

CHAPTER 3-EARLY AFRICAN SOCIETIES AND THE BANTU MIGRATIONS

You would not know it to look at it now, but the Sahara used to be a vast grassland until this environment began to change about 5,000 B.C.E. Despite these changes, the eastern part of the desert surrounding the Nile River remained fertile and provided not only water, but also a sustainable way of life. Egypt is referred to as the “gift of the Nile” because the highly predictable floods brought new soil and provided an incredibly fertile environment for farming. States and then kingdoms, based on great amounts of surplus food, began to emerge in the period from 4000 to 3300 B.C.E. The most notable of these was Egypt. Over time, Egypt went through a series of kingdoms, good and bad pharaohs (who were thought to be gods), great building projects, including the pyramids, and finally a series of foreign invasions. As with other complex agricultural societies, Egypt and neighboring Nubia developed structured social classes and a system of patriarchy (patria=father, archy=rule by) although women were involved in government and held positions of power. There was also a highly active system of trade networks covering a wide region. Like earlier societies, a system of writing was developed in Egypt, as were religious systems which included a brief flirtation with monotheism.

In sub-Saharan Africa a different group was migrating and influencing the surrounding peoples. Beginning in 3000 B.C.E., the Bantu spread south and east into the African forest lands, bringing with them new foods and trade goods. In 1000 B.C.E. the appearance of iron for tools and weapons gave the Bantu, similar to other societies with access to that important metal, a very strong position in sub-Saharan Africa.

Key Concept 1.2. The Neolithic Revolution and Early Agricultural Societies

- I. Agriculture and pastoralism began to transform human societies.

Key Concept 1.3. The Development and Interactions of Early Agricultural, Pastoral and Urban Societies

- III. Culture played a significant role in unifying states through laws, language, literature, religion, myths and monumental art.