



# African Cultures and Empires

## TERMS & NAMES

paleontologist  
Bantu migration  
Mansa Musa

### MAIN IDEA

Africa south of the Sahara has a rich and significant history.

### WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Many scientists think Africa south of the Sahara is the cradle of the human race. The oldest fossil remains of humans have come from this region.

### DATELINE

**SOUTHERN AFRICA, A.D. 500**—There is a group of newcomers in the area. They come from the north and speak languages unlike ours. Instead of hunting in the forests as we do, they raise animals for food. They plant grain in fields near their settlement.

The newcomers, who call themselves "Bantu," have sharp spears and blades made of a cold, dark metal. They use a short, sharp metal tool for digging—much better than our stone and wood tools. Many of our people have begun to trade goods for the newcomers' fine tools and pottery.



**Movement** • This woman is one of many Bantu who have settled in Southern Africa. ▲

## The First Humans

The roots of the Bantus can be traced back thousands of years. Fossil evidence shows that the first known humans lived in Africa several million years ago. **Paleontologists**, or scientists who study fossils, have discovered human remains in Kenya, South Africa, and other African nations. Fossilized human footprints 3.6 million years old have been found in Tanzania. It is now known that humans in Africa were the first to develop language, tools, and culture. Then, over tens of thousands of years, they migrated to other continents.



## Early African Farmers

The first humans lived in small groups. For food, they collected berries, plants, and nuts and hunted wild animals. As plants and animals became scarce in one place, the people moved on. During this time, a group known as Bantu lived in what is now Cameroon. Around 5,000 years ago, the Bantu became farmers instead of hunter-gatherers. They learned to grow grain and herd cattle, sheep, and other animals. Later, they learned how to work with iron to make tools and weapons.

**On the Move** The Bantu began to move to other parts of Africa around 1000 B.C. Perhaps the desert was spreading, or they needed more land for a growing population. For about 2,000 years, the Bantu gradually spread across the continent. Their great movement is called the **Bantu migration**. In their new homes, they learned to grow and use different plants. In some places, the native hunter-gatherers lived in separate villages or moved away, as did the Sans, or Bushmen. In other places, the Bantu and the local people, such as the Pygmies, intermarried. Over time, the Bantu culture became widespread throughout Africa. Today, many Africans speak Swahili, Zulu, and other Bantu languages.

### Reading Social Studies

**A. Recognizing Effects** How did the Bantu migration influence the character of Africa south of the Sahara?

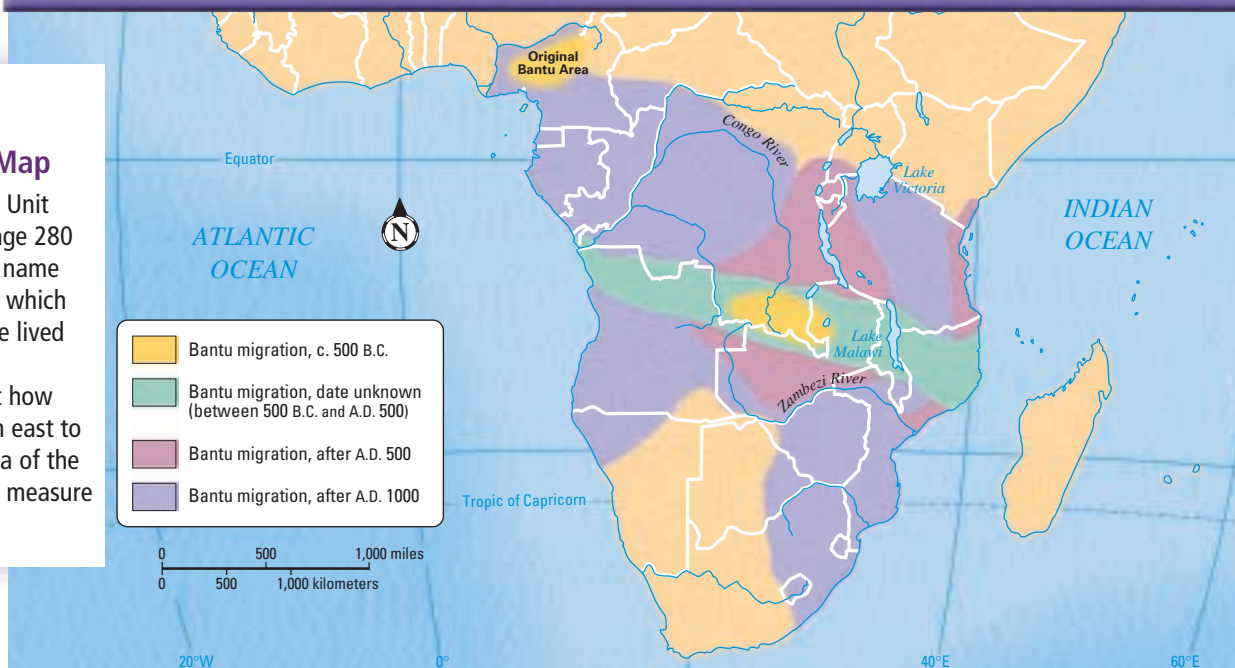


**Culture** • These headdresses represent Tyi Wara—an antelope spirit who, according to Bantu mythology, taught the first people how to grow crops. ▲

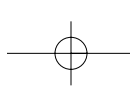
## 2,000 Years of Bantu Migration

### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Place** • Use the Unit Atlas map on page 280 and this map to name two countries in which the Bantu people lived c. 500 B.C.
- Region** • About how many miles from east to west did the area of the Bantu migration measure after A.D. 1000?







