

## **Decolonizing African history: Spotlight on the history of Africa in the ancient and medieval times.**

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### **Introduction:**

Through this paper, we seek to demonstrate the importance of the ancient and medieval history of Africa, as well as the great strides that were made to highlight this history, which has been marginalized. This Paper also tries to cast lights on what has been the role of the African Studies Laboratory (LEA), The University of Algiers 2 in establishing a historiography of sub-Saharan Africa.

As we Know, African history is a fairly new discipline in the academic landscape. This latter was introduced at French and English universities in the sixties. African history has been accelerated by the launch of major scientific journals in English and French just after independence, the general history of Africa initiated by UNESCO, the Cambridge history of Africa and then a final blow accelerator given by archeology which has renewed the data in several African countries.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, our contribution aims to avoid prejudices and move away from subjective emotions and tendencies. And since history is the only passage that links the past to the present and to the future, it has received the care of thinkers since Antiquity, considering that its interpretation requires a particular methodology. On this basis, Ibn Khaldoun was the first to subject writing and rewriting to a number of standards and criteria that must be referred to when processing information and interrogating texts.<sup>2</sup>

The excavations carried out from the 1960s have confirmed what was already partially known from the texts of Arab and European travelers of previous centuries. We were able to verify that there were cities, that Africa had already made history, that the great Zimbabwe was not the work of the Phoenicians.<sup>3</sup> During the Neolithic period, Africa saw the emergence of agriculture, animal husbandry and metallurgy. These phenomena, which came from Egypt and appeared in different parts of the continent, are sometimes older than in Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Coquery-Vidrovich « Réflexions comparées sur l'historiographie africaniste de langue 34 française et anglaise », *Politique africaine*, 66, pp. 91-100, juin 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Moncef Bakail .”The rise and fall of African Kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa: With special reference to Mali,Kongo and Monomotapa Kingdoms”. Communication, Institut des Mondes Africains (IMAF), Aix-en-Provence, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Moncef Bakail. *Studies and research in sub-Saharan Africa (In Arabic language)*, Dar El Oumma edition, Algiers 2017.

The study of the history of ancient and medieval sub-Saharan Africa becomes a difficult and complicated matter for historians due to the nature of the available sources. If the history of Europe was written by the historian's reliance on documents and printed books, then the history of sub-Saharan Africa requires from historians to deal with various other sources, especially those related to oral history. On this basis, the history of African kingdoms such as the Meroe, Kongo, Monomotapa<sup>4</sup> and Buganda requires from the historian to use what was left by Arab and European travelers, and to make use of archeology, linguistics, oral history and anthropology. Thus, it can be said that the study of these kingdoms requires from scholars the use of these various sources to reconstruct a complex past.

In this context, the African continent continued on its own path of development, without significant external intervention until the fifteenth century of our era. Some of the world's other great civilizations, such as Kush, Axum, Mali, and Great Zimbabwe, flourished in Africa in the years before 1500. In this early period Africans participated in extensive international trading networks and in trans-oceanic travel. Certainly some African states had established important trading relations with India, China and other parts of Asia long before these were disrupted by European intervention.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, this paper will also consider methodological questions; for example, how do historians track the history of ideas in the absence of written texts? How can historians assess the influence of African intellectual traditions both within the continent and beyond?

## **1- Historiography and Methods of ancient and medieval Africa:**

The history of Africa is closely related to the history of the world, as archeology has proven that man settled in Africa since ancient times, and through the excavations, scientists were able to trace the stages of human

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<sup>4</sup> The kingdom of Monomotapa is one of the most extraordinary political entities in southern Africa before European colonization. The location of this kingdom is in the south of Central Africa, more exactly in Zimbabwe, between the Zambezi and the Limpopo rivers. The extensive commercial network makes this kingdom one of the most important commercial areas during the medieval period

<sup>5</sup> Moncef Bakail. "The rise and fall of African Kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa.op.cit.

emergence.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it was certified without a doubt that Africa is the cradle of the human race.

African history has long been the victim of prejudices and considerations that have cast a false light on it. Thus, Raymond Mauny said that "Before colonization there were dark nights in Africa". Moreover, the former president of France Sarkozy declared in his speech of July 26, 2007 in Dakar that «**The tragedy of Africa is that the African man has not made enough history**».<sup>7</sup> These considerations stem from a falsification of African history. Africa is denied the existence of a history and collective memory. As late as the mid-1960s, professor of history Hugh Trevor-Roper declared that African history was nothing but: "the unedifying gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque, but irrelevant corners of the globe... There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not a subject of history."<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that In his philosophy of history , Hegel stated that African history was the story of European activities in Africa and Africans had no history before European presence in the continent.

