



## People of West Africa



Mali Carved  
Mask

### Background Information

Some of the West African countries that border the Atlantic Ocean are Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon. Much of this area is covered by tropical rain forests.

Senegal and parts of Mauritania also border the Atlantic, but the land shifts from savannas to shrublands to the Sahara.

The landscape of the inland countries of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger ranges from savannas to desert.

At one time, some of the major groups were the **Hausa**, **Yoruba**, **Fulani**, and **Ashanti**. West Africans have survived the domination of powerful ancient kingdoms, Middle Eastern invasions, European conquests, and the debilitating slave trade. Their customs and beliefs are hundreds of years old.

### Early Migrations and Daily Life

West Africans originated from the late-Stone Age people of the Sahara. The Sahara was once lush and tropical. The first inhabitants lived in hundreds of scattered villages along riverbanks. As the region slowly dried up, groups migrated into more inhabitable land.

It is believed that about 4,000 years ago many groups ventured further south into tropical rain forests. They ate yams, millet, wild grains, onions, roots, kola nuts, watermelons, snails, and fish. Cassava from South America was introduced in the fifteenth century. In the drier sub-Saharan climates, people owned goats and cattle. However, domesticated animals were not kept in the rain forest because disease-breeding insects would infect and kill the herds.

West Africa was rich in minerals. Some records indicate that gold was so prevalent that it could be found lying in streams. People collected gemstones, mined for copper and gold, and harvested rock salt from dry riverbeds. Everyone was allowed to mine for gold, but a certain amount was given to the king.

#### FACT

Salt was such a valuable commodity that it was traded pound for pound for gold.

As with many rich kingdoms, owning slaves was commonplace. Before the arrival of Europeans, West Africans were accosted and forced into slavery only during intertribal wars. Often, owners would marry their enslaved captives.

## Customs and Beliefs

West Africans relied on large extended families for child rearing and survival. The Ashanti built family compounds throughout their villages. A wealthy man might have two or more wives living in separate huts. Both parents helped raise their children. Children learned to behave in public, honor their elders, and respect each other's property. At the age of eight, boys were sent to their fathers' huts for further training and instruction. Girls remained with their mothers and were taught to farm, keep house, and cook.

In the ninth century, Arab traders introduced Islam to West Africans. West Africans were initially opposed to this religion, but Muslim trader-clerics were vigilant in claiming converts. Some West African kings accepted this new religion for political purposes, thus opening the door to influence local populations.

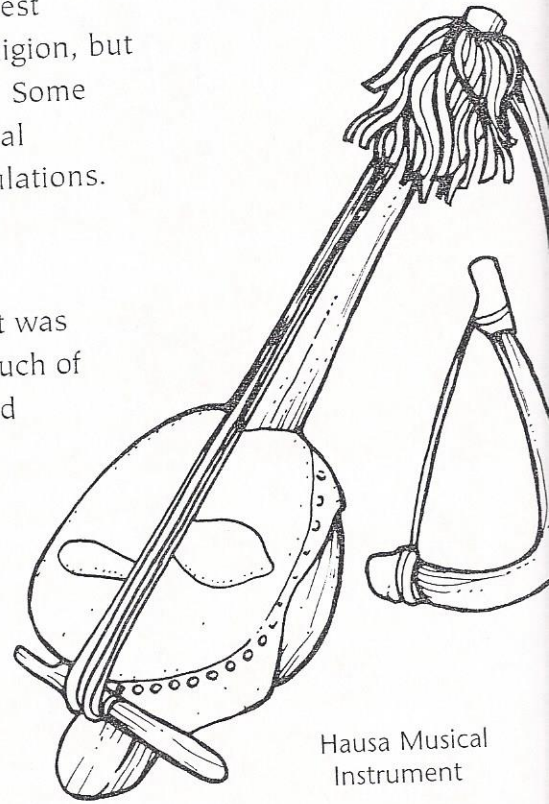
## Ancient Kingdoms of the Savanna

Gold was the major commodity in West African history. It was traded with North Africans for salt as early as 500 B.C. Much of the gold used during the Roman Empire, Middle Ages, and Renaissance came from West Africa. During the seventh century A.D., Arab traders became the major controllers of the gold-salt trade. Their relationship with West Africa lasted more than 1,000 years.

Due to the wealth of this region, several ancient kingdoms emerged. Three early classical kingdoms were Ghana, Mali, and Songhai. The Kingdom of Ghana first arose around A.D. 700. During this time, Timbuktu developed into a major economic port for the gold-salt trade and became the center of religion, culture, and education. A mosque was built to train Muslim clerics, and scholars studied philosophy, medicine, and mathematics.

### FACT

Ancient Ashanti kings wore gold castanets on their fingers and used them to silence their courts.



Hausa Musical Instrument

Ivory Tusk  
Horn



The Kingdom of Ghana was absorbed into the Kingdom of Mali in A.D. 1200. This new kingdom had great political power. It became a major trading empire whose territories reached farther west than its predecessor.

Songhai, the greatest kingdom of classical West Africa, emerged in A.D. 1350. This kingdom slowly usurped the territory of Mali. It grew so large that its soldiers could not patrol the outer regions. Moroccans, who were searching for secret gold mines, attacked outlying villages. The Songhai army's spears and arrows could not match the Moroccans' cannons and guns. Songhai fell under Moroccan power in A.D. 1590.

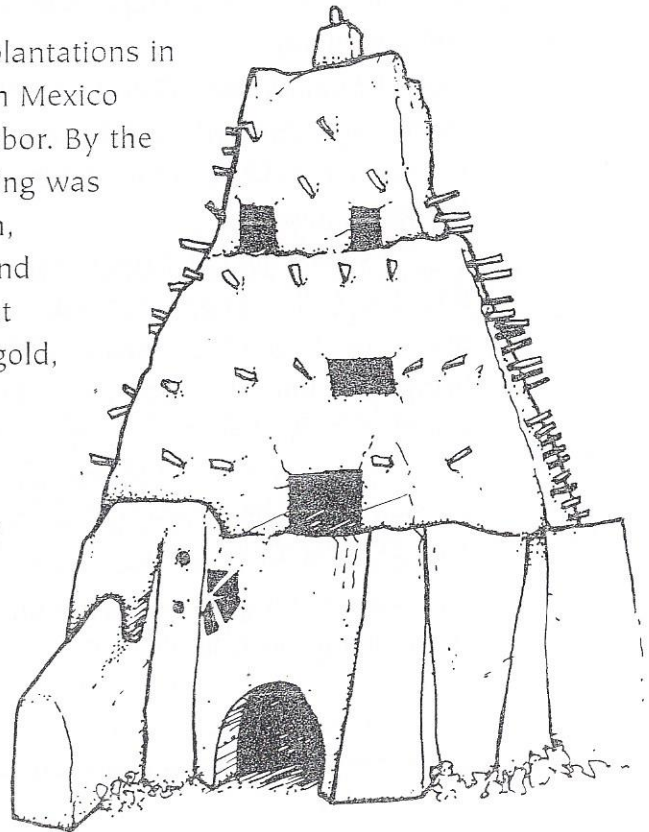
### Arrival of Europeans

Portuguese sailors first landed on the west coast of Africa in A.D. 1470. Aware of its gold reserves, they sought to establish direct trade with the West Africans. The Portuguese built a fort called El Mina after finding the Ashanti gold mines. El Mina held goods and gold received in trade. The Portuguese and the Ashanti pursued trade with each other and became wealthy. West Africans were influenced by Portuguese missionaries, machinery, guns, and new foods.

