

HIST 325: PRECOLONIAL AFRICA

Fall 2009 – MWF 9:00-9:50am, Lillis 111 – CRN 16448

Version 0.99, 24 Sep 2009

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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. Indeed, most African states and societies were materially wealthier than their European counterparts until the 1700s. At the same time, Africa has always been connected—however tenuously at times—to the wider world. Yet in the popular, Eurocentric historical imagination in the U.S. and Europe, there is sparse knowledge of Africa's own history. Indeed, it was rarely considered a subject for historical study until the 1950s. For the pre-colonial period, this lacuna is even more pronounced. In this course, we will explore the history of Africa up to 1500 and occasionally further, while considering the various reasons for our limited exposure to this history. Geographically we will deal primarily with the regions now south of the formidable barrier of the Sahara Desert, but the desert was hardly impregnable, and the wide influence of Africa makes the littorals of the Indian and Atlantic Oceans increasingly important over time.

Our core themes in this course are power, production, and trade, and the ways that African states and societies developed and interacted based on environmental and human factors. After a continental overview and exploration of the peopling of Africa, we will consider a number of regional histories successively. Topics we will treat in our journey include early migration, agricultural innovation, climate change and the development of civilizations, the roles of Christianity and Islam, the development of long-distance trade networks and cross-cultural contacts, the nature and impact of slavery and the slave trade in Africa, and of course the issues surrounding African history as a discipline. No single course can cover more than the tiniest sliver of the complexity and variety in Africa—home today to over 800 million people, 54 nations, and thousands of communities of language and culture—but students completing this course will be able to write upon and discuss major themes in African history with contextual sensitivity and the knowledge necessary to undertake further study.

Although this course is billed as extending to 1880, the chronological break is not so neat and a “grey zone” exists from about 1780 forward. Therefore a large number of 19th-century developments relative to colonial empires, medicine, environment, religion, and production are treated in HIST 326, where they flow more neatly and logically into the modern period. Those wishing to explore such issues are encouraged to sign up for the Winter course.

An Important Note About This Syllabus

Everything on this syllabus is important. Read it carefully and refer to it frequently. **You alone are responsible for knowing its contents.** The paper copy you receive at the beginning of the course is, ideally, the final version, but sometimes the unexpected intrudes and changes must be made. In all cases I will inform you of these changes and assure that an updated version is available and accessible on Blackboard. Pay attention to the version numbers if you are unsure which schedule is correct.

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 **two short papers** (1000 to 1500 words, roughly 4 to 6 pages) on subjects connected to the major course readings. These papers will be due on the dates indicated in the syllabus, and will be expected to conform to the instructions given a week or so prior. For guides to writing history, I would suggest Rampolla's *Pocket Guide to Writing History*; all citations and usage in the papers must be correct and conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th ed.), which is available at the Library.

Besides the response papers, you will be required to complete **two ID/essay examinations** (a midterm and a cumulative final weighted far more towards the second half), and **a map quiz** the second week of the semester. Unannounced quizzes may be given. Your grade is weighted as follows:

Map Quiz	5%
Midterm Exam:	25%
Final Exam (Cumulative):	30%
Papers:	15% each (30%)
Participation/Quizzes:	10%

Please pay close attention to the important dates, which are recapitulated at the end of this syllabus. Late papers will be marked down two full grades per day or portion thereof. Please plan ahead.

Course grades will be assigned according to percentages on the standard scale (90s = A range, 80s = B range, etc), with fractional percentages rounded to the nearest full point (up or down). As a fair warning, **I do not change grades**, except in cases of arithmetical error. I also do not let mathematics rule my grading rigidly; I will raise or lower “close” cases in light of effort and conduct.

Course Texts

The following four books are required and can be purchased at the Duck Store or online from your preferred retailer. **Make sure you get the editions indicated** as content and pagination vary.

