

General History of Africa (UNESCO)

In 1964, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) launched an unprecedented task: to tell the history of Africa from the African perspective. Hence, the volumes show that many techniques and technologies of today originated in Africa, as well as proving that the region was constituted by organized societies and extensive civilizations, contrary to popular belief.

Almost 30 years later, 350 scientists coordinated by a committee of 39 experts, two thirds of them African, met the challenge of rebuilding African historiography free of foreign perspectives and stereotypes. The nearly ten thousand pages comprise eight volumes of the *General History of Africa* collection, published in English, French and Arabic, completed between the 1980s and the 1990s.

Besides providing a perspective from the continent, the work also fulfils the role of showing to the world that African history is not confined to enslavement, civil unrest, and poverty. In May 2013 in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), UNESCO launched the development of the ninth volume of the *General History of Africa* with a meeting attended by some fifty experts from Africa and around the world.

The preparation and publication of a ninth volume of the called upon the African Union membership to assist in the drafting of the ninth volume of the *General History of Africa* scheduled to cover recent history since decolonization, the end of Apartheid and the place of Africa in the world. And thus, it will consider methodological and theoretical questions, new challenges to meet the demands of the people and the needs of youth in Africa and its world community.

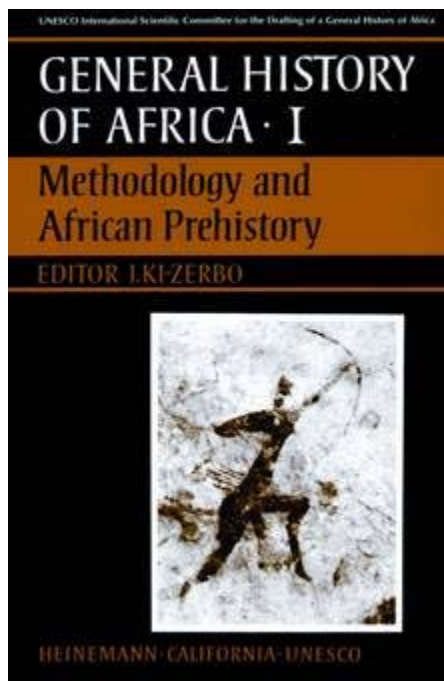
In particular, the objectives of the Ninth Volume are as follows:

- Update the knowledge contained in the GHA, in light of the latest development in scientific research in different areas, and of the political, cultural, socioeconomic and ecological changes that occurred in the continent since the publication of the last volume of the collection;
- Analyze the different African Diasporas and their diverse contributions to the construction of modern societies and to the emancipation and development of the continent;


- Identify and analyze the new challenges faced by Africa including questions of African unity, Pan Africanism, regional integration, education and culture, youth, gender issues, health, cultural diversity, creativity, arts, culture and development, intercultural dialogue within Africa, peace and environment, climate change, urbanization, scientific research and innovation, health care, sustainable development, good governance, South- South cooperation, relationship with African Diaspora etc.

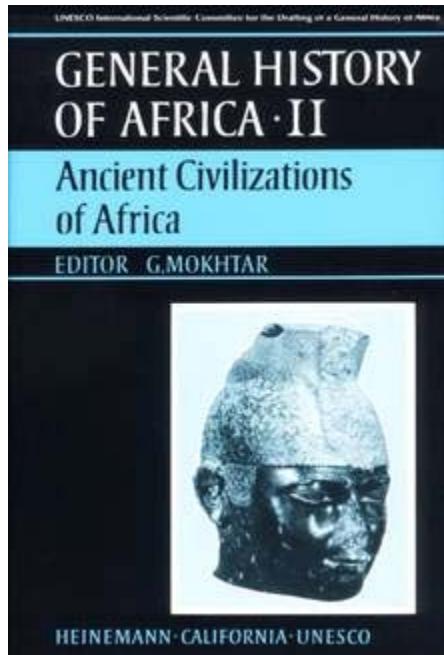
The Ninth volume attempts to make a significant contribution to the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024 proclaimed by the UN General Assembly. Furthermore, changes that occurred after the Cold War, the Apartheid era, and other international landmark events will be analyzed from an African perspective. And with regard to the African world community, the new findings concerning the African presence in different parts of the world in ancient time, the deportation of African people during the great enslavement era (...the Maafa, the great disaster; the holocaust of enslavement) and the migration of African people during colonization and after independence will also be examined.