#### FACT

"Talking" drums were used to broadcast news throughout the territory. Everyone understood the language of the drums.

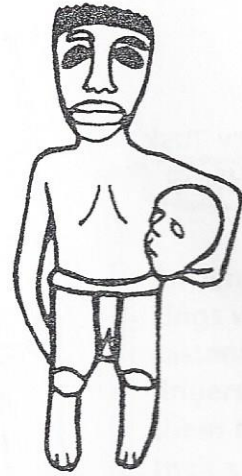
The Spanish sugar plantations in the Caribbean and in Mexico required imported labor. By the 1700s, slave trafficking was rampant. The British, Spaniards, Danes, and French came to West Africa in pursuit of gold, ivory, and slaves. In 1791, Great Britain outlawed the slave trade and in 1820 it abolished slavery.



Fourteenth-Century Sankore  
Mosque at Timbuktu

# THE FOLKTALE

## Searching for Gold (Ashanti)



A chief who had to make a long journey was concerned about leaving his daughter alone. So he met with Gold, his most trusted friend. "I shall be gone for several months," he said. "I need you to watch over my daughter. If young men come hoping to marry her, turn them away. I will speak to them when I return."

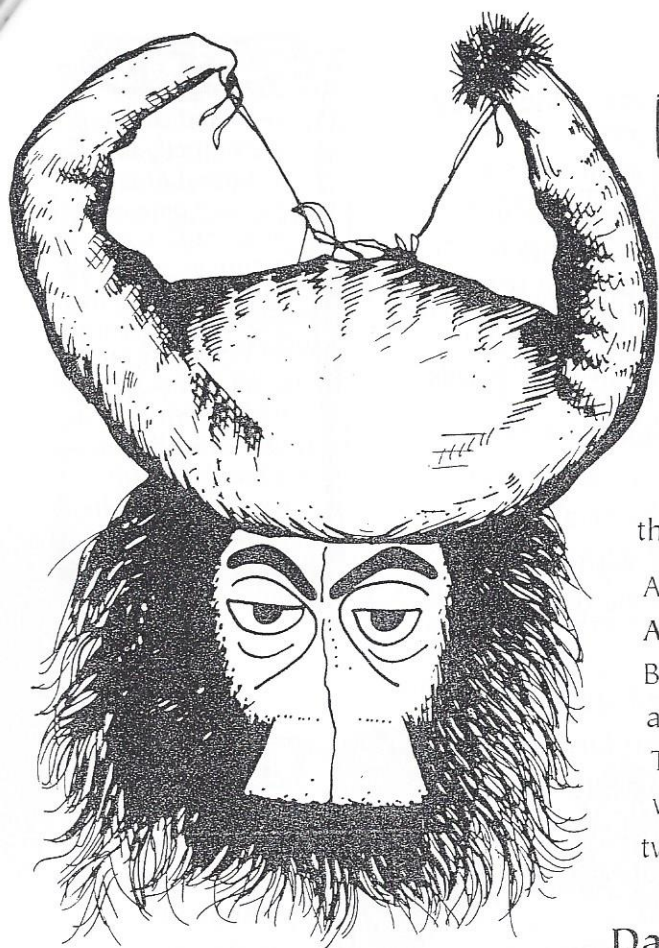
"I will look after your daughter as if she were my own," Gold replied.

The chief felt confident that his daughter was safe and went off on his journey. Many months passed and he did not return. Young men came seeking the young girl's hand in marriage, but Gold turned them away. However, he became very worried that something terrible had happened to the chief. When another young man asked for the chief's daughter's hand, Gold agreed, saying, "Since I am watching over her, you must make the marriage settlement with me." Gold received great riches in exchange for the young girl.

A while later, Gold heard that the chief was on his way home. He was terrified. "How will I ever be able to face my friend?" he wondered. Gold grabbed everything he owned and moved to the grasslands.

When the chief returned, he asked, "Where are Gold and my daughter?" The people replied, "Gold has fled," and they told him about his daughter's marriage. The chief was furious! "You must bring Gold back," he declared. "But where will we look?" the people asked. "Everywhere," he said. "I will not rest until I see him."

So the people searched as they hunted food. They searched as they dug yams. Every trader that passed through was asked, "Have you seen Gold?" But no one knew where Gold was hiding. The search still goes on. And that is why, even today, the people are still looking for Gold.



Wooden Cow  
Masks of  
Eastern Congo

## People of Central Africa

### Background Information

Central Africa encompasses the countries of Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo, northern Angola, Central African Republic, Zaire, and western Uganda. Much of this region is covered by tropical rain forests so dense that the inhabitants were cut off from the rest of the continent.

At one time, some of the major groups were the Azande, Fiote, Bambala, Bakongo, and Pygmies. Because of their isolation, they developed beliefs and lifestyles different from those in other areas. This is particularly evident in the Congo basin, which was mostly uncharted until the twentieth century.

### Daily Life

The Pygmies lived in the heart of the Congo basin. Anthropologists believe the Pygmies have inhabited the rain forest since around 5000 B.C. The Pygmies, or Bambuti, averaged from four to five feet in height. They made their homes out of trees or poles and very big leaves. The forest provided an abundance of roots, nuts, bananas, and other fruit.

The Pygmies were excellent hunters and could ward off aggressive intruders. Their small statures allowed for easier movement through the thick rain forest. Animals were killed with poison darts or trapped in vine nets.

Around 2000 B.C., Bantu-speaking groups and others migrated south from what is now Cameroon in West Africa. Many settled in villages along the shores of the Congo River or moved into the savannas outside the rain forest. They cultivated crops and raised livestock.

Other Bantu migrations took place in around 500 B.C., into what is now Zaire and northern Angola. They also raised livestock, fished, and cultivated the land. They learned how to smelt iron and copper into weapons and tools. They wove

#### FACT

Pygmy children played with balls made of raw latex from rubber trees, which were introduced to Africa from South America in the sixteenth century.

beautiful fabrics from the fibers of raffia palm trees, which they traded for other goods.

The Bantu and Pygmy groups relied on each other. Trading was usually cloaked in darkness, because the Pygmies were wary of strangers. A Bantu-speaking group such as the Bakongo would leave items in the open fields. Later, Pygmy hunters would stealthily leave the forest and replace the items with their goods.

### Customs and Beliefs

The Pygmies believed that all good came from the rain forest and that no harm would come to them if they stayed within it. The Bantu believed that dangerous spirits possessed the dark rain forest and rarely ventured in.

Few people were as prolific at creating masks and statues as those who lived near the western coast of the rain forest region. These religious items were used for initiation rites into adulthood, preparations for war, and death ceremonies. The terrifying expressions on the masks often represented supernatural forces. Wearers of masks believed they were possessed by spirits. They often went into deep trances, dancing to ceremonial music for hours.

### Kingdoms of the Congo River

In around the fifth century A.D., small kingdoms and chiefdoms emerged along the mouth of the Congo, or Zaire, River. The kings, royal courts, and officials oversaw effective systems of law and order. Warfare and clashes, though still common, became more symbolic. For instance, opposing groups might brandish spears or take prisoners to be ransomed for cattle.

