

BOOK REVIEW

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Title: A History of the Yoruba People

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Publisher: Amalion Publishing, Dakar, 2010, ix + 498, Maps, Photographs, Notes, Bibliography and Index

ISBN: 978-2-35926-005-2HB

ISBN: 978-2-35926-006-9PB

Professor S. A. Akintoye's volume, *A History of the Yoruba People* is a new and engaging contribution to the growing body of literature on the Yoruba past. Since the publication of Reverend Johnson's *History of the Yorubas* in 1921 no other major attempt has been made to document the history of the Yoruba in a comprehensive and stimulating manner as in the present work. The scope of the volume covers the period from antiquity to the present.

Organized into eighteen chapters, the volume is the outcome of the author's rich and long academic experience both as a student and teacher of Yoruba and African studies. Within the first five chapters, the author attempts a reconstruction of the origin and evolution of the Yoruba people. Using the various myths and traditions of origin widely held among the people, the author places the claims of the Yoruba about their origin within the context of empirical evidence from archaeology, linguistics, art history and anthropology. He submits with interpretative expertise that the various myths and traditions of origin could only be understood to mean that the many Yoruba groups have lived so long in their different homesteads they can no longer recall coming from elsewhere.

An intriguing twist to this explanation is the position of the author about what he terms "Johnsonian hypothesis" (p.57). This was Reverend Johnson's claim that Oduduwa, the acclaimed progenitor of the Yoruba was a migrant from Egypt. The author's analysis clearly indicates that Oduduwa was in actual fact, 'a son of the soil' of Yorubaland. Another significant submission is that contrary to widespread belief about Oduduwa being the 'progenitor' of the Yoruba people, the Yoruba and their origin in fact predated Oduduwa. However, that Oduduwa was a great visionary leader of the Yoruba at a crucial period in the evolution and developmental stages of the people's history was clearly demonstrated. In this, Professor Akintoye agrees with other Yoruba historians like Professors Adeagbo Akinjogbin, Joseph Atanda and Jacob Ade-Ajayi in suggesting a farther-than-Oduduwa origin of the Yoruba people.

By using outcomes of recent research on Yoruba history from different academic disciplines, the author has produced an excellent account of Yoruba history. The study of Yoruba history is particularly relevant as the author pointed out in his preface. The Yoruba are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa whose history and culture has long engaged the interest of scholars. The author succeeds in weaving a web of events in the development of Yoruba society and states into a coherent and stimulating narrative. His bold attempt to write an all inclusive Yoruba history however suffers certain set-backs. First, even though the inclusion of the Yoruba diasporas and the Yoruba beyond the borders of Nigeria is a welcome development, the venture not only widens the scope of the work but also places it at a disadvantage in the sense of providing a limited glimpse into the past of these groups of Yoruba and thereby providing the platform for further research into this aspect of their history.

Specifically, one would have expected a more detailed account of the Yoruba diasporas and their contributions to their various countries in the post-independence era, a contribution that can not be disputed judging from their remarkable antecedents. However, the author's devotion to indicating the trend of unity and continuity among Yoruba socio-cultural and political communities can not be mistaken. The Yoruba are portrayed as a history-conscious, creative and enterprising people whose love for community has been a distinguishing factor. Second, there are a number of typographic errors noticed in the book. On page 449 for instance, 'in' was miss-spelt 'im'.

A juicy contribution to knowledge is the author's inclusion of the social transformations among the Yoruba people in the twentieth century. Here the author illustrates the dynamic change and growth in Yoruba cultures through the influence of Islam, Christianity and western education. The flowering of Yoruba popular culture, music, dance literature and other forms of entertainment is explored in detail showing the pattern of change and continuity.

In all, the book is a scholarly masterpiece, an engaging narrative and impressive expose of how the Yoruba people have emerged as an interesting group of forward looking nation both in Africa and in the diaspora. It is recommended to all people of Yoruba origin, scholars of African and Yoruba studies and the general public. It is a must read for all who are interested in the knowledge of the Yoruba's fascinating heritage. This book has the potential to change some of the wrong ideas about Yoruba origin and reinforce popular impressions about the vibrancy of Yoruba culture and heritage. It is an invaluable contribution to knowledge on the Yoruba people.