**Another Voice Podcast with Eric Nelson**

**to accompany Strayer/Nelson, *Ways of the World*, Third Edition**

**Thinking about Northeast African Civilizations (Chapter 6)**

**SLIDE 6.1**

Do Meroë and Axum belong in this chapter? This question engages with a current debate among historians about how sub-Saharan Africa during the Second Wave Era should be understood. To what extent was sub-Saharan Africa a world apart from North Africa and Eurasia? To what extent was it linked into an Afro-Eurasian zone of interaction and exchange?

**SLIDE 6.2 [Map: Africa in the Second Wave Era]**

Historians have to make choices when presenting the past. A case can certainly be made that we should have included Meroë and Axum in the previous three chapters, alongside the Second Wave Era civilizations of the Mediterranean and Southwest Asia. The Nile River and Red Sea provided corridors of contact that made sub-Saharan northeast Africa far less isolated from the Mediterranean than central and west Africa. Through these routes, both Meroë and Axum integrated into Mediterranean and Southwest Asian networks of interaction. Regular trade, periodic diplomatic exchanges and the activities of missionaries connected Meroë and Axum to the Hellenistic Greek and later Roman and Byzantine empires.

**SLIDE 6.3 [Image: The Columns of Axum]**

Axum, in particular, also established significant links on the Arabian Peninsula. Through these contacts, both imported technologies and trading goods and developed written scripts. Writing in particular distinguished these societies from other sub-Saharan African civilizations of the Second Wave Era. Finally, in the long run, both Axum and the successor kingdoms to Meroë adopted Christianity, a cultural tradition widely embraced in the Mediterranean basin and Southwest Asia.

**SLIDE 6.4 [Map 6.1: Africa in the Second Wave Era]**

But there are also good reasons for including Meroë and Axum in this chapter, which explores the variety of civilizations and societies that took root in sub-Saharan Africa. By including them in this chapter, we highlight the significant contacts between Africa and Eurasia during the Second Wave Era, while also contrasting with alternative patterns of interaction in other regions of the continent. They provide an early example of sustained contact and interaction between societies in sub-Saharan Africa and Eurasia, a theme that will grow in importance in coming chapters as other regions establish contacts across the Sahara Desert and Indian Ocean.

The case of where to place Meroë and Axum in our examination of the Second Wave Era is just one of many choices that shape this book. These decisions often come with trade-offs. In this case the discussion of Meroë and Axum in this chapter allows for a fuller survey of the variety of civilizations in sub-Saharan Africa during the Second Wave Era. But it is worth emphasizing here that, much more so than any of the other societies examined in this chapter, Meroë and Axum were also participants in the Eurasian and North African world that we have explored over the past three chapters.