

African Civilizations and the Spread of Islam

I. Introduction

- A. Mansa Musa – crossed Sahara on hajj
 - 1. wealth symbolized potential of Africa
- B. Sub-Sahara never totally isolated
 - 1. But...for periods contact was difficult and intermittent
- C. Changes came from
 - 1. Arrival of Muhammad followers
 - a. Commercial and military attributes
 - b. changed by Islam, but retained individuality
 - c. African culture not united
 - d. provided major external contact between sub-Saharan Africa and world
- D. State building
 - 1. Mali, Songhai – created more from military power than ethnic/cultural unity
 - 2. Merchant city states on west/East coast
 - 3. Portuguese in 15th century brought Africans into world economy more
 - 4. Bantu migration continued
 - 5. Societies don't build so much on previous civilizations

II. African Societies: Diversities and Similarities

- A. Introduction
 - 1. Diverse – large centralized states to stateless societies
 - a. Differences in geography, language, religion, politics
 - 2. Universalistic faiths penetrated continent
 - b. but...universal states/religions don't characterize history
- B. Stateless societies
 - 1. organized around kinship and other forms of obligation
 - 2. council of families
 - a. or...secret societies of men/women
 - 3. little concentration of authority
 - a. government – not a full-time job
 - b. after internal dispute, you can always leave and form new village
 - 4. Unable to
 - a. mobilize for war
 - b. organize large building projects
 - c. create stable conditions for long distance trade
- C. Common Elements in African Societies
 - 1. Even though different, similarities existed
 - a. language – Bantu migration
 - b. thought
 - c. religion – animistic religion
 - 1. power of natural forces
 - 2. ritual and worship
 - 3. dancing, drumming, divination, and sacrifice
 - 4. witchcraft
 - 5. cosmology – how universe worked
 - 6. belief in creator deity
 - 7. saw selves as first settlers, land meant more than economic usefulness
 - 8. link of deceased ancestors

2. Economies

- a. North Africa – fully involved in Mediterranean trade – quite different than rest
- b. Settled agriculture and skilled metalwork had spread
- c. Market life key for men and women
- d. Professional merchants controlled trade

D. Arrival of Islam

1. Land conquered and re-conquered by Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans, Vandals
 - a. Cyrene and Carthage became huge trading centers
2. 640-700 CE – Muslim followers spread across Africa
3. 11th century – Almoravids – ultra-conservative - reformers
 - a. launched jihad – holy war to purify, spread, protect faith
 - b. Almohads – also reformers
 1. Return to original teachings of Muhammad
4. Why attractive?
 - a. Egalitarian teachings – all Muslims are equally
 - b. Reinforced African kings authority
 - c. Equal footing with Arab invaders
 - d. ...but **Disparity between law and practice**

E. The Christian Kingdoms: Nubia and Ethiopia

1. Islands of Christianity left behind
2. Christian Egyptians – Copts
 - a. Traded with Byzantine Empire
 - b. Eventually split with empire – doctrinal and political issues
 1. What differences
 - c. Muslim invaders allowed them to keep religion – tolerance
 1. Met resistance in Kush/Nubia – couldn't push Islam further
3. Axum > Ethiopia – most important African Christian outpost
 - a. Cut off, surrounded by pagans, influenced by Jewish/pagan immigrants
 - b. Dynasty appeared – build rock sculptures
 - c. Traced origins to marriage of Solomon and Sheba – Bible
 - d. Maintained its brand of Christianity – isolated
 - e. in 1542 Portuguese expedition pushed back Muslim invaders
 1. But...couldn't push Catholic faith, remained isolated