It appears useful to note that those who accept this approach think that the history of Africa begins only with colonization. However, it is in relation to this falsification of history that we can speak of a specific role of history and of the historian in Africa. This task of reconstituting the African past, carried out under the direction of UNESCO, has allowed a rewriting of the history of the continent by honest historians from all continents (8 Tomes on the General history of Africa) This truth rediscovered must make it possible to restore the historical consciousness that CA Diop defined as the bulwark against alienation,

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<sup>6</sup> Around 6000 BC , Thousands of years before our era, the Sahara Desert was a region of grasslands and lakes. Its inhabitants hunted wild ox, rhinoceros, giraffe and hippopotamus. Then, around 6000 BC, they learned to domesticate animals and gave up hunting in favour of breeding. Around 4000 BC, The meadows of the Sahara have become a desert. However , the drought turned the prairies into a desert and the Sahara divided ancient Africa into North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa.

<sup>7</sup> It was on 27 July 2007, when the former French president Nicolas Sarkozy gave a speech to 1,300 guests at Cheikh Anta Diop University in the Senegalese capital, Dakar.

<sup>8</sup> For more details, see H. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* .Thames and Hudson, London, 1965.

acculturation and various complexes so that the African has no confidence in himself, in his capacity to innovate, to invent and to assimilate .<sup>9</sup>

In this context , It is worth noting that among the characteristics of the scientific approach inaugurated by Cheikh Anta Diop in the field of African history, we note in particular, the introduction of historical time in the study of African societies , the multidisciplinary approach , The analysis of linguistic facts, Oral tradition, The analysis of the phases of politico-social evolution of societies establishing correlations between interior and exterior events, The use and interpretation of archaeological facts and Internal and external written sources.

In fact, the history of Africa exists even in the absence of writing and there are no people without history. Better, the history of Africa is the beginning of that of Humanity. However, some specific sources of African history are problematic.

African historiography has evolved significantly from the 15th century to the present day. In general, there are two phases: a first where almost all literary production was the work of foreign authors and a second phase marked by the emergence of Africanist historians. African history is made with sources. The basic documents are of diverse origin. However, a distinction is made between internal sources and external sources.

Internal sources are documents produced in Africa itself. They can be classified into three categories. Native or local written records like oral tradition, archeology, linguistics and Anthropology.

The absence of written documents in Africa has often been used by some authors to defend the thesis of an ahistorical Africa. Today, many authors point to the presence of written sources of indigenous origin. Akoha <sup>10</sup> Reported the existence of the phonetic writings among the Mende (Sierra Leone) and Vai (South-West Liberia), the Somali and Ethiopian scripts. The works of Cheikh Anta Diop and Théophile Obenga to demonstrate the kinship of the civilization

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<sup>9</sup> Cheikh Anta, Diop. *African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*. New York: L. Hill, 1974 and *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology*. Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill, 1991.

<sup>10</sup> A.B Akoha. "Les systèmes graphiques de l'Afrique pré coloniale", in PJ Hountondjl P J (Dir) : *Les savoirs endogènes. Pistes pour une recherche*. Paris, Karthala, pp. 283-313. 1994.

of Pharaonic Egypt and the Negro-African civilizations have addressed African writings.

The historical interest of these African writing systems is real. Baumann and Westermann report correspondence and works in Vai, manuscripts in Tifinagr,<sup>11</sup> works printed matter and manuals in Mende; collections of legends and stories in Bamoun. Native written documents have some limitations which are characterized by their regional character and the difficulties of translating them into the working languages of researchers. Furthermore, abundant sources of information provide testimonies which allow the historian to decode the African past. These accounts may be partial or erroneous, fragmentary or inaccurate. This is why historians must take them critically.<sup>12</sup>

It is worth mentioning that oral tradition<sup>13</sup> is very rich in information and has long been the main source of African history. Oral tradition is the mode of transmission from generation to generation of information relating to the history of peoples. Oral tradition, judiciously interpreted, is an irreplaceable source of African history. It should be remembered that sub-Saharan Africa only learned about writing late; hence the importance of oral tradition, the custodians of which are the old men and the griots. Also, the Malian writer, historian and traditionalist Amadou Hampâté Bâ (1901-1991) said: "In Africa, an old man who dies is a library that burns".<sup>14</sup> As for the Malian politician and historian

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<sup>11</sup> Derived from Berber language of North Africa.

