**Ch. 19 – States and Societies of Sub-Saharan Africa**

**Introduction.** Agriculture and herding spread gradually throughout the sub-Saharan Africa from about 2000 BCE until the end of the first millennium CE through a process known as the Bantu migrations. After about 500 BCE the knowledge of iron metallurgy was also disseminating throughout Africa. As a result of these movements, of the introduction of new nutritious foods such as bananas, and of long-distance trade, the population of Africa grew dramatically, and increasingly complex forms of government began to emerge. Most sub-Saharan African cultures were kin-based and organized into relatively small villages that were loosely allied into districts governed by a chief. Occasionally larger and more structured kingdoms and empires appeared. These larger states generally consolidated their position through controlling long-distance trade in their regions. In general, the history of sub-Saharan Africa from 1000 to 1500 CE is noted for:

- The introduction and widespread dissemination of the Islamic religion. In many cases the belief in Islam supplemented rather than supplanted traditional religious practices. Some sub-Saharan societies became important centres of worship and learning in the Islamic world.
- A regular and reliable flow of trade goods: gold, ivory, and slaves being the most important exports. These trade networks were both overland – particularly notable was the trans-Saharan camel caravan routes – and maritime, where east African city-states became important stops on the Indian Ocean seaways.

The emergence and growth of states that became highly influential in the cross-cultural interactions of this period. The states of Kongo, Zimbabwe, Ghana, Mali, and the Swahili city-states became trade and religious centres whose fortunes were clearly tied into those of Eurasia

Sundiata, Mansa Musa, Ibn Battuta, Kin-based society
Chiefdom, Mali Empire, Kingdom of Ghana, Swahili, Kilwa, Zimbabwe, Age Grades, Diviners, Axum

I. **Effects of early African migrations**

A. Agriculture and population growth
   1. Bantu and other migrations from 2000 B.C.E.--1000 C.E.
      a. Spread agriculture and herding throughout Africa
      b. Displaced and/or absorbed hunting/gathering/fishing people
      c. Iron metallurgy after 500 B.C.E. facilitated clearing more land
      d. Yams, sorghum, and millet cultivated
      e. Introduction of bananas after 500 C.E. caused migration and population surge
   2. Population growth: from 3.5 million in 400 B.C.E. to 22 million by 1000 C.E.

B. African political organization
   1. Kin-based society the norm (sometimes called "stateless society")
      a. Early societies did not depend on elaborate bureaucracy
      b. Societies governed through family and kinship groups
      c. Village council consisted of male family heads
      d. Chief of a village was from the most prominent family head
      e. A group of villages constituted a district
      f. Villages chiefs negotiated intervillage affairs
   2. Chiefdoms
      a. Population growth strained resources and increased conflict
      b. Some African communities began to organize military forces, 1000 C.E.
      c. Powerful chiefs overrode kinship networks and imposed authority and conquered
      d. Examples: Ife and Benin
   3. Kingdom of Kongo
      a. Villages formed small states along the Congo River, 1000 C.E.
      b. Small states formed several larger principalities, 1200 C.E.
      c. One of the principalities overcame its neighbors and built kingdom of Kongo
d. Maintained a centralized government with a royal currency system
e. Provided effective organization until the mid-seventeenth century

