

## A Tenth-Century Arab Description of the East African Coast

*This selection is from the famous Baghdadi scholar, al-Mas'udi, who died in Cairo about 956 C.E. It treats the country of the Zanj, by which he means the coastal region of East Africa from the Horn down to Mozambique, a region that he visited on a voyage from Oman.*

**SOURCE:** Basil Davidson, *The African Past* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1967), pp. 108-109.

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The sea of the Zanj reaches down to the country of Sofala and of the Wak-Wak which produces gold in abundance and other marvels; its climate is warm and its soil fertile. It is there that the Zanj built their capital; then they elected a king whom they called *Walkimi*.

The *Walkimi* has under him all the other Zanj kings, and commands three hundred thousand men. The Zanj use the ox as a beast of burden, for their country has no horses or mules or camels and they do not even know these animals. Snow and hail are unknown to them as to all the Abyssinians. Some of their tribes have sharpened teeth and are cannibals. The territory of the Zanj begins at the canal which flows from the Upper Nile and goes down as far as the country of Sofala and the Wak-Wak. Their settlements extend over an area of about seven hundred parasangs in length and in breadth; this country is divided by valleys, mountains and stony deserts; it abounds in wild elephants but there is not so much as a single tame elephant.

Although constantly employed in hunting elephants and gathering ivory, the Zanj make no use of ivory for their own domestic purposes. They wear iron instead of gold and silver.

*Walkimi*. . . means supreme lord; they give this title to their sovereign because he has been chosen to govern them with equity. But once he becomes tyrannical and departs from the rules of justice, they cause him to die and exclude his posterity from succession to the throne, for they claim that in thus conducting himself he ceases to be the son of the Master, that to say of the king of heaven and earth. They call God by the name of Maklandjalu, which means supreme Master.

The Zanj speak elegantly, and they have orators in their own language. . . . These peoples have no code of religion; their kings follow custom, and conform in their government to a few political rules. . . . Each worships what he pleases, a plant, an animal, a mineral.

They possess a great number of islands where the coconut grows, a fruit that is eaten by all the peoples of the Zanj. One of these islands, placed one or two days' journey from the coast, has a Muslim population who provide the royal family. . .

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### Document Analysis

1. In what ways does this Muslim observer seem to be critical, and in what ways laudatory, of the East Africans?
2. What can the reader conclude about the observation that the Zanj do not use ivory for domestic purposes, although they hunt elephants?
3. Describe the government and religion of the Zanj.

## Ghana and Its People in the Mid-Eleventh Century

*The following excerpt is from the geographical work of the Spanish Muslim geographer al-B akri (d. 1094). It describes with great precision some customs of the ruler and the people of the capital of Ghana as he carefully gleaned them from other Arabic sources and travelers (he never visited West Africa himself it seems).*

*SOURCE: J. F. P. Hopkins, trans.; N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins. eds., Corpus of Early Arabic Sources/or West African History. Reprinted with permission of Cambridge University Press, pp. 79 - 80.*

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Ghana is a title given to their kings; the name of the region is Awkar, and their king today, namely in the year 460 [1067-8], is Tanka Manin. . . . This Tanka Manin is powerful, rules an enormous kingdom, and possesses great authority. The city of Ghana consists of two towns situated on a plain. One of these towns, which is inhabited by Muslims, is large and possesses twelve mosques, in one of which they assemble for the Friday prayer. There are salaried imams and muezzins, as well as jurists and scholars. In the environs are wells with sweet water, from which they drink and with which they grow vegetables. The king's town is six miles distant from this one and bears the name of Al Ghaba. Between these two towns there are continuous habitations. The houses of the inhabitants are of stone and acacia (sunt) wood. The king has a palace and a number of domed dwellings all surrounded with an enclosure like a city wall (sur). In the king's town, and not far from his court of justice, is a mosque where the Muslims who arrive at his court. . . pray. Around the king's town are domed buildings and groves and thickets where the sorcerers of these people, men in charge of the religious cult, live. In them too are their idols and the tombs of their kings..

All of them shave their beards, and women shave their heads. The king adorns himself like a woman [wearing necklaces] round his neck and [bracelets] on his forearms, and he puts on a high cap (tartur) decorated with gold and wrapped in a turban of fine cotton. He sits in audience or to hear grievances against officials (mazalim) in a domed pavilion around which stand ten horses covered with gold-embroidered materials. Behind the king stand ten pages holding shields and swords decorated with gold, and on his right are the sons of the [vassal] kings of his country wearing splendid garments and their hair plaited with gold. The governor of the city sits on the ground before the king and around him are ministers seated likewise.... When the people who profess the same religion as the king approach him they fall on their knees and sprinkle dust on their heads, for this is their way of greeting him. As for the Muslims, they greet him only by clapping their hands.

Their religion is paganism and the worship of idols (dakakir). When their king dies they construct over the place where his tomb will be an enormous dome of saj wood. Then they bring him on a bed covered with a few carpets and cushions and place him beside the dome. At his side they place his ornaments, his weapons, and the vessels from which he used to eat and drink, filled with various kinds of food and beverages.

## **Iroquois Creation Story**

*The original homeland of the Iroquois was in upstate New York between the Adirondack Mountains and Niagara Falls. Through conquest and migration, the Iroquois gained control of most of the northeastern United States and eastern Canada. At its maximum in 1680, their empire extended west from the north shore of Chesapeake Bay through Kentucky to the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. The following is an excerpt of the tribe's creation story.*

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Among the ancients there were two worlds in existence. The lower world was in great darkness – the possession of the great monster – but the upper world was inhabited by mankind; and there was a woman conceived who would have the twins born. When her travail drew near and her situation seemed to produce a great distress on her mind, she was induced by some of her relations to lay

herself on a mattress which was prepared so as to gain refreshments for her wearied body. While she was asleep the very place sunk down towards the dark world.

The monsters of the great water were alarmed at her appearance of descending to the lower world. In consequence all the species of the creatures were immediately collected into where it was expected she would fall. When the monsters were assembled they made consultation, and one of them was appointed in haste to search the great deep in order to procure some earth, if it could be obtained. Accordingly the monster descends, succeeds, and returns to the place. Another requisition was presented: who would be capable to secure the woman from the terrors of the great water? None was able to comply until a great turtle came forward and proposed to endure her lasting weight. A small quantity of earth was varnished on the back part of the turtle. The woman alights on the seat prepared, and she receives a satisfaction.

While holding her, the turtle increased every moment and became a considerable island of earth, and apparently covered with great bushes. The woman remained in a state of unlimited darkness, and she was overtaken by her travail. While she was in the limits of distress one of the infants in her womb was moved by an evil opinion and he was determined to pass out under the side of the parent's arm, and the other infant in vain endeavored to prevent his design. The woman was in a painful condition during their disputes and the infants entered the dark world by compulsion, and their parent expired in a few moments. They had the power of sustenance without a nurse, and remained in the dark regions.