<sup>12</sup> Nearly all West African languages between Liberia and Nigeria belong to the Mande, Kru (roughly West), Kwa and Gur subfamilies. For instance, the Cape Palmas variety in Liberia was studied relatively early by missionaries. Liberia has seen the development of no less than five different scripts, all developed by visionary native speakers of Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle (all Mande family) and Bassa (Kru family) respectively. The oldest one, Vai, was developed in the 1830s while the others were devised in the 1920s or slightly later. Only the Vai script is still in use today. The scripts are not variants of each other or of European/ Arabic scripts. Only the Bassa script is alphabetical and records tone, while the others are syllabic scripts. Mende was written from right to left, while the others left to right. See Dalby, David. 1967. A survey of the indigenous scripts of Liberia and Sierra Leone: Vai, Mende, Loma, Kpelle and Bassa. *African Language Studies* 8. 1-51, 1967.

<sup>13</sup> Oral tradition has been defined as testimony transmitted orally from one generation to another. Or Oral traditions as verbal messages spoken or sung which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generations. This preservation however depended on the powers of the memories of successive generations of human beings.

<sup>14</sup> Amadou Hampâté Bâ was born in 1901 in Mali in Bandiagara, and he died in 1991. Disciple of the sage Tierno Bokar, he devoted his life to saving the treasures of the oral tradition of the Fulani tribes. He is for sub-Saharan Africa the guardian of high memory and the vigilant defender of a civilization so long unrecognized.

Alpha Oumar Konaré (born in 1946), he declared: "If Africa loses its sound memory, it loses its memory at all".<sup>15</sup>

However, oral tradition has shortcomings. First, the chronological framework is not precise. Second, socio-economic facts are rarely reported. Finally, oral tradition is often affected by subjectivity.<sup>16</sup> Serious work is therefore needed to properly process the information provided by oral tradition. Thus, direct knowledge of African languages is necessary.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the link between written documents and oral traditions should be explored again in order to show the interferences existing between the two categories. Moreover, the use of oral language as a source of history by continuing field surveys and working to conserve the oral data collected is a real intangible heritage that researchers must collect and preserve.

## **2) Written primary sources:**

During Ancient and Medieval Ages, major centers of religious learning arose in both East and West Africa, hastening the spread of literacy and promoting reverence for the power of the written word. Monasteries throughout Christian Ethiopia produced illuminated manuscripts of great refinement and beauty written in Ge'ez, the indigenous written language of the royal court. Literate individuals also produced autobiographical accounts and other writings of a secular nature.

In the western Sudan, centers of trade such as Jenne and Timbuktu were early outposts for the spread of Islam in the region. Cities were homes to imposing mosques and the oldest universities and libraries in sub-Saharan Africa. The library at Timbuktu has survived to the present day and counts 400-year-old volumes of poetry, manuscripts on the sciences and history, and Qur'anic texts among its holdings. Thousands of students traveled to Timbuktu to study at the university at Sankore, where they learned astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. Throughout West Africa, Qur'anic schools associated with mosques

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<sup>15</sup> L'Intelligent, N ° 2241, from December 21, 2003 to January 3, 2004, p. 122.

<sup>16</sup> If oral tradition can help, it also presents pitfalls due to the manipulative practices operated to their advantage by their authors

<sup>17</sup> Moncef bakail.African "African heritage and globalization" in "Algerian Review of Political Sciences and Information". (In Arabic language), 2003-2004;

still educate younger generations of scholars in Muslim philosophy and the art of calligraphy.<sup>18</sup> There are several types of written sources:

**a - Ancient sources:** From the origins to the 7th century. These are Egyptian and Nubian archaeological pieces such as papyri, epigraphic documents (rock paintings and engravings) and texts by Greek and Latin authors such as Herodotus, Strabo and Diodorus of Sicily.<sup>19</sup> For instance, Herodotus wrote about Tran's Saharan trade, geographical issues on Africa and provided a map containing some names that have survived to present.

The African continent entered the documentary record with the independent invention of writing in Egypt around 3250 BCE. For ancient history, nearly the only extant textual sources are ancient Egyptian writing, in addition to largely ignored epigraphic evidence such as at Damaat. For the classical period, diverse African societies adopted writing, including Nubians in Meroitic and Ethiopians in Ge'ez.<sup>20</sup>

Ancient Egyptians independently invented two forms of writing (c. 3250–2700 BCE): hieroglyphics and a cursive script known as hieratic. Arising in roughly the same period as the development of complex society and political unification in Egypt, the invention of writing facilitated both a cultural and a political unity in the region and later served the administrative needs of a centralized state.<sup>21</sup>

It should be noted that the Egyptian civilization rests to a large extent on African bases and shows that this region was once the main center of universal civilization from which science, art, mathematics, astronomy, radiated. Medicine, architecture and music.

