

Section 1

Africa

A Huge and Diverse Land

Africa, the second largest continent in the world (only Asia is larger), is bounded by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the west, and the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea to the east. A narrow strip of land in its northeast corner connects it to the Arabian Peninsula and beyond that to Asia and Europe.

From north to south, Africa is divided into a succession of climatic zones (see Map 1–1). With the exception of a fertile strip along the Mediterranean coast and the agriculturally rich Nile River valley, most of the northern third of the continent consists of the Sahara Desert. For thousands of years, the Sahara had limited contact between the rest of Africa—known as sub-Saharan Africa—and the Mediterranean coast, Europe, and Asia. South of the Sahara is a semidesert region known as the Sahel, and south of the Sahel is a huge grassland, or **savannah**, stretching from Ethiopia westward to the Atlantic Ocean. Arab adventurers named this savannah *Bilad es Sudan*, meaning “land of the black people,” and the term **Sudan** designates this entire region, rather than simply the modern East African nation of Sudan. Much of the habitable part of West Africa falls within the savannah. The rest lies within the northern part of a rain forest that extends eastward from the Atlantic coast over most of the central part of the continent. Another region of savannah borders the rain forest to the south, followed by another desert—the Kalahari—and another coastal strip at the continent’s southern extremity.



Reading Check What are the geographical characteristics of Africa?

The Birthplace of Humanity

Paleoanthropologists—scientists who study the evolution and prehistory of humans—have concluded that the origins of humanity lie in the savannah regions of Africa. All people today, in other words, are very likely descendants of beings who lived in Africa millions of years ago.

GUIDE TO READING

- ▶ What are the geographical characteristics of Africa?
- ▶ Why is Africa considered the “birthplace of humanity”?
- ▶ Where and how did humans originate?
- ▶ Why are ancient African civilizations important?

KEY TERMS

- ▶ savannah, p. 7
- ▶ Sudan, p. 7
- ▶ hominids, p. 8
- ▶ *Homo erectus*, p. 9
- ▶ ancient Egypt, p. 9
- ▶ pharaoh, p. 10

