

AS 100.121
History of Africa to 1800
Syllabus, Fall 2002

Time: Tuesday, 2-4
Place: tba by the Registrar's Office
Professor: Pier M. Larson
Office: 404 Gilman
Office Hours: Tuesday 10-12
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Scope and Purpose

AS 100.121 is the first in a two-semester survey of African history offered by the History Department. The course considers the early period of African history, to about 1800. Because there is so much to learn about Africa and Africans in this period, we cannot strive for exhaustive coverage. Rather, through the course readings, lectures, and discussion we will explore several important themes in the history of the continent and its peoples.

The course will consist of lectures, discussions, and some audiovisual, the intermixture of which will vary according to the reading schedule and other considerations.

Requirements for superior achievement in the course (i.e. an A) include regular attendance with no unexplained absences, always completing the reading for each week before our Tuesday meeting, regular and vociferous participation in course discussions, and thoughtful and well-written papers. Anyone missing a course should notify the professor by telephone or email BEFORE the said course, not afterward.

Required Coursework

1. Attendance, preparation, asking questions during lectures, and participation in class discussions, or, in other words, being responsible and engaged. I expect responsibility and engagement from every single class participant. Absences will adversely affect your grade, especially since the course meets only once every week.
2. Weekly reaction/thought papers. They must be typed. One page, single spaced, is entirely adequate, but you may write more if you wish. The paper should record your informal reaction to the week's assigned reading, a sort of journal of your thoughts. Each paper should also raise two or more questions or issues for the class to deliberate. The purpose of the papers is for the professor to get a sense of how you are thinking critically about the readings and to help you prepare for your participation in the class discussions. Weekly papers are due each week in class.

3. Two map quizzes: one of African geographical features and the other of contemporary African country names. These will be administered in class on September 24 and October 1.
4. Three reading quizzes, given randomly without notice during the semester. These quizzes will consist of several questions with very short responses to test whether you have read the assigned material and are attending class. Unless I receive notification from you by email or telephone BEFORE the class in which the quiz is given, there will be no chance to make the missed quiz up.
5. A take-home mid-term examination. This will consist of essay answers to general questions relating to the required readings, professor's lectures, and course discussions through Meeting 7. Questions will be made available on the web (at the professor's web site, see above url, then click "syllabi") on Friday, October 18 and are due in the professor's history department mailbox on Friday, October 25.
6. A take-home final examination. This will consist of essay answers to general questions relating to the required readings, professor's lectures, and course discussions for Meetings 8-13. Questions will be distributed in class on December 3 and are due in the professor's history mail box by 5pm December 10.

Grading System

Attendance and Weekly Papers do not add to your grade but detract from it if not current. If you need to make adjustments in your weekly papers, you will hear from me. If you do not hear from me about your weekly papers, assume that your grade is not being detrimentally affected by them (i.e. they are satisfactory). Any absence, especially unexplained absences, will detrimentally affect your grade in a number of ways. Unexplained absences will definitely count against you if your grade is otherwise on the fence between two options. If a quiz occurs during an unexplained absence, you will not be able to make it up and your quiz score for that quiz will be zero.

Map Quiz I	5%
Map Quiz II	5%
Three Random Quizzes	averaged together for 10%
Midterm	40%
Final	40%

Readings

Most readings are available in MSEL Print or Electronic Reserves.

Course books available in the Homewood Bookstore:

Christopher Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800 (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 2002).

Joyce Tyldesley, Daughters of Isis: Women of Ancient Egypt (New York: Penguin Books, 1995).

D.T. Niane, Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali (London: Longman, 1995).

Reading Materials available by other means (these books are either out of print or too expensive to purchase for class):

Roderick McIntosh, The Peoples of the Middle Niger: The Island of Gold (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 131-286.

Peter Garlake, Life at Great Zimbabwe (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1983).

Robert Harms, River of Wealth, River of Sorrow: The Central Zaire Basin in the Era of the Slave and Ivory Trade, 1500-1891 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981).

Richard Elphick, Kraal and Castle: Khoikoi and Founding of White South Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

Meeting Schedule

Meeting 1: September 10

Myths, Origins

[Lecture: myths, studying skills, Human Origins]

No Reading.

Meeting 2: September 17

From Hunting and Gathering to Agriculture

[Lecture: Language, Settlement, Agricultural Transition]

Reading:

- Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, 3-102.
- Larson, "Ten Myths about Africa."

