



Big Era Four
Expanding Networks of Exchange and Encounter
1200 BCE - 500 CE



Landscape Teaching Unit 4.3
Migration and Change in Africa South of the Sahara
1000 BCE-200 CE

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Why this unit?

Africa is often presented to students as a place outside of history. Nothing could be further from the truth. Nonetheless, the myth of an Africa “without history” still carries much weight. In this Landscape Teaching Unit, students will find evidence to counter the myth. Africa, it turns out, contributed much more to the human race than simply its existence. Big Era Four saw a good deal of innovation in, among other things, ironworking technology and agriculture. Also, the era marked the linkage of East Africa to Indian Ocean trade networks.

Unit objectives

Upon completing this unit, students will be able to:

1. Use textual, archaeological, and linguistic evidence to draw conclusions about history.
2. Chart patterns of diffusion of ironworking technology in Africa.
3. Weigh the validity of historical arguments using evidence.
4. Examine the broad contours of the spread of agriculture in Africa south of the Sahara in the last millennium BCE and the first millennium CE.
5. Weigh the costs and benefits of a society’s transition to agriculture.
6. Document the role of African cities in long-distance trade networks.
7. Explore the relationship between economic diversity and social stability.

Time and materials

4-8 class periods of 50 minutes, depending on balance between homework and class work.

Required materials are photocopies, writing materials, and overhead projector. The unit contains enough background material for students to complete the lessons. That said, there is nothing wrong with preparing students for the unit activities at hand by giving them supplemental historical materials to read. Teachers should be aware, however, that student textbooks might in some respects contradict the material included in this unit. Also, textbooks may draw different conclusions from those of the unit author. This unit is based on relatively recent scholarship, some of which may not have filtered down to middle or high school textbooks. Teachers should not, on the other hand, shy away from contradictory evidence and interpretation. Such differences between scholars and the reasons for these differences can make for great class discussion.

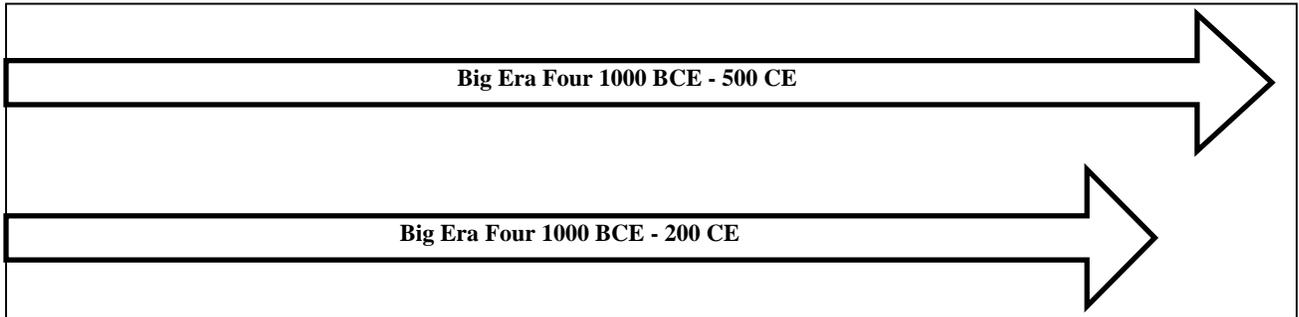
Author

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The historical context

The years between 1000 BCE and 200 CE were marked by great technological innovation and demographic change in Africa south of the Sahara. Ironworking techniques were developed and later diffused from Central Africa. This innovation occurred independently of the famous, earlier development of ironworking in Anatolia (Turkey). New farming techniques, developed in earlier eras, spread with human migrations into territories previously inhabited only by hunter-gatherers. Agriculture in this era, however, added new crops and livestock. Some of these items, for example the chicken, were introduced to Africa by Indonesian migrants and traders.

This unit in the Big Era Timeline



Lesson 1

Peoples Without History?

Lesson 1 does not examine historical narrative, nor does it present a broad factual overview of a subject. Rather, it tackles historical bias and interpretation. Without doubt, many students will bring preconceived ideas about African history to this study, in particular an impression, borne of the eras of the Atlantic slave trade and colonization, that African societies south of the Sahara were made up of “primitive” people, outside of historical development—a land, as it were, that time forgot.

This view is not supported by evidence. On the contrary, we may discover the historical development of people who may not have left a written record. Lesson 1 presents three types of evidence historians use to piece together a picture of the historical development of non-literate peoples. This initial lesson shows students that, yes, there really is a solid evidentiary basis for the lessons that follow. But that evidence is of a different nature than that one might use for studying, say, Han China or Renaissance Europe.

Preparation

1. Prepare photocopies and an overhead of Student Handouts 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3.
2. Check vocabulary on Student Handouts. You may want to prepare a vocabulary review for your students.
3. Give students the handouts. Depending on how much time you wish to spend on this lesson, you might have each student complete all three handouts or you may group students in threes, having each individual complete one of the three handouts.

Introduction

1. Clarify to students that Lesson 1 is not about learning a story about history or a series of places and name, but is rather about how we know what we know about the past—about evidence and its uses. This may be a new type of exercise for the students, so do not hesitate to respond to their questions.
2. Discuss in general terms with students what they know about Africa or, more specifically, African history. Lesson 1 is designed, among other things, to counter the notion that the bulk of Africa, particular Africa south of the Sahara, is a place untouched by historical development until fairly recently. More than likely, many of your students have learned this notion, and if they can become conscious of such assumptions before embarking on Lesson 1, the issues at hand will have greater meaning.

Activities

1. If students are to complete Student Handouts in groups, divide the class.
2. Introduce the general problem of the division, still commonly made by many people, between “historical” peoples and those “without history.” This can be done either by reading the Introduction in Student Handout 1.1 or through class discussion.
3. Clarify the three types of evidence students will examine and how historians can use these types to find out about human societies that lacked their own written historical records. This can be done by reading from the handout or by discussion.
4. Point out the different parts of the Student Hands—the evidence, the description, the background, the statements, and the questions. The questions are the same on each handout, but the other sections differ.
5. Have students complete handouts as assigned, either in groups or individually.
6. When students have completed handouts, check responses as a class. A brief explanation of the issues involved in each handout follows:

Student Handout 1.2

Question 1: Statement C best fits the evidence. We have a document written as a guide for Greek-speaking traders in the Indian Ocean, and it describes Rhapta. Very simply, Rhapta is in Africa. Rhapta participated in Indian Ocean trade. Therefore, Africans participated in Indian Ocean trade. The evidence at hand really doesn’t say anything more than that.

