

# ***African Literature***

## **An introduction**

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# Africa: The Timeline

- ◉ The cradle of life
- ◉ Egypt
- ◉ African countries and regions
- ◉ Oral traditions
- ◉ Literature
- ◉ Colonization
- ◉ Modern African Contributions

# In the Beginning.....

- Anthropologists believe that the first modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) began in the northern regions of the African continent
- Cradle of life
  - High number of archeological finds
  - Some of oldest fossils
- *Homo sapiens*: Roughly 100,000 years ago
- African climate is varied in several regions: Desert, coastline, tropical rain forest, plains and mountains.

# Egypt

- 3000 B.C.-343 B.C.
- First great civilization
- Vibrant and strong empire that centered on a polytheistic society
- Pantheon of gods and influence on the middle eastern religious perspective: Greek, Roman
- Written language: Hieroglyphics (picture symbols)





# The Golden Age:

- 300-1600 AD
- Sculpture, music, metal work and textiles
- Literature plays a huge role in the creation and success of the empires
  - Oral traditions and epics
  - Praise poems
  - Fables
  - Proverbs
  - Dramas



# Types of literature

- **Epics:** long narrative that relates deeds of larger-than-life hero who embodies traits of society
- **Proverb:** a short, traditional saying that expresses some obvious truth or familiar experience
  - Used to convey accumulated cultural wisdom
  - Often use literary elements (metaphors, alliteration, parallelism, rhyme)
- **Oral traditions:** stories passed from generation to generation through word of mouth.
  - **Dilemma/enigma tale:** moral tale that ends with question to allow audience to share judgments
  - **Chain/cumulative tale:** formulaic, each incident is repeated as new incidents are added
    - The 12 days of Christmas
    - A single extended joke