After a time the turtle increased to a great island and the infants were grown up, and one of them possessed a gentle disposition and was named Eni-gorio, or "the good mind." The other youth possessed an insolence of character and was named Enigon-ha-het-gea, or "the bad mind." The good mind was not content to remain in a dark situation and he was anxious to create a great light in the dark world; but the bad mind was desirous that the world should remain in a natural state. The good mind took the parent's head, of which he created an orb and established it in the center of the firmament, and it became of a very superior nature to bestow light to the new world – now, the sun. And again, he took the remnant of the body and formed another orb which was inferior to the light – now, the moon.

Whenever the light extended to the dark world the monsters were displeased and immediately concealed themselves in the deep places. The good mind continued the works of creation, and he formed numerous creeks and rivers on the Great Island, and then created numerous species of animals of the smallest and the greatest to inhabit the forests, and fishes of all kinds to inhabit the waters.

## **Marco Polo, from Voyages and Travels of Marco Polo**

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*Marco Polo's recollections of his travels through Asia planted seeds of curiosity, wanderlust, and want in the minds of Europeans within a century after his death in 1324. Known at the time as The Description of the World or The Travels of Marco Polo, his account of the wealth of Cathay (China) and the exotic customs of the Orient made his book a bestseller. Although criticized by some as fiction, his narrative nevertheless captured readers through the centuries and served as the foremost description of the world outside Europe available at the time.*  
*SOURCE: Marco Polo, Voyages and Travels of Marco Polo (New York: The F. M. Lupton Publishing Company, [n.d.]).*

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Ten miles off Cambalu is a certain great river named Pulisangan, emptying itself into the ocean, by which many ships with much merchandise ascend; and in that place there is a very fair bridge, all of serpentine stone, curiously wrought, containing three hundred paces in length, and eight in

breadth, so broad that ten men may ride abreast; on each side it is secured with a wall of marble, and pillars set in a row, and in the height of this ascent is a great and high pillar, at the feet whereof is a great lion, and on the top another, and so quite through the bridge: one pace and a half distance are pillars with lions on the tops, and a fair wall with wrought marble work betwixt, to keep men from falling. Having passed over the river and bridge, and proceeding thirty miles westward (in which palaces are continually seen, with vineyards and fertile fields), you come to the city Gouza, both fair and great, having many monasteries of idols. Cloths of gold and silk are made there, and the purest and finest cambrics or lawns; and many common inns for strangers or travellers are found in that city. The citizens are artificers and merchants. A mile without this city the way parteth, one leading west, the other south-east; that to the west leadeth through the province of Cathay, but the other, towards the country of Mangi, from the city of Gouza to the kingdom of Tainfu.

You ride ten days through Cathay, always finding many fair cities, well furnished with vineyards and tilled fields, from whence wine is carried to Cathay, where there is none; there are many mulberry-trees for silkworms, the people civil, and cities very numerous and populous. Tainfu is the name of the kingdom, and of the chief city, which is great and fair, hath much trade, with stores of ammunition, fit for the Khan's armies. The wine about this city serveth the whole province. Seven days further westward is a pleasant country beautified with many castles and cities, in which also there is great trade in different merchandise carried on. After which you come to a city very great, named Pianfu, in which there is vast abundance of silk and much trade. Westward from Pianfu stands a very pleasant castle, named Thaigin, anciently built by a king called Dor; in it is a spacious palace, wherein is a fine hall, in which are painted all the famous kings which have reigned there, and it is a fair spectacle. Of this king Dor, they say he was potent, and was attended only by young damsels, of which he had many in his court. These also, when he had a mind to take his pleasure, carried him in a small light chariot through the castle, which was so fortified by art and nature, that the governor thereof feared none, no, not Umcan his lord, against whom he rebelled.

But seven men, professing fidelity and service to Dor, took him at a disadvantage in hunting, and brought him prisoner to Presbyter John, or Umcan, who put him on vile cloths, and appointed him to keep his cattle, and set over him a strong guard, till two years were ended: after which he commanded him to be brought before him, and being dressed in princely apparel, he giving him his pardon, after a sharp admonition, sent him well attended to the re-possession of his kingdom. About twenty miles beyond the castle Thaigin is the river Caramaran, which, by reason of the exceeding breadth and depth thereof, hath no bridge over it in all the space from thence till it floweth to the ocean. On the shore thereof are many cities and castles built, wherein great trade is carried on. This country abounds with ginger, silk, and fowl, especially pheasants, so that three of them are bought for a Venetian groat. There grow reeds in vast plenty, so thick that some are a foot, and others a foot and a half in compass, which are applied to many uses. Passing this river, after two days' journey, is the famous city called Carianfu, where many cloths of gold and silk are made. Here grow ginger, galingale spike, and many spices. The people are idolaters.

Proceeding seven days' journey westward, many cities and towns, lovely fields and gardens, are found, and everywhere mulberries for silkworms. As for the people, they are mostly idolaters; but there are also Christians, Turks, Nestorians, and some Saracens. There is a vast abundance

here of wild beasts and fowl. If you proceed seven days' journey farther, you shall come to a certain great city named Quensanfu, which is the chief city of the kingdom, in which have reigned many famous kings; and at this day the son of the Great Khan, called Mangalu, hath the command thereof. That country yields great plenty of silk, cloth of gold, and all other things necessary for furnishing an army, and for the preservation of man's life. The inhabitants worship idols, and there are some Christians, Turks, and Saracens. Five miles without this city standeth the palace of Mangalu, seated in a plain, where are many springs, rivulets, and places of game. There is a high wall encompassing a park of five miles, where are all sorts of wild beasts and fowls. In the midst is an excellent palace, having many halls and chambers, great and fair, all painted with gold and azure, and numberless statues adorning it. The king, with his courtiers, delights himself in hunting the wild beasts, and taking of fowl, and following his father's examples in justice and equity, is much beloved of his people.

Proceeding three days' journey westward from the said palace, through a very beautiful plain, where many cities and castles are, which abound with silk merchandise and manufactures, you come to a country where in the mountains and valleys are frequent habitations, and many villages of the province of Chunchian. The inhabitants as to religion are idolaters; and as to employment, husbandmen. Also in that country they hunt lions, bears, stags, roebucks, deer, and wolves. This plain is two days' journey over, and the country is about twenty days' journey westward, well inhabited, being finely diversified into mountains, valleys, and woods. After these twenty days towards the west, there lies a province called Achbaluch Mangi, that is, the white city, on the borders of Mangi, which is well peopled. This province, for two days' journey, hath a plain, in which are an infinite number of villages: beyond these lie mountains, valleys, and wood, all well inhabited. It hath plenty of wild beasts, and of those creatures that yield musk. In this province ginger grows in great plenty, as also corn and rice.

