

# **ATLAS OF PRECOLONIAL SOCIETIES**

## **CULTURAL HERITAGE AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES OF AFRICAN, ASIAN AND MELANESIAN COUNTRIES**

An atlas including 21 maps and a CD-ROM with digital book and databases for records and further research, covering 2240 cultural units in 95 countries

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## ***What is the Atlas of Precolonial Societies?***

The *Atlas of Precolonial Societies* is a compendium of the cultural heritage of the non-western world. For 95 African, Asian and Melanesian countries, the Atlas describes the preindustrial economies, traditional systems of kinship and precolonial modes of political organization on maps and in a databank. These traits are explained in detail in the digital textbook on CD-ROM. Since the same variables are represented on two analytical levels, ethnic and national, they lend themselves to research on very different topics.

Most modern nation-states are culturally heterogenous, containing a patchwork of different cultural traditions. The cultural heritage documented in the Atlas influences contemporary societies in many ways. The ethnic units of analysis are defined by a common linguistic, religious and social traits. The aim of the *Atlas* is to describe the cultural diversity of contemporary nation-states, not to record ethnic groups or lend scientific legitimization to any kind of ethno-nationalist claims.

In the country profiles of the *Atlas*, the cultural units are represented by a set of 52 ethnographic variables and indices. For the most part, the definition of the variables is identical with those of the *Ethnographic Atlas* by G. P. Murdock (Pittsburgh 1967). The indices and typologies, however, are original. They permit a more compact and complex characterization of the cultural units. The number of the ethnographic units documented goes far beyond anything available so far. In addition to the 95 countries, 29 Chinese provinces and 25 Indian federal states are coded like separate countries.

The ethnographic and demographic information were collected from many sources. They rely on compilations like the *Human Relations Area Files* (New Haven), the *Atlas Narodow Mira* (Moscow 1964), *Languages of the World* (Dallas 1988), the *Area Handbook* and *Country Study Series* (Washington). In cases where these sources were not sufficient, the informations were extracted from primary ethnographic reports, mostly written during the first half of the 20th century.

Anthropological literature provides a multitude of information about non-western cultures. Until today, it was hardly possible to communicate this knowledge beyond the frontiers of the discipline. This was partly due to the qualitative nature of ethnographic description, and partly reflecting the difficulty to link cross-cultural data from ethnic societies with national indicators in cross-national analysis. The *Atlas of Precolonial Societies* enables the users to do just that: On one side, the Atlas presents the cultural traits of ethnic units, grouped by country, on the other side, the ethnographic variables are calculated such to provide cultural indicators for each country on the national level. In this way the variables and indices give an overview of the broad spatial distribution and an analytical perspective we never had before.

## ***Overview: The elements of the Atlas***

The Atlas consists of two main parts: the CD-ROM and the maps.

### ***1. The components of the CD-ROM***

1. The **Editorial** with information and addresses
2. German and English Summary
3. The **digital book** provides the description of the methodology and the theoretical background of the maps (in German). All chapters, sections and tables are accessible by bookmarks. Use the respective screen display in Acrobat Reader.
4. The **maps** as digital files
5. The **databases**:
  - (A) Country profiles containing: The ethnographic data per country and per culture unit for 95 countries (*Excel-Files*); comparative tables with references; a codebook with the definitions of the 52 variables and frequency distributions of the categories (in English).
  - (B) Aggregated country data: 95 countries with aggregated ethnographic data on national level for cross-national studies (*Excel-Files*)
  - (C) Cultural units per country: Alphabetic list of names for all cultural units and the countries where they are mapped. This file is accessible by *Acrobat-Reader*.
  - (D) Ethnographic records providing details of coding and reference literature for all ethnic units, with an index of names.
6. **Contents** of the CD: An index of all files on the CD-ROM.

### ***2. The maps***

There are two types of maps: Identification maps and thematic maps.

#### ***1. The identification maps:***

The 12 identification maps locate the cultural units of each country, with a name and population size (1960). The background colours of the countries indicate the average population density. Part II and IV of the electronic book explain the theoretical and methodological background of the construction of cultural units. The 12 maps cover the following regions:

North Africa	West Asia	Malaysia, Indonesia
West Africa	Middle Asia	Melanesia
North East Africa	South Asia	
Central Africa	East Asia	
Southern Africa	South East Asia	

#### ***2. The thematic maps:***

There are eight thematic maps, presenting the cultural indicators for the 95 African, Asian and Melanesian countries. Information is given by symbols representing the cultural units presented on the identification maps. The background colours of the countries indicate the predominant cultural type. Part III of the electronic book explains the theoretical and methodological background of the thematic maps. The 8 maps visualize the following themes:

language families	family typology
politics	kinship systems I
subsistence modes	kinship systems II
modes of marriage	intergenerational transfer of social status

## ***Table of content of the book on CD-ROM (written in German)***

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## ***Who will use the Atlas of Precolonial Societies?***

- As a research tool: Anthropologists will enjoy the most comprehensive compendium of ethnographic data. Other social scientist will link the new cultural indicators with indicators of their interest in cross-national research.
- As a teaching tool: Anyone interested in visual representations of anthropology – museum trustees, the staff of development organizations, university teachers etc. – will be delighted to find new possibilities offered by the *Atlas*.
- As a new look at the non-western part of the world: The geographic distribution of traditional social institutions offers a scientific way to approach the cultural diversity and cultural history of a neglected part of the world.