

African History and the Transformation of Modern Society

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Abstract

The history of Africa spanned through the cultural development of man and his environment from the earliest times to the Iron Age period. In African history, this period has often been described as pre-history or proto-history. It covers the period when the earliest creature identified as man came into existence and his efforts since then to master and to relate to his environment. This early creature utilized stone tools, became a hunter, wonderer, gatherer and gradually learnt to domesticate animals. He achieved a settle life and domesticated crops. Each of these achievements resulted to revolutionary changes in his life. He embarked on the organization of social life and due to that, communities came into existence. His discovery, invention, mastery and use of iron technology transformed not only the man himself but also his environment. As a result of these changes, great civilization emerged. The early man developed through different stages, these are the Stone Age, domestication of animals and crops, the evolution of settled communities and the use of Iron. The development and progress of modern society through this early creature in Africa and how he made these achievements constitute the discourse of this paper.

Keyword: African, Transformation, Society, Modern, History.

Introduction

It has been said that “history is a light that illuminates the past and a key that unlocks the door to the future” the present conditions of the global African community from the periphery of our imagination to the centre of our attention, and is devoted to the review of what has been referred to as “that other African”. This is not the stereotypical African savage, but the African that first peopled the earth, and gave birth to or significantly influenced the world oldest and most magnificent civilization. (Runoko 2009). African according to Runoko (2009) entered Asia, Europe, Australian, the South Pacific and the early Americas not as slave, but as master. It was confirmed by recent scientific studies that modern humanity originated in Africa that Black people are the world’s original people, and that all modern humans can ultimately trace their ancestral roots back to Africa. If not for the primordial migration of early African people, humanity would have remained physically Africild, and the rest of the world outside of the African content absent of human life (Clarke 1993).

Historically, according to Finch (1990) Africa produced the first modern population (homosapiens) new researches and early discoveries in the relevant scientific field confirm 1986 that elite group of scientists led by Oxford University James Wainscoat, recorded the following statements “the earliest fossils of anatomically moderns man (Homosapiens sapiens) have been found in Africa at Omo in Ethiopia Border cave (Ingwavuma) in south Africa and at kaasies River mouth in South Africa. (Hilliard 1994).

Hence, it has been argued that the evolution of modern man took place in Africa. In the confirmation of the findings according to Finch (1992) declared that a founder population migrated from Africa and subsequently gave rise to all non-Africa populations, that brings modernity to the world civilization.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to:

1. Intimate people of the importance of Africa history to the transformation of the society.
2. Develop the interest of people about the history of Africa to the present modern day society.
3. Help people trace the development of modern world to the history of Africa.
4. Make people appreciate the contribution of Africans to the transformation of modern society.

History of African Culture

Africa culture can be traced through their language, festivals, ideology, belief, occupation. Integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behaviour that is, both as a result of integral to the human capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generation is being referred to as culture (Adolf 2009).

Culture thus consist of language, ideas, beliefs consumer, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of arts, rituals, ceremonies, and symbols. This has played a crucial role in Africa evolution, allowing them to adapt the environment to their purposes rather than depend solely on natural selection to achieve adaptive success (Ankerl 2000).

Every human society according to (Ankerl 2000) has its own particular culture, or socio-cultural system. Variation among cultures is attributable to such factors as differing physical habitats and resources; the range of possibilities inherent in areas such as language, refusal and social organization and historical phenomena such are the development of links with other cultures. An individual's attitudes, values, ideals, and beliefs are greatly influenced by the culture (or cultures) in which he or she lives. Culture change according to Kim (2001) takes place as a result of ecological, socio economic, political, religious, or other fundamental factors affecting a society. Culture is something that articulates a human society with its environment and, for Leslie White writing in the late 1950s, could be seen in adaptive functional terms as an extra somatic, temporal continuum of things and events dependent upon symboling, a mechanisms in whose function is to make life secure and continuous for groups and individuals of human species (Jary and Jary 1991). Culture has been taken as constituting the way of life of an entire society, including the codes of manners, language, rituals, norms of behaviour, and systems of beliefs. Sociologists stress the importance of culture in determining human behaviour, thus, the attitude of individuals to sport maybe greatly influenced by the culture; for example, in North America there is a very strong cultural influence to win at all costs. However, sport has also been seen as an important means of encouraging people to conform to a particular culture (Kim 2001).