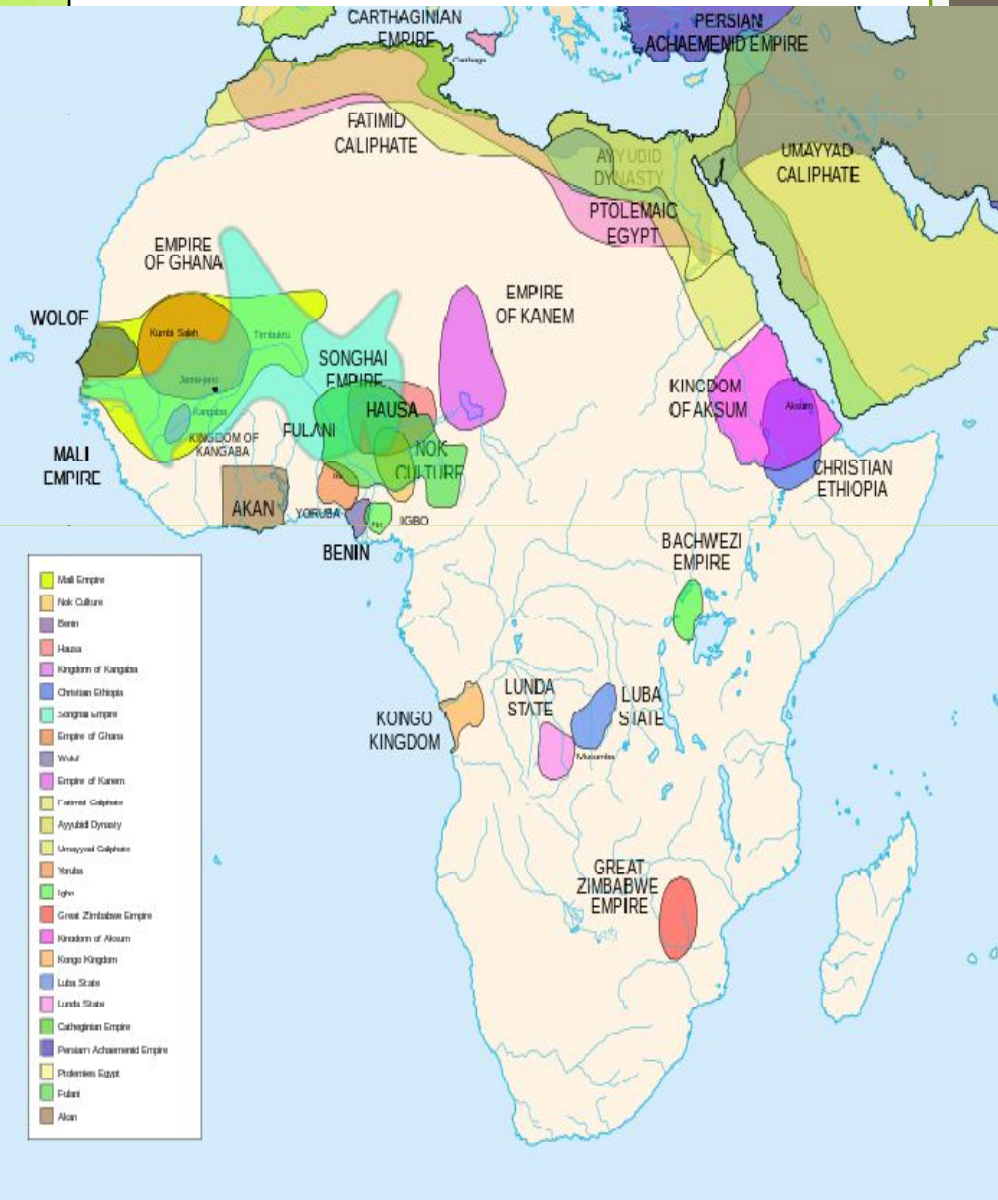
# Eastern Africa: Fasa and Aksum

- Well developed oral traditions
- These were the first great civilizations that created full and dominant cultural footholds in the northern region of Africa
- These were the center of trade routes from Rome all the way to India
- The key to their success was the development of a specific and complex writing system.



# African empires

- **Old Ghana:** A strong and prosperous kingdom: Mainly traders of salt and gold
- **Old Mali:** Overtook Old Ghana for supremacy
- **Songhai:** The last of the great kingdoms
  - Timbuktu: The marriage of Songhai and Old Mali empires: Hugely successful kingdom





# Religious and cultural influences

- Tribal origins are founded in a polytheistic and nature-based belief system
- 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. Roman empire introduces Christianity
- 700 A.D. Islam introduced into the African continent.
- Islam becomes the recognized state religion of Mali and many eastern nations in 1235

# Literary devices for Africa Unit

- Parallelism
- Epithet
- Apostrophe
- Polytheistic vs. Monotheism
- Omniscient Point of view
- Legend
- Oral epic
- Refrain
- Folk tale
- Trickster
- Personification
- Proverb
- Metaphor
- Alliteration
- Rhyme