After twenty days' journey through those hills is a plain, and a province in the confines of Mangi, named Sindinfu. The chief city hath the same name, and is very great, and exceeding rich, being twenty miles in circuit. It hath had many rich and mighty kings; but an old king dying, left three sons successors in the kingdom, who divided the city into three parts, compassing every part with their proper walls; all which, notwithstanding, were contained within the former wall; but the Great Khan subjected nevertheless that city and kingdom. Through this city run many rivers, and many places round about, some half a mile over, some two hundred paces, very deep; on them are many bridges of stone, very fair, eight paces broad, set on both sides with marble pillars, which bear up a timber frame that covers the bridge, each bridge having streets and shops thereupon. When the rivers have passed through the city they become one great river, called Quian, which runs one hundred days' journey hence to the ocean. Near these rivers are many cities and castles, and on them innumerable ships for merchandise. Proceeding four days' journey farther, through a very fine plain, many cities, castles, and villages are found, in which five lawns extend in beautiful order. There are also many wild beasts there. Beyond the plain, which we have now mentioned, is the wide province of Thibet, which the Great Khan vanquished and wasted; for in it lie many cities destroyed and castles overthrown, by the space of twenty days' journey; and because it is become a wilderness, wanting inhabitants, wild beasts and lions are increased excessively, and it is requisite therefore that travellers carry victuals with them. Very large cane grows in this country, ten paces in length, and three palms in thickness, and as much from knot to knot. When travellers therefore will rest at night secure from beasts, they take great

bundles of the greener reeds, and putting fire under, kindle them, which makes such a crackling, and so great a noise, that it may be heard two miles off; which terrible sound the wild beasts hearing, flee away; but it has sometimes happened that horses and other beasts, which merchants use for their journey, hearing this noise and cracking, have grown also much afraid, and betaking themselves to flight have escaped from their masters; and therefore wiser travellers binding their feet together detain them in their proper places.

## "Askia Muhammad al-Turi and Reform in Songhai"

*Around 1500 Askia Muhammad al-Turi, the first Muslim among the rulers of Songhai, wrote to the North African Muslim theologian Muhammad al-Maghili (d. 1504) with a series of questions about proper Muslim practices. These excerpts are from the seventh question of al-Turi and the answers given by al-Maghili. Here one sees something of the zeal of the new convert to conform to traditional religious norms, as well as the rather strict and puritanical "official line" of the conservative Maliki ulama on "pagan" mores. Also evident is the king's desire for bettering social order and his concern for justice in the market and elsewhere. However, also manifest is that many of the more strongly Shari'a-minded ulama did not want to compromise at all, let alone allow syncretism to emerge among formerly pagan, newly converted groups.*

**SOURCE:** *The African Past*, trans. by J.O. Hunwick. reprinted in Basil Davidson (Grosset and Dunlap, The Universal Library), pp. 86—88. Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown Ltd. Copyright (c) 1964 by Basil Davidson.

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### **From Al-Turi's Seventh Question**

Among the people [of the Songhai Empire said Askia Muhammad], there are some who claim knowledge of the super- natural through sand divining and the like, or through the disposition of the stars . . . [while] some assert that they can write (talisman) to bring good fortune. . . or to ward off bad fortune. . . . Some defraud in weights and measures.

One of their evil practices [continued Askia Niuhammad] is the free mixing of men and women in the markets and streets and the failure of women to veil themselves... [while] among the people of Djenné [Jenne] it is an established custom for a girl not to cover any part of her body as long as she remains a virgin. . . and all the most beautiful girls walk about naked among people.

So give us legal ruling concerning these people and their ilk, and may God Most High reward you!

### **From Al-Maghili's Answer**

The answer—and God it is who directs to the right course— is that everything you have mentioned concerning people's behavior in some parts of this country is gross error. It is the bounden duty of the commander of the Muslims and all other believers who have the power [replied al-Maghili] to change every one of these evil practices.

As for any who claims knowledge of the supernatural in the ways you have mentioned...he is a liar and an un- believer. . . . Such people must be forced to renounce it by the sword. Then whoever renounces such deeds should be left in peace, but whoever persists should be killed with the sword as an unbeliever; his body should not be washed or shrouded, and he should not be buried in a Muslim graveyard...

As for defrauding in weights and measures [continued al-Maghili] it is forbidden (haram) according to the Qur'an, the Sunna and the consensus of opinion of the learned men of the Muslim community. It is the bounden duty of the com- mander of the Muslims to appoint a trustworthy man in charge of the

markets, and to safeguard people's means of subsistence. He should standardize all the scales in each province... Similarly, all measures both large and small must be rectified so that they conform to a uniform standard...

Now, what you mentioned about the free mixing of men and women and leaving the pudenda uncovered is one of the greatest abominations. The commander of the Muslims must exert himself to prevent all these things.

He should appoint trustworthy men to watch over this by day and night, in secret and in the open. This is not to be considered as spying on the Muslims; it is only a way of caring for them and curbing evildoers, especially when corruption becomes widespread in the land as it has done in Timbuktu and Djenné [Jenne] and so on.

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### Document Analysis

1. What is the attitude of the new ruler, Al-Turi, toward the people of Songhai, especially those who are not Muslim?
2. Which of Al-Mahili's answers would contemporary Western reformers agree with? Which would they disagree with and why?
3. What does this reading tell us about the division between institutionalized religion and the state in Songhai?

### **Ottawa Origins Story (recorded ca. 1720)** **Nicolas Perrot, in Emma Helen Blair, ed. and trans., *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1911) Vol. 1, pp. 37-40.**

*Nicolas Perrot was a French fur trader who traveled extensively in the area around the Great Lakes, especially in modern-day Wisconsin and Montreal, in the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. His skills as an interpreter, trader, and diplomat led him to take part in many negotiations between the French and various Native American peoples. Among these peoples were the Ottawa, whose origins story he retold as part of his memoirs, which were unavailable in English until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because the Ottawa, like other Native American peoples, had no written language, accounts such as Perrot's were often the only versions Europeans ever read. The prejudices of the authors were often obvious in their accounts, though it should be noted that Perrot was greatly respected and honored by the tribes with whom he interacted.*

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After the creation of the earth, all the other animals withdrew into the places which each kind found most suitable for obtaining therein their pasture or their prey. When the first ones died, the Great Hare caused the birth of man from their corpses, as also from those of the fishes which were found along the shores of the rivers which he had formed in creating the land. Accordingly, some of the savages derive their origin from a bear, others from a moose, and others similarly from various kinds of animals; and before they had intercourse with the Europeans they firmly believed this, persuaded that they had their being from those kinds of creatures whose origin was as above explained. Even today [ca. 1720] that notion passes among them for undoubted truth, and if there are any of them at this time who are weaned from believing this dream, it has been only by dint of laughing at them for

so ridiculous a belief. You will hear them say that their villages each bear the name of the animal which has given its people their being—as that of the crane, or the bear, or of other animals. They imagine that they were created by other divinities than those which we recognize, because we have many inventions which they do not possess, as the art of writing, shooting with a gun, making gunpowder, muskets, and other things which are used by [civilized] mankind.

