Overview and Objectives

Africa is central to human history. It is the continent where our species arose, where some of the greatest ancient civilizations thrived, and where dynamic, complex, and innovative cultures confronted a variety of social, political, and environmental challenges. Far from being the “primitive tribal peoples” and mystical ancients of popular imagination, African societies in the era before the eighth century CE incorporated sophisticated cultural, social, and material systems that confound such old, persistent ideas.

No course about such an immense, diverse continent can claim to be comprehensive. Accordingly, this course mainly focuses on key developments in the broad history of the African continent in roughly chronological order between about 10000BCE and around 700CE. After a brief overview of the continent and its early peopling, we will deal with the emergence of major linguistic clusters up to the advent of agriculture, and then move to regional histories successively. These include the development of urban civilization in the Nile Valley and the Horn of Africa, ironworking and the ‘African Classical Age’ of the Bantu Expansion, urban culture south of the Sahara, and African links to the ancient Mediterranean and Indian Ocean (including Judeo-Christian religion, its transmission, and some of the variations). Through these episodes and selected source readings, we will investigate a range of developments of, and interactions between, material cultures, ideologies, and modes of sociopolitical organization. All along the way, we will take note of some thorny issues for the study of early African history, limitations in our sources, uncertainty about some mechanisms of change, and ways that Africa’s ancient histories have been misunderstood and misused.

Thus, although we must be selective, students completing this course satisfactorily will at minimum:

- Develop a broad understanding of major processes and patterns of historical change across the African continent up to around 700 CE, with meaningful geographic specificity;
- Recognize the diversity of ancient societies and historical developments across the continent as well as the importance of that variability, without discounting shared phenomena;
- Interpret primary sources for major themes and episodes in early African history in historical context through discussion, and assess the nature of the evidence for this past; and
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze and discuss material dealing with Africa’s remote past in writing, with sensitivity to various African historical contexts and the state of our knowledge.

You'll see that we have two major textbooks. Both are important; each uses a slightly different methodological mode, so they complement and sometimes contradict one another. This is by design, to get you thinking about how we know what we know about an era where there is ample evidence, but not as yet ample scholarly coverage comparable to (say) the Mediterranean, Mesoamerica, or East Asia.

**NOTE:** This is a fairly reading- and writing-intensive course. Keep the syllabus handy—it’s up to you to stay abreast of assignment due dates, reading, and policies via Canvas or in class. I’ll announce any changes as early and as often as I can.
Assignments and Grading

Because African history requires the mastery of entirely new bodies of knowledge for most students, it is important for you not only to keep up with the reading but to think actively about it through analytical writing. Therefore, this course will incorporate three short papers (1300 to 1600 words, roughly 5 to 7 pages) on subjects connected to the major sections of the course, using the sources we’ve read and engaged as well as our discussions. These papers will be due on the dates indicated in the syllabus, and will be expected to conform to the instructions and address the questions provided a couple of weeks beforehand. See also “Writing Style” under Policies below.

Besides the short topic papers, you will be required to complete a cumulative final exam that will be slightly weighted towards the last two weeks of the course and a map quiz the second week of the term. Unannounced quizzes on the reading may be given, and if so will form part of a broader participation grade that may exceed the 10% allotted. The overall weighting of the grade is as follows, from a total of 400 points:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Weight (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Map Quiz</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers:</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>60 (20% each)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam (Cumulative):</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation/Quizzes:</td>
<td>40+</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please pay close attention to the important dates, which are recapitulated at the end of this syllabus. Late papers will be marked down 10% (8 pts) per calendar day or any portion thereof. No further papers will be accepted once an assignment has been returned. If you have an AEC letter, a national service responsibility, or a documented medical emergency, your deadlines may shift to accommodate them; see me as soon as you can.

Course grades follow this model of percentages for grades above F:

- A+: Awarded rarely, for extreme merit
- A: 93.00%
- A-: 90.00-92.99%
- B+: 87.00-89.99%
- B: 83.00-86.99%
- B-: 80.00-82.99%
- C+: 77.00-79.99%
- C: 73.00-76.99%
- C-: 70.00-72.99%
- D+: 67.00-69.99%
- D: 63.00-66.99%
- D-: 60.00-62.99%

Finally, an important policy note: I do not change grades, except in cases of arithmetical error. I am however happy to discuss your work and aid you in improvement during the term, when it counts! Extraordinary contribution or improvement may raise a final course grade slightly, but I only do so at my discretion. All emails or calls to appeal for a certain grade will be denied without response or comment, regardless of merit.

Course Texts

The following books are required and can be purchased at the Duck Store or online from your preferred retailer. Make sure you get the exact editions indicated as content and pagination vary; in the case of Ehret and Connah, the 14 years between the current and immediately prior editions have rendered the old ones grossly obsolete.