Question 2: The *Periplus* states that Rhapta was subject to an Arabian state, *not* that it was founded by Arabs. This rules out Statement A. Statement B erroneously assumes that because this Greek-speaking writer did not record any cities south of Rhapta, such cities did not exist. We might be able to say that the evidence supports the notion that Rhapta was the southernmost city in Africa to participate in Indian Ocean trade. But that is a very different statement than what we have in Statement B. This theme will be explored further in Lesson 3.

Student Handout 1.3

Question 1: Statement B best fits the evidence. We have an iron-smelting furnace from central Africa dating, very roughly, to as early as the tenth century BCE. All that tells us—taken by itself—is that African people knew how to work iron at that point. Statement B is not necessarily profound, but based on the evidence at hand, it is valid.

Question 2: Statements A and C stretch the evidence in two directions. We cannot tell anything about how people in Africa acquired iron technology by this piece of evidence alone. If Statement A were to be true and African people learned iron-working from

Anatolians, we would have to have some *other* evidence that forms a link with this. If Statement C were correct, indicating an independent invention of iron-working, we would need other evidence to distinguish this invention of iron-working from that in Anatolia in roughly 1500 BCE. Both statements require more evidence than provided here. This theme will be explored further in Lesson 2.

Student Handout 1.4

Question 1: Statement A best fits the evidence. Coming to this conclusion might, however, be very difficult for students, as it is likely that the type of reasoning involved in using linguistic evidence in history is quite new to them. Be prepared to work through it slowly. The critical words in Statement A are “techniques originally associated with. . . .” Just because people in the south-western savannah zones of Africa use a Bantu loanword for sorghum does not mean they learned how to cultivate sorghum from Bantu-speakers. They could have easily learned it from other people, who, in turn, learned it from Bantu-speakers. The clear implication, though, is that if one wants to chart over the long-term the spread of sorghum cultivation through southern Africa, one would find its origins in the same place that one finds the proto-Bantu homeland.

Question 2: Statements B and C erroneously conclude that the presence of loanwords in a vocabulary prove a historical contact between two particular groups of people. That is to say, if a Kusi word relating to herding appears in another group’s vocabulary, the second group must have learned herding from Kusi speakers at some distant point in history. The evidence here at hand is not sufficient to draw that conclusion. We cannot say exactly who taught whom what, let alone when. Statement C has a further problem in that it reverses the transmission of farming and herding techniques as one finds them in this evidence. The agricultural vocabulary in the southwestern savannah regions is of Bantu, not Kusi origin, and the reverse of it is true for the herding vocabulary.

Lesson 1

Student Handout 1.1—Drawing Conclusions from Evidence

Introduction

For decades, if not centuries, academic historians often distinguished between “historical peoples” and “peoples without history.” “Historical peoples,” so went the argument, left a record by which later peoples—specifically, historians—could trace their societies’ development over time. This record consisted of written evidence of various sorts.

Societies which did not use writing, it was assumed, lived an existence more or less the same as in prehistoric times. Over millennia, little or nothing in their way of life changed. By examining such societies, one could gain a glimpse into a human past the “historical peoples” had long since left behind. But this kind of study, it was and often continues to be said, is not the stuff of history. It may be anthropology but not history.

There is a problem—a big problem—with this division of human societies into “historical peoples” and those “without history.” When one takes into account more than just written evidence, the picture we get of non-literate societies is not at all static. Indeed, it’s quite clear that change is the norm in human societies generally. The first used writing and the second did not, but all human societies are historical.

Most societies in Africa south of the Sahara, in the years between 1000 BCE and 200 CE were not literate. The years in question, however, saw momentous change in the nature of those societies. The work we will do to discover this change is based primarily on three types of evidence: textual, archaeological, and linguistic.

Textual Evidence: Textual evidence can come in many forms—carved in stone, written on papyrus, or, more recently, on a computer screen. But in all cases, it consists of written language. Written evidence can be very powerful, particularly when it gives specific information, like names, places, and dates, which historians use to write about the past. However, when we use written evidence to find out about non-literate societies, we always need to remember that the text is written from an outsider’s perspective. That does not mean it is necessarily wrong, but we need to examine it for bias.

Archaeological Evidence: Archaeological evidence is material that has been found or literally discovered—dug out of the ground—by researchers. Archaeology can give us an understanding of things people, notably non-literate people, possessed. By using carbon-dating techniques on organic material found alongside inorganic matter, we can have a fairly clear idea when these people had possessed that material. Of course, there are limits to what this can tell us: imagine if someone 500 years in the future found a box containing all the *things* you own but nothing you had written. That person could understand a lot about you, but surely not everything you might like to be known.

Linguistic Evidence: In recent decades, historians have used language in interesting ways to discover things about the past that the textual and archaeological record do not tell us. The basic assumption behind the use of linguistic evidence is that if one group of people uses a word from someone else's language for something, it means that they *probably* learned about that thing from the group from which they borrowed the word. If a number of related words in one language, for example words about agriculture, are taken from a second language, it makes it all the more certain that the first group learned not only the words for agriculture from the first, but the techniques of it as well. Depending on how widely particular root-words are distributed, historians can gain a sense of from where particular ideas spread and, to some extent, how quickly.

Task

1. You will be presented with a Student Handout that contains one piece of evidence—textual, archaeological, or linguistic.
2. Examine the evidence and read the description and background to help understand the evidence.
3. You will see three statements, each of which draws some conclusion from the evidence. You will determine which of the three statements best fits the evidence, why this is so, and why the evidence does not support the other two statements. Respond to the questions on the handout, drawing on your understanding of these matters.

Lesson 1

Student Handout 1.2—Textual Evidence

“Two days' sail beyond, there lies the very last market-town of the continent of Azania, which is called Rhapta. . . . The Mapharitic chief governs it under some ancient right that subjects it to the sovereignty of the state that is become first in Arabia. . . . And these markets of Azania are the very last of the continent that stretches down on the right hand from Berenice; for beyond these places the unexplored ocean curves around toward the west, and running along by the regions to the south of Aethiopia [Ethiopia] and Libya and Africa, it mingles with the western sea.”

