

WORLD CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Keywords: Archaeology, civilization, Pleistocene, Holocene, urbanism, farming, foragers, scavengers, states, pastoralists, hominids, domestication, metallurgy, empires, monuments

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Summary

World cultural heritage is the archaeological record of human history from the earliest beginnings of proto-hominids to the modern world. It reflects the lifestyles, activities, societies, and cultures of human scavengers, foragers and hunters, farmers, pastoralists, urban dwellers, states, empires, and civilizations. Distinctive heritage traditions are found in Africa, East and West Asia, Europe, the Mediterranean, North and South America, and Oceania. Cultural memorials associated with each heritage tradition include such things as archaeological sites, standing buildings and structures, roads and canals, ancient households and settlements, tombs, plant and animal harvesting and processing sites, rock and cave art, landscapes and sacred places, and artifacts.

1. Introduction

People in the past left behind a material record of their existence and behavior that constitutes a world cultural heritage. Such a heritage ranges from simple stone tools, food refuse, and scavenging sites to the architectural remains of settlements and cities, earthworks and megalithic monuments, ancient gardens and farm fields, and road networks. It evokes the past and contains information about the historical development and diversification of human patterns of adaptation and lifestyles such as scavenging, foraging, pastoralism, farming, civilization, urbanism, and industrialism. And it reflects historical patterns in human demography and biology such as migration routes and places, cemeteries, mass burials, mummies, and tombs. Distinctive traditions of world cultural heritage are found in Africa, East and West Asia, Europe, the Mediterranean, North and South America, and Oceania. The investigation, enrichment, and

conservation of these cultural heritages are key components of global sustainable development.

2. Africa (See “The Archaeology of Africa”)

The earliest archaeological evidence of human history in Africa dates to the time period from 2.7 to 1.65 million years ago and is associated with the fossilized remains of proto-hominids. Such remains include at least four species of *Australopithecus*, *Homo habilis*, and *Homo ergaster* at the end of the period. The archaeological record consists mostly of scatters of stones and bones. Stone tools, mostly cores and flakes, came from the Rift Valley in East Africa and date to as early as 2.7 million years ago. Such “Oldowan” assemblages came from riverbanks and lakeshores. They most likely represent plant gathering, scavenging of large animal carcasses, and hunting of small game. In addition, there is controversial evidence of a constructed shelter at site DK IA at Olduvay Gorge during this same time period.

Small-scattered groups of proto-human and later human foragers occupied most of the continent by the end of the Acheulian Period, which dates from 1.7/1.6 million years ago to 200/150,000 years ago. The archaeological record of this period is most abundant in South Africa, the Rift Valley in East Africa, the Nile Valley, and the Western Desert and poor elsewhere in Africa. First *Homo ergaster* and then *Homo erectus* populations carried the Acheulian tradition of stone tool technology and manufactured a variety of hand-axes, cleavers, picks, and retouched flake tools. They appear to have been “broad spectrum foragers” and to have continued the early hominid pattern of plant gathering, scavenging, and small game hunting but to have intensified hunting by the end of the period. The Acheulian Period also includes special purpose sites such as quarries, workshops, and kill sites and possibly the use of fire and specialized hunting tools.

The Middle Stone Age (MSA) extending from around 200,000 to 40/20,000 years ago saw the emergence of fully modern humans, regional social and cultural diversification, more elaborate tool kits, and structured subsistence-settlement systems. Core tools disappeared from artifact assemblages and the Levalloisian technique of flake tool manufacture emerged. Effective hunters and gatherers lived during the MSA, which witnessed the first specialized use of marine resources at the southern and northern tips of Africa. Five regional cultural traditions during the MSA defined mostly by distinctive stone tool styles emerged in South Africa, East Africa, the western Rift Valley and the Equatorial rainforest, West Africa, and North Africa. Of these, the North African MSA is culturally similar to the European Middle Paleolithic and includes the common use of a Mousterian stone tool technology. The earliest fossil evidence of fully modern humans mostly comes from the three sites of Klasies River Mouth and Border Cave in South Africa and Omo in Ethiopia and dates from 62,000 to around 130,000 years ago. Some archaeological evidence from Africa at this time (e.g., art pieces from Blombos and bone tools from Katanda) also suggests the emergence of the capacity to symbolize and sophisticated craftsmanship associated with modern humans.

