

HIST 399: ANCIENT AFRICA

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Overview and Objectives

Africa is central to human history. It is the continent where our species arose, where some of the greatest ancient civilizations thrived, and where dynamic, complex, and innovative cultures confronted a variety of social, political, and environmental challenges. Far from being the “primitive tribal peoples” and mystical ancients of popular imagination, African societies in the era before the eighth century CE incorporated sophisticated cultural, social, and material systems that confound such old, persistent ideas.

No course about such an immense, diverse continent can claim to be comprehensive. Accordingly, this course mainly focuses on key developments in the broad history of the African continent in roughly chronological order between about 10000BCE and around 700CE. After a brief overview of the continent and its early peopling, we will deal with the emergence of major linguistic clusters up to the advent of agriculture, and then move to regional histories successively. These include the development of urban civilization in the Nile Valley and the Horn of Africa, ironworking and the ‘African Classical Age’ of the Bantu Expansion, urban culture south of the Sahara, and African links to the ancient Mediterranean and Indian Ocean (including Judeo-Christian religion, its transmission, and some of the variations). Through these episodes and selected source readings, we will investigate a range of developments of, and interactions between, material cultures, ideologies, and modes of sociopolitical organization. All along the way, we will take note of some thorny issues for the study of early African history, limitations in our sources, uncertainty about some mechanisms of change, and ways that Africa’s ancient histories have been misunderstood and misused.

Thus, although we must be selective, students completing this course satisfactorily will at minimum:

- Develop a broad understanding of major processes and patterns of historical change across the African continent up to around 700 CE, with meaningful geographic specificity;
- Recognize the diversity of ancient societies and historical developments across the continent as well as the importance of that variability, without discounting shared phenomena;
- Interpret primary sources for major themes and episodes in early African history in historical context through discussion, and assess the nature of the evidence for this past; and
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze and discuss material dealing with Africa’s remote past in writing, with sensitivity to various African historical contexts and the state of our knowledge.

You’ll see that we have two major textbooks. Both are important; each uses a slightly different methodological mode, so they complement and sometimes contradict one another. This is by design, to get you thinking about how we know what we know about an era where there is ample evidence, but not as yet ample scholarly coverage comparable to (say) the Mediterranean, Mesoamerica, or East Asia.

NOTE: This is a fairly reading- and writing-intensive course. Keep the syllabus handy—it’s up to you to stay abreast of assignment due dates, reading, and policies via Canvas or in class. I’ll announce any changes as early and as often as I can.

Assignments and Grading

Because African history requires the mastery of entirely new bodies of knowledge for most students, it is important for you not only to keep up with the reading but to think actively about it through analytical writing. Therefore, this course will incorporate **three short papers** (1300 to 1600 words, roughly 5 to 7 pages) on subjects connected to the major sections of the course, using the sources we’ve read and engaged as well as our discussions. These papers will be due on the dates indicated in the syllabus, and will be expected to conform to the instructions and address the questions provided a couple of weeks beforehand. See also “Writing Style” under Policies below.

Besides the short topic papers, you will be required to complete **a cumulative final exam** that will be slightly weighted towards the last two weeks of the course and **a map quiz** the second week of the term. Unannounced quizzes on the reading may be given, and if so will form part of a broader participation grade that may exceed the 10% allotted. The overall weighting of the grade is as follows, from a total of 400 points:

Map Quiz	20 points	5%
Papers:	240 points (80 points each)	60% (20% each)
Final Exam (Cumulative):	100 points	25%
Participation/Quizzes:	40+ points	10%

Please pay close attention to the important dates, which are recapitulated at the end of this syllabus. Late papers will be marked down 10% (8 pts) per calendar day or any portion thereof. No further papers will be accepted once an assignment has been returned. If you have an AEC letter, a national service responsibility, or a documented medical emergency, your deadlines may shift to accommodate them; see me as soon as you can.

Course grades follow this model of percentages for grades above F:

A+: Awarded rarely, for extreme merit	A: 93.00%	A-: 90.00-92.99%
B+: 87.00-89.99%	B: 83.00-86.99%	B-: 80.00-82.99%
C+: 77.00-79.99%	C: 73.00-76.99%	C-: 70.00-72.99%
D+: 67.00-69.99%	D: 63.00-66.99%	D-: 60.00-62.99%

Finally, an important policy note: **I do not change grades**, except in cases of arithmetical error. I am however happy to discuss your work and aid you in improvement during the term, when it counts! Extraordinary contribution or improvement may raise a final course grade slightly, but I only do so at my discretion. All emails or calls to appeal for a certain grade will be denied without response or comment, regardless of merit.