▶ Guide to Reading/Key Terms

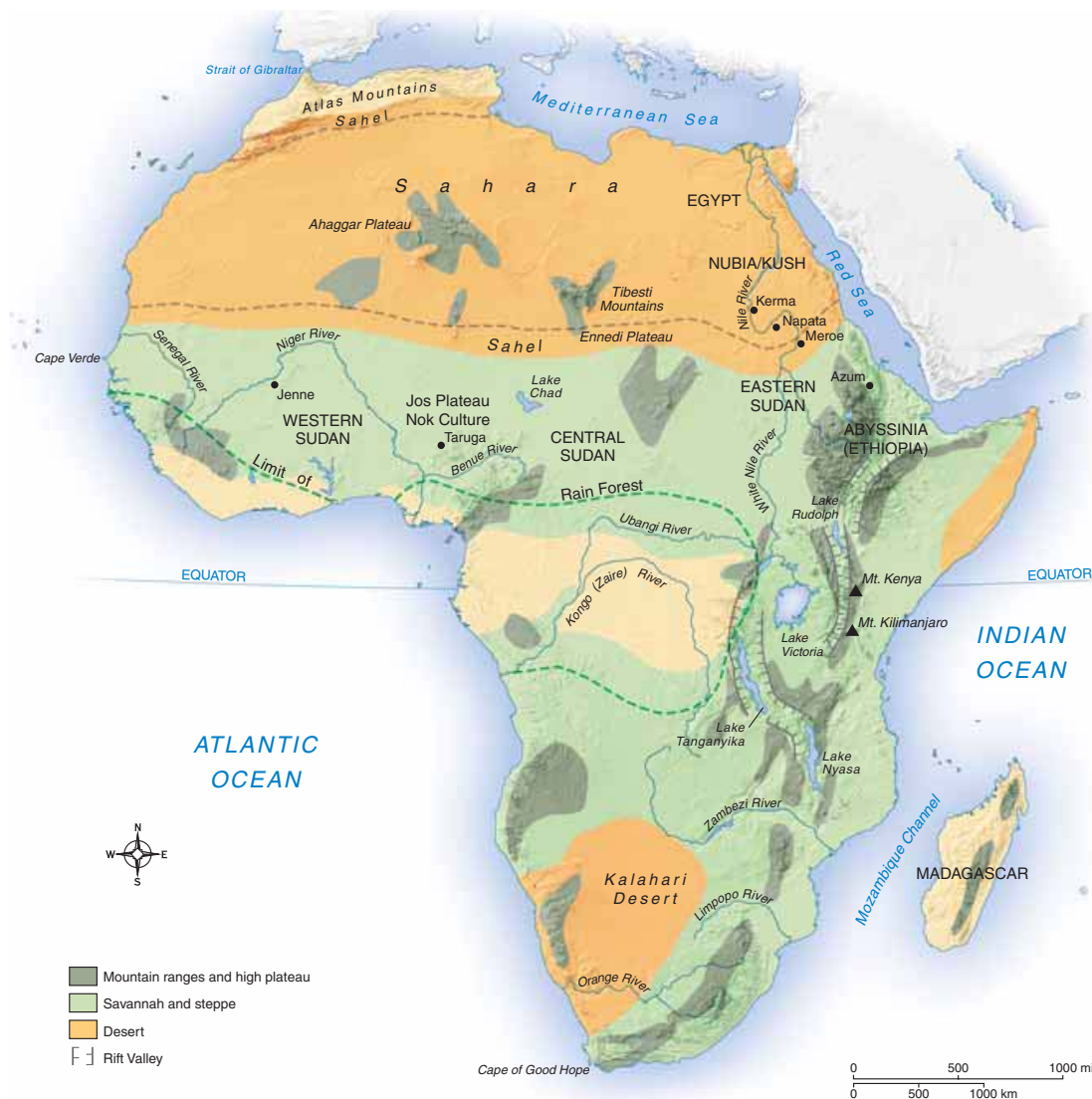
For answers, see the *Teacher’s Resource Manual*.

▶ Reading Check

With the exception of the Mediterranean coast and the Nile River valley, most of the northern third of the continent consists of the Sahara Desert. South of the Sahara is a semi-desert region known as the Sahel. South of the Sahel is a huge grassland, or savannah. A rain forest covers much of the center of the continent. The rain forest is bordered by savannah to the south, followed by the Kalahari Desert and another coastal strip.

▶ Recommended Reading

John Reader. *Africa: A Biography of the Continent*. New York: Knopf, 1998. The most up-to-date account of early African history, emphasizing the ways the continent’s physical environment shaped human life there.



MAP 1-1 Africa: Climatic Regions and Early Sites

Africa is a large continent with several climatic zones. It is also the home of several early civilizations.



What impact did the variety of climatic zones have on the development of civilization in Africa?



Explore this map online at www.prenhall.com/aah.map1.1

Fossil and genetic evidence suggests that humans descended from a common ancestry who lived in Africa about five to ten million years ago. The African climate was growing drier at that time, as it has continued to do into the present. Forests gave way to spreading savannahs dotted with isolated groups of trees.

The earliest known **hominids** (the term designates the biological family to which humans belong) were the *australopithecines*, who emerged about four million years ago. The first stone tools are associated with the emergence—about 2.4 million years ago—of *Homo habilis*,

the earliest creature designated as within the *homo* (human) lineage. Individuals of the *Homo habilis* species had larger brains than the australopithecines. They butchered meat with stone cutting and chopping tools and built shelters with stone foundations. Like people in hunting and gathering societies today, they probably lived in small bands in which women foraged for plant food and men hunted and scavenged for meat.

Homo erectus, who emerged in Africa about 1.6 million years ago, is associated with the first evidence of human use of fire. *Homo erectus*, spread even farther from Africa, reaching eastern Asia and Indonesia.