Those first men who formed the human race, being scattered in different parts of the land, found out that they had minds. They beheld here and there buffaloes, elks, and deer, all kinds of birds and animals, and many rivers abounding in fish. These first men, I say, whom hunger had weakened, inspired by the Great Hare with an intuitive idea, broke off a branch from a small tree, made a cord with the fibers of the nettle, scraped the bark from a piece of a bough with a sharp stone, and armed its end with another sharp stone, to serve them as an arrow; and thus they formed a bow [and arrows] with which they killed small birds. After that, they made viretons [crossbow arrows], in order to attack the large beasts; they skinned these, and tried to eat the flesh. But as they found only the fat savory, they tried to make fire, in order to cook their meat; and, trying to get it, they took for that purpose hard wood, but without success; and [finally] they used softer wood, which yielded them fire. The skins of the animals served for their covering. As hunting is not practicable in the winter on account of the deep snows, they invented a sort of racket [snowshoe], in order to walk on this with more ease; and they constructed canoes, in order to enable them to cross the rivers.

They relate also that these men, formed as I have told, while hunting found the footprints of an enormously tall man, followed by another that was smaller. They went on into his territory, following up this trail very heedfully, and saw in the distance a large cabin; when they reached it, they were astonished at seeing there the feet and legs of a man so tall that they could not descry his head; that inspired terror in them, and constrained them to retreat. This great colossus, having wakened, cast his eyes on a freshly-made track, and this induced him to step toward it; he immediately saw the man who had discovered him, whom fear had driven to hide himself in a thicket, where he was trembling with dread. The giant said to him, "My son, why art thou afraid? Reassure thyself; I am the Great Hare, he who has caused thee and many others to be born from the dead bodies of various animals. Now I will give thee a companion." Here are the words that he used in giving the man a wife: "Thou, man," said he, "shalt hunt, and make canoes, and do all things that a man must do; and thou, woman, shalt do the cooking for thy husband, make his shoes, dress the skins of animals, sew, and perform all the tasks that are proper for a woman." Such is the belief of these peoples in regard to the creation of man; it is based only upon the most ridiculous and extravagant notions—to which, however, they give credence as if they were incontestable truths, although shame hinders them from making these stories known.

## Pima Creation Story

*The Pima lived in the Arizona desert along the Gila and Salt rivers, a remote location that helped them resist European influence. They were named "Pima" in the fifteenth century by the Spanish, who later recorded their first narratives. However, no creation stories were transcribed until the early twentieth century when a Pima named Edward H. Wood met J. W. Lloyd at the Pan-American Fair in Buffalo and asked his help in preserving the legends of Wood's grand-uncle, Thin Leather. The Pima creation story takes us to a landscape on the other side of the North American continent, to a people who favored stability, settlement, and peace and whose artistic traditions were long and rich.*

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In the beginning there was no earth, no water – nothing. There was only a Person, Juh-wert-a-Mah-kai, "The Doctor of the Earth."



He just floated, for there was no place for him to stand upon. There was no sun, no light, and he just floated about in the darkness, which was Darkness itself.

He wandered around in the nowhere till he thought he had wandered enough. Then he rubbed on his breast and rubbed out moah-haht-tack, that is, perspiration, or "greasy earth." This he rubbed out on the palm of his hand and held out. It tipped over three times, but the fourth time it staid straight in the middle of the air and there it remains now as the world.

The first bush he created was the greasewood bush.

And he made ants, little tiny ants, to live on that bush, on its gum which comes out of its stem.

But these little ants did not do any good, so he created white ants, and these worked and enlarged the earth, and they kept on increasing it, larger and larger until it at last was big enough for himself to rest upon.

Then he created a Person. He made him out of his eye, out of the shadow of his eyes, to assist him, to be like him, and to help him in creating trees and human beings and everything that was to be on the earth.

The name of this being was Noo-ee – the buzzard.

Noo-ee was given all power, but he did not do the work he was created for. He did not care to help Juh-wert-a-Mah-kai, but let him go by himself.

And so The Doctor of the Earth himself created the mountains and everything that has seed and is good to eat. For if he had created human beings first they would have had nothing to live on.

## **The Story of the Creation of the World, Told by a Zuni Priest in 1885**

*All cultures use myth and legend to help explain the beginning of things. Many Indian myths tell of a creator who first lights up the darkness, then creates a world of water from which the land gradually emerges. This legend, told by Zuni elders to the ethnologist Frank Hamilton Cushing in the 1880s, features Earth-mother and Sky-father, the original parents.*

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*SOURCE:* Frank Hamilton Cushing, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1894–95 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1896).

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Before the beginning of the new-making, Awonawilona (the Maker and Container of All, the All-father Father), solely had being. There was nothing else whatsoever throughout the great space of the ages save everywhere black darkness in it, and everywhere void desolation.

In the beginning of the new-made, Awonawilona conceived within himself and thought outward in space, whereby mists of increase, steams potent of growth, were evolved and uplifted. Thus, by means of his innate knowledge, the All-container made himself in

person and form of the Sun whom we hold to be our father and who thus came to exist and appear. With his appearance came the brightening of the spaces with light and with the brightening of the spaces the great mist-clouds were thickened together and fell, whereby was evolved water in water; yea, and the world-holding sea.

With his substance of flesh outdrawn from the surface of his person, the Sun-father formed the seed-stuff of twain worlds, impregnating therewith the great waters, and lo! in the heat of his light these waters of the sea grew green and scums rose upon them, waxing wide and weighty until, behold! they became Awitelin Tsita, the "Four-fold Containing Mother-earth," and Apoyan Tächu, the "All-covering Father-sky."

From the lying together of these twain upon the great world-waters, so vitalizing, terrestrial life was conceived; whence began all beings of earth, men and the creatures, in the Fourfold womb of the World.

Thereupon the Earth-mother repulsed the Sky-father, growing big and sinking deep into the embrace of the waters below, thus separating from the Sky-father in the embrace of the waters above. As a woman forebodes evil for her first-born ere born, even so did the Earth-mother forebode, long withholding from birth her myriad progeny and meantime seeking counsel with the Sky-father. "How," said they to one another, "shall our children when brought forth, know one place from another, even by the white light of the Sun-father?"

Now like all the surpassing beings the Earth-mother and the Sky-father were changeable, even as smoke in the wind; transmutable at thought, manifesting themselves in any form at will, like as dancers may be mask-making.