Summary: The reading this week is for unlearning and learning. The unlearning portion relates to the setting straight of common myths; the learning portion to the earliest periods of African history. Historians of early human life employ a wide variety of evidence to construct their arguments: environmental history, paleontology, archaeology, historical linguistics, human genome research, and other disciplines. The reading demonstrates how African people of various language groups lived their lives in different parts of Africa and how Africans made the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture—the African agricultural revolutions (note the plural here, for there was not a single revolution in this huge continent). During this time, the climate of Africa, especially the Sahara, was very different than it is today. Pay careful attention to this fact and how it has influenced early human history in Africa.

Meeting 3: September 24

Mettalurgy & Ancient Egypt

[Lecture: Ancient Egypt]

Reading:

- Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 143-156.
- Tyldesley, *Daughters of Isis*, 1-145 [Bookstore, MSEL Print Reserve, PT 1489 .T9 1994].
- Geography Map Quiz in class

Summary: The brief reading in the textbook provides an overview of the history of Ancient Egypt, which comprises both the upper and lower Nile River between about 5500 BCE and 2000 BCE. Refer to the map on p. 150. Tyldesley, by contrast, utilizes a variety of evidence to provide you with a sense of the rhythm and texture of everyday life in Ancient Egypt through the lens of women's history. The author aims to provide a history of women and in so doing gives us an important sense of how the civilization of Ancient Egypt affected and interpreted the lives of common people (men's history does this too). The focus is both important and interesting because most narratives of ancient Egypt tend to take the lives of the Pharaohs as their center. This is a much more engaging history than those. What do you think are the strengths and weaknesses of a history of everyday people and everyday life as opposed to that of the lives and deeds of the rulers?

Meeting 4: October 1*Ancient Egypt II*

[Lecture/Slideshow: Ancient Egypt through its Art]

Reading:

- Tyldesley, *Daughters of Isis*, 146-275 [Bookstore; MSEL Print Reserve, PT 1489 .T9 1994]
- African Countries Map Quiz in class

Summary: The reading this week continues that from the last. We delve into Egyptian fashion, the harems of the great, female pharaohs, and religious expression.

Meeting 5: October 8*Urbanism along the Middle Niger River*

[Lecture: Middle Niger River]

Reading:

- Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 136-143, 159-169, 227-235.
- Roderick McIntosh, *The Peoples of the Middle Niger*, 131-286 [MSEL Print Reserve, GN652.M25 M35 1998; for individual availability ask professor, assistant].

Summary: The textbook reading for this week is very important and sketches out significant developments in West African history, focusing on the region of the Middle Niger River (pp. 142-143, 231-233), about which we read in Roderick McIntosh's book. As you read in the textbook on the issues of copper production, agricultural innovation, agricultural specialization, the iron and commercial revolutions, economic specialization, and growing trans-Saharan trade, take notes so you can summarize major developments

in each of these areas. Refer to the map on p. 166 for the placing of the Middle Niger River (ie. the area along the bend of the Niger River between Jenne and Kukiya) and for a view of developing long-distance trade routes in West and North Africa. We read only a portion, though a substantial one, of Roderick McIntosh's book entitled The Peoples of the Middle Niger. The reading selection begins with Chapter 5, which as all the "Historical Imagination" chapters in the book (5, 7, 9), creates a fictional understanding of historical developments. Here the author, an archaeologist, imagines, and then writes about in Chapter 6, the movement of humans into the Middle Niger River area as the Sahara dries up some 2300 years ago. He moves to the founding of Jenne-jeno, the focus of his research and of this book (locate Jenne-Jeno along the Niger River in the lower left portion of Mali on the map on p. 195). The rest of the reading provides you with an archaeologist's view of Jenne-jeno's past, its social and economic structures and organization, its relationships with surrounding parts of Africa. What is McIntosh's argument about diffused authority and peer polity interaction? How does his argument about trade and the "island of gold" differ from most and what is the role of Jenne-jeno in that trade? Chapter 10 about the empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhay is directly related to the subject matter for next week, and you may wish to consult it as you plunge into next week's reading.

Meeting 6: October 15

Trade, Islam & West African Kingdoms

[Lecture: West African Kingdoms]

Reading:

- Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, 309-329.
- Niane, Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali, entire book [Bookstore, MSEL Print Reserve, DT532.2 .N513 1965].