## Trade Networks

Eventually, the Bantu built permanent villages. Trade routes began to develop between these communities across Africa.

**The Salt Trade** Salt was as precious to ancient Africans as gold and diamonds. People needed salt each day to stay alive. They also used it to preserve food. However, most of Africa south of the Sahara had no salt deposits. The closest source was in the Sahara, where giant salt slabs, some as heavy as 200 pounds, were mined. A vast trade network developed between the salt mines and the area south of the Sahara. To get salt, people in Southern Africa traded gold, slaves, ivory, and cola nuts.

**Camels and Caravans** African trade expanded even further when the Arabian camel was introduced to Africa in the A.D. 600s. Camels are well adapted for long treks across the desert. Using camels, salt traders could carry goods from the savannas and forests across the desert to Northern Africa. There they traded for goods from Europe and Asia, such as glass from Italy or cotton and spices from India. The desert trade was profitable but risky. Robbers lived in the desert. For protection, traders traveled together in caravans.

### BACKGROUND

Salt cakes were used as currency in ancient Ethiopia.

**Place •** Adapted to their desert environment, camels can drink up to 20 gallons of water in 10 minutes and store it in their bloodstream. ▼

### Why Camels Are Well Adapted to Desert Travel

A double row of **long, curly eyelashes** keep sand out of eyes, and **bushy eyebrows** shield eyes from the sun.

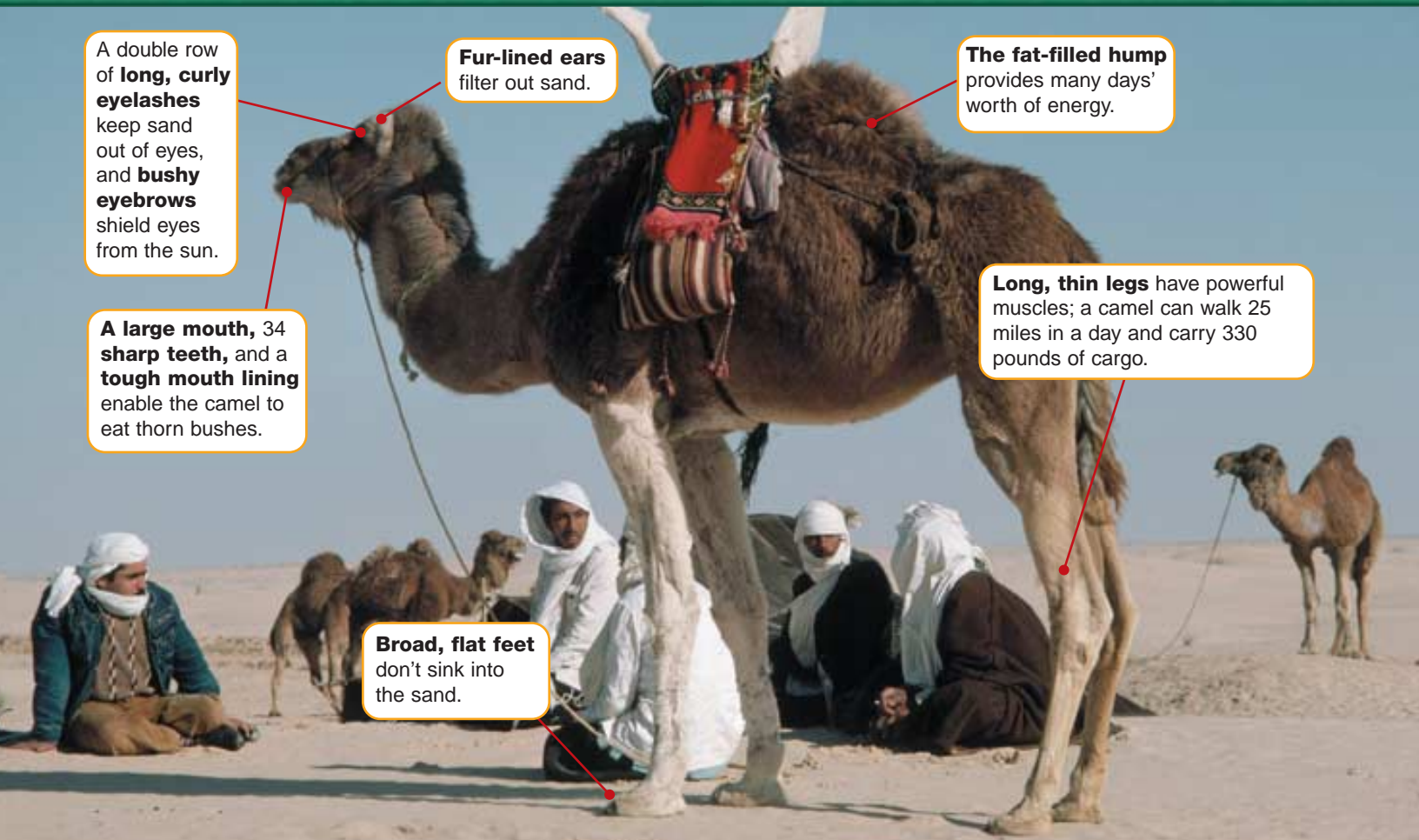
**Fur-lined ears** filter out sand.