Thus, as a man and woman, spake they, one to the other. "Behold!" said the Earth-mother as a great terraced bowl appeared at hand and within it water, "this is as upon me the homes of my tiny children shall be. On the rim of each world-country they wander in, terraced mountains shall stand, making in one region many, whereby country shall be known from country, and within each, place from place. Behold, again!" said she as she spat on the water and rapidly smote and stirred it with her fingers. Foam formed, gathering about the terraced rim, mounting higher and higher. "Yea," said she, "and from my bosom they shall draw nourishment, for in such as this shall they find the substance of life whence we were ourselves sustained, for see!" Then with her warm breath she blew across the terraces; white flecks of the foam broke away, and, floating over above the water, were shattered by the cold breath of the Sky-father attending, and forthwith shed downward abundantly fine mist and spray! "Even so, shall white clouds float up from the great waters at the borders of the world, and clustering about the mountain terraces of the horizons be borne aloft and abroad by the breaths of the surpassing of soul-beings, and of the children, and shall hardened and broken be by thy cold, shedding downward, in rain-spray, the water of life, even into the hollow places of my lap! For therein chiefly shall nestle our children mankind and creature-kind, for warmth in thy coldness."

Lo! even the trees on high mountains near the clouds and the Sky-father crouch low toward the Earth-mother for warmth and protection! Warm is the Earth-mother, cold the Sky-father, even as woman is the warm, man the cold being!

"Even so!" said the Sky-father; "Yet not alone shalt *thou* helpful be unto our children, for behold!" and he spread his hand abroad with the palm downward and into all the wrinkles and crevices thereof he set the semblance of shining yellow corn-grains; in the dark of the

early world-dawn they gleamed like sparks of fire, and moved as his hand was moved over the bowl, shining up from and also moving in the depths of the water therein. "See!" said he, pointing to the seven grains clasped by his thumb and four fingers, "by such shall our children be guided; for behold, when the Sun-father is not nigh, and thy terraces are as the dark itself (being all hidden therein), then shall our children be guided by lights—like to these lights of all the six regions turning round the midmost one—as in and around the midmost place, where these our children shall abide, lie all the other regions of space! Yea! and even as these grains gleam up from the water, so shall seed-grains like to them, yet numberless, spring up from thy bosom when touched by my waters, to nourish our children." Thus and in other ways many devised they for their offspring.

1. *How does this creation story compare to others with which you may be more familiar?*
2. *For the Pueblos, the sexual union between men and women was a symbol of the forces that ordered the universe. What elements of this idea can you find in this legend?*

## **The Story of the Creation of the World, Told by a Zuni Priest in 1885**

*All cultures use myth and legend to help explain the beginning of things. Many Indian myths tell of a creator who first lights up the darkness, then creates a world of water from which the land gradually emerges. This legend, told by Zuni elders to the ethnologist Frank Hamilton Cushing in the 1880s, features Earth-mother and Sky-father, the original parents.*

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*SOURCE: Frank Hamilton Cushing, *Thirteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, 1894–95 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1896).*

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Before the beginning of the new-making, Awonawilona (the Maker and Container of All, the All-father Father), solely had being. There was nothing else whatsoever throughout the great space of the ages save everywhere black darkness in it, and everywhere void desolation.

In the beginning of the new-made, Awonawilona conceived within himself and thought outward in space, whereby mists of increase, steams potent of growth, were evolved and uplifted. Thus, by means of his innate knowledge, the All-container made himself in person and form of the Sun whom we hold to be our father and who thus came to exist and appear. With his appearance came the brightening of the spaces with light and with the brightening of the spaces the great mist-clouds were thickened together and fell, whereby was evolved water in water; yea, and the world-holding sea.

With his substance of flesh outdrawn from the surface of his person, the Sun-father formed the seed-stuff of twain worlds, impregnating therewith the great waters, and lo! in the heat of his light these waters of the sea grew green and scums rose upon them, waxing

wide and weighty until, behold! they became Awitelin Tsita, the “Four-fold Containing Mother-earth,” and Apoyan Tāchu, the “All-covering Father-sky.”

From the lying together of these twain upon the great world-waters, so vitalizing, terrestrial life was conceived; whence began all beings of earth, men and the creatures, in the Fourfold womb of the World.

Thereupon the Earth-mother repulsed the Sky-father, growing big and sinking deep into the embrace of the waters below, thus separating from the Sky-father in the embrace of the waters above. As a woman forebodes evil for her first-born ere born, even so did the Earth-mother forebode, long withholding from birth her myriad progeny and meantime seeking counsel with the Sky-father. “How,” said they to one another, “shall our children when brought forth, know one place from another, even by the white light of the Sun-father?”

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1. *How does this creation story compare to others with which you may be more familiar?*
2. *For the Pueblos, the sexual union between men and women was a symbol of the forces that ordered the universe. What elements of this idea can you find in this legend?*

## ***Two Nineteenth-Century Archaeologists Provide the First Scientific Description of the Indian Mounds of the Mississippi Valley in 1848***

*In the 1840s the archaeologists Ephraim George Squier (1821-1888) and Edwin H. Davis (1811-1888) researched and wrote Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley (1848), the first work issued by the newly-organized Smithsonian Institution. Squier and Davis provided detailed surveys of hundreds of Indian mounds, many of which have since been destroyed by agriculture and town building. In the following passages they offer their concluding observations on the mystery of the mounds.*

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SOURCE: E. G. Squier and E. H. Davis, *Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1848), pp. 1-3, 301-306.

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THE ancient monuments of the Western United States consist, for the most part, of elevations and embankments of earth and stone, erected with great labor and manifest design. In connection with these, more or less intimate, are found various minor relics of art, consisting of ornaments and implements of many kinds, some of them composed of metal, but most of stone.

These remains are spread over a vast extent of country. They are found on the sources of the Alleghany, in the western part of the State of New York, on the east; and extend thence westwardly along the southern shore of Lake Erie, and through Michigan and Wisconsin, to Iowa and the Nebraska territory, on the west. We have no record of their occurrence above the great lakes. Carver mentions some on the shores of Lake Pepin, and some are said to occur near Lake Travers, under the 46th parallel of latitude. Lewis and Clarke saw them on the Missouri river, one thousand miles above its junction with the Mississippi; and they have been observed on the Kansas and Platte, and on other remote western rivers. They are found all over the intermediate country, and spread over the valley of the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. They line the shores of the Gulf from Texas to Florida, and extend, in diminished numbers, into South Carolina. They occur in great numbers in Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, Tennessee, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and Texas. They are found, in less numbers, in the western portions of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and

North and South Carolina; as also in Michigan, Iowa, and in the Mexican territory beyond the Rio Grande del Norte. In short, they occupy the entire basin of the Mississippi and its tributaries, as also the fertile plains along the Gulf..

