

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.

Many Bantu who settled in areas where there was a strong Arab presence are **Muslim**. Others, living in parts of Africa influenced by missionary efforts are **Christian**. Still others follow traditional **animist religions**. Animists believe that spirits are found in natural objects and surroundings. They may feel a spiritual presence in rocks, trees, a waterfall or particularly beautiful place in the forest.

SWAHILI

The **Swahili** community developed along the coast of East Africa when Arab and Persian traders looking for profitable markets began to settle there and intermarry with the local Bantu-speaking population. The resulting Swahili culture is a mix of people who can claim ancestors in Africa, in Arabia, and even across the Indian Ocean. Many people in the countries of Kenya, Tanzania, and Mozambique share the Swahili culture, language, history and traditions. While the Swahili language is considered a Bantu language, there are many Arabic words and phrases included as well. The word Swahili comes from the Arabic word "Swahili," which means "one who lives on the coast." Most Swahili today are city dwellers rather than traditional farmers and herdsman. Many are engaged in fishing and trade, as their ancestors were.

Because contact with Arab traders was such a big part of their history, most of the Swahili today are Muslims. Islam has been one of the factors that helped create a common identity for such a diverse group of people. It is not unusual for Swahili men to wear charms around their necks containing verses of the Quran to protect them from harm. The Quran is the holy book of the Muslims. Many among the Swahili also follow local beliefs that have been part of the culture of eastern Africa since before Muslim traders arrived over a thousand years ago. These local beliefs are known as **mila**. One belief that is part of mila is that there are spirits that can possess a person. Many Swahili also see a close link between their religious beliefs and the practice of medicine and healing. Herbal medicines are often given along with prescribed prayers and rituals that are all thought to be part of the cure.

- ___ 78. What religion did the Arabs bring with them to Africa?
- A. Islam
 - B. Judaism
 - C. Animism
 - D. Christianity
- ___ 79. Why was learning Arabic important for those who became Muslims?
- A. The Quran is written in Arabic.
 - B. Arabic is an easy language to learn.
 - C. Arabic was the only written language.
 - D. Muslims are required to speak only Arabic.
- ___ 80. Which were goods Arab traders carried across the Sahara by caravan?
- A. salt and gold
 - B. silk and wool
 - C. grains and olives
 - D. books and writing utensils
- ___ 81. Where do most Muslims live in Africa?
- A. only in the Sahel
 - B. near the southern tip of Africa
 - C. in Northern and Eastern Africa
 - D. few Muslims live in Africa today

- ___ 82. In which country do most Ashanti live?
- A. Egypt
 - B. Kenya
 - C. Ghana
 - D. Morocco
- ___ 83. What is the significance of the Golden Stool for the Ashanti people?
- A. It symbolizes the power of the Ashanti people.
 - B. The stool was meant to encourage equal rights for all.
 - C. The Ashanti would become rich making furniture and household goods.
 - D. The Ashanti people could only worship if they were sitting on the Golden Stool.
- ___ 84. Those who practice the traditional Ashanti religion
- A. use the Quran as their holy book.
 - B. believe there is one supreme god.
 - C. believe that Jesus is the son of God.
 - D. must pray facing Mecca five times a day.
- ___ 85. What are the main religions found among the Ashanti people today?
- A. a traditional religion and Hinduism
 - B. a belief in Judaism and Christianity
 - C. a traditional Shanti religion, Christianity, and Islam
 - D. There is little formal practice of religion among the Ashanti today.
- ___ 86. Which BEST describes the Bantu people?
- A. The Bantu are nomadic people in the Sahara Desert.
 - B. The Bantu are a separate race in the northern part of the African continent.
 - C. The Bantu live only in cities and towns; none of them farm or herd animals anymore.
 - D. They are many different people who share a related language and some cultural characteristics.
- ___ 87. Why is the Bantu migration so important in the study of Africa?
- A. The Bantu migration led to the first settlements in the Sahara.
 - B. The migration was forced by the African governments in the north.
 - C. The Bantu migration brought language and iron tools across Africa.
 - D. During the Bantu migration, the people refused to intermarry with Arabs or Muslims.
- ___ 88. How many people in Africa today are part of the Bantu culture?
- A. only a very few
 - B. over 60 million
 - C. several hundred thousand
 - D. those living in the southern part of the continent

- ___ 89. Which best describes the religion of the Bantu people?
- A. most are Muslims
 - B. most Bantu practice Animism
 - C. nearly all Bantu are Christians
 - D. the Bantu practice a wide variety of religions
- ___ 90. Where are the majority of the Swahili people found?
- A. the Sahel
 - B. East Africa
 - C. North Africa
 - D. South Africa
- ___ 91. The Swahili language is a mixture of Bantu and
- A. Arabic
 - B. Muslim
 - C. Ashanti
 - D. English
- ___ 92. What does the word "Swahili" mean in Arabic?
- A. forest dweller
 - B. nomad wanderer
 - C. one who herds animals
 - D. one who lives on the coast
- ___ 93. What religion is most common among the Swahili today?
- A. Islam
 - B. Hinduism
 - C. Buddhism
 - D. Christianity
- ___ 94. What are the "mila" that are part of Swahili belief?
- A. spirits that can possess a person
 - B. rituals of the pilgrimage to Mecca
 - C. special foods eaten on the holidays
 - D. prayers that must be said five times a day