Description: Taken from the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, a document written originally in Greek in the first century CE. It describes trade routes and market towns around the Indian Ocean, documenting the participation of Africans in Indian Ocean trade networks of the ancient world.

Background: One of the fundamental developments of the years between 1000 BCE and 200 CE in Africa is what some historians have called the Commercial Revolution—increased volume of trade over greater distances, linkages to trade networks via land and sea, and the increasing importance of merchant classes in the societies that took part in the trade.

Source: W.H. Schoff, trans. and ed., *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea: Travel and Trade in the Indian Ocean by a Merchant of the First Century* (London: Bombay and Calcutta, 1912). From <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/periplus.html>.

Statements

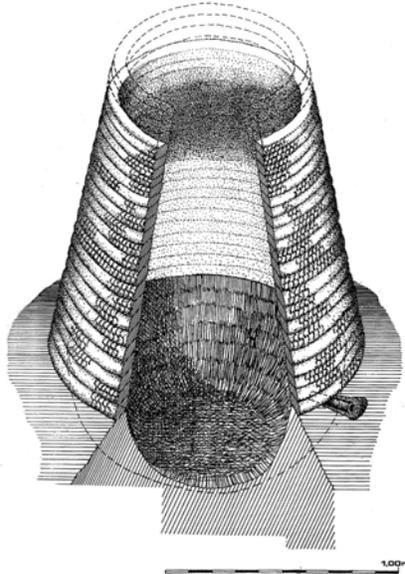
- A. “Rhapta was founded by Arabs.”
- B. “In the first century CE, there were no cities in Africa south of Rhapta.”
- C. “Africans participated in Indian Ocean trade networks through ports such as Rhapta.”

1. Which of the three above statements is best supported by the textual evidence, and why?

2. What is wrong with the other two statements?

Lesson 1

Student Handout 1.3—Archaeological Evidence



Description: Reconstruction of a tenth-to fifth-century BCE iron-smelting furnace from modern-day Rwanda, by the archaeologist Marie-Claude Van Grunderbeek, based on her own excavation.

Background: The knowledge of how to work iron is one of the major technological dividing lines historians use in characterizing the development of human societies. Iron tools allow for much more intensive agriculture than stone tools, which in turn allows for the development of denser populations. The earliest evidence for iron-smelting technology comes from Anatolia, the part of Asia that is now Turkey.

Source: Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2002), 160.

Statements

- A. “African people learned how to make iron as early as 1000 BCE from people who lived in Anatolia.”
- B. “By as early as 1000 BCE, people in Africa knew how to make iron.”
- C. “People in Africa invented iron technology by 1000 BCE.”

1. Which of the three above statements is best supported by the archaeological evidence, and why?

2. What is wrong with the other two statements?

Lesson 1

Student Handout 1.4—Linguistic Evidence

Agricultural/herding vocabulary in proto-Bantu, that is, the language of the earliest Bantu-speaking, who lived in what is today Cameroon (first millennium BCE).

*-pú “sorghum”
*-bágá “livestock pen”

Agricultural/herding vocabulary in Kusi (first millennium BCE)

*-pila “sorghum”
*-tàngá “herd; cattle pen”

Words reflecting westward agricultural spreads in southerly savanna zones (first millennium CE)

*-pú “sorghum”
*-tàngá “cattle pen”

Source: Christopher Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. to A.D. 400* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998), 49, 51, 212, 272.

Statements

- A. “Peoples of the south-western savannah zones of Africa learned agricultural techniques originally associated with Bantu speakers, while they learned herding techniques originally associated with Kusi speakers.”
- B. “Peoples of the south-western savannah zones of Africa learned agricultural techniques from the proto-Bantu people, while they learned herding techniques from the Kusi.”
- C. “Peoples of the south-western savannah zones of Africa learned herding techniques from the proto-Bantu people, while they learned agricultural techniques from the Kusi.”

Description: These are words related to grain cultivation and animal husbandry. Proto-Bantu and Kusi should be thought of as languages rather than particular peoples for historical-linguistic analysis. Sorghum is a type of grain widely cultivated in Africa.

Background: The spread of agriculture throughout Africa south of the Sahara in the first millennium BCE and the first millennium CE has often been portrayed as the work of Bantu-speaking peoples. However, historians have in recent decades used a variety of evidence to add complexity to the story. While Bantu-speakers played a large role in the spread of farming and herding techniques, it is clear that other groups contributed significantly to this process.

1. Which of the three above statements is best supported by the linguistic evidence above and why is this so?

2. What is wrong with the other two statements?

Lesson 2

Ironworking: Innovation and Diffusion in Africa

Lesson 2 builds on the basic exercise found in Lesson 1—assessing the validity of a quote—but does so in a more comprehensive way. The matter at hand is the spread of iron-working techniques throughout Africa south of the Sahara in our period. Students examine the chronological and geological contours of the spread, as well as confront the question of whether or not there was an indigenous African invention of iron-working technology.

Preparation

1. Prepare photocopies and an overhead of Student Handout 2.1 and photocopies of Student Handout 2.2.
2. Give students Student Handout 2.1.

Introduction

1. Introduce the concepts of innovation and diffusion. Students may, because of prior lessons, be aware of the meaning of these terms. Adjust your discussion of them accordingly. It might be best to simply read, with the students, the introductory portion or more of Student Handout 2.1.
2. Clarify the task on Student Handout 2.1, either by reading instructions or by briefly going over the basic task.
3. Place map from Student Handout 2.1 on the overhead. Go over the example (the arrow between the 1500 BCE date and the 1200 BCE date) with students, explaining why it is drawn where it is.

Activities

1. Students complete the task on Student Handout 2.1. Depending on students' need or your preference, students may work alone or in pairs.
2. When students have completed Student Handout 2.1, go over the work as a class. Make it clear from the start that not all students' maps will look exactly the same, but that there will be a common, general pattern to the maps, with arrows pointing from older sites to newer. Begin by finding the oldest sites, and then filling in arrows following students' work. Correct as necessary.
3. When Student Handout 2.1 has been checked, give students Student Handout 2.2.

4. Allow students some time (depending on your group, this could take as little as five minutes) to complete Student Handout 2.2.