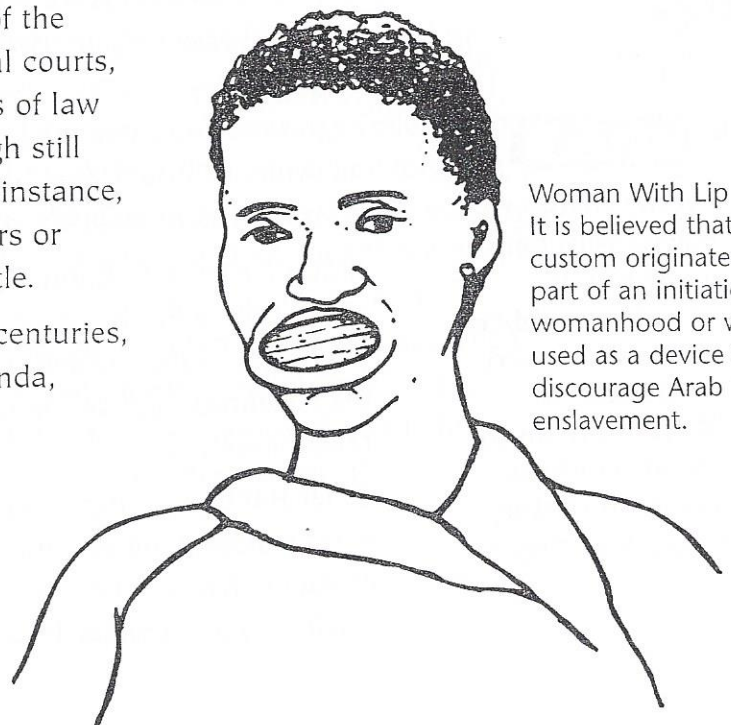
Between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, other kingdoms, such as the Luba, Lunda, and Malawi, emerged in the northern and southern parts of central Africa. These kingdoms benefited from trade with the Swahilis and Arabs.

#### FACT

Laws and customs were strictly followed in central Africa. Accused persons were brought to trial before an official of the court. They had to prove their innocence by explaining their point of view. They tried to justify their case by stating moral principles from common proverbs, sayings, or songs.

#### FACT

Oranges, lemons, and bananas are indigenous to central Africa.



Woman With Lip Disk. It is believed that this custom originated as a part of an initiation into womanhood or was used as a device to discourage Arab enslavement.

## FACT

In the late 1800s the famous missionary-explorer Dr. Livingstone charted the source of the Congo River. After Livingstone located illegal slave-trading ports deep within the Congo, the British government made great efforts to stop the continual export of slaves.

Ivory, slaves, and gold were always important trading commodities between the eastern traders and central groups. In the nineteenth century there was such a great demand that the Swahili and Arab traders used unscrupulous means to get what they wanted, with little resistance from central groups. Congo law stated that slaves could be taken only during a war. To acquire slaves, Arab traders pitted one African group against the other and caused much mistrust among people. Wars, which were once casual, became more aggressive and continual.

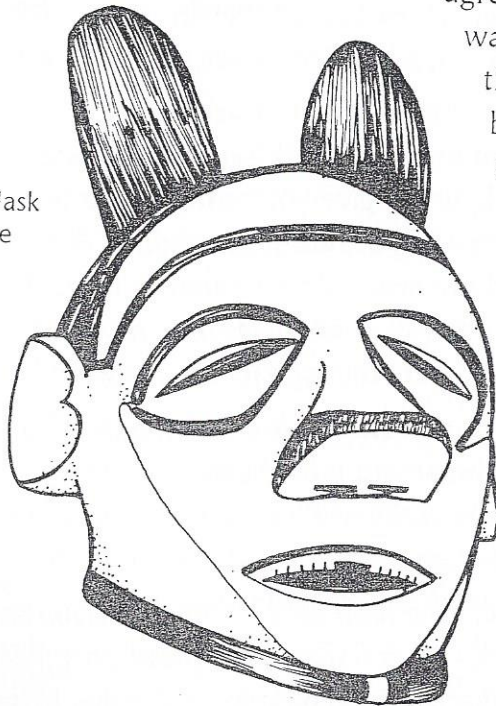
## Arrival of Europeans

The Portuguese first encountered the Kongo Kingdom in 1482. In 1491, King Joao I, the Mani Kongo, entered into a friendly trade agreement with the Portuguese. Kongo nobles wanted to expand their chiefdoms, develop their technology and military strength, and become literate. In exchange the Portuguese planned to enrich their colony with gold, copper, and other goods. They also wanted to claim new territories, expand missionary work, and acquire enslaved workers for Brazilian sugar plantations.

King Joao I allowed his people to be converted to Catholicism. He was baptized and took a Christian name. He sent ambassadors to Portugal to represent him and his people.

The growing friendship and peaceful trade between the Portuguese and central Africans led to grim results. By 1526 the Portuguese had extracted so many slaves that the area became underpopulated. King Alfonso, the Mani Kongo at that time, sent a letter to the Portuguese king requesting that the slave trade end. He feared that his people would disappear. He received no response, and the slaving continued until the 1800s.

Helmet Mask  
From Zaire



## FACT

Today there are more than 300 ethnic groups in Zaire alone.



## THE FOLKLORE

### The Father-in-Law Below the Earth (Bakongo)



One day a man found some pigs that had eaten his crop of bananas. Furious, the man chased away the pigs and managed to wound one on its tail. The man was determined to find the pigs' owner so he could demand payment.

He gathered both good and damaged bananas and followed the pigs' trail to the edge of a pond. Without thinking, he jumped into the water. To his surprise there was a village at the pond's depths. Greeting the chief, he said, "Are you the owner of the pigs who destroyed my crops? If you are, I have come for payment of the fruit your pigs destroyed."

The wise chief ate a piece of the fruit. "I have never tasted anything so wonderful," he said. "I will give you more than a regular payment; I will allow you to marry my beautiful daughter." The man happily agreed. As the man and his new wife prepared to leave the village for the world above, the chief warned, "You may never visit us during the dry season. Only come here during the rainy season."

The couple were happy for a year, and in that time they had a healthy child. But one day the woman started screaming. She cried to her husband, "Our baby is deathly ill. Please let me take him to see my father, because he has great magic. Only he can save our son!"

"It is impossible, my wife," the man said. "Your father forbade us to visit during the dry season." She continued to plead until her husband gave in. At the pond, the family sunk into its depths. Instead of a thriving village, they found all the plants, trees, and people dead. The woman and her son died, too. The man ran to escape but could not find an opening out of the pond.

Suddenly a drop of rain fell. Then more and more until the land was drenched. Everything came back to life. The man followed the sounds of chattering villagers. There he found his wife and son alive. Indeed, there is magic with the rain.

## People of Southern Africa

### Background Information

Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi are landlocked countries of southern and southeastern Africa. Swaziland and Mozambique border the Indian Ocean. South Africa borders the Atlantic and the Indian Oceans. The southern Africa coastline is covered with wooded shrubland, which changes to dry savannas and deserts further inland.

Thousands of Bantu-speaking people lived in southern Africa. The dominant groups were the Zulu, Swazi, Shona, Ndebele, Tswana, Sotho, and Basuto.

### Daily Life

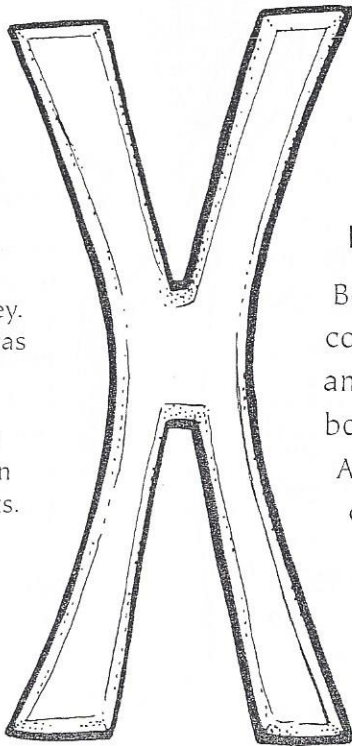
Archaeologists believe the San inhabited southern Africa nearly 20,000 years ago. The Khoikhoi arrived shortly after. They shared a language called Khoisan. From about A.D. 700 to 1000, huge migrations of Bantu-speaking people from the northwest and Congo regions settled in southern Africa. They outnumbered the Khoisan and were skilled at forging metals into weapons. The San and Khoikhoi were forced to fight the Bantu, move into less-inhabited deserts, or merge into Bantu society.