# Colonization of Africa

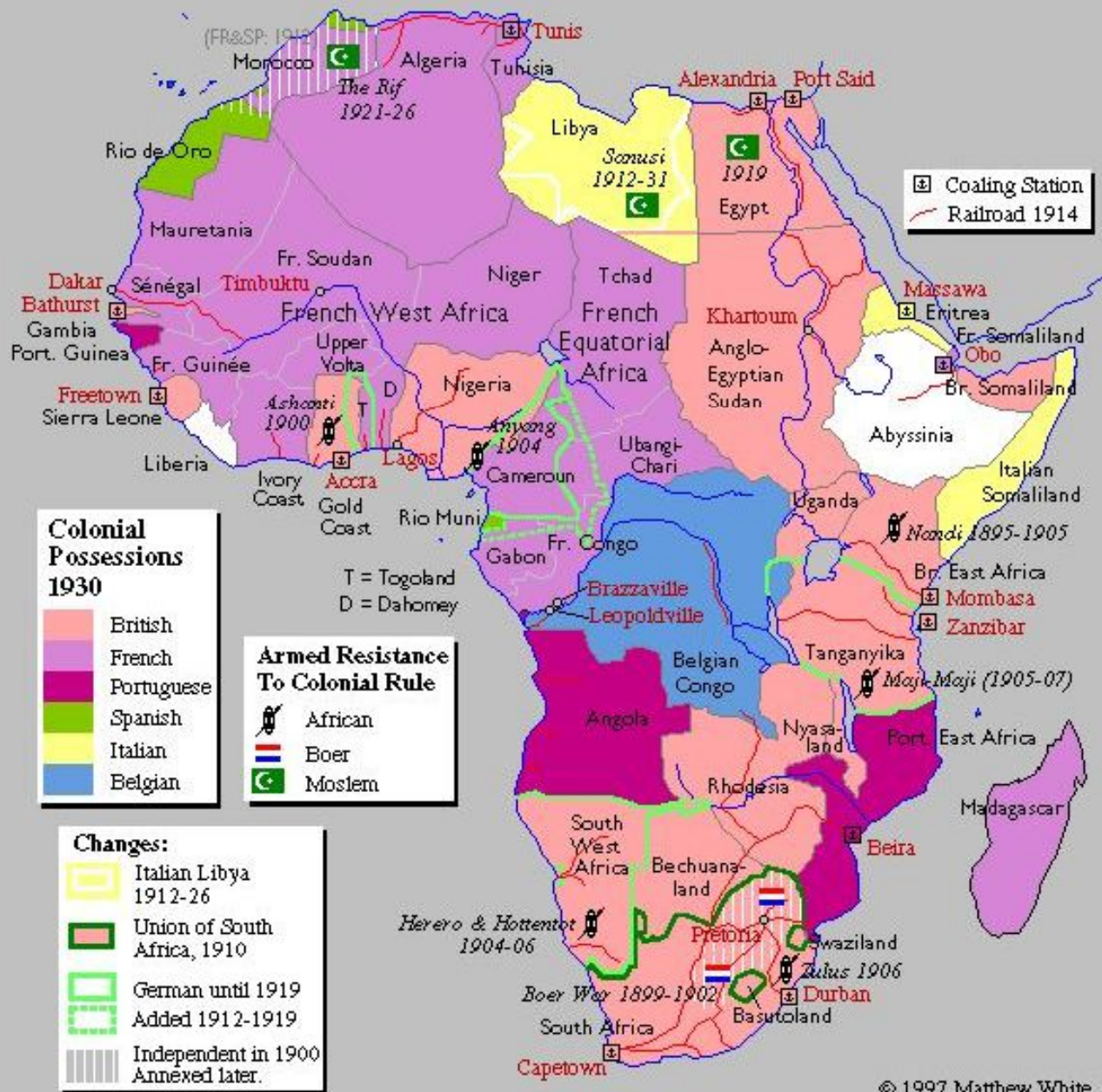
- Many countries playing economic role in continent since exploration began
  - Power of Islam and Christianity both fluctuate throughout Africa
  - Initial interest: Economic not religious
- With the end of slave trade, Western world needed to fill financial gap
  - “Scramble for Africa”: Who gets what part?
  - Religious purposes allow for further exploration
  - Religious colonization meant to “civilize” the natives