5. Go over students' assessments of the quote with class as a whole. Students can respond in many ways, but they should not respond that the quote is entirely correct. The critical detail here is the "before 1000 BCE" date in the Western Great Lakes region of Central Africa. Given the 1500 BCE date in Anatolia and the before 1000 BCE date in Central Africa, we see that there are in fact two separate innovations of ironworking technology from which the new technology diffuses. The quote, at least, needs modification.

Lesson 2

Student Handout 2.1—Ironworking Map

Introduction

In history, people have acquired new technologies by two different ways. When people respond to a problem by inventing a solution, the process is known as *innovation*. When people have learned about a new technology from other people's example, the process is known as *diffusion*.

We can see these processes at work with the development of ironworking technology between 1500 BCE and 100 BCE. Where archaeologists have found the oldest evidence of ironworking, we can assume that this evidence is an example of *innovation*. If, some distance from that earliest site, more recent evidence of ironworking is unearthed, we can assume that people there followed the earlier example.

Most often, but not always, technological innovations spread through diffusion from one center—the place the technology was invented—to a wider area. At times, however, different people might come up with the same innovation in two or more areas, depending on the circumstances.

Task

1. Chart the spread of ironworking technology in Africa using the map below. There are several dates on the map. Each date indicates that archaeologists have been able to establish the presence of ironworking technology in that particular area by the date indicated. You will draw arrows indicating the direction ironworking spread through diffusion.

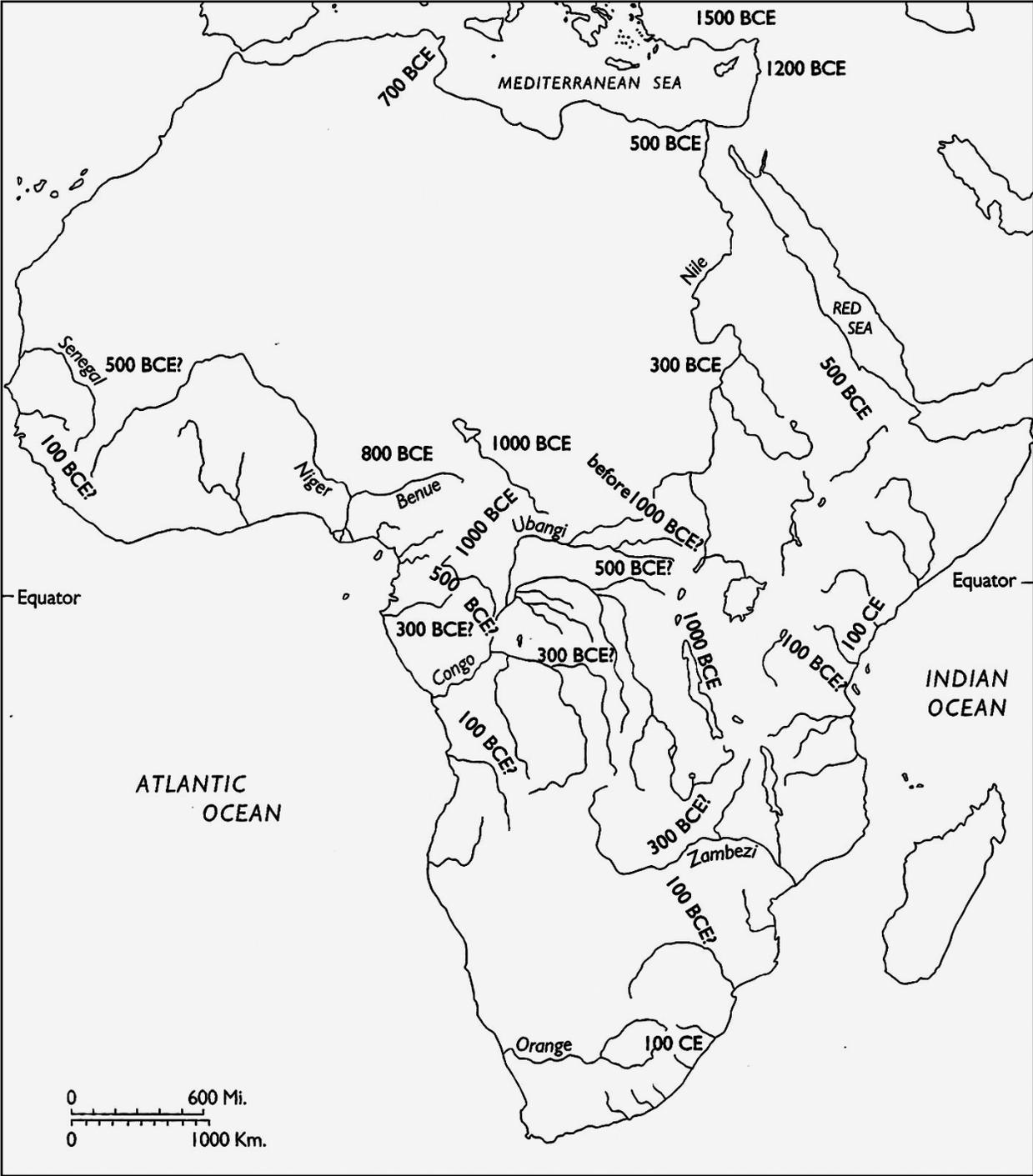
2. Take a look at the upper-right hand corner of the map. You will see the date for the earliest evidence of ironworking technology, 1500 BCE, in Anatolia (what is today Turkey). Not far from that site, there is the date 1200 BCE. You will note that there is an arrow pointing from the 1500 BCE site toward the 1200 BCE site. We can assume that the older site marks the first invention of ironworking technology, and that by 1200 BCE the technology had spread through diffusion to the second site, hence the arrow.

Process

1. Examine the dates on the map of Africa below. Each date indicates, roughly, the year of the first appearance of iron technology in a particular area.

2. Beginning at the earliest dates, use a pencil to draw arrows toward later dates. Remember that technology can spread not only by land, but by water, and that some geographical features may hinder the spread of technology rather than help it.

3. Continue charting the spread of ironworking technology until all dates are accounted for.



Source: Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2002), 163.

Lesson 2***Student Handout 2.2—Assess the Quote***

“Ironworking technology first developed in Anatolia (Turkey) and then spread to other parts of the world through a process of diffusion.”