Summary: The reading in the textbook—which builds on last week's reading on the commercial revolution, increasing specialization, and Jenne-jeno (see especially McIntosh pp. 261-265)—provides historical background for the many well-known "classical" West African states/empires. Be sure to refer to the maps on pp. 293 and 299 while you are reading in the textbook so you can correctly place these kingdoms on the map. I suggest you photocopy the maps and refer to them as you are reading in the textbook. What were the economic bases of these kingdoms and empires? Pay special attention to the short text on the coming of Islam to west Africa on pp. 313-314. The lecture will discuss all these issues at greater length. Sundiata is an oral history about the origins of the Mali empire in the mid-13th century (textbook, pp. 324-329). The epic was recorded from an oral historian—or Griot—in the 1960s it is claimed by the compiler, D.T. Niane. Sundiata is a classic in African history and literature that illustrates the way in which oral history is useful and important for modern historians. The epic relates the conflict between Sumanguru, the leader of the Susu, and Sundiata (or Sunjata), the magical kingdom builder from Mali who expanded his little Mali out into a huge empire by first defeating the Susu kingdom. The epic puts flesh, color and magical detail into the history of the rise of Mali and its early conflict with Susu. One of the subtexts in the epic is the place of Islam and "magic" in the struggle between Sumanguru and Sundiata. Who represents Islam, and who magic? What is the evidence? Contrast the colorful epic

with the narrative in the textbook. How reliable as an historical source do you think the epic is? What makes better reading, the epic or the textbook? How do the epic and the traditional historical narrative in the textbook function together to provide an understanding of ancient Mali?

Meeting 7: October 22

East Africa & The Western Indian Ocean

[Lecture: Swahili]

Reading:

- Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa*, 110-123, 169-176, 185-191, 248-251, 275-286, 445-451.
- McPherson, "The Early Maritime Trade of the Indian Ocean," *The Indian Ocean*, 16-75 [MSEL Electronic Reserve].

Summary: East Africa is an area of tremendous historical and linguistic complexity. In the textbook reading for this week, you encounter that complexity. This complex history results from the mixing of peoples from four different African language families in the region: Speakers of Niger-Congo languages (the Bantu speakers, both the Mashariki and Kaskazi versions or Bantu people), Sudanic Languages, Afrasan languages (Cushitic speakers or Cushites) and Khoisan languages. Very Important: See the linguistic maps on pp. 37 & 63 for the earlier placement of these peoples who came into East Africa. The essential process was one of expansion of the speakers of Bantu (Niger-Congo), Sudanic and Cushitic (Afrasan) languages pushing out and absorbing speakers of the Khoisan languages such that Khoisan languages are, with some minor exceptions, no longer spoken in East Africa. The migration of Indonesian speakers from Indonesia to Madagascar did not bring any Indonesian languages to continental East Africa, but left an important agricultural legacy from which Africans borrowed. The largest immigration into East Africa proper was that of Bantu speakers, both the Mashariki (eastern) and Kaskazi (southern) branches coming from a homeland in southern Cameroon described in the early part of the reading in the textbook. People speaking languages from each of these four different families had different modes of life, which made their interactions very complex and rich. Another important theme in the textbook reading is the rise of Swahili civilization & commerce along the East African coast, tying East Africa into the international trade of the Indian Ocean just as West Africa was tied into the trade of the Mediterranean world by commerce across the Sahara. Refer to the map on p. 204 for the placement of Rhapta as you read about it. The reading by McPherson on "The Early Maritime Trade of the Indian Ocean" sets all of the eastern side of Africa in its maritime context. Unlike the Atlantic Ocean, which was not circumnavigated and in which there was not long-distance and intercontinental trade before the era of European expansion, the Indian Ocean has been a vital sea of trade for the last 5000 years. Africa is part of this history of navigation and trade on the Indian Ocean, a complex system of commerce linking far-flung places such as China, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt and the east African coast. How was Africa's linkage to the Indian Ocean different from that of Southeast Asia? How did Africa's maritime technology differ from that of other areas around the rim of the Indian Ocean? Refer to the maps on pp. 47, 50-51.

Meeting 8: October 29*The Ethiopian Highlands & Great Zimbabwe*

[Lecture: Aksum Slides, Great Zimbabwe]

Reading:

- Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, 127-136, 208-221, 241-247, 251-256, 291-309.
- Garlake, Life at Great Zimbabwe [MSEL Electronic or Print Reserve].

