

Listening script

Unit 8

13

Well, in today's lecture we are going to explore early human migration out of Africa to colonise the world. Throughout history there've been waves of humans migrating as people have moved from one locality to another, sometimes quickly over very short distances ... and sometimes slowly over very great stretches of land, mmm ... in search of a new or different or better life. There now appears to be general agreement that the first movement of people of any real significance in any part of our planet originated in East Africa approximately 100,000 years ago. This first group of modern humans made their way across the Red Sea, which was then a dry bed. Then through Arabia and into what is now the Middle East. But these early pioneers soon died out.

Just like today, the Earth was subject to shifts in temperature. About 70,000 years ago the planet became warmer and another group of modern humans migrated out of their homeland of Africa, following basically the same route, and then moving on to South Asia. By about 50,000 years ago, modern humans had colonised China, and about 45,000 years ago they had reached Europe. These early humans settled in the wide open spaces of Siberia about 40,000 years ago and about 20,000 years ago modern humans reached Japan, which was connected to the main land mass at that time.

Now, there was no land connection between Australia and South East Asia, so the first Australians who arrived around 50,000 years ago must have made the journey across the sea in simple boats to settle on the Australian continent.

Modern humans moved from Asia to North America, which was reached across what is now the Bering Strait through Alaska. This migration happened between 15 and 13,000 years ago. There is also some evidence to suggest that modern humans came across pack ice via the North Atlantic, but this theory has been discounted by some. Since that time, the American continent has been the destination of waves of human settlement.

.....

Before we look at more modern examples of human movement, like the Anglo-Saxon migrations to Britain in the 5th century AD, the migration of Turks during the Middle Ages and the migration of the Irish to America in the mid-19th century, I'd like to look at a migration within the continent of Africa itself, that I'm personally very interested in.

If we look at the map of Africa, we can see some patterns that are common to other waves of human movement throughout history. The routes here show what is probably the most significant migration in Africa itself: that of the Bantu, who spread out from a small region in West Africa near the present day border of Nigeria and Cameroon, just around here on the map ... to occupy roughly 30 per cent of the continent by the year 1,000 AD. A trigger for this movement may have been the result of the cultivation of the yam, a starchy root vegetable, which Bantu farmers started to grow as part of their staple diet. This cultivation began around 2,750 BC, resulting in the expansion of the population. The Bantu people then spread out into the neighbouring territories, which were at that time sparsely populated. As the land of the rainforest could not sustain the farmers and their families for longer than a few years, they moved on, felling trees and creating new clearances in the forest to cultivate yams. With the numbers of the Bantu on the increase between 2,500 and 400 BC the people were constantly on the move, migrating south down through modern-day Congo ... in central Africa, and reaching Zimbabwe and modern-day South Africa by about 100 AD.

It was contact with Sudan in North Africa that introduced the Bantu to iron production, in which they excelled. Once they had exchanged knowledge of working in iron from Sudan, the quality of their work rivalled that produced by the Mediterranean people of the time. They now had better tools to cut down trees, clear forests and work fields. And there is one other benefit iron gave them, and that was a military advantage over their neighbours.

I'd say that migration has transformed the world from early times, and we all reap the benefits of different peoples coming into contact with each other.