Paleoanthropologists agree that modern humans, *Homo sapiens* evolved from *Homo erectus*, but they disagree on how. According to the out of Africa model, modern humans emerged in Africa some 200,000 years ago and began migrating to the rest of the world about 100,000 years ago, eventually replacing all other existing hominid populations. According to the multiregional model, modern humans evolved throughout Africa, Asia, and Europe from ancestral regional populations of *Homo erectus* and archaic *Homo sapiens*. According to this model, a continuous exchange of genetic material allowed archaic human populations in Africa, Asia, and Europe to evolve simultaneously into modern humans. Although, both of these models are consistent with recent genetic evidence, and both indicate that all living peoples are closely related, the prevailing consensus in anthropology is that Africa is the birthplace of all humankind. The “Eve” hypothesis, which supports the out-of-Africa model, suggests that all modern humans are descended from a single African woman. The multiregional model maintains that a continuous exchange of genetic material allowed archaic human populations in Africa, Asia, and Europe to evolve simultaneously into modern humans.



Reading Check Where and how did humans originate?

Ancient Civilizations

The earliest civilization in Africa and one of the two earliest civilizations in world history is that of **ancient Egypt** (see Map 1–1), which emerged in the Nile River valley in the fourth millennium BCE. Civilization appeared at the end of a long process in which hunting and gathering gave way to agriculture. The settled village life that resulted from this transformation permitted society to become increasingly hierarchical and specialized. Similar processes gave rise to civilization in the Indus valley in India around 2300 BCE, in China—with the founding of the Shang dynasty—around 1500 BCE, and in Mexico and Andean South America during the first millennium BCE.

The race of the ancient Egyptians and the extent of their influence on Western civilization have long been sources of controversy. It is a con-



Anthropologists discovered these fossilized bones, nicknamed “Lucy,” in 1974 at Hadar, Ethiopia.

► [Map 1-1, p. 8](#)

Such distinct environments, savannah and forest, resulted in very different and distinct cultures.

► **Reading Check**

The earliest known hominids emerged about 4 million years ago. The first use of stone tools is associated with *homo habilis* (about 2.5 million years ago) and the first use of fire is associated with *homo erectus* (about 1.6 million years ago). *Homo sapiens* evolved from *homo erectus*.

► **Recommended Reading**

Christopher Stringer and Robin McKie. *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity*. New York: Henry Holt, 1997. A very clearly written account favoring the “out of Africa model.”

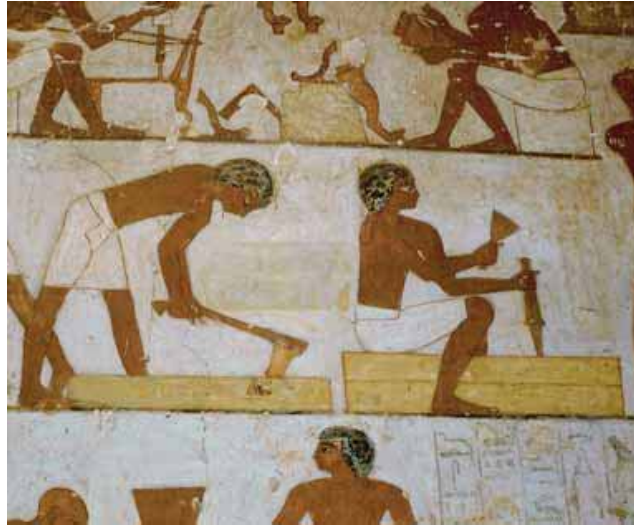
► Map 1-2, p. 11

Egypt was much more established than Nubia/Kush, with many more city centers and pyramids.

► Teaching Notes

According to Dr. John Henrik Clarke, the racial history of the ancient Egyptians is a dilemma created in Western historiography dating back 200 years, when some historians stated that Egyptians were non-African. Although these accounts were challenged, the most noted challenge came from Drs. Cheik Ante Diop and Theophile Obenga. Diop answered the question, “Who were the Egyptians of the ancient world?” at the 1974 symposium sponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This symposium, which was held in Cairo, Egypt, attracted twenty prominent Egyptologists from around the world who debated the race of the ancient Egyptians. Dr. Diop’s presentation included his development of the “melanin dosage test,” which “provided the means by which one could determine the phenotype of the Egyptian royal mummies by examining the melanin content present in their skin”