The Late Pleistocene and Early Holocene in Africa from about 40,000 to 8,000 years ago brought with it numerous environmental, social, and cultural changes that ushered in the beginnings of agriculture and pastoralism, sedentary village life, and complex

societies. Increasing aridity dramatically reduced rain forests and expanded the Sahara Desert. At the beginning of the time period, intensive hunters and gatherers produced and used stone blades and bladelets, microliths, and pottery for the first time. Most of the sites also include numerous ground stone artifacts such as grinding stones, pestles, and mortars. Microliths reflected the invention and spread throughout the continent of the bow and arrow by about 15,000 years ago. Cemeteries appeared for the first time and suggest increased territoriality; some of the cemetery populations contain the earliest evidence of organized violence such as warfare in the form of arrow points embedded in the skeletal remains. Pottery vessels appear between 9500 and 8000 years ago in North Africa and were used for storage, serving, and cooking.

The end of the time period also saw the appearance of the earliest archaeological evidence for domestication and food production. Several sites in northeastern Africa dating from 9500 to 8000 years ago contain cattle bones that appear to be from domesticates. Livestock herding system spread throughout much of the continent by 6000 years ago, especially in North Africa and the Sahara, with several regional variants of cattle, sheep, and goat pastoralism-nomadism. A “Pastoral Neolithic” made up of fishing, livestock herding, and hunting and gathering emerged in the Rift Valley in East Africa by 5000 years ago, and livestock husbandry spread to South Africa by 2400 years ago. During the same time period, a cultural tradition emerged that combined the cultivation of domesticated plants and livestock herding. The earliest archaeological evidence of such a lifestyle comes from the Nile Delta and the Fayum. Dating to 7500 to 7000 years ago, this complex includes domesticated cattle, sheep, goat, pigs, dogs, donkeys, barley, emmer-wheat, and flax. Specialized agriculturalists cultivating sorghum, millet, and/or African rice, however, do not appear in Africa until about 4500-4000 years ago. A horticultural complex that included domesticated yams, oil plants, and nuts emerged in the Equatorial regions of west and Central Africa not long afterwards; banana, taros, and other Malayo-Polynesia plants reached east Africa by 2500 years ago, followed by the introduction of American domesticates such as maize and manioc about 600 years ago.

The earliest complex and socially stratified societies in Africa appeared in the northern Nile Valley by the middle of the fourth millennium BC. Two competing Egyptian states merged around 3050 BC under King Narmer, followed by the development of Egyptian Civilization with urban centers and monumental architecture. Nearby Nubia and Ethiopia also saw the emergence of urban states such as the Kush Kingdom in Nubia and the Daamat Kingdom in Ethiopia. Complex societies in North Africa appeared about 3,000 years ago with Phoenician colonization and the construction of the town of Carthage; Greek city-states and then Roman cities followed during the next several centuries. North African towns and pastoralists developed an elaborate system of social and economic symbiosis. The first millennium BC brought about the development of the earliest complex societies in West Africa with mixed-farming communities organized into a hierarchical settlement system. Urban societies emerged in the area about 2000 years ago on a foundation of intensive long distance trade. The Niger River played a major role in the development of long distance trading networks involving copper and iron, manufactured goods such as weapons and clothing, foodstuffs such as grains and dried meat, and natural resources from a variety of ecological zones such as the savannah and forest. Complex societies and city-states

emerged in the West African rainforest by 1000 years ago; they engaged in extensive trading networks, dominated regional hinterlands, and were centered in Ghana and southern Nigeria. Ife and Benin City in Yorubaland had perhaps the most spectacular arts and crafts traditions with elaborate domestic and urban architecture, shrines and palaces, earthworks, jewelry, and other artworks. The East African Coast was another regional center of complex societies during the last 3,000 years. Swahili city-states developed between 1000 and 500 years ago in the region. They engaged in long distance maritime trade in slaves, ivory, gold, and iron, among other things, and constructed elaborate stone mansions for elite groups. Complex chiefdoms, kingdoms, and states also appear to have spread throughout the Great Lakes and savannah regions of East Africa by about 1000 years ago but little is known about the area. South Africa witnessed the growth of complex societies by the end of the first millennium AD including several Zambebian chiefdoms and states such as Mapungubwe. The state of Great Zimbabwe emerged about 700 years ago and lasted until 1450 AD. It encompassed a regional hierarchical network of settlements based upon grain agriculture and livestock husbandry and that engaged extensively in the Indian Ocean trade. At the top of the state hierarchy stood the town of Great Zimbabwe with spectacular monumental architecture.

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Biographical Sketches

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