We find numberless mounds, most of them conical but many pyramidal in form, and often of great dimensions. The pyramidal structures are always truncated, sometimes terraced, and generally have graded ascents to their summits. They bear a close resemblance to the Teocallis of Mexico; and the known uses of the latter are suggestive of the probable purposes to which they were applied. Accompanying these, and in some instances sustaining an intimate relation to them, are numerous enclosures of earth and stone, frequently of vast size, and often of regular outline. These are by far the most imposing class of our aboriginal remains, and impress us most sensibly with the numbers and power of the people who built them. The purposes of many of these are quite obvious; and investigation has served to settle, pretty clearly, the character of most of the other works occurring in connection with them..

Without undertaking to point out the affinities, or to indicate the probable origin of the builders of the western monuments, and the cause of their final disappearance, -inquiries of deep interest and vast importance in an archaeological and ethnological point of view we may venture to suggest that the facts thus far collected point to a connection more or less intimate between the race of the mounds and the semi-civilized nations which formerly had their seats among the sierras of Mexico, upon the plains of Central America and Peru, and who erected the imposing structures which from their number, vastness, and mysterious significance, invest the central portions of the continent with an interest not less absorbing than that which attaches to the valley of the Nile. These nations alone, of all those found in possession of the continent by the European discoverers, were essentially stationary and agricultural in their habits-conditions indispensable to large population, to fixedness of institutions, and to any considerable advance in the economical or ennobling arts. That the mound-builders, although perhaps in a less degree, were also stationary and agricultural, clearly appears from a variety of facts and circumstances, most of which will no doubt recur to the mind of the reader, but which will bear recapitulation here.

dd>It may safely be claimed, and will be admitted without dispute, that a large local population can only exist under an agricultural system. Dense commercial and manufacturing communities, the apparent exceptions to the remark, are themselves the offspring of a large agricultural population, with which nearly or remotely they are connected, and upon which they are dependent. Now it is evident that works of art, so numerous and vast as we have seen those of the Mississippi valley to be, could only have been erected by a numerous people, -and especially must we regard as numerous the population capable of constructing them, when we reflect how imperfect at the best must have been the artificial aids at their command, as compared with those of the present age. Implements of wood, stone, and copper could hardly have proved very efficient auxiliaries to the builders, who must have depended mainly upon their own bare hands and weak powers of transportation, for excavating and collecting together the twenty millions of cubic feet of material which make up the solid contents of the great mound at

Cahokia alone.

But the conclusion that the ancient population was exceedingly dense, follows not less from the capability which they possessed to erect, than from the circumstance that they required, works of the magnitude we have seen, to protect them in danger, or to indicate in a sufficiently imposing form their superstitious zeal, and their respect for the dead. As observed by an eminent archaeologist, whose opinions upon this and collateral subjects are entitled to a weight second to those of no other author, "it is impossible that the population, for whose protection such extensive works were necessary, and which was able to defend them, should not have been eminently agricultural." The same author elsewhere observes, of the great mound at Grave creek, that "it indicates not only a dense agricultural population, but also a state of society essentially different from that of the modern race of Indians north of the tropic. There is not, and there was not in the sixteenth century, a single tribe of Indians (north of the semi-civilized nations) between the Atlantic and the Pacific, which had means of subsistence sufficient to enable them to apply, for such purposes, the unproductive labor necessary for the work; nor was there any in such a social state as to compel the labor of the people to be thus applied."\*

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\* [Alibert] GALLATIN'S "Notes on the semi-civilized nations of Mexico," *Transactions of American Ethnological Society*, Vol. I, p. 207.

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In respect to the extent of territory occupied at one time, or at successive periods, by the race of the mounds, so far as indicated by the occurrence of their monuments, little need be said in addition to the observations presented in the first chapter. It cannot, however, have escaped notice, that the relics found in the mounds, -composed of materials peculiar to places separated as widely as the ranges of the Alleghanies on the east, and the Sierras of Mexico on the west, the waters of the great lakes on the north, and those of the Gulf of Mexico on the south, -denote the contemporaneous existence of communication between these extremes. For we find, side by side in the same mounds, native copper from Lake Superior, mica from the Alleghanies, shells from the Gulf, and obsidian (perhaps porphyry) from Mexico. This fact seems seriously to conflict with the hypothesis of a migration, either northward or southward. Further and more extended investigations and observations may, nevertheless, serve satisfactorily to settle not only this, but other equally interesting questions connected with the extinct race, whose name is lost to tradition itself, and whose very existence is left to the sole and silent attestation of the rude but often imposing monuments which through the valleys of the West.

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*1. What explanations do Squier and Davis offer for the building of mounds in the Mississippi Valley? 2. The authors argue that only an agricultural people could construct the mounds. On the basis of your reading in the text, is this strictly true? 3. According to the authors, the builders of the mounds must have "disappeared," for when the Europeans arrived there was not a single tribe of Indians between the Atlantic and the Pacific with "the means of subsistence sufficient" to build them. What is wrong with this interpretation?*

1. *According to the Bible, God gave man and woman “dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.” By contrast, what does this myth suggest about Cherokee beliefs concerning the relationship between people and the animals?*
2. *It is often said that Indian peoples viewed themselves as part of the natural world. Discuss the various elements in this tale that might support such an interpretation.*

## **Voyage from Lisbon to the Island of São Thomé (1540) Anonymous Portuguese Pilot**

**1942. Description of a Voyage from Lisbon to the Island of São Thomé. *Europeans in West Africa 1540-1560*. Edited by John William Blake. London: The Hakluyt Society.**

*Early descriptions of Portuguese travelers to West Africa are vital to our understanding of African life before the advent of colonial rule. These descriptions portray the nature of kingship, religion, social life, economic activity and slavery in Africa in the sixteenth century. This early account is particularly interesting because it describes the trade in gold and slaves in West Africa from someone other than an Arab traveler. It is well known that gold from West Africa was heavily traded in the trans-Saharan trade by Berber merchants making their way to the major trading centers in North Africa and Egypt. This is perhaps one of the earliest accounts of gold being traded directly with Europeans along the Atlantic coast. Eventually this shift in trade routes will undermine the caravan traders in the north, as Europeans make direct contact with African merchants nearer the gold fields.*

*The Portuguese pilot is fascinated by the extent of the slave trade and the items that are given up in the trade, including cowrie shells, glass beads, coral, copper, brass items and cotton cloth. Portuguese merchants and traders are also involved in the buying and selling of sugar grown on the islands off the west coast of Africa. Sugar was a lucrative trade item that was in high demand in Europe. It wasn't long after this time that Europeans began to set up sugar plantations in the New World.*

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*The Ships which leave Lisbona to go to the island of San Thomé to load sugar, the wind they sail by to the Canarie islands, called by the ancients the Fortunate islands, the island of Palme, and the promontory called Capo di Boiador.*