According to Professor Anthony Browder, in his book, *Nile Valley Contributions to Civilizations*: “The general consensus reached at the Cairo Symposium was that there was no evidence that the ancient Egyptians were white, and Egypt was not influenced by Mesopotamia, but by peoples from “the Great Lakes region in inner-equatorial Africa.” Anthony Browder, further states that despite the fact that the research of Drs. Diop and Obenga addressed numerous issues concerning the ethnicity of the ancient Egyptians, the Egyptians’ contributions to civilization continue to be discussed and debated. The works of white and black historians such as Gerald Massey, Martin Bernal, Carter G. Woodson, W.E.B. Du Bois, J.A. Rogers, John Jackson, Yosef Ben-Jochannan and Chancellor Williams have recognized Egypt’s contribution to the spread of civilization not only throughout the Mediterranean region but throughout the history of the world.



Egyptian wall paintings from ancient tombs show skilled carpenters at work.

trovery that reflects more about racial politics since the eighteenth century than about the Egyptians themselves. Ethnically the Egyptians were an African people related to other African peoples across that continent. They had early cultural associations with people to their south in Nubia and in the “Great Lakes region.” They were, nevertheless, engaged in cultural exchanges with early civilizations in southeastern Asia. In addition, many scholars have recognized that Egypt as an African nation influenced the spread of civilization to Greece and throughout the world. In religion, commerce, philosophy, art, science, and mathematics Egypt played a founding role in what became Western Civilization.

Egyptian Civilization

Egypt was, as the Greek historian Herodotus observed 2,500 years ago, the “gift of the Nile.” It was the Nile that allowed Egyptians to cultivate wheat and barley and herd goats, sheep, pigs, and cattle in an otherwise desolate region. The Nile also provided the Egyptians with a transportation and communications artery, while its desert surroundings protected them from foreign invasion.

Egypt was unified into a single kingdom in about 3150 BCE and was ruled by a succession of thirty-one dynasties until its incorporation into the Roman Empire in the first century BCE. Historians have divided this immensely long span into several epochs. During the early dynastic period (3100–2700 BCE) and Old Kingdom (2700–2200 BCE), Egypt’s kings consolidated their authority and claimed the status of gods. After a period of instability following the end of the Old Kingdom, royal authority was reestablished during the Middle Kingdom (2050–1650).

During the New Kingdom (1550–1100), Egypt expanded beyond the Nile valley to establish an empire over coastal regions of southwest Asia as well as Libya and Nubia in Africa. It was in this period that Egypt's kings began using the title **pharaoh**, which means “great house.” During the Post-Empire period (1100–30 BCE), Egypt fell prey to a series of outside invaders. (see Map 1–2).

The way of life that took shape during the Old Kingdom, however, had resisted change for most of ancient Egypt's history. Kings presided over a strictly hierarchical society. Beneath them were classes of warriors, priests, merchants, artisans, and peasants. A class of scribes, who were masters of Egypt's complex hieroglyphic writing, staffed a comprehensive bureaucracy.