Culture can be classified into two broad groups: material and intangible cultures. Material culture includes those concrete objects made by man that enabled him to master his environment. For the early man in African history these concrete objects include his stone tools, weapons, dwelling sites, houses, household wares, clothing, pottery and iron tools. However, material culture has been used as an index for the assessment of the level of technological development of societies (McClenon 1998). After the invention of writing which occurred in ancient Egypt some 3,000 years ago, we begin to have a fuller description of African culture written by the people themselves or by outsiders who had earlier acquired the art of writing. Yet, these description according to Middleton (1990) have not displaced the importance of reconstructing African cultural development.

Intangible culture according to Kim (2001) on the other hand refers to ideas, societal institutions such as religious, political and economic ideas developed by man. Some of these ideas can be expressed in concrete terms and so become parts of the material culture.

Stages in African History to the Transformation of Modern Society

African history started with early man, as a pathfinder, and had no precedents to follow. He spent over two million years using stones culture or tools as well as bones, wood and leather under special circumstances. These scarcely survived the climatic conditions. This has made it difficult if not impossible for archaeologists to study these tools and thrown more light on the history of the early man was believed to have emanated from Africa. The most easily available evidence of his existence was the stone and as he spent the greater part of his life using stones, he was accordingly referred to as the stone age man. (Dioka and Junaid 1997). Three stages according to Dioka and Junaid (1997) can be identified with early man. These stages are as follows:

Early stone age, middle stone age and late stone age. (15,000 – 500B.C).

Early Stone Age

The cultural development of man during the period was very slow. Three important changes occurred during this period.

According to Gombrich (2005) the first was the change from the used of simple pebble stone to the hand-axes and cleavers. These are generally described as Achenlian industry or culture. The second occurred during the desiccation of the sahara, man began to adapt his tools to his particular environment. Thirdly, man discovered the art of making fire about 55,000 B.C. This latest discovery according to Jerrold (2003) was very significant to the cultural evolution of man. With fire, man was able to take control of caves once occupied by stronger carnivores and dangerous reptiles.

In effect, fire enabled man to acquired his first apartment. He no longer slept in the open or on top of trees. Fire enabled him to eat cooked food, roasted his meat instead of eating it raw. Fire according to Elkins (1995) transformed the life of the early man and enable him to live in caves and rock shelters. Examples of such caves include the Montague cave in the cape Province of South Africa, Kalambo cave in Zambia and Egbunike cave in Anambra State of Nigeria (Graham 2005).

Middle Stone Age

Based on the ecological deforestation mentioned earlier, man largely abounded grassland and dry areas and moved towards rivers. According to Breskin (2010) different types of tools were developed both for the

grassland and forested areas, the lupembam and Tshitolian tools were developed. Lupembam in Angola while Tshitolian was named after the Bena Tshitoli Plateau in the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The lupembam tools are smaller than the Sangoan tools. They included lance heads and arrow points. Tshitolian tools were even more refined, more pointed while the arrow heads were barbed or tanged to make them more effective for hunting. The tools for the grassland regions were different. Three major tools according to Robertson (2005) are the Stillbay, Magosian and Wilton industries replaced the faures with tools. These tools had a finer finish they were smaller in size and more sharp pointed.

There were general improvement not only in the shape and size of the tools but also in the efficiency. More contraction of population were found around lakes and rivers, the sources of fishing. Man was able to live longer in definite settlements leading to increase in population (Dioka and Junaid 1997).

Late Stone Age

During this period, progress, and advancement in tool making leading to existing races and the transformation of African society. Man embarked on more specialization of his living pursuits by making use of material other than stones bones. He also developed artistic interest and began to paint scenes of his daily activities. Man at this point in time developed his artistic instinct and by 6,000 B. C. painted scenes on the rocks at Tassilian, Ajjer a Plateau 900 miles, south east of Algeira as well as those at Fezzan, Hoggar and Tibesti mountains. Most of the paintings according to Radford (2004) were nationalistic and depicted scenes of hunting fishing and social events. In South Africa are paintings showing, game drives in which a herd of animals involved be driven towards a line of waiting bow men. There were also pictures of hunters disguised with the head and horns of an antelopes.