Course Texts

The following books are required and can be purchased at the Duck Store or online from your preferred retailer. Make sure you get the *exact* editions indicated as content and pagination vary; in the case of Ehret and Connah, the 14 years between the current and immediately prior editions have rendered the old ones grossly obsolete.

- Burstein, Stanley, ed. *Ancient African Civilizations: Kush and Axum*. Exp. & rev. (3rd) ed. Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2008. ISBN 978-1558765054.
- Connah, Graham. *African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective*. 3rd ed. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2015. ISBN 978-1107621275.
- Ehret, Christopher. *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800*. 2nd ed. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0813928807.

All other readings will be on Canvas approximately a week before the relevant class session. If you have any trouble obtaining course materials, or something isn’t available when it should be, please let me know immediately. I do not normally plan course reserves for classes under 50, but let me know if you have need.

Policies and Provisions:

Attendance: Attendance is expected at all class meetings. I monitor attendance, and it figures into the participation grade. (documented absences or emergencies will exempt you from a quiz in any case). Experience has shown that poor attendance correlates very strongly with low grades, because in-class material and discussion do not merely recapitulate the readings, and getting notes from a classmate is a very weak substitute. I also ask that you be as punctual as possible despite our sometimes-too-brief passing times, because late arrival and anticipatory rustling tend to disrupt everyone.

Laptops & Phones: Although I'm a technophile too, gadget use in class can be annoying and distracting. This is especially true for those around you, who can hear your typing and whose eyes drift inexorably towards lit screens. Laptop and tablet computers are particular problems, and they have a demonstrably negative effect on learning and participation in large classes like ours.¹ However, I also recognize that some students have grown up depending on note-taking via typing, so if you wish to use a laptop computer or tablet, **you must sit at the back of the room to minimize the peripheral effects.** Be sure to set your phone to "silent" when you come in, as well. Lectures and discussions may not be recorded without full class consent, per Oregon law. Breaches of tech policy will affect your final grade.

Special Needs: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. Substantial modifications of course policy or requirements, however, **require** a letter from the Accessible Education Center. Call (541) 346-1155 or email uoac@uoregon.edu to set up a consultation. They are excellent advocates for your success here at the UO, and I am happy to work with them.

Writing Style: All writing for this course must be typed, and must employ grammatically correct and clear college-level English. For citation format, quotes, and the like, make sure you are using a style guide such as the *Chicago Manual of Style* or the *MLA Guide*. Although style takes a backseat to content when it comes to grading, poor style and grammar can damage content if I am unable to figure out what you're really saying or citing. I am glad to look at early outlines and drafts in order to help, up to a few days before the deadline.

Academic Honesty: The information in this subsection isn't necessary for 99+% of the students in my courses, but unfortunate ongoing experience demands I link to the UO's academic misconduct guide:
<https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct>

The issues of academic honesty that arise most often are cheating and plagiarism. The written final exam format tends to discourage the former, but the latter has become a greater problem in take-home papers even though we keep them on file. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is, the UO has a useful guide:
<http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism>

It is a gross understatement to say that academic dishonesty will adversely affect your grade. At the very least, you will receive an automatic zero for the assignment, which almost guarantees a failing course grade. At worst, you may be suspended or expelled from the University. If you have any concerns or you're not sure if something is plagiarism, ask **before** you turn it in for a grade. I'm here to help!

One final warning, regarding the potential crutch of the Internet: if you can find it, so can we—so resist the temptation to cut corners. By all means use internet tools (such as Google or Wikipedia), but use them properly and judiciously. **Accept nothing from an unaccredited source like Wikipedia or a random webpage alone as reliable or authoritative—and never use them as substitutes for actual course material.**

Everything Else: In all other matters of classroom policy, we default to the relevant Departmental or University standard. If you're not sure of something, or need to talk about a concern, please see me.

¹ See *inter alia* C. B. Fried, "In-class Laptop Use and Its Effects on Student Learning," *Computers and Education* 50, no. 3 (2008): 906-914; Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer, "The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand over Laptop Note-taking," *Psychological Science* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1159-1168 (both are available online via the UO Libraries).