The following is a synopsis of the eight volume of the *General History of Africa*:



Volume I of the UNESCO General History of Africa (Methodology and African Prehistory), under the direction of J. Ki-Zerbo deals with the African prehistory and its methodology. The early part of the volume assesses the importance attached by African societies to the past and the growth and development in African historiography, together with a general outline of sources and techniques. This is followed by accounts of the primary literary sources, the oral and living traditions and African archaeology and its techniques. Chapters 10-12 cover linguistics and migrations, and the next two chapters focus on historical geography and a discussion of the chronological framework that has been adopted.

The second half of the volume deals specifically with the earliest human and the prehistory of Africa according to geographical areas: North, South, East, West and Central, with the Nile Valley singled out. Chapters are devoted to prehistoric art, agricultural techniques and the development of metallurgy. Each chapter is highly illustrated with maps, figures, diagrams and a selection of black and white photographs. The text is fully annotated and there is an extensive bibliography and index. [Vol. I: Table of Contents](#).  [Read the complete volume Online](#).




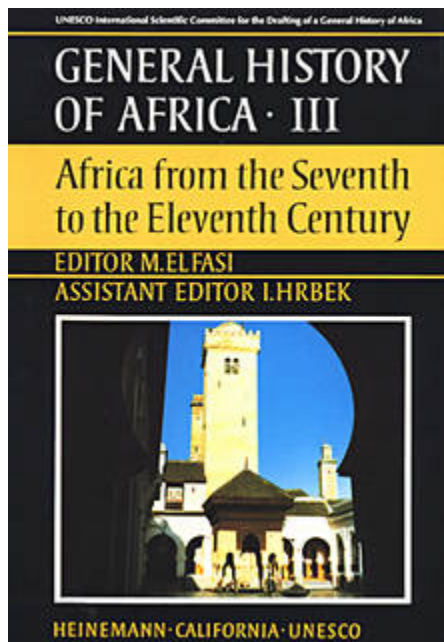
Volume II of the *General History of Africa* (Ancient civilizations of Africa) under the direction of G. Mokhtar deals with the period beginning at the close of the Neolithic era, from around the eighth millennium, before our era.

This period of some nine thousand years of history has been sub-divided into four major geographical zones, following the pattern of African historical research.

Chapters 1 to 12 cover the corridor of the Nile, Egypt and Nubia. Chapters 13 to 16 relate to the Ethiopian highlands. Chapters 17 to 20 describe the part of Africa later called the Maghrib and its Saharan hinterland, and Chapters 21 to 29, the rest of Africa as well as some of the islands in the Indian Ocean.

By far the largest proportion of Volume II is devoted to the ancient civilization of Egypt because of its pre-eminent place in the early history of Africa.


Each chapter of the volume is copiously illustrated with black and white photographs, maps and figures. The text is accompanied by footnotes, many of which refer to the extensive bibliography at the end of the book and there is an index. [Vol. II: Table of Contents](#).  [Read the complete volume Online](#)

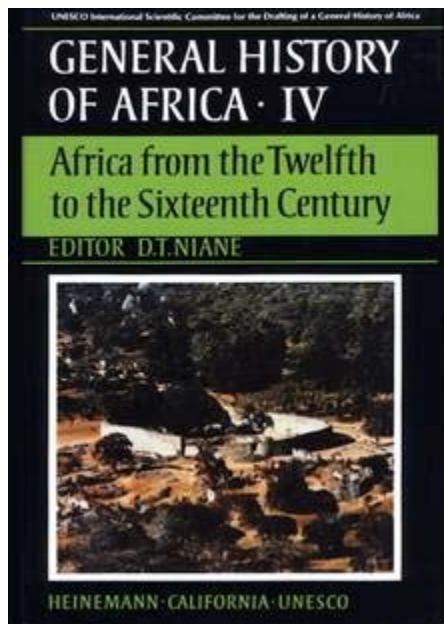


Volume III of the *General History of Africa* (Africa from the Seventh to the Eleventh Century) under the direction of M.M. El Fasi and I. Hrbek covers the history of Africa from the seventh to the eleventh century.


Two movements to have major and lasting cultural, political and economic significance on the Continent's history are covered by this period: the increasing influence of Islam and its dissemination and interaction with traditional African culture in northern and western regions, and the Bantu expansion in the south.