Théophile Obenga's book, *Egyptian Geometry - Contribution of Africa to World Mathematics*- restores Egyptian geometry directly from documents:

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<sup>18</sup> Souad Mostefaoui. "The role of the Arab Islamic civilization in developing the scientific movement in West Africa". *Dirassat Ifriquia* (African Studies Review), Algiers, deuxième année, Numéro 4, Mai 2006. pp 113-132.

<sup>19</sup> The African continent is now recognized as the birthplace of humanity and the cradle of civilization. We still marvel at the great achievements of Kemet, or Ancient Egypt, for example, one of the most notable of the early African civilizations, which first developed in the Nile valley over 5000 years ago.

<sup>20</sup> The Ge'ez language served as the Ethiopia church and other literary functions.

<sup>21</sup> MacArthur, Elise V. "The Conception and Development of the Egyptian Writing System," in *Visible Language: Inventions of Writing in the Ancient Middle East and Beyond*, ed. C. Woods, G. Emberling, and E. Teeter. Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2010, 115–136.

papyri, monuments, instruments, bas-reliefs, etc. The objects and geometrical problems treated are numerous: the straight line, the circumference, the angles, the triangle, the rectangle, the rhombus, the square, the trapezoid, the regular polygons, the symmetries in relation to a point and an axis, the square, the triangle, the trapezoid, the circle, the area of a surface limited by any curve, the surface of the sphere, the trigonometry, the volumes of the cylinder, the pyramid. Moreover, the author also provides all the geometric vocabulary in hieroglyphic Egyptian.<sup>22</sup>

**b - Arab sources:** which go from the 9th to the 15th century and are the work of Arab authors such as Al Bakri (1040-1094), Al Idrisi (1099-1164), Ibn Batouta (1304-1377), Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406), etc. To these authors, we must add Africans who wrote their own history in Arabic, such as the chronicles (tarikh in Arabic) of two scholars from Timbuktu: Mahmoud Kati (Tarikh el-Fettach, who wrote about the reign of Askia Mohamed) and Abderrahmane es-Sadi (Tarikh es-Sudan); Some are of great importance; for example, Arab historian Shihab Al Umari's work is an important source about Malian history despite the fact al-Umari did not travel to west Africa. The reason is that al-Umari collected oral testimony from Egyptian officials who had met Mansa Musa and informants who had travelled to Mali during his time in Cairo.<sup>23</sup>

Two Arab writers, Al-Sharif al-Idrisi and Leo Africanus, were particularly influential for medieval Africa. Al-Idrisi wrote a universal geography for the Norman king Roger II of Sicily in 1150, the earliest work of its kind published in Europe. His work remains an important reference for many scholars.<sup>24</sup>

It can be said that this scientific production is a geographical Encyclopedia containing detailed maps and information on European countries, Africa and Asia. In this book, Al Idrissi told us stories about sailors crossing the Atlantic around 800 AD. He confirmed the reports recorded by other Arab Historians and geographers concerning navigators crossing the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Africa can therefore be credited not only with giving rise to the many scientific developments associated with Egypt, engineering, mathematics, architecture and medicine etc. but also with important early political developments such as state formation and monarchy. This demonstrates that scientific development was, during this early period, perhaps more advanced in Africa than in other continents.

<sup>23</sup> For more details see Moncef Bakail. Research and studies in sub-Saharan Africa op.cit..

<sup>24</sup> M. bakail. African "African heritage and globalization" op.cit. pp 263-264.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Moroccan-Andalusian al-Hasan b. Muhammad Al Wazzan al-Zayyani, known in Europe as Leo Africanus, left a valuable 16th-century account of North Africa, West Africa and Egypt. Through his work, Europeans acquired descriptions of Timbuktu, Gao, Agades, Hausa city states, and Borno .<sup>26</sup>

We can also mention the two trips made by Al Masoudi and Ibn Battuta who visited Africa, in particular East Africa, Mali, Timbuktu and Gao. Both of them gave us a full description of the Kenyan port of Mombasa in the 12th century AD, in addition to its mines, houses, mosques and tiger hunting. Moreover, Al Masoudi left a very interesting description of Sofala and its port where the Monomotapa kingdom traded gold and ivory with goods from East Africa , India and China.<sup>27</sup>

