

Samuel A. Akintan, *A History of Idanre (Ufe'ke) Earliest Times to the Present*, John Archer Publishers Limited, Ibadan, 2014, 360 pages.

The book, *A History of Idanre (Ufe'ke) Earliest Times to the Present* written by Samuel Agboola Akintan is a descriptive history of Idanre in both its ancient and contemporary phases. In all, it has 360 pages divided into nine chapters discussing issues including land and people, history of origin, migration, and settlement patterns. It further examines integration, leadership, organization, and Idanre's relations with neighboring people. Nor does it neglect tradition, religion, society, or colonial Idanre up to 1933. The publication is a synthesis of the author's perspectives and an interpretation of collected oral traditions and such written sources of Idanre's (Ufe'ke) history and culture that are available. Though titled and described as history, the book addresses a broad range of socio-political, legal, and economic subjects as it relates to the Ufe'ke people and their neighbors. It is in line with this that one must first commend the author for his flowing and easily understood analysis of historical accounts that makes the work accessible to even the basic reader.

Through his writing, the author demonstrates the history of a people who were able to master their environment without an understanding of modern science, develop a unique political community, and establish and maintain cordial relations with both powerful and weak neighbors. This is made clear, for example, in the author's description of the use of Upaghe (herbal medicine) for yam production, incantation to develop language/dialect, and a strong team of herbal specialists equipped with special anti-poison medicine (Osu) to fight wars (pp.83, 88). Thus, the history gives a simplistic magical explanation to the process of state formation and related issues that are also exemplified by the prominence given to the stories of the foreign hero. He

comes from afar and with his magical sword, or his mandate from the god of the sky or sea or rock, or his supernatural power otherwise derived, imposed himself and his progeny on a previously unorganized people, creating new allegiances among them and mustering them into new communities in the form of states. Evidence of such claims is common among various societies in Africa as in the case of Sayf Ibn Yazzan the legendary founder of the Seifawa Dynasty of Borno, Bayajida the legendary founder of the Hausa people, Tsoede the legendary father of the Nupe people, and Oduduwa and Oranmiyan of the Yoruba group.

Although the work only adds flesh to the oral traditions of Idanre earlier documented by H.U. Beier in his work titled “The Oba’s Festival” published in 1956, it adds a new twist to Benin history, refuting traditions published by Egharevba as well as positing an Idanre version with new names and a new migration story. This is clearly brought out in the author’s attempt at establishing historic relationships between the various people in the area, with specific reference to Benin. He says:

These people originally called Ado originally came out of ile –ife with Olofin and actually first settled along the eastern side of Ufe’ke or Utaja (Olofin’s last settlement) only some 2 kilometres away. Like the other groups, they were part of the followers of Olofin. At Urede, the leader called Okoro quarreled with Olofin, but the Ado people still tarried around at Ufe’ke until they witnessed the death of Olofin. A short while after however, Okoro the leader of the Ado-Benin group, gradually moved his followers’ people away to Usen where they stayed for a while before migrating further to Benin (p. 82).

On explaining the difference in the languages/dialect of Idanre and Benin, the book avers that: “many local historians in Idanre asserted that the people of Ado initially spoke Idanre dialect and that it was Olofin who changed their tongue through incantation” (p. 83). In a bid to authenticate this claim,

the author was quick to quote from the tenth page of Egharevba's work, *A Short History of Benin*, which claim that "the Oludane of Idanre, Eruan, was a priest and followed Oba Ogiso from Uhe, who afterwards put him in charge of the god Orohun at Idanre" (page 83).

However, as a way of claiming equal status of Idanre with the Ado-Benin, the books asserts

While it is not correct that Oludanre came with Ogiso from Ife or that he was put in charge of Orohun, this claim is a pointer that Idanre–Benin relationship is age-long. Again in another study, Egharevba appears to have modified his claim by again saying that Oludanre was one of the followers of Oranmiyan, the other being Olobbah of Oba Ile and Elawue of Usen. But, Idanre oral traditions do not support this... But, in Idanre, the Ado people's leader was known as Okoro, not Ogiso. Yet, the guess can be hazarded that the names belonged to the same person. History also reported that in spite of the difference between Olofin and Okoro, Olofin gave the Ado people a herbal medicine called Upaghe used for growing yams (page 83).

Critical scrutiny of the above shows that in the author's attempt to interpret available documents, he neglected to carry out a proper historical analysis.

Although he attempted to provide a description of the foundation of the Idanre people, he gave no real explanation of the process of state formation in either Idanre or Benin.

There are other arguments about the origin and language of the Benin people that have little to do with incantations or magic. Earlier scholars have argued that the origin of the Benin monarchy dates back to Ogiso Igodo, believed to have begun his reign in the year 900 AD. This predates the establishment of the Eweka dynasty, which is probably contemporaneous with Idanre's. Regarding language development, R.G, Armstrong argued that the glotto-chronological period of separation between Edo, Yoruba, and Ibo has been put between 3,000 and 6,000 years (p.80). This argument is

supported by A.F.C Ryder in Benin and the Europeans, 1485 – 1897 where he states that “linguistic evidence suggests that they (Edo) have occupied this region for some thousands of years” (p.174). These references indicate that Benin civilization has grown over a period of some 6000 years if not more.

Also, the author has painted a picture of Benin seeking special military assistance in time of war against a neighboring town, but an analysis of the history of Benin especially as it relates to war, shows that it had a well-organized military and would not have to ask for such “special assistance” against Akure in the 1820’s, especially as the author noted that Ado-Benin was at this time at the peak of its war glory (p.87). A request during this period might not have been “special,” as the author suggests, but might simply have been to inform a people of Ado-Benin’s intention to use their area as passage and not have been a request for military assistance. This could be understood from the author’s claim in the second paragraph of page 88 that reads:

... Idanre sent able-bodied men to clear the route for Benin soldiers to Akure, and on completion of the expedition, Idanre people felt quite satisfied with their diplomacy and started to refer to themselves as omo’lana nun ghan’Do gwo’gun – meaning, the people who constructed road for the Ado people to wage war. This remains a popular praise name of Idanre till today, and the road is still there now and more passable than it was then. The road became known as Onan mole meaning, the road I constructed.

As previously noted, the author must be commended for his work to rescue endangered oral traditions as contained in human memories and a few written sources of Idanre’s past. In this way, he has exposed to historians and others in related fields the nature of successive waves of migration and the historicity of intergroup relations among the various peoples in the area

and beyond. However, the emergence of state-like political organizations in history can be better understood (whether the emergence of an Oba, Oludanre, or Owa among others) when considered with the historical issues surrounding their emergence and those conditions favoring the foundation and development of such centralized types of government and settlements. It is to these conditions that research must be directed, rather than the pursuit of the phantom of the strange invader (the heros civilisateur such as Okoro or Olofin from the west with his superior power and culture to change people's tongues through incantation) since civilization and political institutions, like other institutions of human culture, are developed because they offer solutions to problems which arise for men out of the conditions in which they live.

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