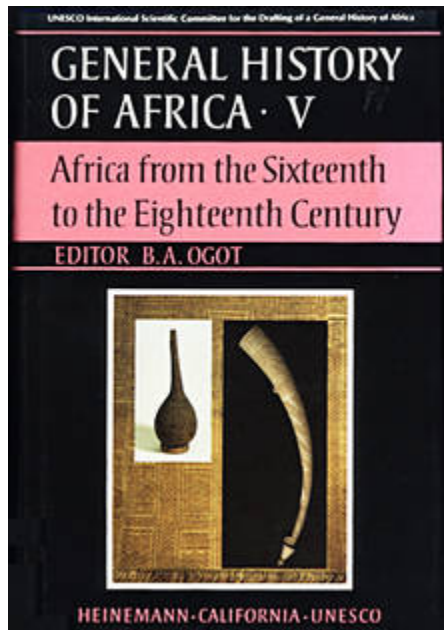
The book first places Africa in the context of world history at the opening of the seventh century before examining the general impact of Islamic penetration; the continuing expansion of the Bantu-speaking peoples; and the growth of civilizations in the Sudanic zones of West Africa.

Detailed chapters follow discussing the successive Islamic dynasties of North Africa and their wider contacts; the Horn of Africa; the East African coast and interior; Central Africa; Southern Africa; and Madagascar's internal development and international contacts. Three concluding chapters trace the African Diaspora in Asia; examine international relations and the spread of technology and ideas within Africa; and assess the overall impact of the period on African history. Each chapter is illustrated with black and white photographs, maps and figures. The text is fully annotated and there is an extensive bibliography of works relating to the period. [Vol. III: Table of Contents.](#)  [Read the complete volume Online](#)



Volume IV of the *General History of Africa* (Africa from the Twelfth to the Sixteenth Century) under the direction of D.T. Niane engages the history of Africa from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. This period constitutes a crucial phase in the continent's history in which Africa developed its own culture and written records. There were several major characteristic themes: the triumph of Islam; the extension of trading relations, cultural exchanges and human contacts; the development of kingdoms and empires. The book first describes the unification of the Maghrib under the Almohads. There follow chapters on the various civilizations of West Africa – Mali, Songhay, the Niger Bend, the Volta Basin, Chad, the Hausa and the coastal peoples from the Casamance to modern Cameroon.

Chapters 15 onwards cover North-east and East Africa, starting with Egypt and going on to Nubia, Ethiopia and the States of the Horn of Africa, including material on the development of the Swahili civilization. Central Africa is represented by chapters on the area between the coast and the great lakes, the interlacustrine region and the basins of the Zambezi and Limpopo rivers. There are chapters on Equatorial Africa and Angola, southern Africa and Madagascar and neighboring islands. Each chapter is illustrated with black and white photographs, maps and figures. The text is fully annotated and there is a comprehensive bibliography of works on the period. [Vol. IV: Table of Contents.](#)  [Read the complete volume Online](#)




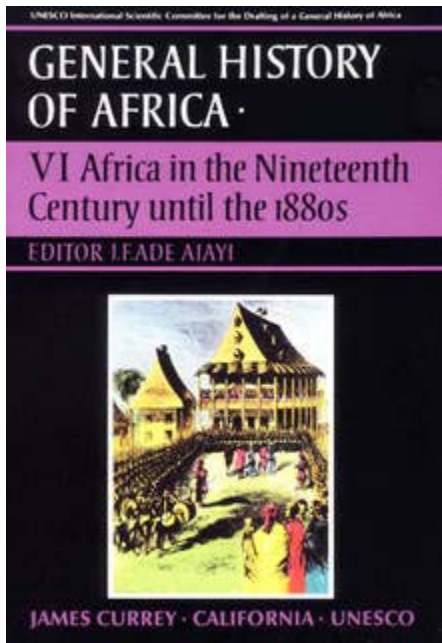
Volume V of the *General History of Africa* (Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century) under the direction of B.A. Ogot covers the history of Africa from the beginning of the sixteenth century to the close of the eighteenth century. Two major themes emerge: first, the continuing internal evolution of the states and cultures of Africa during this period; second, the increasing involvement of Africa in external trade- with major, but then unforeseen consequences for the whole world.