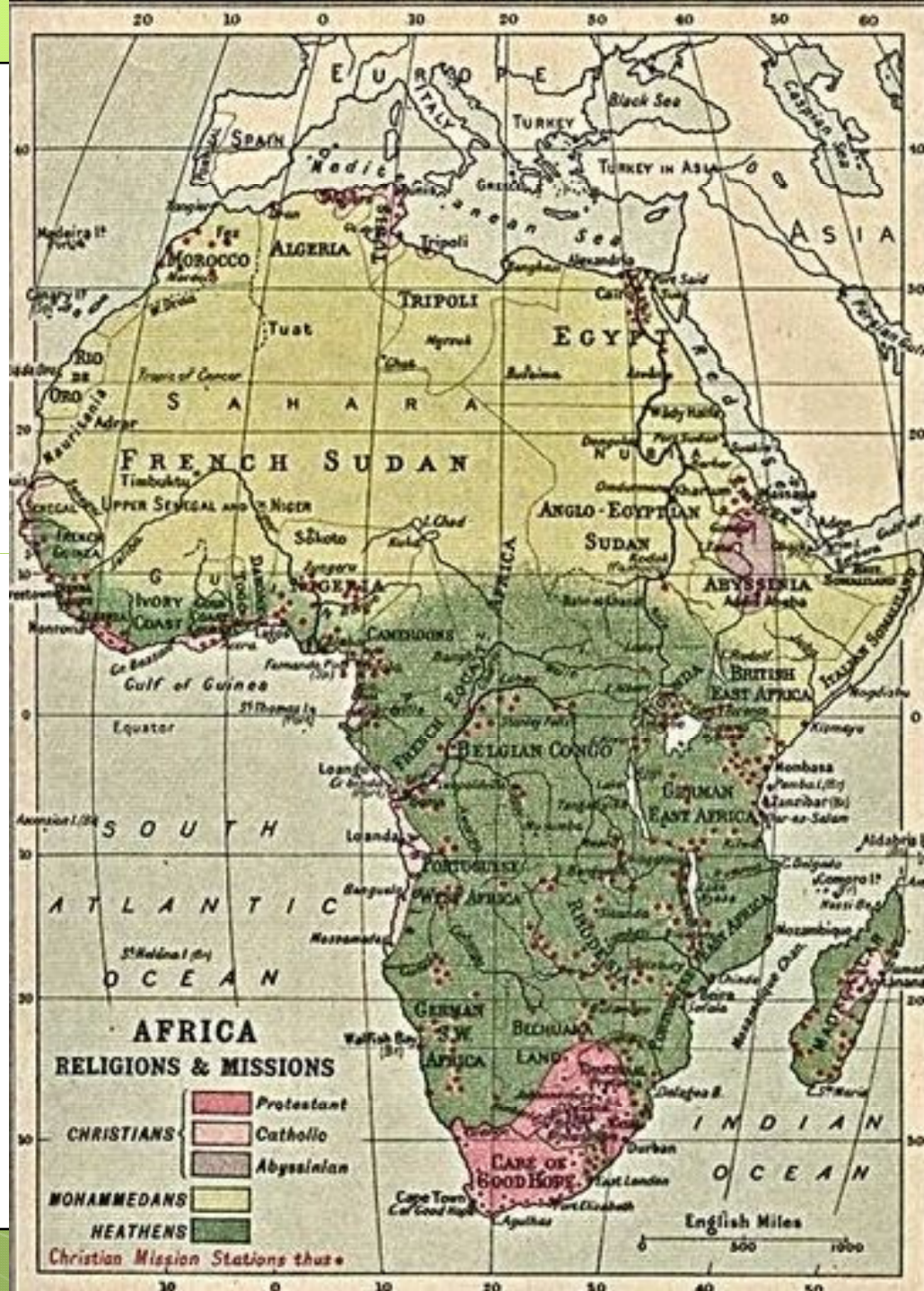




# Africa in the Early Twentieth Century









People often underestimate quite how large Africa is, so we figured we'd put it in perspective by transposing as many of the world's other countries over it as we could. As you can see, Africa is larger than China, the USA, Western Europe, India, Argentina and the British Isles... combined!



# African Literature

- ◉ **African literature** refers to the literature of the African peoples, written by African nationals living in African soil reflecting the African native sensibility and atmosphere.
- ◉ the European perception of literature generally refers to written letters, the African concept includes oral literature.
- ◉ The value of African literature lies in its Africanness
- ◉ Half devil / half child suppressed the native culture and perpetuated Africa's reputation as a dark continent.

# University Wits

- J.P. Clark
  - Chinua Achebe
  - Wole Soyinka
  - Christopher Okigbo
  - T.M. Aluko
- 
- First crop of writers who had a firm grounding in the european literary tradition.

# Early written literatures

- ◉ North Africa had an early literate indigenous civilization (Ancient Egypt)
- ◉ North Africans also contributed to writing in Phoenician, Greek and Latin.
- ◉ Encouraged by the royal patronage of the Ptolemaic rulers, scholars in Alexandria assembled the famous Library of Alexandria and Alexandrian writers contributed not insignificantly to the material housed in this institution.
- ◉ North Africans writing in Latin include Apuleius and Saint Augustine. (*Confessions*)



# Oral literature

- Oral literature (or orature) - prose or verse.
- The prose is often mythological or historical
- Poetry, often sung, includes: narrative epic, occupational verse, ritual verse, praise poems to rulers and other prominent people.
- love songs, work songs, children's songs, along with epigrams, proverbs and riddles

# Colonial African literature

- The African works best known in the West from the period of
- **colonization** and the
- **slave trade**
- are primarily slave narratives, such as Olaudah Equiano's The Interesting Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Olaudah Equiano, also called *Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789).