Many Bantu-speaking groups lived in homesteads called kraals, individual huts protected by brush and wood fences. The walls and floors of the huts were made from a mixture of anthills, soil, and cow dung. The roofs were made of dry grass and weeds. In the center of the kraal was a fenced enclosure for cattle, to protect the livestock from thieves and wild predators.

These Bantu-speaking groups ate two meals a day, based on the hours in which cattle were taken to and returned from the fields. The Bantu diet included sorghum, millet, yams, sugarcane, watermelon, gourds, and *amasi*, or curdled milk. Pumpkin and peanuts were added after the fifteenth century. The Bantu ate cattle only on special occasions.

Zulu men of particular distinction wore head rings made of tree fungus. Eventually the head rings would harden. They were never removed. The women decorated their necks, arms, and ankles with brass and copper rings called *iindzilas*. These ornaments, too, were never removed.

Copper Ingot  
Found in the  
Zambezi Valley.  
The copper was  
this shape so  
that bearers  
could carry it  
more easily on  
shoulder sticks.



### FACT

#### Shona Manners

- Clapping hands was a gesture of thanks when receiving a gift. Taking the gift with both hands symbolized that the gift was large and generous, no matter how small it really was.
- To show respect, young people would sit or squat when speaking to elders.

## Customs and Beliefs

Swazi infants were secluded from outsiders for as long as one month. Only the mother, wet nurse, or medicine man could see the baby. Fathers were not allowed to visit the baby for fear that evil spirits might be attached to him. The higher the father's warrior status, the more spirits he carried. At the age of three months, the child was given a name and introduced to the world.

Cattle were the Bantu's most important possession. Cattle were considered intermediaries between this world and the spirit world. Before an animal was sacrificed, it was given a message to carry to the owner's ancestors. Cattle were considered beautiful and were the subjects of poems. Owners often had a favorite steer and treated it as a pet.

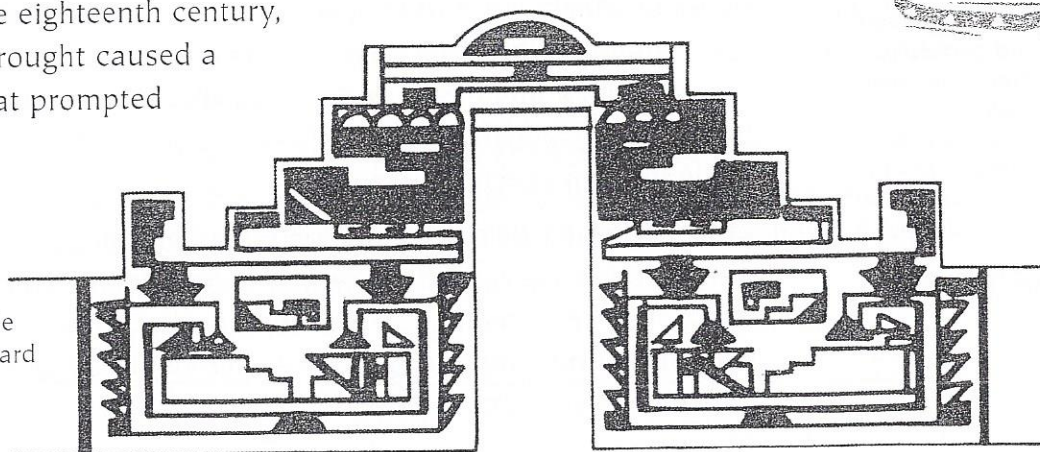
The desire for cattle also caused many wars, which were often started by surprise attacks. Groups stole cattle from each other and also stole children, women, and booty. Unmarried girls were taken to become wives. The ongoing battles increased people's fears and anxieties.

## The Rise and Fall of Kingdoms

The Great Zimbabwe Kingdom began around the thirteenth century A.D. and lasted for nearly 350 years. A rich kingdom, it was built upon the trading of gold, ivory, and copper. The capital contained huge conical towers, great curving walls, and pillars built of perfectly cut stone. Builders constructed these famous structures without using nails or mortar. However, Great Zimbabwe is shrouded with mystery. Archaeologists are not sure who built the kingdom, where they came from, or why they disappeared. Some believe that a great drought caused the first inhabitants to abandon the sites.

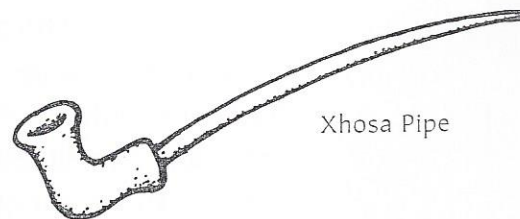
During the eighteenth century, another drought caused a famine that prompted raids and

Ndebele  
Courtyard  
Wall



### FACT

Zulu women wore body creams and lipstick made from vegetable oils mixed with hippopotamus fat and herbs.

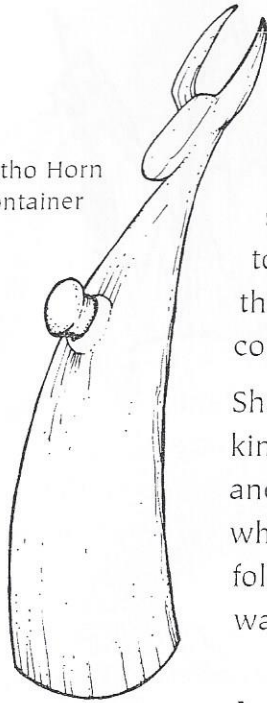


Xhosa Pipe

### FACT

Visitors had to stop at the entrance of a village and announce their arrival. They could not enter without approval.

Sotho Horn  
Container



rivalry among the Bantu. By 1819 a Zulu warrior named Shaka had become a powerful leader. Shaka's military strategies, discipline, and fighting techniques enabled his army to dominate southern Africa. Shaka also refined the long-throwing spears, called *assegais*, into shorter weapons for close-contact fighting.

Shaka wanted peace for his people, but his quest to build a kingdom and control the entire territory left millions homeless and starving. This period in African history is called *Mfecane*, which means "The Crushing." Eventually even Shaka's most avid followers saw that he had gone too far. At the age of 41, Shaka was murdered by his half-brother.