- Kevin Shillington. *History of Africa*, rev. 2nd ed. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005. ISBN 0-333-59957-8 (also used in HIST 326)
- Stanley Burstein, ed. *Ancient African Civilizations: Kush and Axum* exp & rev. ed. Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2008. ISBN 1-55876-505-0 (hardcover of this ed. is also OK)
- Said Hamdun and Noel King. *Ibn Battuta In Black Africa* expanded ed. Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2005. ISBN 1-55876-336-8 (hardcover of this ed. is also OK)
- D. T. Niane. *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 2006. ISBN 1-40584-942-8

The following book is recommended as it is a useful source volume and many of our document readings will be drawn from it; it is also required for HIST 326:

- Robert O. Collins, ed., *Documents from the African Past*. Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001. ISBN 1558762892

All other readings should be obtainable via Blackboard by the requisite time. If you have any trouble obtaining them, please let me know immediately.

Policies:

Attendance: Attendance is expected at all class meetings and events. Repeated absences for reasons unrelated to illness will lead to warnings and grading penalties. Besides any direct penalties, however, poor attendance tends to result in poor grades, because lectures and discussions do not merely recapitulate the readings and getting notes from a classmate is a poor substitute. Furthermore, I ask that you be punctual, as late arrival and early departure—including anticipatory “rustling”—are intensely disruptive. If you have insufficient time between classes to be on time and stay the entire period, please rethink your schedule.

The H1N1 Modification: This year’s swine flu concerns dictate more leniency and adaptability in attendance policy than usual, but you are still responsible for satisfying the requirements of the course regardless of H1N1 status. You **must** provide me as much advance warning as humanly possible if you anticipate missing sessions or needing extensions (or incompletes). Naturally, if you’re running a fever with flu-like symptoms one morning, **do not come to class**. Make sure you have access to phone and Internet (and Blackboard) so that we may be in contact, and be certain to email me so I am kept informed and can work with you, but *ex post facto* pleas will get no leniency. Finally, the University requests that you be without a fever for at least 24 hours before returning to classes to prevent further transmission.

In the unlikely event that the spread of H1N1 at the University forces us to change the structure of the course (for example, preventing classroom meetings), I will keep you informed of developments via Blackboard. That contact includes making alternate arrangements for completing course objectives.

Special Needs and Gizmos: Although I’m otherwise a technophile, gadgets in class are annoying and distracting. As a result, **I do not permit the use of laptop computers or personal communications devices (text or voice) in the classroom** without specific permission from me. Please turn your cell phone off or to “silent” before you come in. Technological disturbances of any kind will negatively affect your grade. If you think you have a good reason to be reachable in class, or you have a special need that requires a laptop, clear it with me first. Recording of lectures and discussions also requires express permission from me, although we may put something in place depending on the H1N1 situation.

If you have physical or learning differences that require special accommodations such as a laptop, notice from Disability Services (ds.uoregon.edu) is required. I am not empowered to make such arrangements myself, but rest assured that I will do everything in my power to address your documented needs.

Writing Style: I expect your formal writing for this course to be typed and to employ grammatically correct and clear college-level English. For citation format and the like, the *Chicago Manual of Style* 15th ed. or its Turabian derivative are acceptable to use. (If you don’t know what those two terms refer to, please ask.) MLA style, for those who know it, is permitted but not preferred. Poor style and grammar may result in a lower grade, if only because I may not be able to figure out what you’ve written.

Academic Honesty: The information in this subsection isn’t necessary for 99% of the students in my courses, but unfortunate experience has prompted me to include it in my syllabi. I refer you, for your information, to Student Conduct and Community Standards at the Office of Student Life:

<http://studentlife.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/tabid/68/Default.aspx>

You will find there a number of relevant headings to policies on academic honesty and conduct. In practice, the issues of academic honesty that arise most often are cheating and plagiarism. The all-writing exam format tends to discourage the former, but the latter has become a commensurately greater problem in the take-home papers. If you are unsure of what plagiarism is, an excellent guide exists here at UO:

<http://libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/>

It is a gross understatement to say that academic dishonesty will adversely affect your grade. At the very least, you will receive an automatic failing mark for the course. However, my personal view of the matter is that plagiarists and cheaters have no place in an institution of higher learning. Therefore I **always press for the maximum penalty** for offenses of this nature, which usually means suspension or expulsion from the University. If you have any concerns or you're not sure whether something is plagiarism, ask me as soon as possible, *before* you turn it in for a grade.