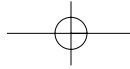
**The fat-filled hump** provides many days' worth of energy.

**A large mouth, 34 sharp teeth,** and a **tough mouth lining** enable the camel to eat thorn bushes.

**Long, thin legs** have powerful muscles; a camel can walk 25 miles in a day and carry 330 pounds of cargo.

**Broad, flat feet** don't sink into the sand.





## An Empire Built by Trade

In the fourth century A.D., a kingdom called Ghana arose in the Niger River Valley. Ancient Ghana's location allowed it to control trade between Northern and Southern Africa. Traders had to pay a tax in gold nuggets to pass through the kingdom on their way to Europe and Southwest Asia. In addition, Ancient Ghana had many gold mines. Ghana had so much gold from these two sources that the kingdom was called the Land of Gold.

### Reading Social Studies

**B. Synthesizing**  
Why was Ghana called the Land of Gold?

People eagerly traded gold for other precious items, such as salt. The merchants of Ghana also traded gold and slaves for cooking utensils, cloth, jewelry, copper, and weapons.



**Human-Environment Interaction •**  
This 18th- or 19th-century gold jewelry from Ghana was probably worn by members of an Ashanti king's court. ▲

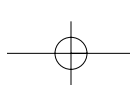
## The Mali Empire

Muslim armies began a war with Ghana in 1054. The fighting continued for many years and interfered with the trade upon which Ghana depended. This weakened the empire. By the 1200s, the people under Ghana's rule began to break away.

**Mali Absorbs Ghana** Around 1235, a Muslim leader named Sundiata united warring tribes. He then brought neighboring states under his rule to create the Mali Empire. In the year 1240, he took control of what was left of the Ghana Empire. The Mali Empire included most of the area that Ghana had ruled, along with lands to the east.

**Culture •** This daughter of a Fanti chief continues a long tradition of Ghanaian royalty by wearing gold jewelry and ornaments. ►





It controlled trade routes across the Sahara and from the south, as well as along the Niger River. Many rulers and people of Mali became Muslims but still continued to practice their traditional religions, too.

**Mali's Golden Age** **Mansa Musa** ruled Mali from about 1312 to 1332. Under his rule, Mali expanded and flourished. In 1324, he made a religious pilgrimage to Mecca in Arabia. During his journey, he persuaded Muslim scholars and artisans to return to Mali with him. Timbuktu, Mali's major city, became a cultural center. Architects built beautiful mosques in and around the city. Scholars brought their knowledge of Islamic law, astronomy, medicine, and mathematics. Universities in several West African cities became centers of Islamic education.



**Culture** • Mansa (King) Musa spread interest in Mali as he traveled to Arabia. Tales of his wealth reached as far away as Europe. ▲

## The Songhai Empire

Mali's power declined after Mansa Musa's death in 1337. Eventually, Mali was conquered by nearby Songhai. Like Mali and Ghana had in the past, Songhai controlled trade across the Sahara. It ruled neighboring states, and by the early 1500s was larger than Mali had been. Timbuktu again became a center of Muslim culture. In the early 1590s, a Moroccan army defeated the Songhai Empire.

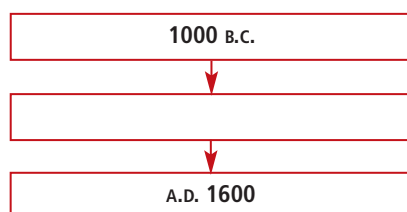
### SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

#### Terms & Names

1. Identify: (a) paleontologist (b) Bantu migration (c) Mansa Musa

#### Taking Notes

2. Use a time line like this one to list important events in this region's history.



#### Main Ideas

3. (a) How did the introduction of the camel influence trade in ancient Africa?  
(b) What were the two most valuable minerals in ancient Ghana? Why?  
(c) How did a location in the Niger River valley help empires flourish?

#### Critical Thinking

#### 4. Recognizing Effects

What were the effects of Mansa Musa's pilgrimage on Mali?

#### Think About

- ♦ who came to Mali after the pilgrimage
- ♦ what changes occurred in the culture of Mali

#### ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Make a **diorama** showing a camel caravan traveling through the Sahara, carrying salt to people in Southern Africa.