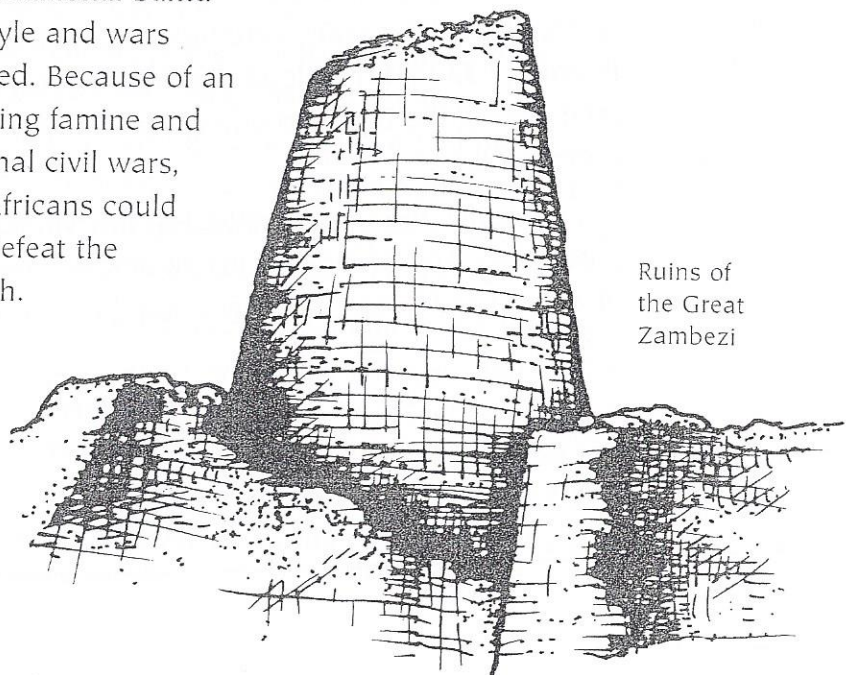
### Arrival of Europeans

The Arabs, Portuguese, British, and Dutch came to southern Africa to trade. By the 1700s, thousands of Dutch Boers took over the land for farming. The Dutch pushed the displaced Khoisan into the Namib and Kalahari Deserts. Meanwhile the British navy established a base off the coast of what is now South Africa. Their domination forced the Bantu, Khoisan, and Dutch further inland.

In 1869, diamonds were found in what is now South Africa. Thousands of speculators from Australia, Europe, and the Americas converged on this region. Great Britain quickly annexed the country for itself and wrested control of much of the Bantu land. The infiltration of foreigners disturbed the traditional Bantu lifestyle and wars ensued. Because of an ongoing famine and internal civil wars, the Africans could not defeat the British.

#### FACT

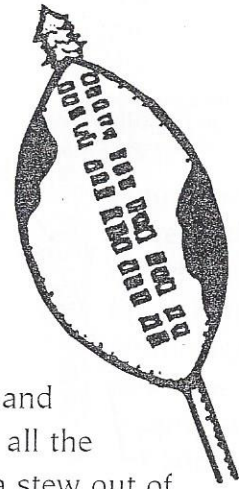
Sotho girls carried beaded dolls during their wedding ceremony. The doll was named and carried by the bride until the first child was born. The doll's name was then transferred to the child.



Ruins of  
the Great  
Zambezi

# THE END

## The Lost Immortal and His Feast of Peace (Zulu)



One day the Lost Immortal met with the Bantu people. "I will deliver you from war but you must trust and obey me," he said, and the people agreed. He captured all the warring chiefs and had his wives and daughters make a stew out of them. From that moment all the fighting stopped.

The Lost Immortal instructed his people to prepare a grand feast. Men cut down trees and made huts, kraals, bowls, spoons, forks, drums, marimbas, and many other wooden objects. Others hunted food and collected roots and berries. Former enemies now worked side by side as friends. People from distant lands walked for days to participate in the festivities. Everyone dressed in elaborate clothes. The Lost Immortal was very pleased.

When the festivities began, warriors from every nation lined up to perform a breathtaking parade of unity. People rose to their feet at the sound of the drums. Ten warriors from each regiment helped carry a huge stone of peace to be placed in front of the Lost Immortal. The stone was inscribed "These great nations have taken an oath of peace. All respect this peace." Everyone was filled with hope.

In turn, each warrior laid down his shield and assegai, or spear, and replaced it with a tree branch. People sang, danced, and feasted as the assegais were broken. Each warrior cut his thumb and forefinger and let the blood drip into bowls, merging with others'. The men passed the bowls to other warriors, saying, "You are my brother; I am yours."

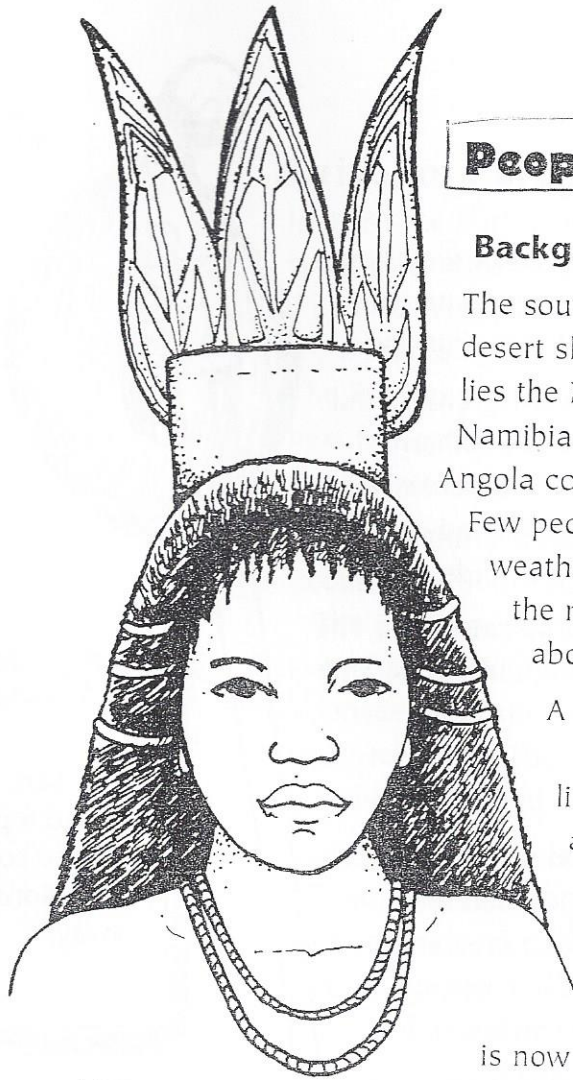
At the end of the festivities, the warriors gathered around the great stone and dropped it inside a hole. They covered it with the dirt of a thousand hoes. And peace was built for a thousand years.

## People of Southwest Africa

### Background Information

The southwest region of Africa is a sparse land of desert shrubs and sand dunes. On the Atlantic Coast lies the Namib Desert, which runs the length of Namibia (formerly Southwest Africa) and part of the Angola coastline. Further inland is the Kalahari Desert. Few people lived in these areas because of the severe weather and unappealing terrain. However, toward the northern fringes of Angola, wooded savannas abound and a kingdom once flourished.

A few San still live in the Kalahari Desert. They are perhaps Africa's oldest inhabitants. Their lifestyle is similar to those of their Stone Age ancestors, although they have used steel tools for hundreds of years. People such as the Khoikhoi and Damara moved from what is now South Africa to the southwest region during the 1600s. The major groups of what is now Angola were the Ndongo, Ovimbundu, Ovambo, and Herero.



Herero  
Headdress

### Daily Life

Through the centuries the San developed unique ways to live off the land. They traveled in small bands in search of food. Hunters used poison arrows to kill big-game animals such as wildebeests, buffaloes, and zebras. They caught smaller animals with snares and leather string bags. The San dug up roots with digging sticks, then scraped and squeezed them to extract a bitter juice. Termites, caterpillars, grasshoppers, and ostrich eggs were also part of the San diet, as were watermelons.