Summary: The textbook reading for this week centers on two geographical regions: Northeast Africa, otherwise known as the Ethiopian Highlands and Horn of Africa, and the highland portion of Southern Africa around what is now Northeastern South Africa and Zimbabwe. The Ethiopian highlands are unique for the high fertility (the black, fertile soil carried down to Egypt by rains falling in the Ethiopian highlands) and their plow agriculture of grains, akin to the Mediterranean agriculture of North Africa and along the Nile River in Egypt. A productive agriculture mixed with the increasing involvement of the inhabitants of Highland Ethiopia and the Horn in the trade of the Indian Ocean and Red sea led to the rise of kingdoms such as Aksum, Ethiopia (under the Solomonic dynasty), and the Nubian states. In southern Africa, on the other hand, an important process was the expansion of the Bantu speakers and the pushing away and absorption of Khoisan speakers. Agriculture was important, but cattle herding spread to a large extent. Pay careful attention in your reading to the spread of cattlekeeping and to how it was linked to new kinds of chiefship and state power. One section of the reading (251-256) provides direct background for the history of Great Zimbabwe. Life at Great Zimbabwe is an illustrated pamphlet produced in Zimbabwe for use in the schools there. You will see that here and there it assumes knowledge of common words in local languages. The pamphlet does a wonderful job of showing how life was lived at Great Zimbabwe. But the wonderful hand-drawn illustrations convey the aesthetics of Great Zimbabwe with skill. Note that Great Zimbabwe was only the largest of the many Zimbabwe--or mazimbabwe--in southern Africa. The modern nation of Zimbabwe derives its name from this stone-building tradition. Notice the sailing ship in the illustration in the "Decline of Great Zimbabwe" section. What does this suggest about the impact of trade in the Indian Ocean on developments in the interior of Africa?

Meeting 9: November 5*European Expansion & The Slave Trade*

[Lecture: European Expansion]

Reading:

- Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, 349-379.
- Harms, River of Wealth, River of Sorrow, 1-108 [MSEL Print Reserve, HF3914 .H371 1981; for individual availability ask professor].

Summary: The first seven pages of the textbook reading for this week are extremely important. They provide a way of understanding the early impact of European navigation around African coasts on African history. Two propositions from p. 352 are particularly important: 1) "For the first 200 years of the Atlantic Age, Europeans remained peripheral historical actors in African history, in most cases able to strongly influence the course of

events only in those regions where their activities were allowed and encouraged by Africans,” and 2) “We should not read back into past times the technological advantages of the nineteenth-century Europeans.” The remainder of the textbook reading illustrates these propositions with respect to major developments in African history. Make sure to refer to the maps on pp. 356 and 364. River of Wealth, River of Sorrow, by contrast, is a history of African trade with Europeans and its impact on Africans and their societies along the great Zaire or Congo River of Equatorial (forested) central Africa. It tends to emphasize more recent times, especially the 18th and 19th centuries, while the textbook reading covers an earlier period, the 15th through 17th centuries. Please be aware of this as you read. European influence in Africa generally became stronger over the centuries, reaching its apogee only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. River of Wealth is based heavily on both written documentation and oral history. What opportunities did international trade provide Bobangi and other Africans with? Can you detect some problems created by international trade?

Meeting 10: November 12

European Expansion & The Slave Trade

[Lecture: The Slave Trade]

Reading:

- Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, 407-429.
- Harms, River of Wealth, River of Sorrow, 111-236 [MSEL Print Reserve, HF3914 .H371 1981; for individual availability ask professor].

Summary: The textbook reading details major developments in African history up to 1800 against an intensifying set of commercial relationships with Europeans. The trans-Atlantic slave trade is a growing theme, though 85% of that trade, in terms of volume, would occur after 1800 as I will show in the lecture. Pay careful attention to the increasing influence of European commerce in African societies while Europeans themselves remained almost exclusively on their ships at the coast. Does the map on p. 409 provide you any clue as to why slave trading was so effective in parts of Africa? Does it suggest, at this early date, one reason why Europeans were—much later in the 1880s and 1890s—able to conquer Africa? The continued reading in River of Wealth provides a detailed case study of international commerce and its local effects along the Congo River. Pay very careful attention to chapter 7: what was the impact of commerce on ethnicity along the River? How were the African societies along the Congo River weakened by pursuing their own interests (and experiencing their own tragedies) in the context of international commerce even before Europeans came beyond African shores into the continent? What insight has this book provided you about the trans-Atlantic slave trade?

