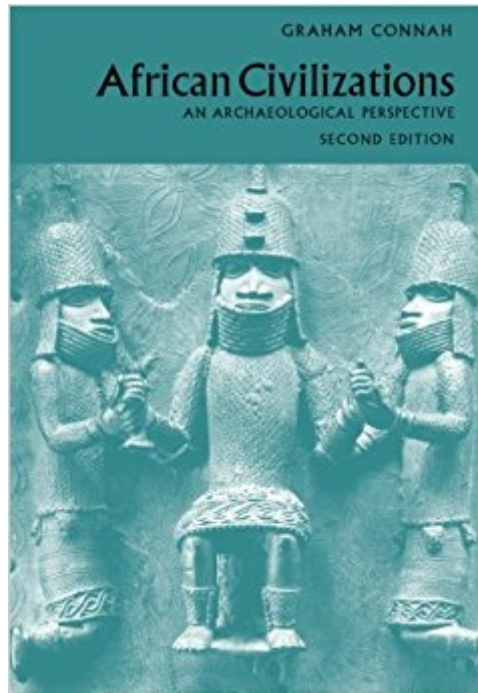




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# African Civilizations: An Archaeological Perspective



## Synopsis

This major new revised edition of *African Civilizations* reexamines the physical evidence for developing social complexity in tropical Africa over the past four thousand years and considers possible explanations of the developments that gave rise to it. Graham Connah focuses on urbanism and state formation in seven main areas of Africa: Nubia, Ethiopia, the West African savanna, the West African forest, the East African coast and islands, the Zimbabwe Plateau, and parts of Central Africa. Extensively illustrated and offering an extended bibliography, this book provides essential reading on the topic.

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## Customer Reviews

"The text is intelligible to laymen, the illustrations excellent, and the case studies intriguing." *Africa Today* "Graham Connah states in the introduction of this work that his purpose is to overcome the widespread stereotype that Africa represents a continent 'of scattered groups of people living in small villages of grass or mud "huts," but 'is about the material evidence of cities and states,' that is 'civilization.' The author succeeds admirably in this goal. The organization of the study is unique. The writing is integrated, lucid and eminently readable." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*

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urbanism and state formation in seven main areas of Africa: Nubia, Ethiopia, the West African savanna, the West African forest, the East African coast and islands, the Zimbabwe Plateau, and parts of Central Africa. Extensively illustrated and offering an extended bibliography, this book provides essential reading on the topic.

I had this as a textbook for my Ancient African Civilization class and I was amazed to find that I thought I was taking a class to fill a requirement and this book and some others made me change my entire major to African History/African Studies... this book is so interesting and offers so much insight into African history and the different populations that resided there over the last couple milleniums...

Excellent.

In much of Africa, particularly south of the Sahara, the written record extends only a short time into the past. In "African Civilizations" Graham Connah makes good this deficiency with an examination of the archaeological evidence for the development of technology and increasingly complex societies and the growth of urban areas and states. This is not however a purely archaeological survey, as Connah's multi-disciplinary approach covers the broader historical context of the physical evidence described. There is a certain amount of theoretical speculation, but this is firmly grounded in the physical evidence. After an initial chapter on the geographical and ecological setting and the development and relevance of African archaeology, there are seven chapters on different areas of pre-colonial, and largely pre-literate Africa. These are described, in roughly chronological order from the Nubian Nile valley over 4,000 years ago, early and medieval Ethiopia, the West African savanna, the West African forest, the East African coast and islands, the Zimbabwe Plateau and two areas of Central Africa. The final chapter considers what the common denominators are, and concludes that a combination of developments in metal technology and mixed agriculture led to denser populations, increased trade and increasingly complex societies. Each chapter first considers geographical and environmental factors, the historical sources and, in more detail, the archaeological evidence (well illustrated by site plans, maps and line drawings). The chapters also consider the subsistence economy, technology, society and demography, ideology, and external trade of each area and how these affected urbanization and state formation. Connah does not give easy answers, but accepts the limitations and the patchiness of archaeological evidence. Nor does he propose a single theory to explain the diversity of African city and state formation. The standard

of writing is uniformly excellent and this broad synthesis of the archaeological evidence for African prehistory is useful reading for anyone interested in African history.

The approach Connah takes with this text is that he is discussing Africa, excluding Egypt and the Maghreb which he considers not ever being a part of "black" Africa. It is here that he makes his first folly. Secondly he attempts to discuss tropical Africa primarily from archaeological evidence. This works well, since few historians focus on history in this way. The problem with this is that Africa's story is a million times more complex and dynamic than archaeological evidence has provided. Not because of some elusive romantic idea of Africa but from the simple fact, which Connah admits, that archaeological/anthropological research in Africa is next to nothing in comparison to other places. The majority of such studies focus on pre-modern man's existence in Africa and not on modern man's civilization in Africa. For this reason alone such an approach to African history, as good as its intentions and scholarly methods may sound can be revealing in some senses, but extremely limiting. I do recommend this text, for the simple fact that there is a fair amount of knowledge an Africanist can learn from some of the archaeological work discussed but I warn you that this should not be considered a well-rounded text for studying Africa's history.

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