According to Arab Historians such as Al Messaoudi , Al Idrissi and Al Omari Many Muslim Sailors reached a distant land. One of the first accounts came from a tenth century historian named Al Messaoudi Abou El Hassan Ali bin El Hussein<sup>28</sup>, who was a historian and geographer. He wrote a book entitled " Mouroudj ed dahab oua maadin el djouher " . In his book, he told the story of a young man from El Andalous ( Spain today) named Ibn Said who crossed the Atlantic Ocean and made contact with people on the other side and returned in 889 AD. Al Messaoudi wrote « Ibn Said gathered a group of young men and went on a voyage on this ocean. Thus , all al Andalus knew his story ». <sup>29</sup>

According to Al Omari writings, Mensah Abou Bakar is believed to have travelled to the new World. Thus, a belief shared by many historians today. Al Omari cited that there was two voyages across the Atlantic Ocean preceding that of Christopher Columbus. Both expeditions were pioneered by Mensah Abou Bakar.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Moncef Bakail ."The rise and fall of African Kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa.op.cit.

<sup>28</sup> For more details , Al Messaoudi , Abou El Hassan Ali bin El Hussein ( in Arabic). Mouroudj ed dahab oua maadin el djouher. Dar El Rakha, Cairo , 1938.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> M .Bakail ."The rise and fall of African Kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa.op.cit.

### **c - European sources :**

European sources began with the arrival of the Portuguese on the coasts of East and West Africa and the rise of trade in the Atlantic Ocean culminating in the transatlantic slave trade. Documentary sources by merchants, slave traders, soldiers, missionaries, and others increased exponentially with the increase of the transatlantic slave trade. These sources document the quantity and process of coastal trade. They also illuminate coastal relationships, particularly between Europeans and African rulers and merchants, as well as people of mixed ancestry, many of whom became traders.<sup>31</sup>

It should be noted that many written sources were at best written by people with little knowledge of the languages or people they described and at worst by subjectivity. Indeed, authors who had never visited the places they described wrote the most popular publications about Africa. For example, Dutch doctor Olfert Dapper's synthetic work (1668, French translation 1668) was the major source of knowledge about Africa for a long period.<sup>32</sup>

As it is also known, many African regions, especially its central and eastern regions, remained unknown until the mid-nineteenth century, when some adventurers, merchants, and Christian clerics wrote about the Great Lakes kingdoms. The Kingdom of Burundi was first described in 1858 by the adventurer Richard Burton, while the Kingdom of Buganda was written by the adventurer John Speck for the first time in 1862. Accordingly, it can be said that the sources of the writings of European historians are related to the writings of these adventurers and the archives of Christian missionaries, whether Protestant or Catholic, in addition to the archives of colonial countries. On this basis, many European historians wrote the history of Africa according to their tendencies and far from being objective.

Finally, it should be noted that African heritage was affected by colonial control negatively when Europeans put their hands on public and private libraries and stole the archives and artifacts that decorated the shelves of European museums. This work was carried out by soldiers, spies and Christian

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<sup>31</sup> For Portuguese sources see G. S. P. Freeman Grenville, *The East African Coast: Select Documents from the First to the Earlier Nineteenth Century* ; M. Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415–1670: A Documentary History* , Cambridge University Press, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> This work was translated into French language in 1668.

missionaries, through which the tangible cultural heritage was transferred to European museums, nobles and officers who were entrusted with the tasks of conquest. Also colonialism intentional Burning libraries, especially the library of the University of Algiers in 1962, which contained irreplaceable treasures such as books and documents on the history and civilizations of Africa.

### **3 - The importance of the multidisciplinary approach in the writing of African history:**

With the end of colonialism, many African and European historians have emerged and rejected the idea of the privilege of written sources from the one hand and insisted on including interdisciplinary sources and methods ranging from archeology, ethnography, anthropology, linguistics, art history, and oral history from the other hand.

#### **A – Archeology:**

Archeology is the scientific study of cultures and lifestyles of the past through the analysis of material remains. Archeology has thus become over time a multidisciplinary science, associating art history, anthropology, ethnology, paleontology, geology, ecology, physical sciences, etc. Thus, to establish a chronology, archaeologists use dating methods developed by researchers from other disciplines: dating by carbon 14, potassium argon and the fluorine test developed by specialists in nuclear physics. Archeology has established with certainty that Africa is the cradle of humanity.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, with regard to archaeological sources we can cite: Necropolises: location, skeletons, various objects provide information on the population, rites, the structure of society, the conception of the world, external relations, etc.. The habitat: outlines of urban areas, various objects provide information on land use, demography, political and social organization. Moreover, Technological sites: ceramics, metallurgy, glass, fabrics, pharmacopoeia, tools, etc. provide information on technological and scientific development.