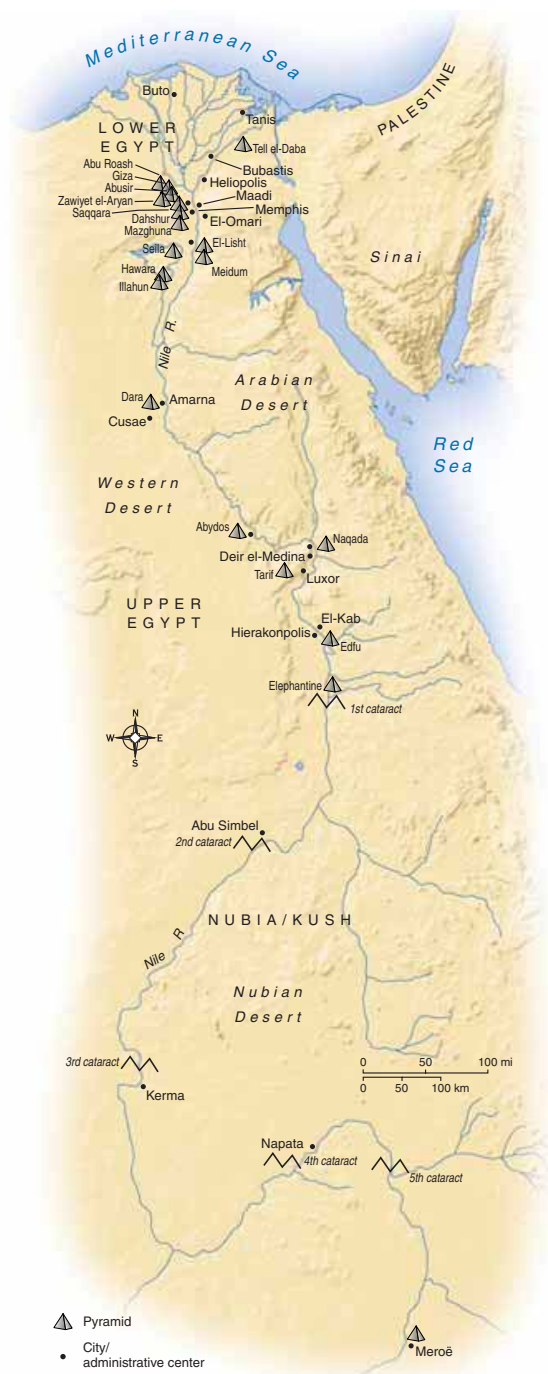
Egyptian society was strictly patrilineal and patriarchal. Kings maintained numerous concubines; other men could also take additional wives if the first wife failed to produce children. Egyptian women held a high status compared with women in much of the rest of the ancient world. They owned property independently of their husbands, oversaw household slaves, controlled the education of their children, held public office, served as priests, and operated businesses. There were several female rulers, one of whom, Hatshepsut, reigned for twenty years (1478–1458 BCE). She is depicted in carvings and monuments, however, wearing the regalia of male rulers, including the traditional false beard.

Religion shaped every facet of Egyptian life. Although there were innumerable gods, two of the more important were the sun god Re (or Ra), who represented the immortality of the Egyptian state, and Osiris, the god of the Nile, who embodied each individual's personal immortality.

Personal immortality and the immortality of the state merged in the person of the king. The Great Pyramids at Giza near the modern city of Cairo, were built more than 4,500 years ago to protect the bodies of three prominent kings of the Old Kingdom so that their souls might successfully enter the life to come. The pyramids also dramatically symbolized the power of the Egyptian state and have endured as symbols of the grandeur of Egyptian civilization.

Kush

To the south of Egypt, in what is today the nation of Sudan, lay the ancient region known as Nubia. As early as the fourth millennium BCE, the indisputably black people who lived there



MAP 1–2 Ancient Egypt and Nubia



What does this map indicate about the relationship between ancient Egypt and Nubia/Kush?



The ruined pyramids of Meroë on the banks of the upper Nile River are examples of the cultural connections between Meroë and Egypt.

interacted with the Egyptians. Recent archaeological evidence suggests that grain production and the concept of monarchy may have arisen in Nubia and then spread northward to Egypt. But Egypt's population was always much larger than that of Nubia. During the second millennium BCE, Egypt used its military power to make Nubia an Egyptian colony and control Nubian copper and gold mines. Egyptians also imported ivory, ebony, leopard pelts, and slaves from Nubia and required the sons of Nubian nobles to live in Egypt as hostages.

The hostages served as ambassadors of Egyptian culture when they returned home. As a result, Egyptian religion, art, hieroglyphics, and political structure became firmly established in Nubia. Then, with the decline of Egypt's New Kingdom at the end of the second millennium BCE, the Nubians established an independent kingdom known as Kush, which had its capital at Kerma on the upper Nile River. During the eighth century BCE, the Kushites took control of upper Egypt, and in about 750 the Kushite king Piankhy added lower Egypt to his realm. Piankhy made himself pharaoh and founded Egypt's twenty-fifth dynasty, which ruled until the Assyrians, who invaded Egypt from south-west Asia, drove the Kushites out in 663 BCE.