In North Africa, we see the Ottomans conquer Egypt and establish Regencies in Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers. South of the Sahara, some of the larger, older states collapse (Songhay, Western Sudan, Christian Ethiopia), and new power bases emerge (Asante, Dahomey, Sakalava). Highly centralized political and administrative structures develop along with societies with distinct social classes and often, a strongly feudal character. Traditional religions continue to

coexist with both Christianity (although, suffering setbacks) and Islam (in the ascendancy).


Along the coast, particularly in West Africa, Europeans establish a trading network which, with the development of New World plantation agriculture, becomes the focus of the international enslavement. The immediate consequences of this trade for Africa are explored, and it is argued that the long-term global consequence include the foundation of the present world-economy with all its inbuilt inequalities.

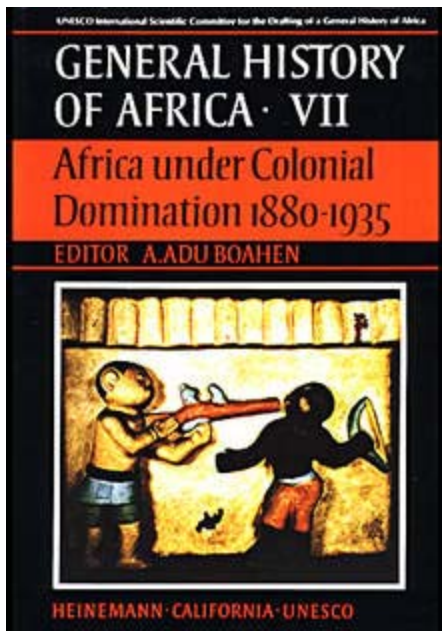
Each chapter is illustrated with black and white photographs, maps and figures. The text is fully annotated and there is an extensive bibliography of works relating to the period, as well as a comprehensive glossary. [Vol. V: Table of Contents.](#)  [Read the complete volume Online](#)



Volume VI of the UNESCO General History of Africa (Africa in the Nineteenth Century until the 1880s) under the direction of J.F.A. Ajayi covers the history of Africa from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the onset of the European 'scramble' for colonial territory in the 1880s.

In spite of growing European commercial, religious and political presence during the century, outside influences were felt indirectly most African societies, and they made a variety of culturally distinctive attempts to modernize, expand and develop. Two influential sequences of events – The Mfecane in Southern Africa with its ramification in Central and East Africa, and the movements of Muslim reformers in West Africa-owed little or nothing to foreign influences and figure prominently in eight of the chapters.

The book opens with four thematic chapters examining the major forces at work in African society at the beginning of the century; Africa's changing role in the world-economy; new trends and processes; and the effects of the abolition of the slave trade. These are followed by twenty-three chapters detailing developments in the various regions. Two concluding chapters trace the African diaspora and assess the state of the Continent's political, economic and cultural development on the eve of the European conquest. Each chapter is illustrated with black and white photographs, maps and figures. The text is fully annotated and there is an extensive bibliography of works relating to the period. [Vol. VI: Table of Contents.](#)  [Read the complete volume Online](#)

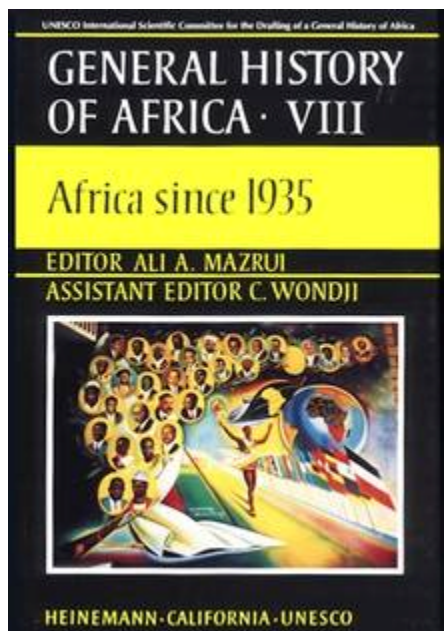


Volume VII of the UNESCO General History of Africa under the direction of A.A. Boahen examines the period of partition, conquest and occupation from the beginning of the 'European Scramble for Africa' to the Italian fascist invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Throughout the volume, the focus is directed towards the responses of African people to the challenges of colonialism.

The first two chapters survey African attitudes and readiness on the eye of the colonial era, and the background to European imperial ambitions. The next seven chapters discuss African initiatives and reactions in the face of partition and conquest up to the First World War. A general overview is followed by more detailed regional analyses.


