

SS7G4 The student will describe the diverse cultures of the people who live in Africa.

b. Explain the diversity of religions within the Arab, Ashanti, Bantu, and Swahili ethnic groups.

ARAB

Arab people began to spread into North Africa in the late 600s AD, when the first Muslim armies arrived in Egypt. From there, Arab armies, traders, and scholars spread across the northern Africa all the way to Morocco. Wherever the Arabs went, they took **Islam** and the Arabic language with them. Arabic was necessary if one was to be able to read the Quran, Islam's holy book. From North Africa, Arab traders began to lead caravans south across the Sahara Desert in the gold and salt trade. This brought Islam and Arab culture to the Sahel region and beyond. Along the east coast of Africa, Arab traders traveled by land and by sea down to present day Kenya, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zanzibar. They married local women and the process of blending cultures and religions began there as well. The Arabic language, the religion of Islam, and many other aspects of Muslim culture became part of Africa. Today Muslims are found throughout Africa. They make up a majority of the people living along the Mediterranean coast and in some countries along the Indian Ocean in the east.

ASHANTI

The **Ashanti** people are found in the modern country of Ghana. They have been a powerful group in this part of Africa for over three hundred years. Their culture has played a part in the countries around them, including Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, and Togo. The Ashanti believe that their kingdom was founded in 1701 with the help of a holy man who produced a **Golden Stool** from the heavens and gave it to the first Ashanti king. The Stool came to symbolize Ashanti power and the belief is that the kingdom will last as long as the golden stool remains in the hands of the Ashanti king. The traditional Ashanti religion is centered on a belief in a supreme god, or **Nayme**. His many children, the **Abosom**, represent all the natural powers and forces in the world. The traditional Ashanti believe that all living things have souls. They also believe that witches, demon spirits, and fairies have powers in the lives of men. Ancestors are given great respect, and there are a number of family rituals associated with birth, puberty, marriage, and death.

Other religions are also practiced by many of the Ashanti. **Christianity** has gained many followers in Ghana and along the west coast of Africa. It was introduced by European and American missionaries beginning in the 1800s. There are also a large number of **Muslims**. Like so many other places in Africa, movement of people through the centuries has resulted in a great deal of diversity in nearly all aspects of life among the Ashanti.

BANTU

The **Bantu**-speaking people of Africa migrated in many different waves from the region just south of the Sahara Desert to the central and southern parts of the continent beginning over 2,000 years ago. Today the speakers of the hundreds of Bantu-related languages include many different ethnic groups, though they share a number of cultural characteristics. From their earliest days, the Bantu were known as farmers and animal herders, and they learned iron-making crafts as well. As they spread south and east across the continent, following rivers and streams, they met many new people and learned new skills, even as they shared their own. Bantu-speaking people settled as far south as the southern tip of Africa. They intermarried with the people they met accepting new traditions and blending them with Bantu culture. The Bantu migration was one of the largest movements of people in Africa's history. Today over 60 million people in central and southern Africa speak Bantu-based languages and share some part of Bantu culture.