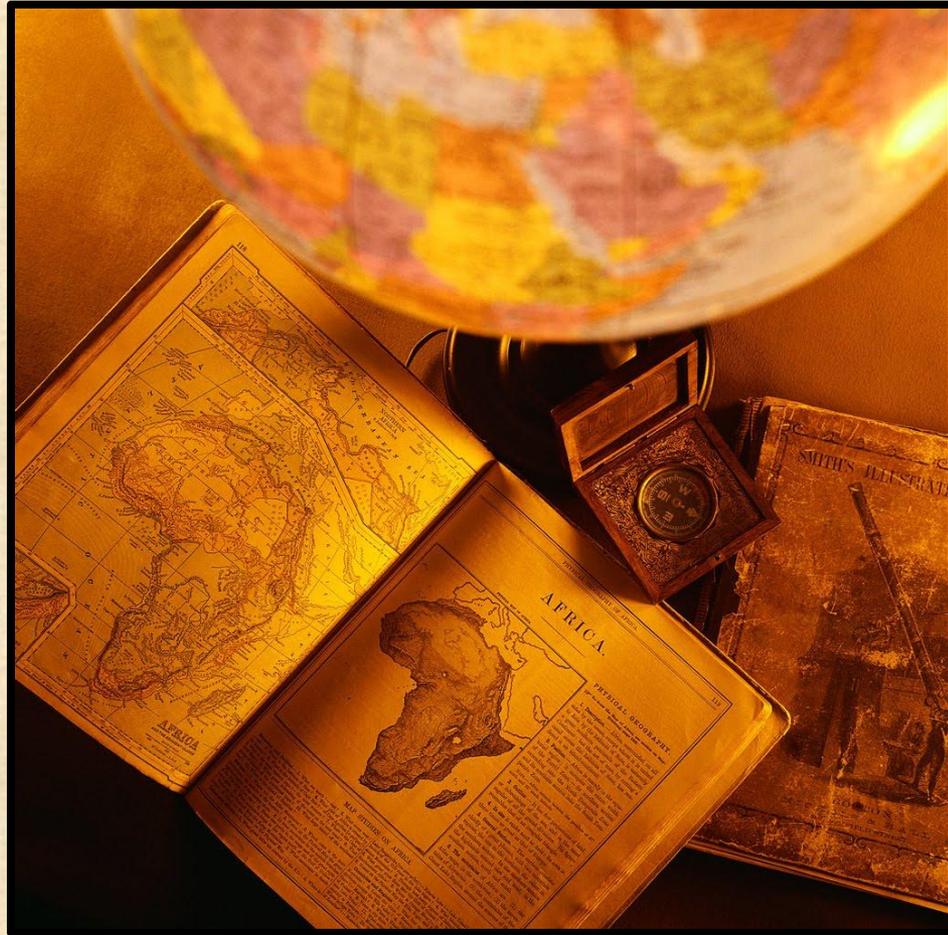


The African Literary Tradition



Highlights from “The African Literary Tradition”
World Literature text pgs. 61-71

Literary Significance:

“Africa’s literary tradition begins in ancient Egypt. There, for the first time, people used paper and ink to record their thoughts and feelings. Ancient Egyptian literature is mainly a religious literature, but the Egyptians also wrote love poems and entertaining tales.

Although the written word has existed throughout Africa for centuries, the spoken word has remained the dominant form of creative expression in most African communities. For centuries, Africa’s oral literature—its proverbs, chants, fables, folktales, and epics—has represented an ongoing creative process in which each reteller injects age-old themes with a fresh perspective.”



Egypt: The “Gift of the Nile” (Greek historian Herodotus)

“The Nile itself provided settlers with water and, during the flood season, the fertilizing silt necessary for growing such crops as barley, wheat, vegetables, flax, and grapes. The Nile also provided the transportation that made ancient Egypt’s thriving trade with neighbors possible. The Nile brought boats laden with gold, hardwood, and metals—all the resources that Egypt itself lacked. Without the Nile, Egypt would simply have been part of the vast and arid Sahara. With the Nile, Egypt was able to become a wealthy agricultural land and one of the most powerful civilizations the world has ever known.”



Egypt: The “Gift of the Nile” continued...