Because water was scarce, finding and storing it became a daily chore. The San collected ostrich eggs, filled them with pond water, then capped them with dry-grass stoppers. They stuck hollow elephant grass in a hole, then sucked up groundwater and dribbled it out into an ostrich-egg container. Cleansing the body was often done by smearing grease over the body then dusting with powder.

### FACT

To make poison arrows, San hunters mixed the venom of puff adders, the crushed bodies of trapdoor spiders, and vegetable juices.

Groups owned territorial rights to hunting grounds, watering holes, and bee hives. These rights were collective. If caught, non-related trespassers on these lands might lose their lives.

The Herero claim to have entered the southwest region around the sixteenth century. They are closely related to southern Zulu groups. Like the Khoikhoi and Ovambo, the Herero were cattle and sheep herders. Women milked the cows and gathered wild roots and bulbs, and men watched over the herds.

The Ovimbundo and Ndongo lived closer to the savannas. The rich soil in that region supported crops of sorghum, nuts, and later, cassava.

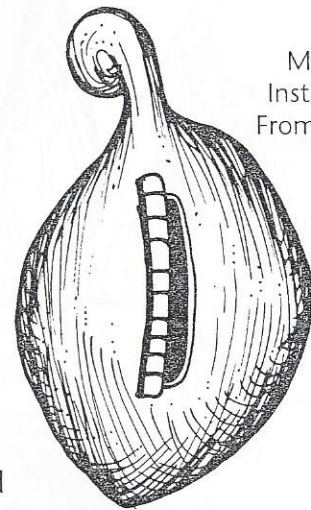
## Customs and Beliefs

The San believed that one great spirit, named Gaua, united the universe. He commanded the earth and sky, caused the sun to rise and set, and gave souls to newborns. Gaua created the first woman and man, from which every creature has sprung. Thus, the San believed that all creatures were their brothers.

For the San, hunting depended more on good luck than on skill. Men wore charms or cut marks in their bodies to help ensure their success. Many of these incisions were made at the start of a boy's hunting career.

For most of the southwest Africans, dancing was more than a social activity. Many dances were connected with hunting, while others were used as a means to connect with their souls.

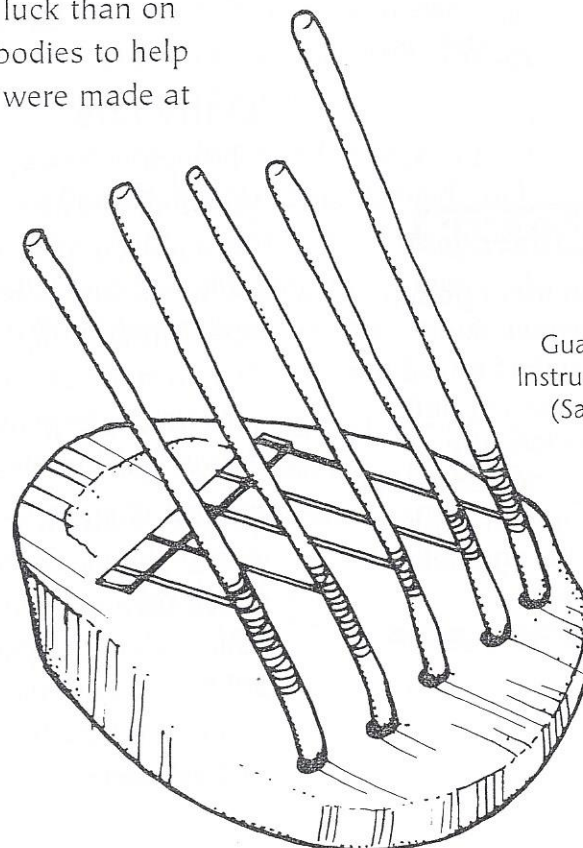
The Herero, Khoikhoi, and Ovambo believed that fire was sacred. Fires were erected on altars and lined with bones from sacrificed cattle. A guard would stand watch over the fire. If the fire went out, it symbolized disaster. Cattle were equally sacred, as was their milk, therefore the washing of cattle-related utensils was prohibited.



Musical  
Instrument  
From Angola

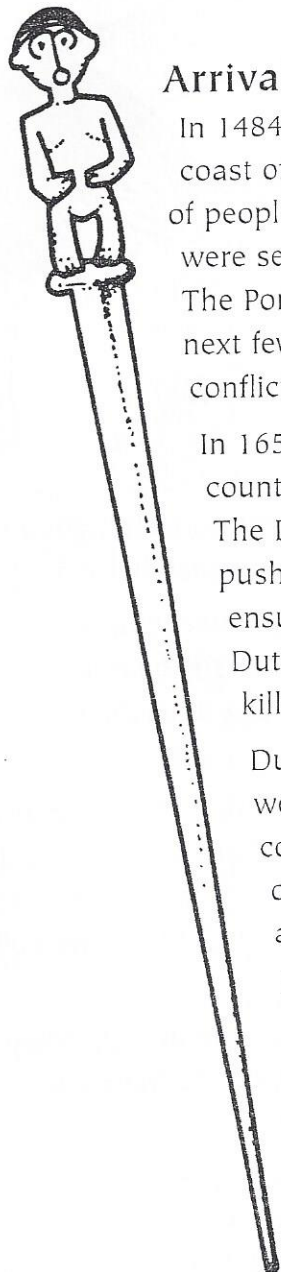
### FACT

The San found a plant whose scent kept lions away.



Guashi  
Instrument  
(San)

Ovimbundo  
Wooden  
Staff



## Arrival of Europeans

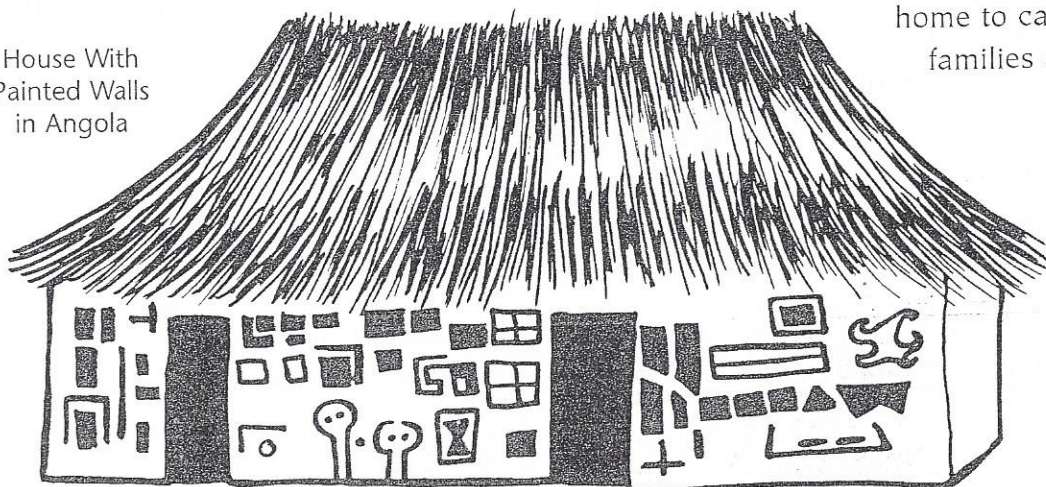
In 1484 the Portuguese made a brief appearance off the coast of southwest Africa. The sand dunes and small bands of people living here offered little to the Portuguese, who were searching for trading goods and for people to enslave. The Portuguese left the coast to go further south. For the next few centuries this region remained free of European conflict or expansion.

