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978-0-521-22215-0 - The Cambridge History of Africa: From the Earliest Times to c. 500 BC:

Volume 1

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF AFRICA

General Editors: J. D. FAGE and ROLAND OLIVER

Volume I

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1 From the Earliest Times to c. 500 BC

edited by J. Desmond Clark

2 From c. 500 BC to AD 1050

edited by J. D. Fage

3 From c. 1050 to c. 1600

edited by Roland Oliver

4 From c. 1600 to c. 1790

edited by Richard Gray

5 From c. 1790 to c. 1870

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6 From c. 1870 to c. 1905

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7 From c. 1905 to c. 1940

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8 From c. 1940 to 1975

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32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013-2473, USA

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It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of
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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521222150

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First published 1982

Reprinted 1987, 1989, 1995, 1997

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-0-521-22215-0 Hardback

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Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-22215-0 - The Cambridge History of Africa: From the Earliest Times to c. 500 BC:
Volume 1

Edited by J. Desmond Clark

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PREFACE

This volume provides the first relatively complete and authoritative overview of African prehistory from the time of the first hominids in the Plio–Pleistocene up to the spread of iron technology after c. 500 BC. For this reason it was considered important to amplify the text of each chapter by including a fairly full set of references so that the serious scholar should be able to consult the original sources, not only for supplementary data but also to enable him or her to make a personal assessment by reviewing the interpretations and reconstructions given in the text of the volume. It is certain that interpretations will change and become modified as new discoveries are made, new concepts and strategies are developed and more refined techniques become available. The basic facts as set out here, however, will remain virtually unchanged so that the volume can be expected to continue to form a useful source of reference for a number of years to come, not only for the detailed evidence that it assembles and the bibliography that is cited, but also for the record it constitutes of the ways in which prehistorians and archaeologists look at their material today and the kinds of interpretative models suggested by the theoretical framework in which today's palaeo-anthropologists work. To this end authors have been at pains to distinguish between basic data and interpretations and, where the data are liable to more than one interpretative explanation, to present the alternative possibilities.

For some periods and in some regions, research is proceeding less quickly than in others so that, where new evidence is accumulating more slowly, fewer changes in interpretation are likely to take place. Elsewhere, however, for example in East Africa where research is carried out on the world of the Plio–Pleistocene hominids, or in South Africa where studies are in progress on the palaeoecology of Later Stone Age populations, the speed with which new discoveries are being made and new knowledge produced can be expected quite soon to necessitate some significant revision of the ways in which some of the evidence has been presented in this volume. The data adduced and the views expressed are, therefore, those current at the time of going to press.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-22215-0 - The Cambridge History of Africa: From the Earliest Times to c. 500 BC:

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Each chapter is designed to be an entity in itself so that, in some instances, the reader may find reference to or discussion of material presented in greater detail in preceding or succeeding chapters. Where it occurs, this duplication is intentional since material which has a bearing on more than one problem and/or time-period will have different significance for one author than for another and so will be used differently.

Because the date of c. 500 BC selected by the General Editors of the *Cambridge History of Africa* as the cut-off point for this volume is, of course, an arbitrary one, though reflecting the time at which urbanism and iron technology began to become important in northern and north-eastern Africa, some minor overlap between volume 2 and the later chapters of volume 1 may well occur; but this will, in most cases, be insignificant.

Prehistorians normally record radiocarbon dates as being so many years BP (Before the Present) together with the standard deviation (e.g. $12\,000 \pm 100$ BP) indicating that *there is a 68% probability that the true age of the sample falls somewhere within the range given* (i.e. between 12 100 and 11 900 BP). Historians, on the other hand, concerned with calendar years, more commonly record dates as either BC or AD. In a *History* of this kind, covering the time when the written record is replacing prehistory in northern and north-eastern Africa, we have compromised by recording all Pleistocene or earlier results as BP dates, unless there is a specific reason to do otherwise. Holocene radiocarbon dates both uncalibrated and calibrated are given as BC dates and based on the Libby Value (5570 ± 30 years) for the half-life of ^{14}C . In most cases also, the standard deviation and the laboratory citation have been omitted from the text but may be found either in the footnotes or by reference to the primary source. More recently, the concern to differentiate and emphasize that radiocarbon dates are not calendar dates has led to the adoption by some laboratories and archaeologists of b.p. to denote uncalibrated ^{14}C dates and BP where the results have been converted into calendar years by calibration against the tree ring chronology established from the bristle cone pine in California and extending back some 8500 years. While emphasizing the need for readers to appreciate this difference, we have thought fit to retain here the more conventional BP form of presenting dates.

The spelling of geographical place names is a continuing problem. We have here tried to follow the usage in the *Times Atlas*. In a number of instances, however, as with many archaeological or palaeontological

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978-0-521-22215-0 - The Cambridge History of Africa: From the Earliest Times to c. 500 BC:

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sites, the names are not in the gazetteer, so that the spellings in general use or in the publications recording the sites have been used. In a very few instances anglicized spellings (e.g. Jebel rather than Gebel) have been adopted.

The volume has not attempted any general explanation of terminology and nomenclature in use by prehistorians north and south of the Sahara. Where expedient for clarification, some explanation of specific terms has been given in the text or footnotes. Those readers who wish to have a more detailed understanding of these terminologies and how they have developed should refer to the volume *Background to evolution in Africa*, edited by W. W. Bishop and J. D. Clark and published by the Chicago University Press in 1967.

It is a pleasure to record here most grateful thanks to my wife, Betty C. Clark, who was not only responsible for translating chapter 8 but whose help with the myriad details of the editing process was a substantial element in my own contribution; and also the staff of the Cambridge University Press, in particular for the painstaking care expended on technical details and on reducing the discrepancies in the volume to a minimum.

March 1979

J. DESMOND CLARK