All other readings will be on Canvas approximately a week before the relevant class session. If you have any trouble obtaining course materials, or something isn’t available when it should be, please let me know immediately. I do not normally plan course reserves for classes under 50, but let me know if you have need.
Policies and Provisions:

Attendance: Attendance is expected at all class meetings. I monitor attendance, and it figures into the participation grade. (documented absences or emergencies will exempt you from a quiz in any case). Experience has shown that poor attendance correlates very strongly with low grades, because in-class material and discussion do not merely recapitulate the readings, and getting notes from a classmate is a very weak substitute. I also ask that you be as punctual as possible despite our sometimes-too-brief passing times, because late arrival and anticipatory rustling tend to disrupt everyone.

Laptops & Phones: Although I’m a technophile too, gadget use in class can be annoying and distracting. This is especially true for those around you, who can hear your typing and whose eyes drift inexorably towards lit screens. Laptop and tablet computers are particular problems, and they have a demonstrably negative effect on learning and participation in large classes like ours. However, I also recognize that some students have grown up depending on note-taking via typing, so if you wish to use a laptop computer or tablet, you must sit at the back of the room to minimize the peripheral effects. Be sure to set your phone to “silent” when you come in, as well. Lectures and discussions may not be recorded without full class consent, per Oregon law. Breaches of tech policy will affect your final grade.

Special Needs: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability-related barriers to your participation. Substantial modifications of course policy or requirements, however, require a letter from the Accessible Education Center. Call (541) 346-1155 or email uoaecc@uoregon.edu to set up a consultation. They are excellent advocates for your success here at the UO, and I am happy to work with them.

Writing Style: All writing for this course must be typed, and must employ grammatically correct and clear college-level English. For citation format, quotes, and the like, make sure you are using a style guide such as the Chicago Manual of Style or the MLA Guide. Although style takes a backseat to content when it comes to grading, poor style and grammar can damage content if I am unable to figure out what you’re really saying or citing. I am glad to look at early outlines and drafts in order to help, up to a few days before the deadline.

Academic Honesty: The information in this subsection isn’t necessary for 99+% of the students in my courses, but unfortunate ongoing experience demands I link to the UO’s academic misconduct guide: https://dos.uoregon.edu/academic-misconduct

The issues of academic honesty that arise most often are cheating and plagiarism. The written final exam format tends to discourage the former, but the latter has become a greater problem in take-home papers even though we keep them on file. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is, the UO has a useful guide: http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism

It is a gross understatement to say that academic dishonesty will adversely affect your grade. At the very least, you will receive an automatic zero for the assignment, which almost guarantees a failing course grade. At worst, you may be suspended or expelled from the University. If you have any concerns or you’re not sure if something is plagiarism, ask before you turn it in for a grade. I’m here to help!

One final warning, regarding the potential crutch of the Internet: if you can find it, so can we—so resist the temptation to cut corners. By all means use internet tools (such as Google or Wikipedia), but use them properly and judiciously. Accept nothing from an unaccredited source like Wikipedia or a random webpage alone as reliable or authoritative—and never use them as substitutes for actual course material.

Everything Else: In all other matters of classroom policy, we default to the relevant Departmental or University standard. If you’re not sure of something, or need to talk about a concern, please see me.

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HIST 399: ANCIENT AFRICA

Schedule (subject to change based on our shared interests or emergent circumstances)
Readings are to be completed before the class assigned, and be ready to discuss them, especially our primary source documents. Readings marked with (C) will be on Canvas.

Foundations: African History on a Continental Scale?

M 24 Sep  Introduction to Ancient African History
(In-class)  David Northrup, Seven Myths of Africa in World History (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2017), 1-3 (Also available to catch up via Canvas).

W 26 Sep  Legacies of Meaning and Method: Approaching the African Past
Reading:  Ehret, Civilizations of Africa, 1-16.
Connah, African Civilizations, 1-16.

M 1 Oct  African Ecologies, Climates, Geography, and Human Emergence
TOPIC #1 DISTRIBUTED TODAY OR WEDNESDAY
Reading:  Ehret, Civilizations of Africa, 17-33.
James McCann, Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), 9-22 (C).

W 3 Oct  Migration and Settlement: The Four Language Families and Lifeways
MAP QUIZ TODAY AT START OF CLASS
Reading:  Ehret, Civilizations of Africa, 26-103.

Civilizations of the Nile Valley and Red Sea, c. 4000BCE-200CE

M 8 Oct  Kemet (Egypt) to the Achaemenid (Persian) Era, 525BCE
Connah, African Civilizations, 14-42.
“Hymn to the Nile” (2100BCE) (C).
Selections from the Book of the Dead (700-400BCE) (C).

W 10 Oct  Succession in Nubia: Kerma, Kush, and Napata
PAPER #1 DUE VIA CANVAS BY CLASS TIME
TOPIC #2 DISTRIBUTED (TODAY OR BY FRIDAY)
Connah, African Civilizations, 69-82.
Burstein, Ancient African Civilizations, 3-14 (introductory text) and 25-34 (Documents 1-2).

