and Saharan Desert~~
3. **Identifying Ideas** What geographic factors made contact difficult among peoples in Africa's interior?
4. **Summarizing Ideas** What nonwritten evidence has been used to identify early African cultures?
5. **Synthesizing Ideas** What conclusions have scholars reached about patterns of life in early Africa?

Section 2

African City-States and Kingdoms

Focus Questions

- What were some distinguishing characteristics of the kingdoms of Kush and Aksum?
- What part did trade and trade routes play in the rise and fall of East and central Africa's early kingdoms?
- For what are the early kingdoms of West Africa noted?

While some African peoples lived happily without developing state structures, others came together to establish small city-states, kingdoms, and even empires before A.D. 1500. These states were as diverse as the African geography.

Kush

Along the Nile River, south of the major centers of ancient Egypt, lay an area known as Nubia. Nubia thrived as an important corridor of trade for gold, ivory, ebony, and ostrich feathers. Here caravans hauled goods from the Red Sea to barges on the Nile. Here, too, arose a powerful kingdom known as Kush.

Kush (See map on page 300) traces its roots to the city of Kerma, a trading center of southern Nubia that emerged about 1800 B.C. Recent archaeological