Task

1. Read the quote in the box above.
2. Based on your knowledge of the spread of ironworking technology gained in Student Handout 2.1, check whether or not the quote is accurate.
3. In the space below, explain briefly why or why not you find the quote accurate. Give the reasons based on your work in Student Handout 2.1.

Lesson 3

Agriculture: Telling the Story of Settling Down

Lesson 3 examines the spread of agriculture throughout central and southern Africa in Big Era Four. Drawing from textual material and maps, students examine the meaning of the transition from hunting and gathering to farming and herding. They do so by creating a story of this transition in the identity of an African person whose society made this transition in his or her lifetime. A series of questions to be answered as part of the story guides students to incorporate concrete evidence.

Preparation

1. If desired, have students read selections from a textbook concerning the spread of agriculture in Africa south of the Sahara between 1000 BCE and 200 CE.
2. Photocopy Student Handout 3.1 and distribute.

Introduction

1. Tell students that the class will examine not just how agriculture spread in Africa south of the Sahara between 1000 BCE and 200 CE but also how the change affected peoples' lives.
2. Sketch broad factual contours of the spread of agriculture in Africa south of the Sahara between 1000 BCE and 200 CE by having students read the text box on Student Handout 3.1.
3. Briefly brainstorm with students some differences they might imagine between a hunter-gatherer lifestyle and that of a farmer. If students do not offer suggestions on which they would prefer, try to elicit their thoughts on the benefits and costs of each.

Activities

1. Go over with students the Background section on Student Handout 3.1. Make sure they understand their role as storyteller, that is, a person who had, himself or herself, made the transition from a hunter-gatherer lifestyle to that of a farmer or cattle herder.
2. Go over the Task section on Student Handout 3.1. Answer any questions raised.
3. Ask students to write out their stories of how they moved from hunting-gathering to farming-herding.

Lesson 3

Student Handout 3.1—Telling the Story of Settling Down

Between 1000 BCE and 200 CE, various agricultural peoples, mainly but not exclusively Bantu-speaking peoples, expanded their societies in Africa south of the Sahara. In the process, areas occupied by hunter-gatherer peoples shrank in size.

The farmers drew on three different agricultural traditions

- The West African planting tradition, which relied heavily on yam cultivation
- The Sudanic agri-pastoral tradition, which combined the cultivation of grains like sorghum and pearl millet with the raising of goats, sheep, and cows
- The Cushitic agri-pastoral tradition from Eritrea, which used teff (*t'ef*) and finger millet grain cultivation in addition to animal husbandry.

Other agricultural influences came from outside Africa. In the last few centuries BCE, Indonesian traders and migrants brought crops like Asian yams, taro, bananas, and sugarcane, as well as chickens, to the East African coast.

While agriculture spread throughout central and southern Africa, hunter-gatherer peoples often remained remarkably persistent in maintaining their ways. Most notable here were the BaTwa people of the equatorial rainforest, who formed close trade relationships with farmers, adopting, over time, Bantu, Ubangian, or Central Sudanic languages, depending on who their neighbors were.

Background

When you were young, thirty years ago, you were a hunter-gatherer in Africa, south of the Sahara. Your parents were hunter-gatherers. So were your grandparents, and theirs before them as long as anyone could remember. You could say that hunting and gathering was your family business. Honestly, you didn't even know you had other options.

Until you became a young adult. Then, a new group of people showed up in your area. You met these people while hunting. These new neighbors spoke a different language from yours but that was hardly the difference that impressed you. You hunted, you gathered. They stayed put and farmed. You found it kind of funny at first, this farming thing. But within a few years, your people began to imitate their techniques.

Many years have passed since then. The young ones among your people have never known anything but the settled life. Though your people still hunt occasionally, you fear that their skills are not what they once were. You accept that things have changed, but you don't want your

people to forget their past... so you make sure to tell the young ones the story of how your people decided to become farmers.

