

## **The Multiple Facets of African Cultures**

### **The Egyptian Cultural Sphere:**

- Egyptian civilizations (Ancient Egyptian, Hellenic and Coptic) owe their existence to the Nile river. However, the desert surrounding the Nile valley limited the spread of Egyptian civilization to the surrounding regions.
- The situation changed after the sweeping conquest of Egypt by the Arab Muslim armies between 639 and 641 A.D. when Egypt became part of the central Syro-Egyptian axis.

### **The Mediterranean Cultural Sphere:**

- North Africa was geographically separate from Egypt and Sub-Saharan Africa by vast expanses of desert.
- It was part of the Mediterranean cultural sphere dominated by the Roman/Byzantine hegemony.
- Augustine of Hippo (354-430), a native Berber, was the bishop of Hippo, modern Annaba in Algeria, and is considered a key figure in the development of Western Christianity.
- Arab Muslim armies conquered North Africa between 647 and 709 A.D. making part of the Arab/Islamic world. The local ethnic Berber tribes converted to Islam and led the conquest of Hispania starting 710 A.D. and of Egypt in 969.

### **The Sub-Saharan Cultural Sphere:**

- Sub-Saharan Africa was ruled by three consecutive Empires: Ghana, Mali and the Songhai Empire (15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> cent.)
- Empire of Ghana (8<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> cent) was conquered by North African Almoravids who established a Muslim rule in the region.
- Non-Muslim Sosso empire conquered the Mandinka kingdom which was liberated by a coalition of small states under Prince Sundiata Keita forming Empire of Mali (13<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> cent.)
- An interesting facet of the trans-Saharan trade exchange is expressed in the Gnawa community in Morocco composed mainly of sub-Saharanans who ended up in the north either as a result of captivity and slavery or trade. The result was an interesting cultural fusion between Sub-Saharan customs and North African Sufi rituals.
- In 1591, the Moroccan Sultan Ahmad Al-Mansour Al-Dahbi (d.1603) conquered the civil-war-ravaged Songhai Empire causing its break up into smaller kingdoms and tribal chiefdoms.

### **The Abyssinian/Ethiopian Cultural Sphere:**

- Ethiopia is geographically isolated from the rest of the continent. As a result, an Ethiopian Orthodox Church survived dramatic changes in the region.
- Ethiopian geography also sheltered a monarchy from foreign invaders for a continuous 2500 years.

**The Indian Ocean Cultural Sphere:**

- Monsoon winds created a unit out of the vast world of the Indian Ocean
- Swahili (“coastal” in Arabic) is a Sub-Saharan language of the Bantoid family of languages spread along the eastern coast of Africa in its arabized form thanks to Indian Ocean trade
- Several wealthy trading outposts spotted the East African coast such as Kilwa, Mogadishu and Mombasa.

**The Central African Cultural sphere**

- Kingdom of Zimbabwe

**The West African Cultural sphere**

- Kingdom of Congo