*As your excellency knows, before I left Venetia, signor Hieronimo Gracastor ordered me, in his letters from Verona, to transcribe for him, as soon as I reached the Villa di Conde, from some notes which I had told your excellency I had with me, the whole of the voyage which we pilots made to the island of S. Thomé, when we went there to transport a cargo of sugar; together with all that happened during our voyage to this island, that seemed to him so wonderful and worthy of the study of a scholar. Your excellency also, on my departure, made the same request to me; and so, having arrived here, I began at once to write an account of the voyage in question, communicating also with some of my friends who took part in it. . . .*

*The various provinces of the West Coast of Africa, Guinea, the coast of Melegete [Malagueta], Benin, Manicongo; and the lords and kings of these lands; how the people worship their kings believing that they have descended from heaven; and of some of the ceremonies and customs of the kingdom of Benin on the death of the king.*

To understand the negro traffic, one must know that over all the African coast facing west there are



various countries and provinces, such as Guinea, the coast of Melegete, the kingdom of Benin, the kingdom of Manicôgo, six degrees from the equator and towards the south pole. There are many tribes and negro kings here, and also communities which are partly mohammedan and partly heathen. These are constantly making war among themselves. The kings are worshipped by their subjects, who believe that they come from heaven, and speak of them always with great reverence, at a distance and on bended knees. Great ceremony surrounds them, and many of these kings never allow themselves to be seen eating, so as not to destroy the belief of their subjects that they can live without food. They worship the sun, and believe that spirits are immortal, and that after death they go to the sun. Among others, there is in the kingdom of Benin an ancient custom, observed to the present day, that when the king dies, the people all assemble in a large field, in the centre of which is a very deep well, wider at the bottom than at the mouth. They cast the body of the dead king into this well, and all his friends and servants gather round, and those who are judged to have been most dear to and favoured by the king (this includes not a few, as all are anxious for the honour) voluntarily go down to keep him company. When they have done so, the people place a great stone over the mouth of the well, and remain by it day and night. . . .

*The Negroes of Guinea are unmethodical even in their way of eating; they live long; certain superstitions among some of the negroes in this country; melegete spices; the tailed pepper; certain bushes with stems that have the flavour of ginger; soap made with oil of palms and with ashes.*

The negroes of Guinea and Benin are very haphazard in their habits of eating. They have no set times for meals, and eat and drink four or five times a day, drinking water, or a wine which they distil from palms. They have no hair except for a few bristly strands on top of the head, and none grows; and the rest of the bodies are completely hairless. They live for the best part of 100 years, and are always vigorous, except at certain times of the year when they become very weak, as if they had fever. They are then bled, and recover, having a great deal of blood in their system. Some of the negroes in this country are so superstitious that they worship the first object they see on the day of recovery. . . .

*Why the fathers and mothers of these negroes send their own children to be sold, and what they take in exchange; and how these slaves are taken to the island of San Jacobo, where they are sold in couples, that is, the same number of males and females; the coast of Mina, and why the catholic king has built a castle there.*

All the coast, as far as the kingdom of Manicongo, is divided into two parts, which are leased every four or five years to whoever makes the best offer, that is, to be able to go to contract in those lands and ports, and those in this business are called contractors, though among us they would be known as *appaltadori*, and their deputies, and no others may approach and land on this shore, or even buy or sell. Great caravans of negroes come here, bringing gold and slaves for sale. Some of the slaves have been captured in battle, others are sent by their parents, who think they are doing their children the best service in the world by sending them to be sold in this way to other lands where there is an abundance of provisions. They are brought as naked as they are born, both males and females, except for a sheepskin cloth; and they have glass rosaries of various colours, and articles made of glass, copper, brass, and cotton cloths of different colours, and other similar things used throughout Ethiopia. These contractors take the slaves to the island of San Jacobo, where they are bought by merchant captains from various countries and provinces, chiefly from the Spanish Indies. These give their merchandise in exchange and always wish to have the same number of male and female slaves, because otherwise they do not get good service from them. During the voyage, they separate the men from the women, putting the men below the deck and the women above, where they cannot see when the men are given food; because otherwise the women would do nothing but look at them. Regarding these negroes, our king has had a castle built on the said coast, at Mina, 6 degrees north of the equator, where none but his servants are allowed to live; and large numbers of negroes come to this place with grains of gold, which they have found in the river beds and sand, and bargain with these servants, taking various objects from them in exchange; principally glass necklaces or rosaries, and another kind made of a blue stone, not lapis lazuli, but another stone which our king causes to be brought from Manicôgo, where it is found. These rosaries are in the form of necklaces, and are called coral; and a quantity of gold is given in exchange for them, as they are greatly valued by all the negroes. They wear them round their necks as a charm against spirits, but some wear necklaces of glass, which are very similar, but which will not bear the heat of fire.

*Description of the island of San Thomé, nowadays inhabited by many traders; the island called Il Principe, the island of Anobon, and the city called Pouoasan.*

The island of San Thomé, which was discovered 80 or 90 years ago by the sea-captains of our king, and which was unknown to the ancients, is round. It is 60 Italian miles in diameter, that is, one degree; and is situated under the line of the equator and half way between the north and south poles. The days and nights are of equal length, and one never sees the least difference, whether the sun is in cancer or capricorn. The Pole Star cannot be seen, but by turning a little one can see it; and the constellation called *il crusero* appears very far away. To the east of this island, 120 miles distant, there is a small island called Il Principe [O Principe]. This island is inhabited and cultivated at the present time, and the profits made from its sugar trade go to the king's eldest son; this is why it is called Il Principe. . . .

There is a bishop here, and the present one comes from Villa di Conde by order of the archbishop at the desire of the king. A corregedor dispenses justice. There must be 600 to 700 families living here as well as many Portuguese, Castilian, French and Genoese merchants; and people of any nationality, who wish to settle here are welcome. They all have wives and children, and some of the children who are born there are as white as ours. It sometimes happens that, when the wife of a merchant dies, he takes a negress, and this is an accepted practice, as the negro population is both intelligent and rich; the children of such unions are brought up to our customs and way of dressing. Children born of these negresses are mischievous and difficult to manage, and are called *Mulati* [mulattoes].

*Description of how the inhabitants of this island treat sugar; of the goods which the ships bring in exchange for sugar; of the fertility of the land and the way they cultivate sugar cane and trade it; of why the flesh of pigs in this land is so healthy and easy to digest.*

The chief industry of the people is to make sugar, which they sell to the ships which come each year, bringing flour, Spanish wines, oil, cheese, and all kinds of leather for shoes, swords, glass vessels, rosaries, and shells, which in Italia are called *porcellette* [porcelains] — little white ones — which we call *buzios*, and which are used for money in Ethiopia. If the ships which bring these goods did not come, the white merchants would die, because they are not accustomed to negro food. All the population, therefore, buys negro slaves and their women from Guinea, Benin and Manicongo, and sets them to work on the land to grow and make sugar. There are rich men here, who have 150, 200 and even 300 negroes and negresses, who are obliged to work for their masters all the week, except on Saturdays, when they work on their own account. . . .