Meeting 11: November 19

[Lecture: East Africa 19th & Slavery in Africa]

Trade in East Africa & The Lives of Slaves

- Feierman, “A Century of Ironies in East Africa, (c. 1780-1890),” in Curtin, Feierman, Thompson and Vansina, African History: From Earliest Times to Independence (London: Longman, 1995), 352-376 [MSEL electronic reserve].
- Olaudah Equiano (Atlantic)—use the link that follows
<http://jhunix.hcf.jhu.edu/~plarson/smuseum/accounts/equiano/equiano.htm>
- Joseph Wright (Atlantic); Petro Chilekwa (Indian Ocean); Dorugu (trans-Saharan); Aaron Kuku (African); Chisi-Ndjurisiye-Sichayunga (African) — MSEL Electronic reserves, Pier M. Larson, “Slave Narratives”

Summary: There are two themes in the reading for this week. First, we examine the impact of European trade in the Indian Ocean on the societies of the east and central African interior that traded eastward. Major forces of transformation were plantation agriculture, the export slave trade into the Indian Ocean, and the trade in Ivory to India and Europe. Pay careful attention to the trade routes between the interior and the coast on the map on p. 359. The story will focus on Zanzibar, a small island of the east coast of what is now Tanzania, and on the increasing influence of Arabs in east Africa. You should be attentive to how trade transformed politics in the African interior. Second, we read of the life experiences of six individuals who became slaves and ended up in different slave trades and disparate major destinations for slaves: the Atlantic, the Sahara, the Indian Ocean and Africa itself. One interesting fact you will discover is that many people captured served as slaves within Africa for many years before they ended up, by some twist of fate, in a slave trade that swept them away from the continent. It is important to remember that most persons enslaved in Africa never left the continent; they remained slaves there but far away from home and family. What was similar and what unique in the experiences of these individuals? How do their lives make you think differently than you did about slave trading and Africa?

Meeting 12: November 26

Lecture: South Africa, Early Settlement/Peoples

[Lecture: Early South African History]

Reading:

- Ehret, The Civilizations of Africa, 241-247, 256-259, 438-445.
- Elphick, Kraal and Castle, xv-116 [MSEL Print Reserve, D6 .Y2 v.116; for individual availability ask professor].

Summary: South Africa was little involved in the trans-Atlantic or Indian Ocean slave trades. Its history is one of early colonization by Europeans and the importation of slaves across the Atlantic and Indian Oceans. The textbook reading for this week provides critical background information for understanding Kraal and Castle. The first portions of the textbook reading summarize important changes and human interactions in the period prior to the arrival of Europeans at the Cape of Good Hope. In this pre-European period, interactions among hunter gatherers, herders, and farmers is a central theme. As you read, pay careful attention to the map on p. 244. Note that because of minor differences in how the authors employ orthography, the “Khoekhoe” or cattle ranchers of the textbook will be the “Khoikhoi” of Kraal and Castle. The second part of the textbook reading provides an outline history of the establishment of the Dutch East India Company and the Boers at the Cape of Good Hope in the mid-17th century, the first significant

European colonial occupation of Africa. Kraal and Castle is a history of the interactions between Khoikhoi cattle ranchers and Boers at the Cape of Good Hope, the history lying at the basis of modern South Africa. Be sure to read the Introduction to the book very carefully, for it defines some important terms and provides vital background information to the narrative. How does Richard Elphick define the relationship between hunters and ranchers, the San and Khoikhoi? How were Khoikhoi economic strategies in the era of European trade similar to and different from those of the Bobangi and others along the Congo River? How did the relationship between Khoikhoi and Boers change over time?

Meeting 13: December 3

Lecture: South Africa, European Expansion

[Lecture: Dutch Settlement at the Cape]

Reading:

- Elphick, Kraal and Castle, 117-239 [MSEL Print Reserve; D6 .Y2 v.116; for individual availability ask professor].

Summary: In this week we finish reading Kraal and Castle. As you read of the fate of the Khoikhoi in the face of European imperialism, compare and contrast that fate to the interactions between the Boers and Bantu-speaking farming Africans such as the Xhosa and Zulu, about whom I will be lecturing. In all these stories amidst increasing European occupation of Southern Africa, you have the making of the stimulating, complex and tragic history of this region of the African continent.