M 15 Oct  Achaemenid, Ptolemaic, and Roman Egypt

| W 17 Oct | Classical Egypt, Its Contexts, and Their Meanings |

| M 22 Oct | Meroë: Iron, Trade, and Social Change |
| Reading: | Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 195-201 |

| W 24 Oct | The Fall of Meroë and the Ascendancy of Aksum |
| Reading: | Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 201-207 |

**Innovation and Expansion in Central, Eastern, and Southern Africa, to c. 800CE**

| M 29 Oct | The Bantu Expansion: Part I |
| Reading: | **TOPIC #3 DISTRIBUTED TODAY OR WEDNESDAY** |
|          | (Possible third short reading, if available; TBA) |

| W 31 Oct | Cultural Accretion, Ironworking, and Exchange |

| M 5 Nov  | The Bantu Expansion, Part II |

| W 7 Nov  | Early Ironworking Successions in Southern Africa |
| Reading: | Innocent Pikirayi, *The Zimbabwe Culture* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira, 2001), 73-95 (C). |
**Elaboration, Urbanism, and Commerce in West Africa, c. 1000 BCE to 700 CE**

**M 12 Nov**  
**Complex Societies of the Western Sudan, Sahel, and Forest Belt**  
**Reading:** Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 131-136, 218-226, 300-308.  
**Reading:** Connah, *African Civilizations*, 149-184.  

**T 13 Nov**  
**FILM EVENT: West African wonders, 7-9pm, place TBD**  
**Film:** Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Wonders of the African World” (Video 05090, part 3).  
See it independently before Wednesday, if you can’t make this showing.

**W 14 Nov**  
**Jenné-Jeno, Ile-Ife, and Urbanism in Focus**  
**Reading:** Roderick McIntosh, *Ancient Middle Niger: Urbanism and the Self-Organizing Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1-44 (C).  
Remember to revisit Garlake as well, and see Gates!

**Expansion of Trade and the Spread of World Religions in Africa (to c.700CE)**

**M 19 Nov**  
**Trade and Global Connections in North and Northeastern Africa: New & Review**  
**Reading:** Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 213-216  
Cosmas Indicopleustes, “Periplus of the Erythrean Sea,” 5 pp. (C).

**W 21 Nov**  
**NO CLASS MEETING OR OFFICE HRS – our film event stands in for this session.**  
**PAPER #3 IS STILL DUE VIA CANVAS BY CLASS TIME!**

**M 27 Nov**  
**The Spread of Christianity in North and Northeastern Africa**  
**Reading:** Ehret, *Civilizations of Africa*, 216-218, 282-298.  

**W 29 Nov**  
**Conditions at the Spread of Islam (lead-in for HIST 325)**  

**W 5 Dec**  
**FINAL EXAMINATION, 2:45-4:45pm, 185 Lillis**

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**Recapitulation of Major Due Dates and Exam Date:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Location</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wed., 3 Oct., 2pm</td>
<td>Map Quiz at start of class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed., 10 Oct., 2pm</td>
<td>First Paper Due</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., 31 Oct., 2pm</td>
<td>Second Paper Due</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed., 21 Nov., 2pm</td>
<td>Third Paper Due</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wed., 5 Dec., 2:45pm</td>
<td>Final Examination in 185 LIL</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
TOPOGRAPHICAL MAP OF AFRICA
(For map quiz prep; see Ehret p. 30 for labels. A master list is on the reverse. You will receive this map and a set of twelve terms from that master list; you must located ten out of those twelve on the map.)
## TERMS FOR MAP QUIZ

### Bodies of Water

- Atlantic Ocean
- Indian Ocean
- Mediterranean Sea
- Red Sea
- Gulf of Aden
- Gulf of Sirte (Sidra)
- Mozambique Channel
- Victoria Nyanza
- Lake Malawi
- Lake Tanganyika
- Lake Chad
- Lake Tana
- Lake Turkana

### River Deltas

- Nile Delta
- Niger Delta
- Niger Inland Delta

### Islands

- Madagascar
- Comoros (group)
- Canaries (group)
- Pemba
- Zanzibar

### Landforms (indicate full area as well as possible)

- Congo Basin
- Jos Plateau
- Maasai Steppe (and Kenyan Highlands to north)
- Ethiopian Highlands (this surrounds Lake Tana)
- South African Highveld
- Zimbabwe Plateau
- Great Rift Valley (= Eastern and Ethiopian Rifts)
- Kalahari Desert
- Namib Desert
- Sahara Desert
- Hoggar (Ahaggar) Mountains
- Tibetsi Mountains
- Mountains of Aïr
- Jallon Mountains
- Drakensberg Mountains (Great Escarpment)
- Mount Kenya
- Mount Kilimanjaro
- Mount Cameroon