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<sup>33</sup> For more details, see Susan Keech McIntosh (ed.), *Beyond Chiefdoms : Pathways to Complexity in Africa* (Cambridge, 1999); Joseph Vogel (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Precolonial Africa : Archaeology, History, Languages, Cultures, and Environments* (Walnut Creek CA, 1997); and Martin Hall, *Archaeology Africa* (London, 1996).

Both archaeological and textual evidence highlights the commercial importance of Aksum, which by the middle of the first millennium had expanded eastward to the Red Sea and across to the Arabian coast, becoming a central intermediary in long-distance trade and the main East African trading partner of the Roman and Byzantine empires.<sup>34</sup>

However, what should be mentioned here is that these treasures still adorn the shelves of European museums. It is also imperative for the specialists in African studies to highlight the features of African civilization, which are striking in the depths of history throughout its various periods of time. Many archaeological discoveries have proven that Africa was home to many civilizations, and accordingly, we find that both the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras confirm the effects left by African people that still exist to this day, including the rock inscriptions and drawings that symbolize some animals and the craft of hunting. All these appearances faithfully express the techniques used in those eras.<sup>35</sup>

#### **b. Linguistics:**

It is the scientific, historical and comparative study of languages to establish their kinship or affinities. It makes it possible to detect contacts between peoples that the movements had to separate. Thanks to the work of C. A. Diop, we have succeeded in establishing the relationship between ancient Egyptian and the Negro-African languages. In Senegal for example, the linguistic kinship between Wolof, Fulani and Serer would result from their first cohabitation at the level of the Senegal River valley.<sup>36</sup>

Linguistics, helps us to know the past of peoples in which written evidence is not available through concern for the phenomenon of language or dialect related to human activity. Accordingly, researchers in African history can use this knowledge to find out the origins of some languages and dialects<sup>37</sup>, especially

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<sup>34</sup> Eivind Heldaas Seland, "Early Christianity in East Africa and Red Sea/Indian Ocean Commerce," *African Archaeological Review* 31, no. 4 (2014).

<sup>35</sup> Moncef bakail.African "African heritage and globalization" in "Algerian Review of Political Sciences and Information". (In Arabic language), 2003-2004; A.Apparurai. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis University Press, 1996.

<sup>36</sup> El Hadi El Mabrouk Edali . *Fulani tribes (in Arabic)* , CPP , Tripoli , Libya , 2009. pp 34-39.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Ehret, "Writing African History from Linguistic Evidence," in *Writing African History*, ed. John Edward Philips (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005).

those related to the Bantu tribes in East Africa or the Akan, Dan, Senoufou, Bete, Bambara and Manding tribes in West Africa or the Shona, Ndebele, Xhosa and Zulu tribes in Zimbabwe and South Africa. This is in addition to other sciences such as geography, sociology and demography, which are among the basic sciences in such matters.

According to Vansina, a sociolinguistic methodology is appropriate because African societies are best understood through what can broadly be termed “culture” and that culture is understood and expressed through language. In the absence of written documents, language itself becomes a historical source, and it constitutes a particularly useful one at that, because languages are complete, unified systems and they do not change easily.<sup>38</sup>

In conclusion, linguistics is a powerful tool that can provide both broad historical relationships and detailed cultural data about peoples, social organization, political practices and beliefs.<sup>39</sup>

### **c) Anthropology:**

It is the study of the anatomical, biological, cultural and social characteristics of human beings. This science is divided into two main branches:

- 1- Physical anthropology, which studies the biological evolution and physiological evolution of humans (*Homo sapiens*). By means of this method, a racial classification was reached according to the size and shape of the skull. Thus the blacks are dolichocephalic (elongated skull), the whites are brachycephalic (skull wider than it is long) and the yellows are mesocephalic (rounded skull).<sup>40</sup>
- 2- Social and cultural anthropology, which studies the life of human societies, present and past, the evolution of their languages, beliefs and social practices. The general object of anthropology is to make man and all dimensions of human life the object of positive knowledge.

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<sup>38</sup> For more details, see Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforests: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa*. University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Jan Vansina, ‘Linguistic evidence for the introduction of iron working into Bantu-speaking Africa’, *History in Africa*, 33 (2006).