(This does *not* mean that you are barred from discussing papers or readings with one another outside of class, only that the work you turn for a grade must be your own writing and ideas, produced specifically for this class, with proper citation of **all** non-lecture source materials.)

One final warning, regarding the tempting crutch of the Internet: if you can find it, so can I—so resist the temptation to cut corners. By all means use its tools (such as Google or Wikipedia), but use them properly and judiciously, and accept nothing from an unaccredited source like Wikipedia alone as reliable or authoritative. Find the accredited sources. If in doubt, get in contact with me; your professors after all want to help you along **before** problems occur, and aid you in your academic journey.

Everything Else: In all other matters of classroom policy, I default to the Duck Guide or the relevant Departmental policy. If you're not sure of something, please ask!

Note on v.0.99: The new Burstein has not yet arrived, so pagination is still to be determined.

HIST 325: PRECOLONIAL AFRICA

Class Schedule (subject to change based on our interests and available time)

Readings are to be completed *before* the class assigned, and be ready to discuss them (especially primary source documents). Readings marked with (BB) will be on Blackboard.

Week 1: Foundations of African History

W 30 Sep Introduction to the Study of African History

In-Class: H. R. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (1965), 9-11.

F 2 Oct Legacies of Meaning: Africa and Scientific Racism

Film: Stephen Jay Gould, “Evolution and Human Equality” (Video 00680).

Reading: Shillington, Chapter 1 (1-12).
Christopher Lowe, “Talking About Tribe” (BB)

Week 2: Human Societies in Africa to 3500 BCE

M 5 Oct African Environments, Geography, and The Emergence of Humanity

Reading: James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land* (1999), 9-22 (BB).

John Iliffe, “The Frontiersmen of Mankind” in *Africans: The History of a Continent* (1995), 1-5 (BB)

W 7 Oct Early African Civilizations, from Gathering to Agriculture

Reading: J. Iliffe, “The Emergence of Food-Producing Communities” in *Africans: The History of a Continent* (1995), 6-17 (BB)
Shillington, Chapter 2 (13-21).

F 9 Oct Cultivation, Domestication, Migration, and New Settlement (MAP QUIZ)

Reading: C. Ehret, “Culture and Technology in Africa, 9000-3500 BCE,” in *The Civilizations of Africa* (2002): 69-106 (BB) [We will discuss the thrust and meaning of Ehret’s argument in class.]

Week 3: Civilizations of the Nile Valley

M 12 Oct Richness and Rivalry: Egypt and Nubia

Reading: Shillington, Chapters 2-3 (21-42).

“Hymn to the Nile” (2100BCE), (BB)

K. Bard, “Ancient Egyptians and the Issue of Race” (BB)

Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations: Kush and Axum* (2008), pages TBA.

W 14 Oct Nubia, from Kerma to Kush (TOPIC #1 DISTRIBUTED)
 Reading: Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations: Kush and Axum* (2008), pages TBA.

F 16 Oct Ironworking, Trade, and Social Change in Meroë and Beyond
 Reading: Shillington, Chapters 3-4 (40-60).
 Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations: Kush and Axum* (2008), pages TBA.

Week 4: The Spread of World Religions

M 19 Oct The Spread of Christianity: Egypt, Aksum, and North Africa
 Reading: Shillington, Chapter 5 (61-71).
 Burstein, *Ancient African Civilizations: Kush and Axum* (2008), pages TBA.

W 21 Oct Islam’s Spread in Northern Africa
 Reading: Shillington, Chapter 5 (71-76).

F 23 Oct Discussion: Trade Connections from Coast to Coast
PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS
 Reading: Shillington, Chapters 6-7 (77-99)
 Hamdun & King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (2005), ix-xxxii, 101-115.
 Antonius Malfante, “Tawat and the Western Sudan Trade” (BB)

Weeks 5-6: The Sudanic Empires

M 26 Oct Trading Kingdoms: From Wagadu to Mali
 Reading: D. T. Niane, *Sundiata* (2006), vii-xxiv, 1-47.