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Schedule (subject to change based on our shared interests or emergent circumstances)
 Readings are to be completed *before* the class assigned, and be ready to discuss them, especially our primary source documents. Readings marked with (C) will be on Canvas.

Foundations: African History on a Continental Scale?

- M 24 Sep Introduction to Ancient African History**
 (In-class) David Northrup, *Seven Myths of Africa in World History* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2017), 1-3 (Also available to catch up via Canvas).
- W 26 Sep Legacies of Meaning and Method: Approaching the African Past**
 Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 1-16.
 Connah, *African Civilizations*, 1-16.
- M 1 Oct African Ecologies, Climates, Geography, and Human Emergence**
TOPIC #1 DISTRIBUTED TODAY OR WEDNESDAY
 Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 17-33.
 James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 9-22 (C).
 James L. A. Webb, *Humanity's Burden: A Global History of Malaria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18-41 (C).
- W 3 Oct Migration and Settlement: The Four Language Families and Lifeways**
MAP QUIZ TODAY AT START OF CLASS
 Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 26-103.
 John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1-17 (C).

Civilizations of the Nile Valley and Red Sea, c. 4000BCE-200CE

- M 8 Oct Kemet (Egypt) to the Achaemenid (Persian) Era, 525BCE**
 Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 136-148.
 Connah, *African Civilizations*, 14-42.
 "Hymn to the Nile" (2100BCE) (C).
 Selections from the Book of the Dead (700-400BCE) (C).
- W 10 Oct Succession in Nubia: Kerma, Kush, and Napata**
PAPER #1 DUE VIA CANVAS BY CLASS TIME
TOPIC #2 DISTRIBUTED (TODAY OR BY FRIDAY)
 Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 119-131, 193-195.
 Connah, *African Civilizations*, 69-82.
 Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations*, 3-14 (introductory text) and 25-34 (Documents 1-2).
- M 15 Oct Achaemenid, Ptolemaic, and Roman Egypt**
 Reading: Alan Lloyd, "The Late Period" and "The Ptolemaic Period," in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* 2nd ed., ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 364-413 (C). [continued next page]

David Peacock, “The Roman Period,” in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* new ed., ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 414-436 (C).
 “The Greek Text of the Rosetta Stone,” British Museum (2010).

W 17 Oct Classical Egypt, Its Contexts, and Their Meanings

Reading: Martin Bernal, *Black Athena* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1987), 1-39 (C).
 Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism* (London: Verso, 1998), 122-135 (C).
 Kathryn Bard, “Ancient Egyptians and the Issue of Race,” in *Black Athena Revisited*, ed. M. Lefkowitz & G. Rogers (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 103-111 (C).

M 22 Oct Meroë: Iron, Trade, and Social Change

Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 195-201
 Connah, *African Civilizations*, 82-110.
 Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations*, 43-54, 80-83, 87-90 (Documents 4-7, 13, 15).

W 24 Oct The Fall of Meroë and the Ascendancy of Aksum

Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 201-207
 Connah, *African Civilizations*, 111-148.
 Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations*, 97-111, 115-19 (Documents 20-21, 23).

Innovation and Expansion in Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa, to c. 800CE

M 29 Oct The Bantu Expansion: Part I

TOPIC #3 DISTRIBUTED TODAY OR WEDNESDAY

Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 105-136.
 C. C. Fourshey, Rhonda M. Gonzales, and Christine Saidi, *Bantu Africa 3500 BCE to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-13 (C).
(Possible third short reading, if available; TBA)

W 31 Oct Cultural Accretion, Ironworking, and Exchange

PAPER #2 DUE VIA CANVAS BY CLASS TIME

Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 148-152, 164-185.
 Jean-Pierre Chrétien, *The Great Lakes of Africa: Two Thousand Years of History*, trans. Scott Straus (New York: Zone Books, 2003), 41-83.

M 5 Nov The Bantu Expansion, Part II

Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 185-93, 229-234, 268-271, 326-335.
 C. C. Fourshey, Rhonda M. Gonzales, and Christine Saidi, *Bantu Africa 3500 BCE to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 14-42 (C).

