Objectives

• Identify the different ways that the family influenced medieval African cultures.

• Describe the variety of forms of medieval African governments.

• Understand the role of religion and art in medieval societies.
Terms and People

- **nuclear family** – parents and children living and working together as a unit

- **patrilineal** – a family system in which important kinship ties such as inheritance are passed through the father’s side

- **matrilineal** – a family system in which inheritance is passed through the mother’s side
Terms and People (continued)

- **lineage** – a group whose members claim the same ancestry
- **consensus** – general agreement
- **griot** – a professional storyteller who recited ancient stories in West Africa
What factors influenced the development of societies in Africa?

Due to Africa’s immense size, early societies developed in a variety of ways. Settled farming communities emerged in areas with good soil and water.

Transportation advances such as the use of camels connected communities to each other. Each society developed around the elements of family, government, religion, and art.
In medieval Africa, the family was the basic unit of society.

- In some societies, the **nuclear family** formed the basic unit. In others, the **extended family all lived and worked together**.

- Some families were **patrilineal**, tracing inheritance through the father’s side, and some were **matrilineal**, tracing it through the mother’s side.
Belonging to a particular family and lineage gave people a sense of community and responsibility.

- A **lineage** is a group whose members claim the same ancestry. **A clan was made up of several lineages.**

- People’s place in their community was also determined by age grades in medieval Africa. **An age grade was made up of all children born in the same year.**
Governments arose in medieval Africa as communities grew. Political patterns varied.

- In smaller communities, power was shared among many people. Villages made decisions by reaching a consensus after open discussions.

- If villages were part of a kingdom such as Songhai, they had to obey decisions from a distant court and pay taxes.
In another system of government, **villages were grouped into districts** and governed by officials named by a king.

An example of this was the kingdom of Kongo, which existed around 1500.

Each village paid taxes in cowrie shells to a governor.
Religious beliefs in Africa before the arrival of Christianity and Islam were complex and tied to nature.

- **Like Greeks and Romans, Africans worshipped many gods.** Like the Chinese, some Africans believed that the spirits of their ancestors could help them.

- **However, they did believe in a supreme being that was above all other gods.**
Christianity and Islam spread into Africa by A.D. 1000.

- Africans often associated the God of these religions with their supreme being.

- Christianity and Islam assimilated many local beliefs and traditions.
Early and medieval societies in Africa had great artistic and creative power.

Examples of this power can be seen in:

- The ancient rock paintings of the Sahara
- The pyramids of Egypt and Nubia
- The rock churches of Ethiopia
African artists used a variety of materials, such as ivory, wood, and gold.

- They made decorative items such as bowls or jewelry.
- African art often served social or religious purposes. For example, decorative patterns often had special meaning.
Oral traditions were an important part of preserving African history.

- Professional storytellers call griots recited ancient tales.
- Some stories were not spoken—they were communicated by the talking drums of western and central Africa.
Section Review

QuickTake Quiz

Know It, Show It Quiz