W 28 Oct Oral Tradition and Cultural Hybridity
 Film: Dani Kouyaté, “Keita: Heritage of the Griot” (Video 02733). (1st half).
 Reading: D. T. Niane, *Sundiata* (2006), 47-96.
 NOTE: THIS FILM IS LONGER THAN ONE HOUR. I may opt to move us to a second room for viewing additional parts, or holding this as an evening event instead, with the option available for people with schedule conflicts to view the film independently. You are responsible for seeing it before Monday, in any case.

F 30 Oct Mali, Songhay, and the Limits of the Savanna State
 Reading: Hamdun & King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (2005), 29-75, 99-100. **Be sure to read the relevant translation endnotes—they’re important!**

M 2 Nov Discussion: Ibn Battuta, Niane, Kouyaté, and Culture in Islamic West Africa
 Reading: Shillington, Chapters 8 & 13 (99-105, 179-81).

W 4 Nov MIDTERM EXAMINATION (50 minutes)

Weeks 6-7: States and Societies of Eastern & Southern Africa

- F 6 Nov Bantu Societies of Eastern, Central, & Southern Africa**
 Reading: Shillington, Chapters 8 & 10 (114-19, 136-43, 151-55).
 G. Connah, *African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective* (2001), 263-90 (BB)
- M 9 Nov The Development of the Swahili Coast (TOPIC #2 DISTRIBUTED)**
 Reading: Shillington, Chapter 9 (120-135).
 Tuan Ch'êng-Shih, "China's Discovery of Africa, 863" (BB).
 Hamdun & King, *Ibn Battuta in Black Africa* (2005), 15-25, 129-47. **Be sure to read the relevant translation endnotes—they're important!**
- W 11 Nov The Zimbabwe Cultures: Trade, Power, and Innovation in Zambesia**
 Reading: Shillington, Chapter 10 (143-51).
 I. Pikirayi, "Cattle, Gold, and Copper: Traders, Chiefs, and Kings" in *The Zimbabwe Culture* (2001), 123-55 (BB)
- F 13 Nov Discussion: Wealth and Power on the Indian Ocean Coast (Battuta)**
 Reading: Duarte Barbosa, "The East Coast of Africa at the Beginning of the Sixteenth Century" (1540/1516) (BB)

Week 8: Societies and States of the African Atlantic Coast

- M 16 Nov An Overview of the West African Coast and Early States**
 Reading: G. Connah, *African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective* (2001), 144-80 (BB).
- W 18 Nov Kingdoms of the Western Coastal Region**
 Reading: Shillington, Chapter 13 (186-99).
 John Barbot, "Benin, 1680" (BB).
- F 20 Nov Trading, Raiding, and Europeans in Southern Africa**
PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS
 Reading: Shillington, Chapter 15 (210-23).

Weeks 9-10: Slavery, the Atlantic Slave Trade, and African Economies

- M 23 Nov Slavery and Slave Systems in Africa**
 Reading: John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World* (1992), 72-97 (BB).
- W 25 Nov The Atlantic Slave Trade: Practices, Factors, Developments**
 Reading: Shillington, Chapter 12 (169-78).
 Gomes Eannes de Azurara, "The Discovery of Guinea, 1435" (BB).
- F 27 Nov THANKSGIVING BREAK (NO CLASSES)**

- M 30 Nov The African Effects of the Atlantic Slave Trade**
Archibald Dalziel, “Dahomey and its Neighbors, 1793” (BB).
P. D. Curtin, “The Slave Trade and the West African Economy in the Eighteenth Century” from *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex* 2d ed. (1998), 113-28 (BB).
- W 2 Dec Abolition, “Legitimate Trade,” and Their Complications**
Reading: Shillington, Chapters 12 & 16 (169-78; 230-55).
T. F. Buxton, “The Principles of Abolition, 1840” and Theodore Canot, “Slaving in Liberia” (BB).
- F 4 Dec “Africa” in the Global Order, circa 1850: Wrap-up and Discussion**
- Th 10 Dec FINAL EXAMINATION, 10:15AM (80 minutes)**
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Recapitulation of Major Due Dates and Exam Dates:

Friday, 9 October	Map Quiz
Friday, 23 October	First Paper Due
Wednesday, 4 November	Midterm Examination
Friday, 20 November	Second Paper Due
Thursday, 10 December	Final Examination