► **Retracing the Odyssey**

African Collection, National History Museum of Los Angeles County, Los Angeles, CA. This collection includes about five thousand objects representing African cultures.

Meroë

Kush itself remained independent for another thousand years. Its kings continued for centuries to call themselves pharaohs and had themselves buried in pyramid tombs covered with Egyptian hieroglyphics. They and the Kushite nobility practiced the Egyptian religion and spoke the Egyptian language. But a resurgent Egyptian army destroyed Kerma in 540 BCE and the Kushites moved their capital southward to Meroë. The new capital was superbly located for trade with East Africa, with regions to the west across the Sudan, and with the Mediterranean world by way of the Nile River. Trade made Meroë wealthy, and the development of a smelting technology capable of exploiting local deposits of iron transformed the city into Africa's first industrial center.

As Meroë's economic base expanded, the dependence of Kushite civilization on Egyptian culture declined. By the second century CE, the Kushites had developed their own phonetic script to replace hieroglyphics. An architecture derived from that of Egypt gave way to an eclectic style that included Greek, Indian, and sub-Saharan African motifs, as well as Egyptian.

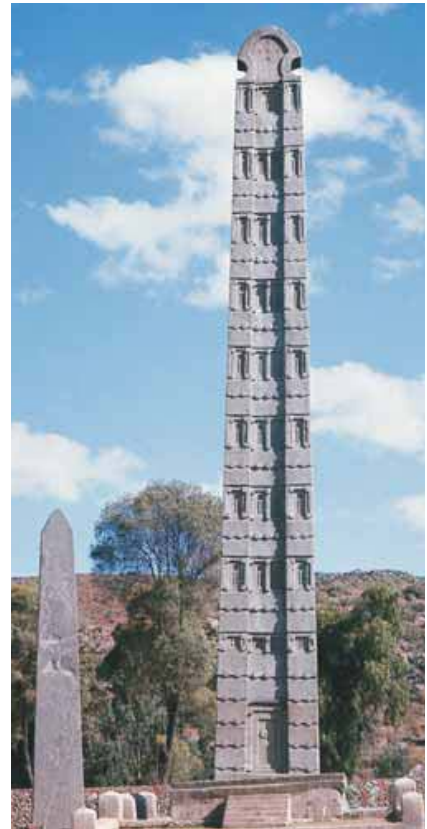
Axum

Because of its commerce and wealth, Kush attracted powerful enemies, including the Roman Empire. By 31 BCE the Roman Empire controlled all the lands bordering the Mediterranean Sea. A Roman army, for example, invaded Kush in 23 BCE. A Roman army, for example, invaded Kush in 23 BCE. But it was actually the decline of Rome and its Mediterranean economy that were the chief factors in Kush's destruction. As the Roman Empire grew weaker and poorer, its trade with Kush declined, and Kush, too, grew weaker. During the early fourth century CE, Kush fell to the neighboring Noba people, who in turn fell to the nearby kingdom of Axum, whose warriors destroyed Meroë.

Located in what is today Ethiopia, Axum emerged as a nation during the first century BCE. Semitic people from the Arabian Peninsula, who were influenced by Hebrew culture, settled among a local black population. By the time it absorbed Kush during the fourth century CE, Axum had become the first Christian state in sub-Saharan Africa. By the eighth century, shifting trade patterns, environmental depletion, and Islamic invaders combined to reduce Axum's power. It nevertheless retained its unique culture and its independence.



Reading Check Why are ancient African civilizations important?



This giant stele at Axum demonstrates the spread of Egyptian architecture into what is today Ethiopia.

► Reading Check

Egypt played a key role in the spread of civilization throughout the Mediterranean region. Egyptian religion, commerce, and art all influenced the development of Greece and subsequent Western civilizations.

► Document

1-1 *Herodotus on Carthaginian Trade and on the City of Meroë*

In these two passages, Herodotus reports (in about 430 BCE) on the trading practices along the Atlantic coast of Africa as gleaned from the Carthaginian traders who passed beyond the Strait of Gibraltar and describes what he knows of the country, known to him as the land of the Ethiopians.