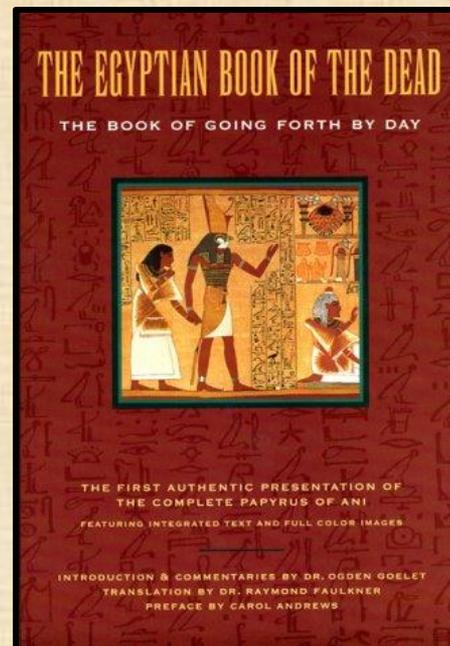
“The Nile provided another gift that enabled Egypt to grow into a remarkable and enduring civilization: the papyrus reeds that grew along its banks. From these reeds the Egyptians developed paper, a far more convenient writing material than the clay tablets used by their neighbors in ancient Mesopotamia. (Our word *paper*, in fact, comes from *papyrus*.) Paper made centralized rule possible, enabling the Egyptians to keep written records, issue instructions, write histories, compute taxes, survey land, and carry out the other practical tasks of a complex society. In addition, ideas and literature could be shared far and wide and handed down for future generations.” (FYI: The name of this PPT “background” is papyrus!)



The Cult of the Dead

“A fascination with death pervaded Egyptian culture. This ‘cult of the dead’ largely dictated Egyptian morality and ethics. Starting in the Old Kingdom, the Egyptians wrote many works dedicated to the quest for life after death. These works contained magical spells for the protection of the dead, burial rites, and other funerary texts. The New Kingdom saw the ultimate expression of Egyptian funerary literature: the Book of the Dead, a kind of ‘traveler’s guide’ to the afterlife containing everything the deceased needed to have and know after death.

Religious literature did not stop with the Book of the Dead. Virtually everything the Egyptians wrote was in some way tied to their religious beliefs, written either to instruct people in morality or to praise the gods.”

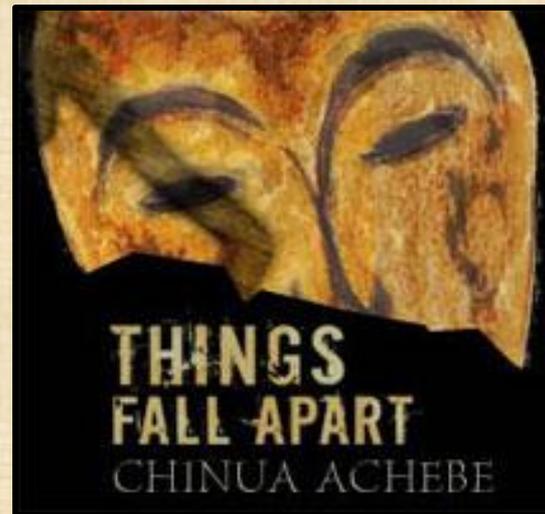


Foreign Influences in Africa

“During the fourth century A.D., the Roman Empire had proclaimed Christianity as its state religion and taken control of the entire northern coast of Africa, including Egypt...

Around A.D. 700, Islam, the religion of the followers of Mohammed, was introduced into Africa...

Much later...Christianity and colonialism came hand in hand to sub-Saharan Africa. Ultimately, in the late 1800s, several European powers created colonized ‘countries.’ Social and political chaos reigned as traditional African nations were either split apart by European colonizers or joined with incompatible neighbors.”



Foreign Influences in Africa continued...

“In the mid-1900s, a move toward independence gained force, and a rebirth of traditional cultures came with it. Literature written in African languages, rather than in English, French, or other European languages, gained popularity. This vital literature is clearly stamped with the tradition of African oral literature, or **orature**, as it has been called.”



Griots: Africa's Living Libraries

“Traditionally, the keepers of oral literature in West Africa have been the **griots** (gre oz). In Africa today, a griot may be a professional storyteller, singer, or entertainer. In the past, though, the griot's role included all of these functions and more. Griots were skilled at creating and transmitting the many forms of African oral literature. Many also memorized their nations' histories and laws. Rather than consulting books or libraries, people in the kingdoms of Africa consulted griots. Elsewhere on the African continents, bards, storytellers, town criers, and oral historians also preserved and continued the oral tradition.

As storytellers, tutors to nobility, and living records of a culture's laws and customs, griots were indispensable to African civilizations.”

[Sample: Traditional Griot](#)



[Sample: Modern Griot](#) (with help from an American...)



“The Great Hymn to the Aten”

Please open your *World Lit.* textbooks to Page 72...