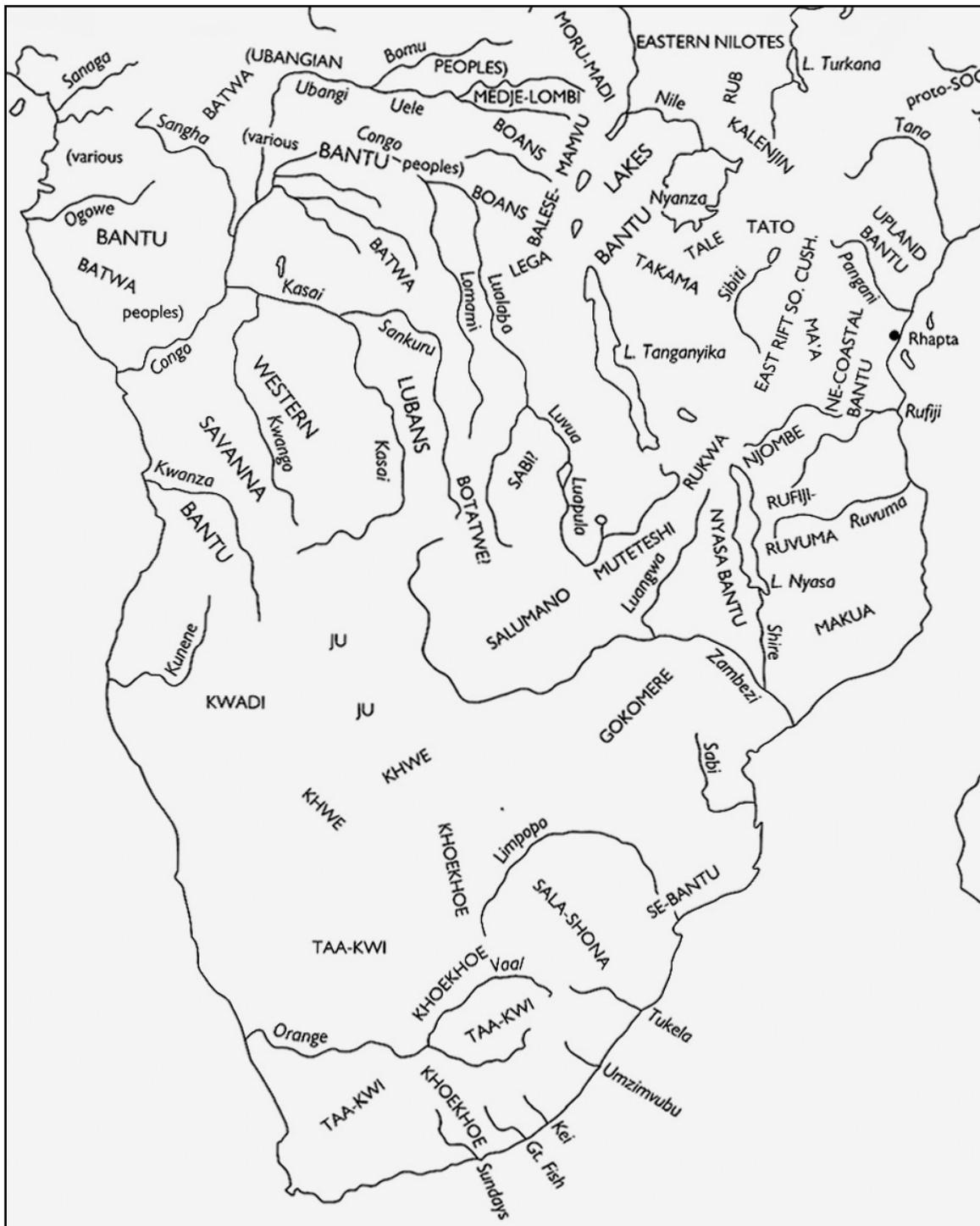
Task

Tell the story of how your people came to be farmers, so the young people and future generations will know their history. Make your story interesting. Don't hesitate to be creative. But as you are being creative, use Student Handouts 3.2 and 3.3 to find out concrete details about your community, the people from whom you learned about farming and herding, and the crops and animals that now provide you with most of your sustenance. Don't forget to answer the following questions in your story.

1. Of what language group are you a part? Use Student Handout 3.2 as your source.
2. Where in sub-Saharan Africa are you from?
3. How did you learn about agriculture?
4. From which language group did you learn agriculture? Use Student Handout 3.2 as your source.
5. What was the main crop that you learned to grow? Use Student Handout 3.3 as your source.
6. Did you raise livestock? If so, what animals? Use Student Handout 3.3 as your source.
7. Do you still hunt or gather to supplement your agricultural production?
8. Did anyone in your group of hunter-gatherers oppose becoming farmers? What were their reasons?
9. Why did your group of hunter-gatherers ultimately decided to become farmers?
10. Have other, neighboring language groups learned about farming or herding from your community? Who are they? Use Student Handout 3.2 as your source.
11. What did they learn from you? Use Student Handout 3.3 as your source.
12. What do you miss about the time when you were a hunter-gatherer?
13. What is better in your life now that you are a farmer?

Lesson 3

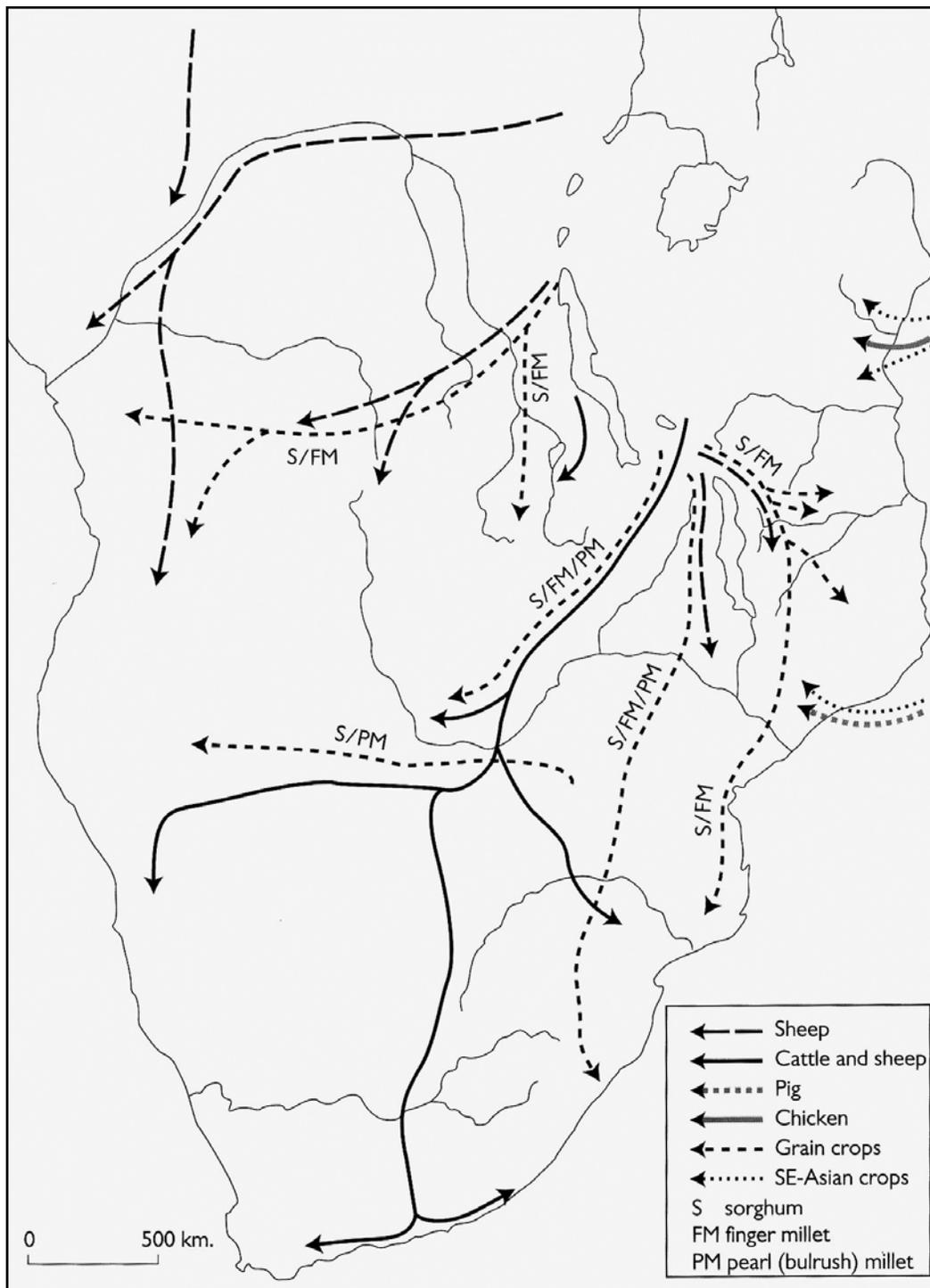
Student Handout 3.2—Language Groups in Southern Africa



Source: Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2002), 204.