Chapters 13 to 21 concern the impact of economic and social aspects of colonial systems in Africa from 1919 until 1935: the operation of the colonial economy in the former French, Belgian, Portuguese and British zones and North Africa; the emergence of new social structures and demographic patterns and the role of religion and the arts in Africa during the colonial period. The final section traces the growth of anti-colonial movements, the strengthening of African political nationalism and the interaction between Africa and people of African descent in the New World. Liberia and Ethiopia are discussed in special chapters. And Each chapter is illustrated with black and white photographs, maps and figures. The text is fully annotated and there is an extensive bibliography of works relating to the period. [Vol. VII: Table of Contents.](#)

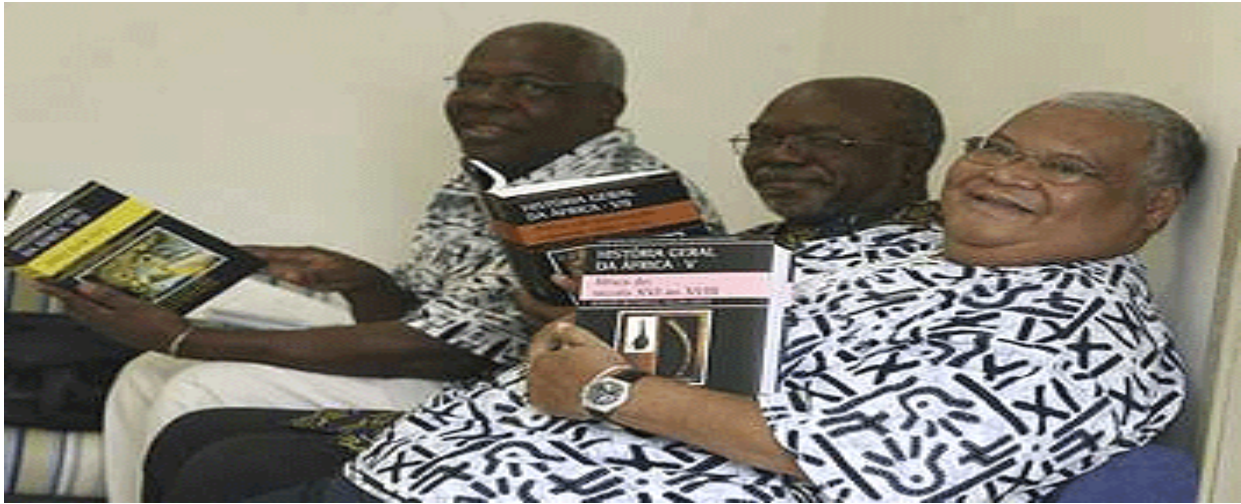
 [Read the complete volume Online](#)



This eighth and final volume of the *General History of Africa* under the direction of A.A. Mazrui and C. Wondji examines the period from 1935 the publication of this volume. As liberation from colonial rule progresses, the political, economic and cultural dimensions of the continent are analyzed.

For Africa, 1935 marked the beginning of the Second World War, with Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. International conflict dominates the first section of this volume, which describes crises in the Horn and North Africa, and other regions under the domination of the European powers. The next three sections cover the ensuing Africa-wide struggles for political sovereignty, from 1945 to independence; underdevelopment and the fight for economic independence, looking at nation-building and changing political structures and values.

Section five deals with socio-cultural change since 1935, from religion to literature, language to philosophy, science and education. The last two sections address the development of Pan-Africanism and the role of independent Africa in world affairs. Acknowledging the original irony that it was the imposition of European imperialism that sparked African resistance to oppression, the volume is directed towards the vital and growing interrelation of Africa and world affairs as the volume is illustrated with black and white photographs, maps and figures. The text is fully annotated and there is an extensive bibliography. [Vol. VIII/ Table of Contents.](#)  [Read the complete volume Online](#)



Professor Valter Roberto Silverio of the Departamento de Ciências Sociais da Universidade Federal de São Carlos (Brazil), Congolese historian and UNESCO consultant Elikia Mbokolo and the late Ubiratan Castro director of the Pedro Calmon Foundation via the Ministry of Culture of the State of Bahia, Brazil (professor of History and founder, Center for East African Studies at Federal University of Bahia) with copies of the *General History of Africa* collection (photo by Raul Spinassé).