In 1652, thirty Dutch settlers moved from what is now the country of South Africa to lands owned by the Khoikhoi. The Dutch seized the best pasture for themselves and pushed the Khoikhoi onto inferior land. A great rebellion ensued, but the Khoikhoi weapons were no match for the Dutch guns. The Khoikhoi who were not enslaved or killed retreated further into the Kalahari Desert.

During the nineteenth century, the Khoikhoi and Herero were in constant turmoil with each other. Both competed for European trade in exchange for guns and other items. The Dutch took advantage of the rivalry and pitted one group against the other, offering protection in exchange for land.

In 1908, diamonds were found on the surface of the Namib Desert, and later they were found on the beaches of Namibia. What was once considered a wasteland with sparse grazing land became known as a region with an unlimited supply of valuable gemstones. Today, many miners are migrant workers who must leave their tribal land for years at a time. The women stay at home to care for their families and cattle.

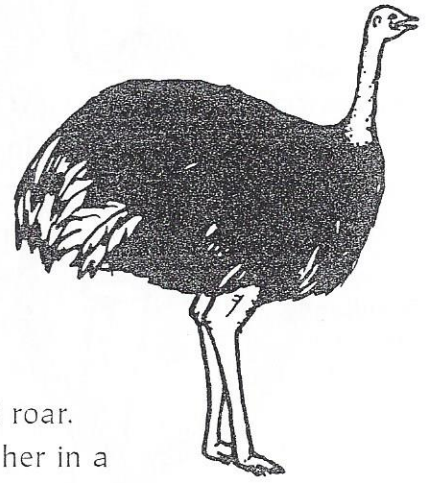
House With  
Painted Walls  
in Angola





## THE FABLES

### The Lioness and the Ostrich (San)



Long ago a lioness heard that ostriches could roar. Being a vain creature, she invited the ostrich to join her in a roaring contest. The ostrich let out a loud, thundering roar. Then the lioness took her turn. Both roars were equal in strength and sound. The dejected lioness realized that the ostrich was her match.

The lioness knew her hunting skills were greater than those of the ostrich. "Let's go on a hunt together and see who is the best hunter," she said. To the lioness's dismay, the ostrich killed many animals, but she killed just one.

The lioness's young cubs grew hungry watching their mother and the ostrich compete. "It's time to eat our kill," the lioness said. "Go and rip the meat for both you and your children," the ostrich replied. "When you are full I will drink the blood." After the meal the lioness, her cubs, and the ostrich took a nap.

The cubs woke early and began to play near the ostrich. They looked at the ostrich, who slept with his mouth open. To the cubs' amazement they found he had no teeth.

"Mother," the cubs whispered. "Wake up. The ostrich has no teeth and is pretending to be your equal. He is making a fool of you." The angry lioness woke up the ostrich. "Get up now," she said. "Let's fight to see who is strongest."

"All right," the sly ostrich said. "Go to one side of that anthill and I will go to the other." As the lioness stood ready to pounce, the ostrich knocked over the anthill. Ants quickly swarmed over the lioness. Then the ostrich kicked her in a vulnerable spot and she died.

Who is smarter, the ostrich or the lioness? Do you think being clever requires sharp teeth and a powerful body?

## People of East Africa

### Background Information

In East Africa the Horn of Africa juts into the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean. Ethiopia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Somalia, Kenya, and Tanzania border these waters. Further inland are Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi. The landscape varies from dry wooded savannas to grasslands to the high plateaus of the Great Rift Valley.

At one time the major groups of East Africa were the Nilotics, Bantu, Cushites, and Pygmoids.

### Migrations and Early Inhabitants

A Pygmoid group called the Twa were the first known inhabitants of east central Africa. The Twa were forest-dwelling hunters and gatherers.

About 15,000 years ago, Khoisan-speaking groups inhabited East Africa. It was not until 1000 B.C. that the first migrations of Cushite-speaking people began. The Cushites came from Ethiopia and merged with the local people. Over time they developed into such groups as the Oromo and Somali.

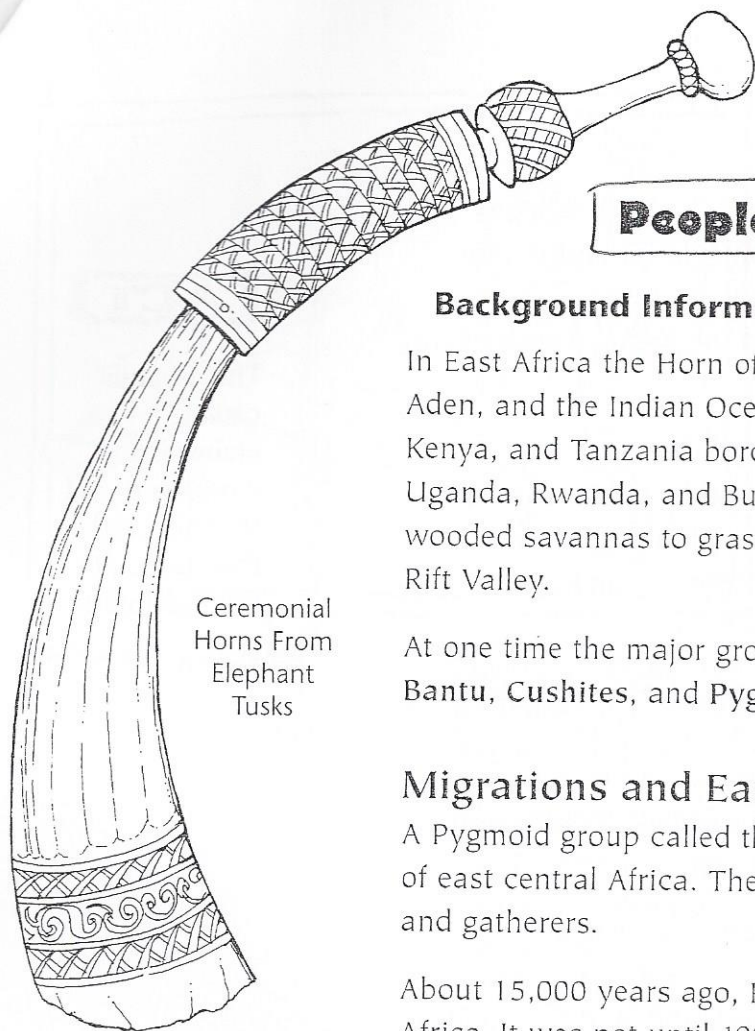
Much later, in the fifteenth century A.D., Bantu groups moved to this region from central Africa. The Bantu-speaking Hutu, Swahili, and Kenye developed fishing and farming communities.

Nilotics migrated from the north between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries A.D. They included the Suk, Tutsi, and Masai. They had a pastoral lifestyle.

### Daily Life and Trading Patterns

The Swahili were skilled sailors. They navigated boats of wooden planks lashed together with palm fiber rope. They journeyed up and down the Red Sea and traded with the Egyptians, Romans, and Phoenicians.

Beginning in the first century A.D., Arab traders traveled to East Africa in search of ivory and gold. Over time, Arabs merged with



Ceremonial  
Horns From  
Elephant  
Tusks

#### FACT

Masai girls had their earlobes cut and stretched with wads of grass as a sign of beauty. They also made decorative cuts in their faces.

the Swahili and other East African groups. The East Africans adopted Islam and integrated Arab customs, laws, and poetry into their existing societies. Swahili, made up of African and Arabic words and grammar, later became the lingua franca of this trading region.

Wealthy Swahili built huge Arab-influenced dwellings and mosques. They constructed sunken courtyards with sculptured gardens and installed indoor plumbing. The buildings were made of coral bricks. The aristocracy wore Chinese silk and cotton. They also minted silver, copper, and gold coins.

