

FOREWORD

It gives me great pleasure to write a foreword to this publication on Yoruba folklore. The volume developed as a result of my lectures to graduate students of Indiana University's Folklore Institute during the Fall Semester, 1971 when I was a Visiting Professor to that Institute. The articles published here were originally presented to me as term papers by their authors. I was fascinated by the high academic insight demonstrated in these papers and I am happy that they will now be available to a wider audience both in the United States and overseas.

This volume is unique in many respects. In the first place, it shows the interests now being developed in African folklore by scholars in other parts of the world where that subject has not been taken seriously in the past. For many generations, Europe and America depended on amateur folklorists such as travellers and missionaries for an understanding of African folklore. Needless to stress that such accounts by non-specialists were usually biased, unsympathetic and, what is more, hopelessly unrepresentative of the rich folklore materials which have for centuries been preserved by African traditional societies. The image of African folklore was so badly distorted by such collectors to the extent that most Europeans believed that African folklore contained mainly animal stories. This volume is therefore important in that it shows that many American scholars have now begun to apply themselves rigorously to the study of African folklore in an academic and unbiased fashion making use of the latest tools which the study of folklore has developed in this country and elsewhere.

Second, this volume shows the need for folklorists to turn their attention to the study of African folklore in a more systematic fashion. General works covering the whole of Africa are needed but more important is the in-depth study of the folk traditions of particular African cultures. This is the only means by which the great resources of African folklore, which have for centuries remained unknown to the outside world, can be opened up for the benefit of the international academic community. The articles presented here are a testimony to what can be done before we begin to have the faintest glimpse into the folk traditions of Africa's numerous ethnic groups.

All the papers presented in this publication are devoted to Yoruba Studies, a field which has received perhaps greater attention than many other fields of African Studies. The academic study of the Yoruba language and culture started more than a century ago among Yoruba as well as Western scholars whose works have become important legacies to African Studies. The humble beginnings made at that time have now culminated in the establishment of Yoruba Studies as a discipline in at least three of Nigeria's universities. Yet, despite this keen interest which has been shown in Yoruba Studies for generations by scholars from all over the world, we still do not know enough about Yoruba folklore. In the years ahead, Yoruba as well as non-Yoruba scholars will undoubtedly widen the horizons of our knowledge about this highly developed African culture.

It is my hope that Yoruba scholars will continue to co-operate with their counterparts in other parts of the world for the study of their rich traditions. This volume heightens the prospects of such co-operation, communication, and more importantly, understanding, between the two shores of the Atlantic.

Wande Abimbola
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April 13, 1973