W 7 Nov Early Ironworking Successions in Southern Africa

Reading: Innocent Pikirayi, *The Zimbabwe Culture* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 2001), 73-95 (C).
 Thomas N. Huffman, “The Early Iron Age at Broederstroom and Around the ‘Cradle of Humankind’,” in *A Search for Origins: Science, History, and South Africa’s ‘Cradle of Humankind’*, ed. P. Bonner, A. Esterhuysen, and T. Jenkins (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2007), 148-161 (C).

Elaboration, Urbanism, and Commerce in West Africa, c. 1000 BCE to 700 CE

- M 12 Nov Complex Societies of the Western Sudan, Sahel, and Forest Belt**
Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 131-136, 218-226, 300-308.
Reading: Connah, *African Civilizations*, 149-184.
 Peter Garlake, *Early Art and Architecture of Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 97-115 (Some of this deals with Wednesday.) (C).
- T 13 Nov FILM EVENT: West African wonders, 7-9pm, place TBD**
Film: Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Wonders of the African World” (Video 05090, part 3).
 See it independently before Wednesday, if you can’t make this showing.
- W 14 Nov Jenné-Jeno, Ile-Ife, and Urbanism in Focus**
Reading: Roderick McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and the Self-Organizing Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-44 (C).
 Remember to revisit Garlake as well, and see Gates!

Expansion of Trade and the Spread of World Religions in Africa (to c.700CE)

- M 19 Nov Trade and Global Connections in North and Northeastern Africa: New & Review**
Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 213-216
 Connah, *African Civilizations*, 43-68.
 Ralph A. Austen, *Trans-Saharan Africa in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-18 (C).
 Cosmas Indicopleustes, “Periplus of the Erythrean Sea,” 5 pp. (C).
- W 21 Nov NO CLASS MEETING OR OFFICE HRS – our film event stands in for this session.**
PAPER #3 IS STILL DUE VIA CANVAS BY CLASS TIME!
- M 27 Nov The Spread of Christianity in North and Northeastern Africa**
Reading: Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 216-218, 282-298.
 E. Gilbert and J. Reynolds, *Africa in World History* 3rd ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 85-97 (C).
 Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations*, 112-14, 131-40 (Documents 22, 27).
- W 29 Nov Conditions at the Spread of Islam (lead-in for HIST 325)**
Reading: John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42-56 (C).
 Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations*, 149-54 (Document 31).
- W 5 Dec FINAL EXAMINATION, 2:45-4:45pm, 185 Lillis**

Recapitulation of Major Due Dates and Exam Date:

Wed., 3 Oct., 2pm	Map Quiz at start of class
Wed., 10 Oct., 2pm	First Paper Due
Wed., 31 Oct., 2pm	Second Paper Due
Wed., 21 Nov., 2pm	Third Paper Due
Wed., 5 Dec., 2:45pm	Final Examination in 185 LIL



TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP OF AFRICA

(For map quiz prep; see Ehret p. 30 for labels. A master list is on the reverse. You will receive this map and a set of twelve terms from that master list; you must located ten out of those twelve on the map.)

TERMS FOR MAP QUIZ

Bodies of Water

Atlantic Ocean
Indian Ocean
Mediterranean Sea
Red Sea
Gulf of Aden
Gulf of Sirte (Sidra)
Mozambique Channel
Victoria Nyanza
Lake Malawi
Lake Tanganyika
Lake Chad
Lake Tana
Lake Turkana

Rivers (know rivercourses up to the second branch, where possible)

Congo
Ubangi
Niger
Benue
Nile
Senegal
Gambia
Atbara
Zambesi
Limpopo
Gariiep (Orange)
Volta
Black Volta

River Deltas

Nile Delta
Niger Delta
Niger Inland Delta

Islands

Madagascar
Comoros (group)
Canaries (group)
Pemba
Zanzibar

Landforms (indicate full area as well as possible)

Congo Basin
Jos Plateau
Maasai Steppe (and Kenyan Highlands to north)
Ethiopian Highlands (this surrounds Lake Tana)
South African Highveld
Zimbabwe Plateau
Great Rift Valley (= Eastern and Ethiopian Rifts)
Kalahari Desert
Namib Desert
Sahara Desert
Hoggar (Ahaggir) Mountains
Tibetsi Mountains
Mountains of Air
Jallon Mountains
Drakensberg Mountains (Great Escarpment)
Mount Kenya
Mount Kilimanjaro
Mount Cameroon