Cows were the Masai's most important possession. They ate cow meat only on special occasions. At certain times of the year, a main staple of their diet was cow milk mixed with blood drawn from a cow's jugular vein. This mixture provided vitamins and proteins not found in other parts of their diet.

The Masai lived in kraals. As cattle herders, they had a seminomadic lifestyle, traveling in search of fresh water and grazing land. They often fought to dominate the land and to steal cattle from others. The Masai gained the reputation of being fierce warriors.

## Customs and Beliefs

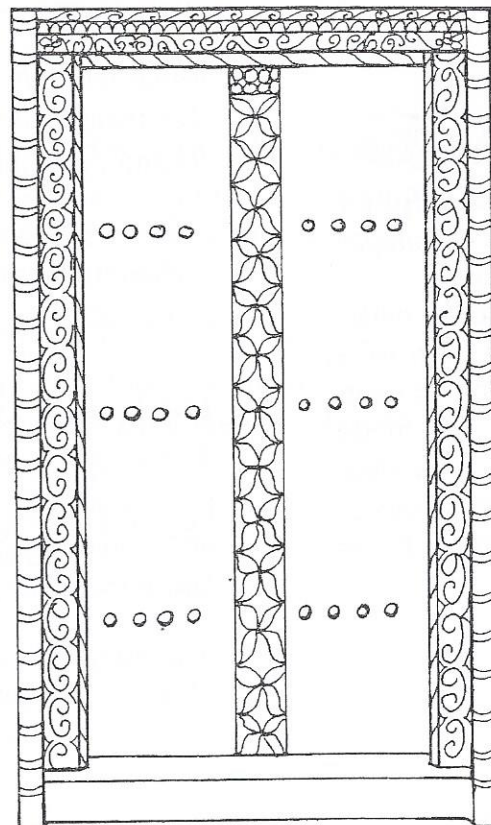
Pastoral groups of East Africa invested important symbolism in milk, blood, and grass. During council meetings, men would drink a mixture of cow milk and blood to reinforce group unity. Grass was used as a sign of peace. A man who wore a tuft of it on his head was spared death during battles or raids.

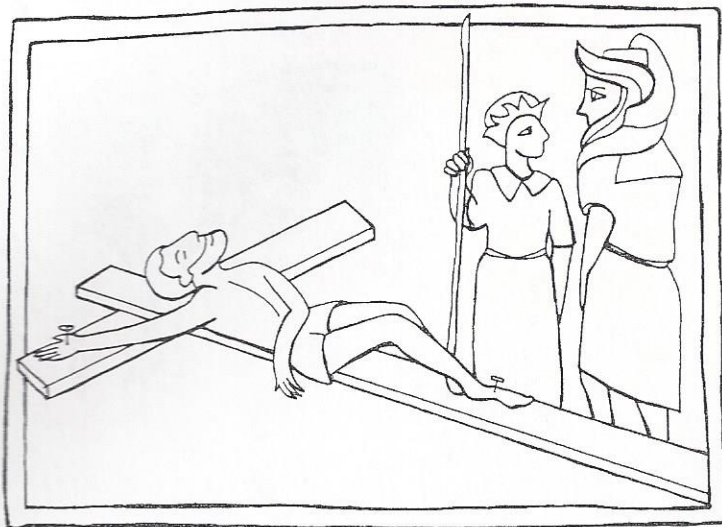
The Swahili—a mixed group from many backgrounds—converted to Islam at least as early as the seventh century A.D. They built mosques and studied the Koran. Christianity had less of an impact on the region. However, in the sixth century, Christianity spread to Ethiopia, where great Coptic cathedrals were built.

### FACT

The Swahili carved elaborate wooden doors that showed the status of the occupants.

Swahili  
Decorated  
Doors





Ethiopian  
Illustrated  
Manuscript of  
the Gospel

## The Kingdom of Axum

Around 220 B.C., the powerful kingdom of Axum emerged in Ethiopia. It was known for its beautiful architecture, government, intellectual society, wealthy citizens, and strong military power. The grandeur of Axum rivaled the Nubian and Kemet Kingdoms of the north.

The kingdom had easy access to land and sea routes. Trade with ancient

Egyptians lasted from 333 B.C. (possibly even earlier) to A.D. 50. Axumites also traded with the early Romans. Able sailors, the Axumites kept the Red Sea safe from Arab pirates.

By A.D. 100, Axum was the strongest empire in the area. It controlled trade from Africa to Asia, China, India, and Sri Lanka. Axum engulfed the Kemet and Nubian Kingdoms. It became so powerful that it was able to invade and rule the Arabian peninsula for almost 50 years. During the sixth century, Axum was a Christian kingdom. It flourished until it was absorbed into Africa's Islamic world, but Christianity and Judaism persisted in this area into modern times.

### FACT

The Ganda and Tutsi were noted for their beautiful straw mats and room screens, decorated with geometric designs.

## Arrival of Europeans

During the 1400s the Portuguese were searching for new trade routes that would take them to India and Arabia without encountering Muslim rivals. In 1498 the Portuguese reached East Africa from the south. They encountered wealthy Swahili cities whose exotic wares included Indian spices, silks, perfumes, and other luxuries.

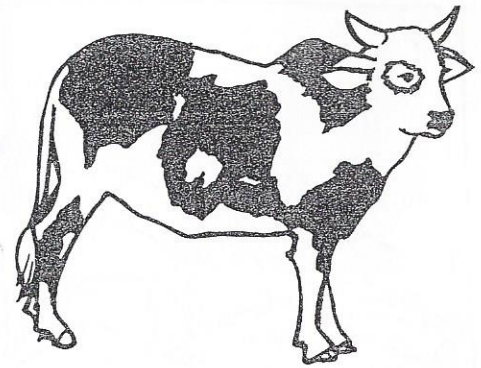
The Portuguese were determined to seize control of this region. They demanded that the Swahili pay allegiance to the king of Portugal with huge amounts of goods and wealth. Those who refused were attacked. After many battles the Portuguese dominated the area. They controlled East African trade for the next century.

Swahili  
Writing

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## LEGEND

### How the Masai Got Their Cattle



In the beginning the Dorobo people owned cattle but the Masai did not. A lesser god named Naiteru-kop came down and spoke to a Dorobo man. "Meet me in the morning, for I have something for you," he said. Of course the Dorobo agreed.

A Masai man named Le-eyo was hiding nearby and overheard their conversation. He could hardly wait for nightfall so he could sneak to the place mentioned by Naiteru-kop. In the long, dark hours, Le-eyo waited while the Dorobo man slept comfortably in his hut.

At dawn the lesser god saw the Masai but was confused. "Who are you and where is the Dorobo?" he asked. "My name is Le-eyo," the Masai man said. "I don't know where the Dorobo is, but I am here for you instead."

Naiteru-kop shrugged. He took a leather thong and lowered his cattle from the sky, one by one. Soon there were so many cattle that Le-eyo pleaded for Naiteru-kop to stop.

Some of the cattle wandered off. And the Dorobo man, who had finally awakened, raced to catch them. He knew that these cattle were rightfully his. He grew furious when he realized that Naiteru-kop had given his people's cattle to the Masai.

The Dorobo and his people grabbed their bows and arrows and shot at the leather thong that still hung in the sky. This action infuriated Naiteru-kop so much that he moved to a distant land and never again gave the Dorobo cattle. After this the Masai owned all the cattle, and the Dorobo were left to hunt wild animals with bows and arrows.