I. Course Description

This class introduces students to ancient, medieval, and early modern African states and societies. The first half of the course focuses on ancient Egypt, empires of West Africa, the maritime worlds of the Swahili Coast, and the highlands of Ethiopia. The second half of the course investigates Africa in the era of European contact and the trade in enslaved human beings that came to shape the Atlantic world.

A central goal of the course is to expose students to the different sources and methods that scholars use to investigate processes of change on the continent. We will explore how oral traditions, linguistics, archival documents, letters, traveler's accounts, and archeological and material evidence offer clues to historical processes of change. We will further analyze how these various types of evidence illuminate the ways that African peoples have shaped and responded to the world around them.

This class requires that students think critically about the past and its interpretation. Students who engage thoroughly with course themes will come away with a set of analytic tools that will help them to think productively about historical processes of change, in Africa and beyond.

II. Class Participation, Expectations, and Assessment

Students must attend every class meeting. Absences should be rare, imperative, and excused in advance. Each week we will divide the readings and students will be assigned to make a very brief presentation. Those presentations should distill the argument of the text, the evidence on which it is based, and offer two to three questions for discussion. Students should not read a prepared text in making their presentations, but instead speak conversationally yet knowledgeably about the reading. Questions to consider in preparing their presentations include: Why did the author write this text? Is the text a primary source or a secondary one? What sort of evidence did the author use to substantiate his or her argument? What is the import or significance of the text?

Readings: Students are expected to come to class with access to a copy of the assigned readings in hand, either as a hard copy or on your laptop. Students must be able to access and refer to whatever page numbers and texts come up in class discussion. On certain
weeks, we will divide up some of the scholarly readings, so that different teams will be responsible for presenting and sharing them to the rest of the class.

**Zoom etiquette and expectations:** If you can, please turn on your cameras during class. I understand that doing so is not always possible or desirable to do so. If turning off your screen will be a persistent feature of your participation, just let me know.

**Museum Visit:** TBD. It is possible we will take a virtual tour of some sort of Egyptian exhibitions at the OI Museum.

**Document analysis and essay:** The document analysis and essay are to be turned in as indicated on the syllabus. Prompts will be handed out in class and posted to Canvas. You will be expected to work with me

**Late paper policy:** The due dates and times are firm. **Late papers will not be accepted or graded without prior approval.** If you need an extension, you must obtain it via email at least two working days before the due date.

**Map quiz:** All students must pass a not-for-credit map quiz with a grade of 90% or better in order to pass the class. Students are responsible for knowing all of the modern countries of Africa, in addition to the geographic features as posted on Canvas. For those who do not pass the first time, you may re-take the quiz. You must pass the map quiz by Week Eight.

**Written assignments:** The first paper is a short, document analysis. The second paper is a longer historiography paper; that is, it is an essay in which you will be accepted to assess the strengths, weaknesses, and thematic linkages of two to three of the scholarly works we have read. We will discuss the expectations of both those assignments in class; the last few minutes of class is typically a good time to do so. For the final project, I am open to your ideas and proposals. You may wish to do a second historiography paper, to practice your academic writing and argumentation. You may decide, either individually or as a team, to conduct some independent research on a topic the course touches upon. Creative projects are welcome, but all projects must include a written component and receive prior approval from the instructor. The course will conclude with oral presentations of these projects, which will count toward the final grade.

**Assessment:**

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
<td>Map quiz</td>
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<tr>
<td>Document analysis</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essay 1</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final oral presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Final project</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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III. Other important notes

Plagiarism: Do not borrow, use, download from the internet, or take the work of anyone else without proper attribution. If in doubt, cite. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, see the professor or the MLA writing adviser. In addition, do not digitally record, film, or make direct reproductions of class lectures or discussions.

Disability Accommodations: If you require any accommodations for this course, please provide me as soon as possible with a copy of your Accommodation Determination Letter (provided to you by the Student Disability Services office) so that we may discuss how your accommodations may be implemented in this course.