II. Islamic kingdoms and empires
A. Trans-Saharan trade and Islamic states in west Africa
1. After 300 C.E. camels replaced horses and donkeys as transport animals
   a. Camels' arrival quickened pace of communication across the Sahara
   b. Islamic merchants crossed desert and established relations
2. The kingdom of Ghana became the most important commercial site in west Africa
   a. Provided gold (most important), ivory, and slaves for traders from north Africa
   b. Exchanged for horses, cloth, manufactured goods, and salt
   c. Koumbi-Saleh, capital city of Ghana, a thriving commercial center
   d. Ghana kings converted to Islam by the tenth century, didn't force on others
   e. Nomadic raids from the Sahara weakened the kingdom in the early thirteenth century
3. Sundiata, or lion prince, built Mali empire (reigned 1230-1255 C.E.)
4. Mali empire and trade
   a. Controlled and taxed almost all trade passing through west Africa
   b. Enormous caravans linked Mali to north Africa
   c. Besides the capital Niani, many other prosperous cities on caravan routes
5. Mansa Musa, Sundiata's grandnephew (reigned 1312-1337 C.E.)
   a. Made his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324-1325 with huge caravan
   b. Upon return to Mali, built mosques
   c. Sent students to study with distinguished Islamic scholars in northern Africa
   d. Established Islamic schools in Mali
6. Decline of Mali due to factions and military pressure from neighbors and nomads
7. The Songhay empire replaced Mali by the late fifteenth century
B. The Indian Ocean trade and Islamic states in east Africa
1. Swahili is an Arabic term meaning "coasters"
   a. Dominated east African coast from Mogadishu to Sofala
   b. Spoke Swahili, a Bantu language, supplemented with some Arabic words
   c. Trade with Muslim merchants became important by the tenth century
2. The Swahili city-states
   a. Chiefs gained power through taxing trade on ports
   b. Ports developed into city-states governed by kings, eleventh and twelfth centuries
3. Kilwa: good example of busy city-state on east coast; exported gold
4. Zimbabwe was powerful kingdom of east Africa
   a. By the ninth century, chiefs began to build stone residences (Zimbabwe)
   b. Magnificent stone complex known as Great Zimbabwe in the twelfth century
   c. Eighteen thousand people lived in Great Zimbabwe in the late fifteenth century
   d. Kings organized flow of gold, ivory, and slaves
5. Islam in east Africa
   a. Ruling elite and wealthy merchants converted to Islamic faith
   b. Conversion promoted close cooperation with Muslim merchants
   c. Conversion also opened door to political alliances with Muslim rulers

III. African society and cultural development
A. Social classes
   1. Diversity of African societies: villages, kingdoms, empires, city-states
2. Kinship groups: extended families and clans as social and economic organizations
   a. Communities claimed rights to land; no private property
   b. Village council allocated land to clan members
3. Sex and gender relations
   a. Men undertook heavy labor
   b. Women were responsible for child rearing, domestic chores
   c. Men monopolized public authority, but women enjoyed high honor as the source of life
   d. Aristocratic women could influence public affairs
   e. Women merchants commonly traded at markets
   f. Sometimes women organized all-female military units
   g. Islam did little to curtail women’s opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa
4. Age grades
   a. Assumed responsibilities and tasks appropriate to their age grades
   b. Age group formed tight circle of friends, later allies
5. Slavery
   a. Most slaves were captives of war, debtors, criminals
   b. Worked as agricultural labor or sold in slave markets
   c. Slave trade increased after the eleventh century
   d. Demand for slaves outstripped supply from eastern Europe
   e. Slave raids of large states against small states or villages
   f. Zanj slave revolt in Mesopotamia in tenth century

B. African religion
   1. Creator god as source of world order
   2. Lesser gods and spirits
      a. Often associated with natural features
      b. Intervened in the workings of the world
      c. Believed in ancestors’ souls; had many rituals
   3. Diviners mediated between humanity and supernatural beings
      a. Interpreted the cause of the people’s misfortune
      b. Used medicine or rituals to eliminate problems
      c. African religion was not theological but practical

C. The arrival of Christianity and Islam
   1. Early Christianity in north Africa
      a. Christianity reached north Africa during the first century C.E.
      b. Christian kingdom of Axum in Ethiopia (fourth century C.E.)
   2. Ethiopian Christianity
      a. Missionaries translated Bible and popularized Christianity there
      b. Carved churches out of solid rock
      c. Solomonic dynasty claimed descent from Israeliite kings (thirteenth century)
      d. Kebrâ Negast fictionalized account of lineage; was popular with Rastafarians
   3. African Islam
      a. Appealed strongly to ruling elite and merchants of sub-Saharan Africa
      b. Converts took their religion seriously; they built mosques and schools, invited experts
      c. Accommodated African gender relations; women retained more freedoms
      d. Supplemented rather than replaced traditional religions