# Colonial African literature

- ◉ In the colonial period, Africans exposed to Western languages began to write in those tongues.
- ◉ In 1911, Joseph Ephraim Casely-Hayford (also known as Ekra-Agiman) of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) published what is probably the first African novel written in English, **Ethiopia Unbound: Studies in Race Emancipation**
- ◉ During this period, African plays began to emerge. Herbert Isaac Ernest Dhlomo of South Africa published the first English-language African play, The Girl Who Killed to Save: Nongqawuse the Liberator in 1935.

# Colonial African literature

- In 1962, Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya wrote the first East African drama, The Black Hermit, a cautionary tale about "tribalism" (racism between African tribes).
- African literature in the late colonial period (between the end of World War I and independence) increasingly showed themes of liberation, independence, and (among Africans in French-controlled territories) négritude.
- One of the leaders of the négritude movement, the poet and eventual President of Senegal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, published the first anthology of French-language poetry written by Africans in 1948, *Anthology of the New Black and Malagasy Poetry in the French Language*, featuring a preface by the French existentialist writer Jean-Paul Sartre.

# Post Colonial African literature

- ◉ With liberation and increased literacy since most African nations gained their independence in the 1950s and 1960s,
- ◉ African literature has grown dramatically in quantity and in recognition, with numerous African works appearing in Western academic curricula and on "best of" lists compiled at the end of the 20th century.
- ◉ African writers in this period wrote both in Western languages (notably English, French, and Portuguese) and in traditional African languages.

# Themes

## seven conflicts as themes:

- ◉ the clash between Africa's past and present,
- ◉ between tradition and modernity,
- ◉ between indigenous and foreign,
- ◉ between individualism and community,
- ◉ between socialism and capitalism,
- ◉ between development and self-reliance
- ◉ and between Africanity and humanity.

# Other Themes

- social problems such as corruption,
- the economic disparities in newly independent countries,
- and the rights and roles of women.
- Female writers are today far better represented in published African literature than they were prior to independence.
- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Nigerian)

# Awards

- ◉ In 1986, Wole Soyinka became the first post-independence African writer to win the Nobel Prize in literature.
- ◉ Algerian-born Albert Camus had been awarded the 1957 prize.
- ◉ The Noma Award, begun in 1980, is presented for the outstanding work of the year in African literature.



# Major African Novels

- ◉ Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart (Nigeria)
- ◉ Gracy Ukala, Dizzy Angel (Nigeria)
- ◉ Daniel Olorunfemi Fagunwa, *(The Forest of a Thousand Demons)* (Nigeria)
- ◉ Mariama Bâ, *(So Long a Letter)* (Senegal)
- ◉ Ousmane Sembène, Xala (Senegal)
- ◉ Ngugi wa Thiong'o, A Grain of Wheat (Kenya)
- ◉ Benjamin Sehene, Le Feu sous la Soutane *(Fire under the Cassock)* (Rwanda)
- ◉ Thomas Mofolo, Chaka (South Africa/Lesotho)

# Major African Novels

- ◉ Tsitsi Dangarembga, *Nervous Conditions* (Zimbabwe)
- ◉ Dambudzo Marechera, *The House of Hunger* (Zimbabwe/Rhodesia)
- ◉ Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning* (Zimbabwe)
- ◉ Mia Couto, *Terra Sonâmbula* (*A Sleepwalking Land*) (Mozambique)
- ◉ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (Ghana)
- ◉ Ben Okri, *The Famished Road* (Nigeria)

# Pan Africanism

- **Pan-Africanism** is a worldwide intellectual movement that aims to encourage and strengthen bonds of solidarity between all people of **African** descent.

# Négritude Movement

- **Négritude** is a literary and political movement developed in the 1930s by a group that included the future Senegalese President Léopold Sédar Senghor, Martinican poet Aimé Césaire, and the Guianan Léon Damas.
- The *Négritude* writers found solidarity in a common black identity as a rejection of French colonial racism.
- They believed that the shared black heritage of members of the African diaspora was the best tool in fighting against French political and intellectual hegemony and domination.