## **When Historians Disagree**

### **How Different Was African Slavery and Slavery in the Americas?**

As many scholars point out, slavery existed in many parts of the ancient world and in Africa long before the significant encounter of Europeans and Africans that began in the 1400s and expanded in the 1500s and 1600s. But over time scholars have noted different aspects of the kinds of slavery that existed at different times and different places. Almost universally slaves were contrasted with free people, though through most of history many different levels of freedom and unfreedom across the world. But in all cases, slaves were unique in the lack of freedom accorded them. They were considered property of others. Their work, their sexuality, even their lives were controlled by others. But beyond that there have also been great differences in the nature of slavery. In some cases slavery was a permanent status inherited from generation to generation while in others slaves were able to earn or be rewarded with freedom. In some cases slaves had certain specific legal rights and

protections, in others they were little more—if any more—than domesticated animals. At some points in American history, people seeking to justify the slavery that existed in North America from as early as the 1500s to 1865 pointed to the similarities between slavery in Africa and slavery in the lands that became the United States after 1776. More recent historians have noted significant differences in the nature of slavery, not only between slavery as it existed in Africa and in the United States but also as it existed at different times in different parts of Africa and at different times and in different parts of the United States. Virtually no one today seeks to defend the institution of slavery. It was at all times and in all places an inhuman relationship between the enslaved and those who enslaved them. Nevertheless, the differences are important and for all the similarities described by historians of slavery, historians also continue to differ among themselves about the nature of slavery, in the United States and in Africa.

Anne Haour, "The Early Medieval Slave Trade of the Central Sahel: Archaeological and Historical Considerations," in Paul J. Lane and Kevin C. MacDonald, editors, *Slavery in Africa: Archeology and Memory*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 61-66.

The trans-Atlantic trade that brought slaves from the African continent to the New World has generated such interest and controversy that it has tended to obscure another significant African slave trade, that which saw individuals sent across the Sahara to be sold in North Africa and Western Asia. This trans-Saharan trade was both longer-lived and, in terms of numbers eventually enslaved, demographically similar to the better-known trans-Atlantic trade. The primary goal of this chapter is to summarise current understandings of the trans-Saharan slave trade for the period AD 750-1500 approximately ...

At present, most volumes dealing with African slavery focus on the period after AD 1500, and on the Atlantic trade. Much less is written about earlier trade and inland routes, including those across the Sahara. There is in fact ... a 'persistent tendency to downplay the significance of the ... early desert trade'. Yet the evidence from between AD 600 and 1500 forms an essential backdrop to the discussion of the slave trade of early modern times.

The difficulties in reaching a clear picture of the prevalence of slaving in early medieval

Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 1-23.

Slavery has been an important phenomenon throughout history. It has been found in many places, from classical antiquity to very recent times. Africa has been intimately connected with this history, both as a major source of slaves for ancient civilizations, the Islamic world, India, and the Americas, and as one of the principal areas where slavery was common... Slavery virtually always has been initiated through violence that reduced the status of a person from a condition of freedom and citizenship to a condition of slavery...

A brief postscript is necessary to consider the special case of slavery in the Americas, because the American system was a particularly heinous development. Many features of American slavery were similar to slavery in other times and places, including the relative size of the slave population, the concentration of slaves in economic units large enough to be classified as plantations, and the degree of physical violence and psychological coercion used to keep slaves in their place. Nonetheless, the American system of slavery was unique in two respects: the manipulation of race as a means of controlling the slave population, and the extent of the system's economic rationalization. In the Americas, the primary purpose of slave labor was the production of staple commodities – sugar, coffee, tobacco, rice, cotton, gold, and silver – for sale on

and medieval times can therefore easily be anticipated. Nonetheless, some attempts have been made to estimate the volume of the trans-Saharan slave trade... Taken globally, considering the trade in slaves to the Islamic world in its entirety (all routes out of sub-Saharan Africa, and the whole period AD 600-2000), the figures advanced ... suggest the displacement of about 14-15 million sub-Saharan Africans...

Just how far back the roots of the trans-Saharan trade extend remains a matter of speculation, and ties in to the second question which must be considered in this preliminary discussion: that of the roles to which slaves were put. It has been argued that a trade bringing Saharans and sub-Saharan to North Africa may go back to Roman times, or even earlier. As the main proponents of the argument are well aware, this is difficult to demonstrate conclusively... But among good possibly traded early on for slaves, one stands out: salt, apparently a staple import from the Sahara to the Sahel [West Africa] from an early date. There is an environmental argument for this: the consumption of salt is crucial to humans and herds, to replenish minerals lost through sweating, yet there exist extensive areas of the Sahel where salt does not occur naturally...

[I]t has been remarked that in both Africa and Europe slave trading offered the elites opportunities for political aggrandizement... McCormick has observed that the 'tragic banality' of the slave trade was, 'for most of human history, a normal part of commercial activity. In the early medieval case, the capture and sale of 'pagan' neighbours allowed nascent 'states' in both northern Europe and the Chad Basin [of Central Africa] to accumulate valuable income.

world markets. Furthermore, many features that were common in other slave systems were absent or relatively unimportant in the Americas. These included the use of slaves in government, the existence of eunuchs, and the sacrifice of slaves at funerals and other occasions (but not the use of slaves and the descendants of slaves in the military). The similarities and differences are identified to counteract a tendency to perceive slavery as a peculiarly American institution...

The rise and expansion of the European slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean had a decided impact on the evolution of slavery in Africa ... Slave exports rose gradually during the first 150 years of the Atlantic trade. Thereafter, the trade was truly large, on a scale that dwarfed all previous exports from Africa. The total volume for the Atlantic trade surpassed 12.8 million people...

As a source for the external trade since time immemorial, Africa has been a reservoir where slaves were cheap and plentiful – indeed they were there for the taking. This feature, enslavement, was another dimension of slavery in Africa that strongly affected the history of the institution there. It is inaccurate to think that Africans enslaved their brothers – although this sometimes happened. Rather, Africans enslaved their enemies... In Africa, the enslavers and the slave owners were often the same. , , , There was no separation in function between enslavement and slave use; these remained intricately associated... Slavery was already fundamental to the social, political, and economic order of parts of the northern savanna, Ethiopia, and the East African coast for several centuries before 1600. Enslavement was an organized activity, sanctioned by law and custom. Slaves were a principal commodity in trade, including the export sector, and slaves were important in the domestic sphere, not only as concubines, servants, soldiers, and administrators but also as common laborers.