

Lesson 3 West, Central, and Southern Africa

MAIN IDEAS

Geography The people of west, central, and southern Africa adapted to life in a variety of environments.

Economics The Nok people were the first ironworkers of West Africa.

Geography Migration by the Bantu people from West Africa populated central and southern Africa.

Early Life in Africa

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What were some of the environments that the people of west, central, and southern Africa had to adapt to?

A Variety of Environments

- Sahara dried up, people moved south into West Africa around 4000 B.C.
- West, central, southern Africa had savannahs, rain forests
- Rain forests didn't support much farming
- Grassy savannahs cover over 40 percent of African continent
 - have dry and rainy seasons

Herding and Farming

- Desertification, climate gave savannahs south of Sahara thin soil
 - soil was bad for farming, so people herded cattle, goats, sheep
- Some practiced slash-and-burn farming
 - cleared land by cutting, burning trees and undergrowth
 - when soil became thin and exhausted, people moved to new areas

Belief Systems and Language

- Most Africans believed in several gods, and a strong creator god
 - believed there were spirits in animals, plants, natural forces
 - **animism**—the belief that everything possesses a soul
- Early societies didn't have written language
 - preserved history through storytelling
 - **griots**—lively storytellers who passed on history

REVIEW QUESTION

How did people live on the plains of Africa?

The Nok Culture

ESSENTIAL QUESTION What role did ironworking play in Nok culture?

Ironworkers

- Scientists found signs of ironmaking between Benue, Niger rivers
 - found ironmaking waste products, charcoal, ironsmelting furnaces
 - concluded iron was produced in West Africa before 500 B.C.
- **Nok** people of southeastern Nigeria were among area's first ironmakers
 - didn't first produce copper, bronze like most early ironmakers

Using Iron

- Nok mined iron ore to produce iron
- Ironsmiths worked smelted iron into tools, weapons
- Some tools, weapons were traded across West Africa

REVIEW QUESTION

What was the pattern of some early ironworkers, and how did the Nok differ?

The Bantu Migrations

ESSENTIAL QUESTION Where did the Bantu peoples first live, and where did they move to?

Bantu Speakers

- **Bantu** people lived in same area as Nok and spread across Africa
 - Bantu means “the people”
- African peoples spoke similar languages based on Bantu parent language
 - these peoples were not one group, but many with similar cultures
 - were farmers, herders, and eventually ironworkers

Migration Begins

- Bantu began migrating to central, southern Africa about 3,000 years ago
 - **migration**—to move from one region to another
- Slow migration—one of history’s greatest—took thousands of years
- Some groups built villages in Congo River rain forest, farmed banks
- Later groups went south to African grasslands, raised cattle and crops
- Groups still made iron farm tools, setting them apart from others

Effects of Migration

- Bantu speakers moved to areas where other people already lived
 - adopted cattle herding from peoples near present-day Lake Victoria
 - displaced hunting-gathering peoples
 - exchanged ideas and customs, intermarried with existing peoples
 - shared knowledge of ironmaking, agriculture
 - spread their Bantu-based languages

REVIEW QUESTION

To which areas of Africa did the Bantu speakers migrate?

Lesson Summary

- Early societies living on the savannah south of the Sahara practiced herding and farming.
- The Nok made iron tools for use and for trade.
- Migration of Bantu speakers spread the Bantu language and culture.

Why It Matters Now...

Despite the great variety of languages and cultures in Bantu-speaking Africa, there are also connections based on a common heritage.