Lesson 3

Student Handout 3.3—Spread of Crops and Herd Animals in Southern Africa



Source: Christopher Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. to A.D. 400* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2002), 198.

Lesson 4

The Commercial Revolution in Africa

Lesson 4 examines two cases of urban and commercial development in Africa south of the Sahara in Big Era Four. Jenne and Rhapsa, the two cities to be investigated, both provide evidence of an Africa that was commercially active and connected to long-distance trade networks. The two cities, however, played different roles in that trade. Students examine these differences to draw broader conclusions about the relationship between trade, production, and the long-term viability of cities.

Preparation

1. Prepare photocopies and an overhead of Student Handout 4.1.
2. Check vocabulary on Student Handout 4.1. Students may need clarification on some words, for example, “commercial” or “condiment.” They may need some map work to clarify the locations of Mali and Tanzania but, strictly speaking, exact knowledge of the geography is not necessary to respond well to the questions on Student Handout 4.1.
3. Give students Student Handout 4.1.

Introduction

1. Clarify concepts and factual background of the Commercial Revolution in Africa. This may be best done by simply reading the background provided on Student Handout 4.1, or through discussion.
2. Clarify for students the task on Student Handout 4.1. Most importantly, be sure they understand that their responses to the questions must include specific references to the data provided in Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2. Let students know that they will not be able to just look at the tables and find “the answer.” They have enough information to respond well, but each of the questions requires that they process the data on their own to formulate a response.

Activities

1. Some time may be well-spent going over the two tables on Student Handout 4.1 for students. Unanticipated vocabulary issues may arise and, depending on experience, students may have questions about how to read tables of this kind.
2. Ask students to respond to questions on Student Handout 4.1. Depending on how best your students work, they may work individually or in groups to discuss the issues at hand.
3. When students complete the questions, go over responses as a class. This is the critical portion of the lesson. As noted above, students have enough information to respond well, but be prepared

for what may seem wild interpretations of the evidence. Making intellectual leaps like this in a skillful fashion is never easy, and the effort should be commended while guidance is offered. Here are some general thoughts on each of the questions that may help your discussion:

Question 1: The key fact here is that Rhapta's exports, entering Indian Ocean trade networks, consisted only of animal products not available in other areas of the Indian Ocean. These animal product exports were used in other places to produce what we might imagine to be luxury goods. The exports from Rhapta were neither grown nor manufactured, but rather were captured. Jenne's exports from the same period consisted of both agricultural and manufactured goods. There was clearly a more diverse export economy in Jenne.

Question 2: The critical detail here is the presence of finished iron among Jenne's exports. There may have been an artisan class in Rhapta, but artisans do not seem to have played a role in the export trade. We might imagine that, given this, artisans were not numerous when compared to their counterparts in Jenne. Jenne brought in iron ore and sent out the finished product as an export.

Question 3: There is no sign in Rhapta, based on the tables, of a large manufacturing class. While surely Rhapta produced at least some of its food, it does not seem to have exported a surplus. If it did not arise as a city because of manufacturing, nor as an area that controlled a good deal of surplus agricultural production, we have to conclude that, wherever the exact location of the city was, Rhapta arose because it was well-situated to tap into the Indian Ocean trade network. Jenne, on the other hand, given its trade in manufactured and agricultural products, clearly became a city not only because it traded things, but also because it made them.

Question 4: Students' responses to this question to some extent depend on what they understand from Questions 2 and 3. Long-distance trade plummeted with the fall of the Roman empire. It follows, then, that the greater the dependence on long-distance trade in a city, the greater the economic damage from decline of that trade. Rhapta, given the content of its trade, depended on long-distance exchange for its existence, whereas Jenne, with its trade in manufactures and agriculture would likely be able to continue its existence based on more localized trade. This is exactly what happened—Jenne could procure its ore fairly locally and sell back finished iron products fairly locally. It continued to be a major city for hundreds of years after Rome's fall, up to about 1400 CE. Rhapta ceased to exist in the seventh century CE. The wellspring of its existence, long-distance trade, dried up, so to speak, following Rome's fall.

Question 4 gives some insight into a basic pattern in world history, which is as true today as it was in Big Era Four: all else being equal, the more diverse an economy, the more stable it was likely to be. Economic diversity equaled economic security. In today's capitalist world economy, to make a connection, regions which depend greatly on trade in one product are much more likely to suffer catastrophic crashes than regions with diverse economies, because when the market for that one product declines internationally, the ramifications of that change are deeply felt. In a diverse economy, if one sector declines, other sectors may suffer. But though times may get tough, the economy as a whole is in a better position to weather the difficulty.

One of the critiques of the International Monetary Fund's prescriptions for developing economies is the organization's tendency to require shifts in production to single products that fetch a relatively high price on the world market at the time the IMF plan is written. A shift is made in a developing economy to meet international demand, but when the market for that product suffers in later years, as markets will do, the developing economy in question, lacking a diverse range of produce, suffers intensely. Such was Rhapta's fate in the seventh century.

Lesson 4

Student Handout 4.1—Jenne and Rhapta

Background: Between 300 BCE and 400 CE African people built cities and participated in land-based and seaborne long-distance trade networks. These developments constituted a Commercial Revolution in Africa.

The Commercial Revolution was more than just a growth in the size of human settlements and an increase in the volume of trade. It also brought about qualitative changes in the African societies affected. In particular, those Africans participating in trade acquired, through their economic roles, an increased social and political importance, even a pre-eminence, in Africa's new urban centers.

Two of the most well-known examples of this urban development of ancient Africa were the cities of Jenne and Rhapta. Jenne, situated along the Niger river in Mali, is the oldest urban site in West Africa that archaeologists have extensively excavated. The physical remains of Rhapta, on the other hand, has never been discovered, though it has been suggested that it lay somewhere in what is today Tanzania. Historians know of its existence through the textual descriptions of ancient authors, such as the one in the *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, which was written in the first century CE. Rhapta was the southernmost African port city on the Indian Ocean. As such, it formed a gateway to the flourishing ancient trade networks on that body of water.

