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978-1-107-01187-8 - African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective Third Edition

Graham Connah

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## African Civilizations

This major new revised edition of *African Civilizations* re-examines the physical evidence for developing social complexity in Africa over the last six thousand years. Unlike the two previous editions, it is not confined to tropical Africa but considers the whole continent. Graham Connah focuses upon the archaeological research of two key aspects of complexity, urbanism and state formation, in ten main areas of Africa: Egypt, North Africa, Nubia, Ethiopia, the West African savanna, the West African forest, the East African coast and islands, the Zimbabwe Plateau, parts of Central Africa, and South Africa. The book's main concern is to review the available evidence in its varied environmental settings and to consider possible explanations of the developments that gave rise to it. Extensively illustrated, including new maps and plans, and offering an extended list of references, this book provides essential reading for students of archaeology, anthropology, African history, black studies, and social geography.

GRAHAM CONNAH is Emeritus Professor of Archaeology at the University of New England, Australia, and a visiting fellow at the Australian National University, Canberra. His earlier book *Three Thousand Years in Africa* (1981) won the Amaury Talbot Prize. Other publications include *The Archaeology of Benin* (1975), *The Archaeology of Australia's History* (1993), *Kibiro: The Salt of Bunyoro, Past and Present* (1996), *Transformations in Africa* (1998), *Forgotten Africa: An Introduction to Its Archaeology* (2004), also translated into German, French, Italian, and Portuguese, and *Writing about Archaeology* (2010). He was awarded the Order of Australia in 2000 for his contributions to African and Australian archaeology.

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An archaeological perspective

THIRD EDITION

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*Australian National University*



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UNIVERSITY PRESS

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

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[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107621275](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107621275)

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First published 2016

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Connah, Graham, author.

African civilizations : an archaeological perspective / Graham Connah, Australian National University. – Third edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-01187-8 (Hardback : alk. paper)

1. Africa, Sub-Saharan—Antiquities. 2. Africa, Sub-Saharan—Civilization.

3. Prehistoric peoples—Africa, Sub-Saharan. 4. Excavations (Archaeology)—Africa, Sub-Saharan. I. Title.

DT352.3.C66 2016

967'.01—dc23 2015032522

ISBN 978-1-107-01187-8 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-107-62127-5 Paperback

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In memory of Nora Fisher McMillan

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## Preface and acknowledgements

I started to write this book in 1983, with previous editions appearing in 1987 and 2001 and a Japanese translation in 1993. Any book that originated so long ago and has remained in print for so long will become seriously out of date, but this is particularly the case for a publication about later African archaeology, which has seen an enormous increase in research activity in recent years. I am therefore very grateful to Cambridge University Press for the opportunity to provide a third edition. In doing so, I feel it essential to stress two points. First, people are sometimes unconvinced about the newness of new editions, but this really is a new edition and I hope that it will assist those who have ignored the second edition and continued to cite the outdated first edition. Second, preparing a new edition of a book will inevitably be constrained to some extent by the thinking that influenced its original content and form, in this instance many years ago; the only way to prevent this is to write a completely new book.

Failing this, what is new about this 'new' edition? First, it is larger and covers the whole continent, not just tropical Africa, like the two previous editions. This has meant the addition of three completely new chapters, on Egypt, North Africa, and South Africa. Although the book is consequently longer, the extra chapters could only be added by also shortening some of the chapters that already existed. In addition, those chapters have required considerable additions to include recent research, and as a result parts of some of them have been substantially rewritten or subjected to numerous smaller changes. Inevitably this has resulted in the deletion of older source material, wherever it could be replaced by newer information. This has included the replacement of some illustrations, as well as the addition of new ones. The whole process has taken more than three years but I remain concerned about recent publications that might have been missed; in spite of the Internet, accessing sources remains one of the main difficulties for the writers of syntheses. However, as far as possible, I have tried to include a representative sample of recently published material. I hope that not too many people will think that I have ignored their work.

Second, although this does not pretend to be a theoretical study, there are inevitably theoretical implications in the way that its subject matter has been treated. As with previous editions, it has been my intention to examine the archaeological evidence for emerging social complexity in Africa,

*Preface and acknowledgements*

particularly the evidence for urbanization and the formation of states. These subjects have a very large literature, particularly concerning social theory, and in the previous editions I tried to outline the most significant of the relevant ideas in the opening chapter. Given the main purpose of the book, however, which is to ask of the physical evidence how we know what we think we know, it is impossible to give adequate space to theoretical matters, and in this new edition I have further compressed the relevant material as well as updating some of its more important aspects. One review of the first edition was headed 'Complex societies made simple' and I have never been able to decide whether this was intended as an insult or a compliment. Whatever the case, is it a crime to attempt straightforward explanations of complex data?

In attempting those explanations, the book continues to emphasize geographical and environmental matters, but sociopolitical aspects are now given greater attention than formerly. The changes in human societies that led to the development of cities and states were clearly influenced by many external factors, but in the end it was changes in the societies themselves and the way that they organized themselves that were of greatest importance. Such changes took place in many different ways and sometimes did not happen at all. There is no magic formula to explain their occurrence or absence, and old explanations involving social evolution and the emergence of so-called civilization have ceased to be adequate. Unfortunately, archaeology is often insufficiently informative on these matters, and our understanding is compounded by the variety of ways used by different researchers to extract meaning from the evidence that is available. It is to be hoped that as time passes, the picture will become clearer.

So many colleagues have assisted in my work on this and previous editions that it is impossible to thank them all here. Instead, the text is heavily referenced to the sources used, and the captions of the illustrations acknowledge the origin of those that are not my own or that have been redrawn. Great efforts have been made to obtain permission to reproduce copyright material where necessary, and in cases where copyright holders could not be contacted, usually because of the passage of time, the author would like to hear from them and offers his apologies for the omission. Some line drawings have been updated by Andrew Stawowczyk Long and/or myself, but I remain grateful to Douglas Hobbs, who did the initial work on many of them long ago. Finally, as for previous editions, I remain greatly in debt to Beryl Connah, whose continuing support and encouragement has been vitally important.

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In the meantime, a whole generation of Africanist archaeologists has gradually departed the scene, leaving a legacy of research on which a younger and more numerous generation can build, and one that increasingly includes African scholars as well as those from many other parts of the world. I wish them all well in their future endeavours.

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