<sup>40</sup> On physical anthropology, see Peter Rosa, ‘Physical anthropology and the reconstruction of recent precolonial history in Africa’, *History in Africa*, 12 (1985), pp 281–305,

#### **4 - The contribution of the African Studies laboratory, Algiers 2 University in the historiography of sub-Saharan Africa:**

The African Studies laboratory (LEA), University of Algiers 2 founded in 2012 is the only knowledge entity in Algeria devoted entirely to the study of the History of sub-Saharan Africa. It undertakes studies and research and is involved in promoting of teaching and support for doctoral students and researchers after the creation of specialized Master's and Doctoral courses in the field of the history of sub-Saharan Africa in 2015. The courses intend to provide students with an understanding of African historiography and the ability to conduct scholarly research. Moreover, the laboratory's mission is not only of importance to researchers but also to policymakers, journalists and other organizations.

In close collaboration with several Algerian research entities such as the Manuscripts laboratory, university of Algiers 2, the African university in Adrar and the National Center for Research in Archeology and the national Center for prehistoric, Anthropological and historical research, The African Studies Laboratory conducts scientific research to contribute to the history of Africa. Along with field research, the Laboratory organizes seminars, conferences, and workshops and published research based on diverse methodological approaches.

Through the publication of many books and scientific articles which contribute to the enrichment of the historiography of sub-Saharan Africa, and over the last five years, we can cite the following works:

Bakail Moncef, two major contributions to the subject (Studies and research in the history of sub-Saharan Africa, 2017) in Arabic and English languages<sup>41</sup>, and the second book (Lights on Africa. Dar es Sabil, Algiers, 2009. (In Arabic language),<sup>42</sup> are considered as a piece of major academic research recognized by

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<sup>41</sup>This work is of a great significance for the subject under study, especially in the field of the history of Equatorial Africa in general and Bantu kingdoms in Particular. The kingdom of Kongo is undoubtedly the best-known thanks to the stories of the Portuguese and its political organization, socio-economic and its cultures. The Kongo kingdom's kings converted to Christianity after their contacts with the Portuguese. It was one of the most famous African kingdoms from the 15th to the end of the 17th century. its rulers, beginning with Alfonso I (1505-1543), who was dealing on an equal footing with the King of Portugal, and helped to make his kingdom known.

<sup>42</sup> Moncef Bakail.Studies and research in the history of sub-Saharan Africa .op.cit.

many scholars. The first one analyze in depth a governance model adopted by a great chief who has succeeded in uniting tribes under the banner of a more coherent and effective political and socio-economic system. It was the kingdom founded by Samory Touré in Northern Côte d'Ivoire in the 19th century.<sup>43</sup> Ben bouzid Lakhdar. “Rock art in the Tassili and Ahagar regions during the Bovid stage between 6000 BC-1000 BC”, 2015 is a very well-documented book which reminds us of the richness of the continent's history.<sup>44</sup>

Amraoui Djamel eddine work (The role of the Bantu tribes in the emergence of Monomotapa and the KCongo kingdoms) in Arabic language, 2020, is one of the best secondary sources. By using some primary sources, this work traces the evolution of Bantu migrations and how villages quickly developed into kingdoms and empires and contributed effectively to the construction of the edifice of world civilization. Djaafri, Ahmed. (The Literary Movement in Tuat during the 12th and the 13th Centuries. 2018), is valuable work in the field of exploiting Manuscripts dealing with scholars neglected by historians.

The scientific council of the African studies laboratory in close collaboration with national and international institutions is adopting a strategy aiming to promoting the historiography of ancient and medieval sub-Saharan Africa by the restoration of the remaining manuscripts.<sup>45</sup> Its task will be to save and restore the cultural heritage of the Touat region in the south of Algeria .<sup>46</sup>

Although it is impossible at the moment to know the exact number of manuscripts preserved in the traditional libraries in the south of Algeria , one of the research teams of the laboratory in collaboration with the owners of these libraries as well as the African university of Adrar are working to determine it. Moreover, its task will be to save and restore the cultural heritage of the Touat

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<sup>43</sup> M.Bakail. Lights on Africa. Dar es Sabil, Algiers, 2009. (in Arabic) pp

<sup>44</sup> Tassili n'Ajjer is a mountain range in the Algerian section of the Sahara Desert, noted for its prehistoric rock art depicting herds of cattle, large wild animals such as antelopes, and human activities. More than 15,000 petroglyphs have been identified at Tassili n'Ajjer.

