Sub-Saharan Africa

Early Bantu migrations and more
Culture Hearths

DEFINITION

Culture Hearth:
- heartland
- source area
- innovation center
- place of origin of a major culture
* “civilization incubator”
Primary Culture Hearths of the World
CULTURE HEARTH

Primary Culture Hearths of the World:

Fertile Crescent (8000 BCE)
India (7000 BCE)
Huang Ho (5000 BCE)
West Africa (2000 BCE)
Mesoamerica & S. America (8000-3000 BCE)
Two broad themes in African history:

1. movement of people and ideas over great distances--regions and zones of interaction.

2. isolation and self-containment of individual communities.

→ A wide diversity of experience
The Advent of Iron and the Bantu Migrations

• Sub-Saharan agriculture had its origins north of the equator and then spread southward. Iron working also began north of the equator and spread southward, reaching southern Africa by 800 C.E..

• Linguistic evidence suggests that the spread of iron and other technology in sub-Saharan Africa was the result of a phenomenon known as the Bantu migrations.
Bantu Migrations
• The original homeland of the Bantu people was in the area on the border of modern Nigeria and Cameroon.

• Evidence suggests that the Bantu people spread out toward the east and the south through a series of migrations over the period of the first millennium C.E.. By the eighth century, Bantu-speaking people had reached East Africa.
The Dynamics of Bantu Expansion

- Bantu--language group from west central Africa
  - Live along banks of rivers; use canoes
  - Cultivate yams and oil palms
  - Live in clan-based villages
  - Trade with hunting/gathering forest people
The Dynamics of Bantu Expansion

• Early migrations of Bantu (3000-1000 B.C.E.)
  – Move south and west into the forest lands
  – Move south to Congo River and east to Great Lakes region
  – Absorb much of the population of hunter/gather/fisher people
  – By 1000 B.C.E. occupy most of Africa south of the equator
The Dynamics of Bantu Expansion

• Features of the Bantu
  – Use canoes and settle along banks of rivers; spread from there
  – Agricultural surplus causes them to move inland from rivers
  – Become involved in trade
The Dynamics of Bantu Expansion

- Bantu rate of migration increases after 1000 B.C.E. due to appearance of iron
  - Iron tools allow them to clear more land for agriculture
  - Iron weapons give them stronger position
Political Organization

• By 1000 A.D, most of the migrations were complete
• Instead of continued migrations, Africans developed increasingly complex forms of government that enabled them to organize their existing societies more efficiently
• Initially the Bantu established “stateless societies” in which they governed themselves mostly through family and kinship groups
Political Organization

- Stateless societies worked well in small-scale communities but as they grew into large populations, resources became strained and conflicts became more frequent.
- Bantu communities began to organize themselves militarily and this development encouraged more formal structures of government.
  - Chiefdoms overrode kinship networks and imposed their own authority.
- In general, between 1000 and 1500, clusters of smaller entities gradually formed into larger states.
Significance of Bantu Migrations

- Bantu the parent language to much of sub-Saharan Africa
- Wet-zone agriculture, herding spreads
- Iron metallurgy
- Population increases dramatically
- Underlying cultural unity—common kinship practices and religious ideas.
The spread of iron technology after the 500s BC changed farming practices in sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, African society changed.

**Iron Technology**
- 500 BC, techniques for refining iron from iron ore changed
- Now possible to produce tools, weapons superior to those they had made before
- **Nok** one of earliest known peoples to practice ironworking
- Lived in what is now Nigeria, West Africa; learned to make iron tools, weapons

**Population Growth**
- As better-equipped farmers, hunters, warriors, Nok grew in power
- Became known for making fine sculptures out of terra-cotta
- Iron tools enabled Africans to cut down trees, clear land, and live in new areas
- Survival easier, Africa’s population increased
The Bantu Migrations

Agriculture, ironworking technology spread throughout Africa because of migration

• Number of groups in Africa spoke related languages
  – Originated from language called Proto-Bantu
  – Developed in what is now Cameroon, Nigeria
  – Over time more than 2,000 Bantu languages developed
By AD 900s, Bantu-speaking peoples had established complex social systems

- Women farmed, men mostly tended cattle
- Cattle important food source, used in ritual sacrifices
- Status in Bantu societies determined by size of cattle herds

Bantu Social Systems

Bantu-speaking people gradually migrated east, south during first centuries AD

- As they traveled, Bantu speakers carried knowledge of agriculture, ironworking
- Because of knowledge, established themselves as dominant group when they reached southern Africa

Migration

Bantu-speaking Peoples
Early Agriculture Societies of Sub-Saharan Africa

- Many other societies besides Bantu migrate
- Spread of agriculture to most of sub-Saharan Africa by 1000 B.C.E.
- Mostly small communities led by chiefs with "age sets" and initiation rites
- Religious differences by area
  - Some worship single, impersonal divine force representing good and bad
  - Many individuals pray to ancestors and local gods for intervention
- Much mixing and intermingling of cultures
Effects of Migrations

- Bantu and other migrations 2000 B.C.E.--1000 C.E.
  - Agriculture and herding throughout Africa
  - Displaced and/or absorbed hunting/gathering/fishing people
  - Iron metallurgy after 500 B.C.E. facilitated clearing more land
  - Yams, sorghum, and millet cultivated
  - Introduction of bananas after 500 C.E. caused migration and population surge

- Population growth: from 3.5 million in 400 B.C.E. to 22 million by 1000 C.E.
Mass movements of people are an important influence on world history. From 500 B.C. to A.D. 1500, migrations of Bantu-speaking peoples into the southern half of Africa create new cultures as they adapt their skills to the lands they occupy and intermix with other people.

How might the migrating Bantu speakers and the peoples they encountered have reacted to each other? **THINK ABOUT:**

Bantu culture - territorial wars - cultural adaptation