During this period, emergence of races in Africa occurred. By 10,000 B.C the Bushman or Hottentots or Khoi – Khoi and san had taken over the extreme south of Africa while the Negroes occupied the greater parts of Africa. There were Berbers at the fringes of the desert, while North Africa was occupied by a mixed group from the Mediterranean and Berbers groups (Jerrold 2003).

In the late stone age sites have been discovered in parts of West Africa in Nigeria, a site at Iwo Eleru in Ondo State has been dated to 9000-3000 B. C. it contained pottery which signified that the inhabitants depended on vegetable diet (Dioka and Junaid 1997). A sketetal remains found at the site is associated with the homosapiens. A Fikpo in Abia State, is another late stone age site and has been dated to about 300 B. C. A mejior cave in old Oyo, a microlifhic industry was discovered. In Kursakata and Diama in Borno State, pottery was formed. In Ghana, a stone age site at kitampo has been dated to 1500 B. C. sedentary life and socio-political changes led to the evolution of communities and laws transformed the society. (Gombrich 2005).

Transformation of science and technology in the history of Africa

The traditional science and technology as well as its end results constitutes part of the legacies inherited and often perfected and developed upon by the modern man. Traditional technology according to Omolade (1998) is the age – long less sophisticated technology which was invented in the early times through which man radio covered himself, his ability and societal progress. Through the knowledge explosion of science and technology man gradually exploits the gift of nature within his environment for socio – political satisfaction and transformation of the world at large. (Adebamowo, Sheyin, Omolade and Ijaduola 1996).

Any man's society has its traditional technologies. These technologies might be as old as the people's settlement which may include the system of making fire, grinding method, nature and process of traditional medicine, textile production, technique and utensils production etc. traditional science and technology could be said to be rudimentary in nature since they were geared to making life more comfortable and meant to solve some problem of the society. Scientific and technological method had been rooted in the ancient practices through trial and error technique of making invention and discoveries for the improvement of the society. (Ameda and Tyson 1979).

Transformation took place in the method of practicing Agriculture through African history, for instance, shifting cultivation and irrigation techniques which are parts of modern methods of farming had their foundations in olden days. History of African science and technology had made significant and remarkable impact in the following areas. Stone technology, iron technology, Boat/canoe construction, basket/hat weaving, sculpturing and pottery production, Bread industry, cotton spinning and textile dyeing, traditional medicine, agriculture, defense, transport and communication (Payne 1959).

The manner and process according to Omolade (1998) through which man has applied scientific knowledge in solving problem of the society through time as science develops, is known as the development of modern technology. Thus, the transformation of modern science and technology refers to the historical process through which improvement and expansion of scientific knowledge on one hand and the application of his knowledge to solve man's problem on the other hand have taken place. The transformation of modern science

and technology has taken place through the efforts of man in trying to solve both economic problems arising from earlier ideas (Ajetumobi and Omosehin 1998) as quoted by (Omolade 1998).

Conclusion

The stone age witnessed changing climatic and ecological conditions and compelled man to adapt to the new ecological conditions. Before changes, the continent had the same climate and ecology and led simple life of hunting and gathering with pebble tools. The life improved when he learnt to make better tools called the Achulean industry. Fire was discovered during the stone age period. This enabled man to have better shelter as he drive wild animals from caves and occupied them himself. The quality of his food also improved as he could roast his insect and no long ate it raw. These improvements continued into the late stone age which witnessed the production of final and more efficient tools. Man improved upon his hunting activities and supplemented his diet with vegetable foods while in the forest areas he depended more on vegetable than on hunting.

Recommendations

For more transformation and improvement in the society through history. These recommendations are made:

- (1) Government should encourage students to offer history in the school by providing better textbooks on the subject.
- (2) Teachers should motivate student during the teaching of history in their various schools.
- (3) More periods should be allotted on the time table for both teachers and students so that teacher may devote their time to teach the subject better.
- (4) School authorities should organize workshop/seminars for teacher and student in order to enlighten the students on the usefulness of history in their careers.

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