<sup>45</sup> 35,000 to 40,000 manuscripts are preserved in traditional libraries in the south of the country, in addition to 5,000 others identified at the National Library in Algiers (BN),

<sup>46</sup> The province of Touat lies on a wide area in the far southwestern part of Algeria, which made it overlooking Sudan especially in the two countries of Mali and Mauritania, and thus, it occupies an important geographical position. The region since ancient times has represented a strategic place within the African region, which has made it a cross point between North and South.

region and that of other regions of Algeria. The owners of this treasure of manuscripts have 28 “Khizanat”<sup>47</sup> in the regions of Akbli and Tit, 300 Kms south of Adrar, and in Ouled Said, 270 Kms north of Adrar. Among the most important libraries are those of Akbli, Meterfa and Zaouia El-Bakria, which shelters manuscripts dating back to the eighth century.<sup>48</sup>

The African studies review (ASR), issued by the laboratory publishes articles and book reviews ranging widely over the African past, from ancient times to the present. As for the scope of the review, it is multidisciplinary specialized in sub-Saharan Africa. The published articles are characterized by their absolute academic and scientific standards. Moreover, the review requires originality of the submitted articles in order to be published after being reviewed by editors and experts. Furthermore. Many articles are of some value concerning Ancient and medieval Africa ( e.g. Azzouz, Fatma Zohra.<sup>49</sup> “The role of rock paintings in introducing religious life in Algeria in ancient history”, in A.S.R., No 2 , May 2015. Betka Brahim. “Aspects of the history of the Tuareg Sultanate in the Ayir region in the 15th century” in A.S.R., No 2 , May 2015. Kaousim Mohamed.” Sakia El Hamra and Oued Ed-Dahab during the Middle Ages, through travel and geography books” A.S.R. Vol 3, No 7 , 2017.

Finally, It is worth noting that a multidisciplinary team is in charge of translating these works into English, French, Tamazight and Swahili languages.

## **Conclusion;**

With the end of colonialism, many African and European historians have emerged and rejected the idea that Africa had no ancient history and they even rejected the idea of the privilege of written sources from the one hand and

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<sup>47</sup> **Khizana:** literally cupboard. It describes a small library that contains manuscripts. The manuscripts in the khizana are organized in terms of type of knowledge, like jurisprudence, sciences ,theology and grammar, etc. For instance, Kusam khizana contains many manuscripts in various sciences such as jurisprudence, theology, grammar, science of Hadith, science of Quran, and the Chapter Three: The Survey of Manuscripts 32 translations of scholars of the region, the basis of which was formed by the Judge Abdul Karim al-Maghili.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Bekri, Abdulhamid. The history of Tuat and Its Ulamas from the 9th until the 14th Centuries. Algeria: Al-Houda Publishing House, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that On the border of the Algerian Tassili n'Ajjer, also a World Heritage Site, this rocky massif is rich in thousands of rock paintings of very different styles, the oldest of which date back to around 12,000 BC. AD, the most recent can be dated to the 1st century of the Christian era. These paintings reflect the profound modifications of the flora and fauna, as well as the various lifestyles of the populations which have succeeded in this part of the Sahara.

insisted on including interdisciplinary sources and methods ranging from archeology to oral history.

In this context, and in order to adapt globalization, African countries are expected to preserve their rich heritage, especially the monuments of the Kingdom of Aksum, the pyramids of Zimbabwe, the manuscripts of Timbuktu and Adrar in Algeria (which contain thousands of manuscripts) and the bronze monuments in Benin or what is known as African plastic art, in addition to the masks for which Cote d'Ivoire is famous, especially the masks of the Gere, Senoufo, Akan and Beté tribes.

Through its scientific production, both the Laboratory and the Algerian research institutions with the collaboration with UNESCO are introducing some new terminology and concepts. Moreover, the African studies laboratory, Algiers University of Algiers 2 is establishing a historiography of Africa by including interdisciplinary sources.

During thousands of years, African peoples have created their own cultural components in terms of housing, clothing, language, dance and singing. On this basis, the history of sub-Saharan Africa needs more academic studies, which will undoubtedly contribute to shedding light on some historical facts that historians have neglected, especially those related to the period before European of Africa.

Finally, one of the major achievements of the laboratory is to have formed a critical mass of historians which constitutes a solid base on which it is possible to build an African studies centre in Algeria which is the gateway to Africa. . The current technological environment requires a wide opening towards African and international universities through creation of sustainable exchange networks.