Jenne and Rhapta were not the only cities in sub-Saharan Africa. They are, however, two particularly ancient and therefore noteworthy examples of the Commercial Revolution of ancient African societies.

Task

As historians, we learn about trade because of what it tells us about people. This is your task! Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 below provide lists of imported and exported products for both Jenne and Rhapta in our period. Use information provided in the tables to respond to the questions. In your responses, make specific references to the data included in Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2.

Table 4.1.1
Jenne: Imports and Exports

<i>Imports</i>	<i>Exports</i>
Iron ore	Finished iron
Sandstone	Grains
Beads (stone and glass)	Smoked meat and fish
Salt	Fish oil
	Condiments

Source: Susan Keech McIntosh, ed., *Excavations at Jenne-Jeno, Hambarketolo, and Kaniana (Inland Niger Delta, Mali,): The 1981 Season* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 380-392.

Table 4.1.2
Rhapta: Imports and Exports

<i>Imports</i>	<i>Exports</i>
Glass beads	Ivory
Iron goods (spears, axes, knives, small awls)	Rhinoceros horn
	Tortoise shell

Source: Christopher Ehret. *An African Classical Age: Eastern & Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. to A.D. 400*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998, p 275.

1. How would you characterize the differences between the exports of Jenne and those of Rhapta?
2. Which of the two cities appears to have had the larger class of craftsmen? What leads you to believe this?
3. Which of the two cities seems to have grown more exclusively for long-distance trading purposes, rather than for both trade and production? What leads you to believe this?
4. Long-distance trade in the ancient world declined precipitously with the fall of the Roman empire in the fifth century CE. Based on what you know about the economies of the two cities, which of them would be most likely to survive that period of economic decline? Why do you think so?

This unit and the Three Essential Questions

	<p>What environmental changes do you think might have caused human beings to adopt agriculture? How might human actions have contributed to or caused these environmental changes? What environmental effects might have resulted when a society adopted agriculture as a way of life?</p>
	<p>Hunter-gatherer societies today make up a tiny percentage of the world's population. Is it possible that these societies could "make a comeback?" What would have to happen in the world to bring back hunting-gathering on a significant scale?</p>
	<p>How might you expect the views of hunter-gatherers, farmers, and merchants regarding the natural and physical environment to differ? Would learning to work iron have changed how people viewed the earth? How might contact through trade with other parts of the world have changed how Africans saw themselves?</p>

This unit and the Seven Key Themes

This unit emphasizes:

Key Theme 1: Populations in Motion

Key Theme 2: Economic Networks and Exchange

Key Theme 5: Expressing Identity

Key Theme 6: Science, Technology, and the Environment

This unit and the Standards in Historical Thinking

Historical Thinking Standard 1: Chronological Thinking

The student is able to (F) reconstruct patterns of historical succession and duration.

Historical Thinking Standard 2: Historical Comprehension

The student is able to (G) draw upon data in historical maps.

Historical Thinking Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation

The student is able to (J) hypothesize the influence of the past.

Historical Thinking Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

The student is able to (C) interrogate historical data.

Historical Thinking Standard 5: Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

The student is able to (C) Identify relevant historical antecedents.

Resources

Resources for teachers

Ehret, Christopher. *The Civilizations of Africa: A History to 1800*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2002. Excellent general history of Africa.

Ehret, Christopher. *An African Classical Age: Eastern & Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. to A.D. 400*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998. More specialized, technical look at the period, with extremely interesting use of linguistic evidence to support conclusions.

Gilbert, Erik and Jonathan T. Reynolds. *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004. Not limited to the period in question but a very clear recent synthesis of secondary material and quite useful.

McIntosh, Susan Keech, ed. *Excavations at Jenne-Jeno, Hambarketolo, and Kaniana (Inland Niger Delta, Mali): The 1981 Season*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Mokhtar, G, ed. *General History of Africa. II: Ancient Civilizations of Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981. Published under the auspices of UNESCO. Very thorough, consisting of articles by various authors on differing subjects. By its nature less of a synthesis than a catalogue, but useful.

Resources for students

Robertshaw, Peter, and Jill Rubalcaba. *The Early Human World. The World in Ancient Times*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. Chapter 24 is titled "Got Milk? Farming in Africa." This series is lively and beautifully illustrated.

Smith, Bruce D. *The Emergence of Agriculture*. New York: Scientific American Library, 1998. Broad overview of the subject not limited to Africa. Great images and clear text.

Correlations to National and State Standards and to Textbooks

National Standards for World History

Era 3: Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires, 1000 BCE-300 CE. 1C: Describe the emergence of states south of the Sahara desert and appraise theories of how iron-working technology spread in West and East Africa.

Georgia Performance Standards for Social Studies

SSWH6. The student will describe the diverse characteristics of early African societies before 1800. a. Identify the Bantu migration patterns and contribution to settled agriculture.

Minnesota Academic Standards in History and Social Studies

III. World History. B. World Civilizations and Religions, 1000 BC-500 AD. The student will demonstrate knowledge of ancient African civilizations.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for Social Studies

113.33 World History Studies. (c) Knowledge and skills. (6) History. The student understands the major developments of civilizations of sub-Saharan Africa.

Conceptual links to other teaching units

Ancient seaborne trade routes in the Indian Ocean linked the East African coast, notably the trade of the port of Rhapta, to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf and therefore to the dense populations that inhabited Southwest Asia and the Mediterranean Basin. Commerce, manufacturing, and urbanization expanded rapidly in those regions, especially between 600 and 200 BCE, when Greek trade flourished in the Mediterranean and Arabian Seas, when both Greek city-states and the Persian empire flourished, and when Alexander the Great created his immense, though short-lived empire. The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, which dates to the first century CE, tells us something about East African commerce, but it was written in Greek for Greek and other Mediterranean and Southwest Asian merchants. We may also surmise that the prosperity of commerce in the Mediterranean basin under the leadership of Phoenician and Greek traders stimulated some measure of trans-Saharan trade, connecting the ancient city of Jenne with Mediterranean ports.