

Discuss the contributions of iron technology to the process of state formation in...



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Iron Technology and the Process of Formation in Bantu Africa Iron technology had a significant impact on the formation of early states of the Bantu community in Africa. Arguably, there was stiff competition due to the uneven distribution of resources such as copper fish, salt and metalwork techniques such as smelting. Moreover, this competition resulted in social inequality. In such an environment, the emergence of more complex and centralized establishments was inevitable. Alimen observes that environmental determinism is not sufficient to explain the process of state formation in the Bantu community of Africa (496). The Bantu community had the notion of a 'big man' who was enchanted with grasping of new opportunities. Such an idea led to the development of political establishments as chiefdoms regrouped. It is believed that three main kingdoms that inhabited the western savannas came into being through this method. They include the Kongo, Luango, and the Tio. Importantly, copper trade in the contributed to the development of major commercial market routes and major markets that expanded the territories of the existing political establishments. For instance, the Malebo Pool along River Zaire began through such a process. Furthermore, copper rich areas were regarded as 'capitals' headed by a 'paramount chief'. The paramount chief was surrounded by a close circuit of a court of title holders who performed rituals and emblems within certain principalities. Archeologically, along the Zaire valley iron and copper deposits had been discovered. In areas such as Boko Songho-Mindouli area, political establishments were related to the large deposits of iron and copper (Alimen).

The emergence of these kingdoms in the 14th to 17th the century occurred more or less simultaneously as a result of iron technology. To begin with, the <https://assignbuster.com/discuss-the-contributions-of-iron-technology-to-the-process-of-state-formation-in-bantu-africa/>

Mbundu Kingdom was established in the 16th century, and it controlled most economic resources and commercial routes in the south of the Kongo. As a sign of the political power they wielded, the Mbundu Kingdom used a piece of iron as an emblem and mark of their authority. This piece of metal was known as 'ngola'. It is known that towards the end of the 15th century a holder of that emblem established a major kingdom. In subsequent centuries, the emblem played a significant role in the slave trade (Alimen). Towards the end of the 18th century, the Mbundu had organized a large commercial network of together with Portuguese immigrants whose trading caravans reached as far as the Lozi and Lunda Kingdoms. The kingdoms developed a royalty form of a political establishment. The royalty was attributed to the use of symbols such as 'ngola', practices and beliefs that legitimized the authority of the local kings. Secondly, the Luba Kingdom had sculptured various items such as ceremonial iron axes with wooden carvings which were important symbols of power. The kingdom used iron weapons to conquer other lands in an effort of expanding its territories. However, through intermarriage and use of political symbols the kingdom used less force; however, it exerted influence through prestige and influence (Alimen). Much of similar conquests through iron technology are replicated in Lacustrine, Swahili, and Zambebian Bantu political states. In essence, the emergence of iron technology contributed significantly towards formation of states in Bantu Africa.

#### Works Cited

Alimen, H. *The Prehistory of Africa*. Michigan: University of Michigan, 1957.