The University of Chicago is committed to ensuring the full participation of all students in its programs. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the University’s programs or services, you are encouraged to contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. To receive reasonable accommodation, you must be appropriately registered with Student Disability Services. Please contact the office at 773-702-6000/TTY 773-795-1186 or disabilities@uchicago.edu, or visit the website at disabilities.uchicago.edu. Student Disability Services is located at 5501 S. Ellis Avenue.

IV. Readings

Required books are available for purchase at the Seminary Co-Op Bookstore or for order. Other readings are available on Canvas, under "Modules."


Galawdewos, The Life of Walatta-Petros: A Seventeenth-Century Biography of an African Woman (concise edition), Wendy Laura Blecher, ed. (Princeton: Princeton, NJ, 2019). [NOTE: There are two versions of this book; you are welcome to purchase the full version, which is full of beautiful plates and a long introduction, but the abridged paperback will work very well.]

D.T. Niane, Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali, Trans by G.D. Pickett. (Harlow: Longman, 2006 [1965]). [NOTE: The Niane book is out of print. You will need to obtain a copy via a used book seller or read the copies on reserve at the library.]

Other readings are available on Canvas https://canvas.uchicago.edu/
V. Course Outline

Week ONE
October 1: Introduction to Course, Geography of the Continent

Readings:

Week TWO
October 8: Ancient Egypt

Primary sources:
Amarna Letters, available online and through the library (such as volume edited and translated by William Moran.) Read EA#1-5; peruse and pick at least three others.

Museum visit: TBD

Scholarly analysis:

Peruse Smith's archaeological dig in Nubia: https://tombos.org/

Week THREE
October 15: Ancient Ghana and Mali

Map Quiz!
Primary sources:

Scholarly analysis:
Michael Gomez, “Thoughts on the Western Savanna and Sahel.”
Hadrien Collet, “Landmark Empires: Searching for Medieval Empires and Imperial Tradition in Historiographies of West Africa.”
Marco Nobili, “Reinterpreting the Role of Muslims in the West African Middle Ages,”

Optional:
Film: Dani Kouyate (dir.), Keita! The Heritage of a Griot (1996; 97 min.)

DUE: Monday, October 19
4-5 page Document Analysis

Week FOUR
October 22: Swahili Coast and Great Zimbabwe

Primary sources:

**Scholarly analysis:** (selected)

**Week FIVE**
**October 29: Ethiopia and Christianity**

**Primary sources:**
E.A. Wallis Budge, The Kebra Nagast, excerpt.
Galawdewos, The Life and Struggles of Our Mother Walatta Petros.

**Scholarly analysis:**

**Week SIX** [Election]
**November 5: European Contact, Experiences of Enslavement**

**Primary sources:**
Pieter de Marees, Description and Historical Account of the Gold Kingdom of Guinea (1602), translated by Albert van Dantzig and Adam Jones (1987), excerpt.

**Scholarly analysis:**


**DUE: Monday, November 9**

8-10 page historiography paper

**Week SEVEN**

**November 12: Enslavement and Material Cultures**

**Primary sources:**


**Scholarly analysis: (selected)**


**Optional:**

Week EIGHT: Quantifying the Trade in Enslaved Africans
November 19

Primary sources:
The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade DatabaseVoyages Database:
  http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces
African Names Database:
  http://www.slavevoyages.org/tast/resources/slaves.faces
Exercise: To do individually or in teams

 Scholarly analysis:
David Eltis, “The Volume and Structure of the Transatlantic Slave Trade: A Reassessment”

Week NINE: Sierra Leone, ‘Legitimate’ commerce, and the ‘Province of Freedom’
December 3
Primary source:
Christopher Fyfe, ed. “Our Children Free and Happy,” excerpt.

 Secondary source:
TBD

Week TEN
December 10:
Final Projects DUE, in-class presentations