

**SSWH6 Describe the diverse characteristics of early African societies before 1500 CE/AD.**



**Element C: Understand the blending of traditional African beliefs with new ideas from Islam and Christianity and their impact on early African societies.**

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**AFRICAN RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM**

- ❑ Most indigenous religious systems in sub-Saharan Africa focused on animism, the belief that divine forces resided in the elements of the natural world including the flora, fauna and natural geography.
- ❑ Many believed that shamans or witches could harness these powers for good and evil.
- ❑ As Islam spread to North, West and the Swahili Coast of East Africa and Christianity spread to Ethiopia and Egypt these traditions were sometimes replaced and sometimes blended with the new faith systems.
  - While these new faith systems brought major changes to much of Africa like the introduction of written language, the establishment of new educational systems like the madras and monastery, and new moral codes like Sharia law, many native traditions endured.




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**AFRICAN RELIGIOUS SYNCRETISM**

- ❑ In West and East Africa the belief in and practice of magic continued despite the objection of orthodox Muslims.
  - This is evident in the Malinke epic Sundiata in which Sundiata and his adversary use magic in battle despite both being Muslim.
- ❑ These regions also saw the modification of many Muslim traditions to better suit native customs.
  - For example, Islamic traditions related to the seclusion and veiling of women did not take hold in West Africa despite their conversion to Islam.
  - The traditional customs that allowed women to move freely in public endured well after the region's conversion.
- ❑ Adaption also occurred as Christianity spread to Egypt and Ethiopia.
  - The Egyptian Coptic Christian belief in the spiritual significance of the Nile is an excellent example.

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