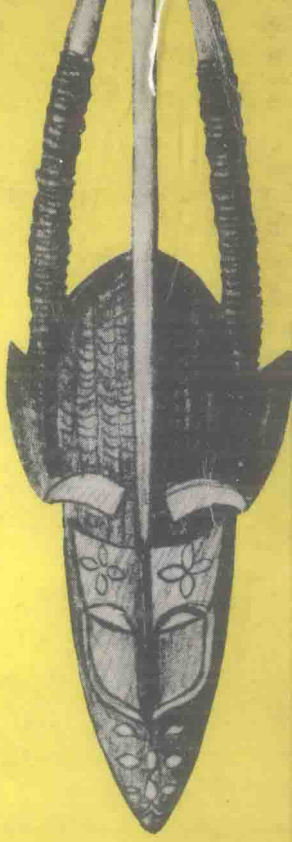

AFRICAN SAGA

• a brief introduction to african history

STANLAKE SAMKANG

AFRICAN SAGA

AFRICAN SAGA

a brief introduction
to african history

STANLAKE SAMKANGE

HARARE
Salisbury

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com

Kuna Amai

PREFACE

This book is what its title proclaims it to be: an introduction to African history. It is not, in any measure, intended to be a comprehensive or in-depth study. Its aim is merely to introduce the student with no previous training or background to the study of African history. It is also intended for the general reader who, while he does not wish to take a course in African history, wants to be knowledgeable and informed on the subject.

I am indebted to Fisk University for arranging a teaching load that enabled me to devote considerable time to research and writing, to my very efficient assistants, Miss Brenda Bass and Miss Thurma McCann, who typed the manuscript, and to my students with whom I discussed the contents of this book in the History of African Civilization course.

S. J. T. SAMKANGE

CONTENTS

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com

INTRODUCTION

It is Hugh Trevor-Roper, Regius Professor of History at Oxford University who said: "Undergraduates, seduced, as always, by the changing breath of journalistic fashion, demand that they should be taught the history of black Africa. Perhaps, in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none, or very little: there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness. . . . And darkness is not a subject for history. Please do not misunderstand me." Prof. Roper hastened to add that "men existed even in dark countries and dark centuries," but to study their history, he maintained, would be to "amuse ourselves with the unrewarding gyrations of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corners of the globe." [1]

Although the progress made within the last decade in the study of African history—particularly in Africa, Europe, and America—clearly indicates that the distinguished professor belongs to an academic species now fast becoming extinct; his attitude is still, unfortunately, all too common. Consequently, African historians find themselves having to beat the drum and to make the claim (a claim which we hope will become clearer, stronger, and more valid with each successive page of this book) that Africa has a history that is certainly longer and just as proud as that of any continent on the face of this earth. So, if there is any darkness about, it is not on the African continent but in the minds of those who proclaim that Africa lacks history.

The attitude of some non-Africans is also exemplified by Sir Phillip Mitchell, the former British colonial governor of Kenya, who declared: "The forty-two years I have spent in Africa—forty of them in public service—cover a large part of the history of sub-Saharan Africa, for it can hardly be said to extend much further back than about 1870." [2] As far as such people are concerned, until the advent of the white man, Africa had no history. To them the history of Africa is the story of the white man in Africa, for Africa has only "his story" and no history. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The history of Africa begins with the origin of man, for it is in Africa that man first became man. The true garden of Eden—albeit, without the apple and the snake—was there. The oldest culture known to, and associated with, man has been discovered in Africa. Scholars are now beginning to realize that for an understanding of the behavior of man, a thorough study of his African genesis is a prerequisite. There is no longer any doubt that African history will attract the attention of more and more scholars throughout the world.

In studying, trying to understand, and interpreting African history, however, it is important that scholars should endeavor to look at things through African eyes. They should, of course, remain free to draw any conclusions they deem fit, but greater accuracy will be attained if an effort is made to look at events in the context of African culture and society. The following story will illustrate the wisdom of such an approach.

In 1888 Lobengula, second king of the Amandebele (part of present-day Rhodesia), sent two of his *induna* ("chiefs") on a diplomatic mission to England. Before they left, the king warned his envoys about the impropriety of an ambassador's showing amazement at things in a foreign land and thus indicating that such things did not exist in his own country. When the indunas arrived in Cape Town and beheld, for the first time, the sea with mountains of angry white foam lashing upon the shores, one of them was heard to remark nonchalantly, "Ah, today the river is in flood!" The indunas refused to look at wax figures in a clothier's window because they believed them to be dead children on show before burial.

The king's envoys spoke about their voyage in what they called the "floating kraal" (i.e., village), and described the sea as being "like the blue vault of heaven at noon and the floating kraal was as the sun in the centre; the water was smooth, thus calmly blue, the kraal being pushed through it by its steamer from behind. Sometimes the sea was full like the boisterous rivers in the rainy season; then the floors of roofs of the kraal rocked till the Whitemen danced. . . . London," they later told their king, "is the place all Whitemen must come from; people, people everywhere; all in a hurry, serious of face and always busy like the white ants. There was no room for everyone above the ground in this great kraal, for we could see men and horses moving in a stage below, just as they live in houses built one above the other (referring to Holborn Viaduct). The free carriages, too (train) . . . have to burrow in the earth under the streets for fear of being stopped by the crowd. Their little boys, the sons of headmen, all learn to fight like men (referring to Eton boys). Their generals corrected all faults; they won't pass a man who is out of time as they dance by in line coming from the fight (the march past)." [3]

Lobengula's ambassadors told of a place (Madame Tussaud's) where they saw bodies of all the kings and queens who had been conquered by kings of England including the body of Cetewayo, king of the Zulus, whose *assegai* was at the end of the corridor.

Of Queen Victoria herself one of them reported, "When she entered the room where we were waiting, I was nervous and stricken with fear and I crouched on the floor with my hands on the stomach and the Queen laughed and said: "Rise, O Babiyane!" And I stood up and saw, hau! She was very small, very, very small, no higher than that calabash of beer but terrible to look at—a great ruler." [4]

The indunas were invited to inspect the vault in which gold of the realm was kept. The ambassadors were impressed, so impressed, in fact, that they could not understand why the English still went to Africa in search of more gold when they already had so much. "The English must indeed be wretched misers, . . . fancy, not even asking us if we would like to have one of those gold bars to take home! What Matebele would take a distinguished guest to his kraal to show him his herd of cattle and not offer the guest at least one beast?" [5]

However, before they left England, the indunas did ask one of the queen's ministers for an English wife to take to their king, this being the usual way in which neighboring states in Africa demonstrated their friendship for each other. "When we tell the men at home," we can hear the indunas argue, "that we were well received by the English and that they are now our friends, the men will ask us, 'But where are the wives for the King?—to show this friendship?' What shall we say in reply?" [6]

The description of England by Lobengula's envoys is, in some ways, very perceptive. Nevertheless, it shows serious limitations. It is couched in the language, concepts, and culture of 1890 Matabeleland where, for instance, people never marched but danced only; cities the size of London were beyond comprehension; the pace of life was leisurely and anyone who was busy was bound to attract attention. To a Ndebele, a queen is an *indhlovukaz* ("cow elephant"). She is expected to be huge, fat, and literally, terrible to behold. For a queen to be small and no taller than a calabash of beer was unthinkable.

The indunas looked at English society through Ndebele eyes and found that society wanting. The Europeans were pronounced stingy misers whose cupidity made them go to the utmost ends of the earth in search of more and more gold to hoard and display to visitors.

As for the failure of the English to offer them a wife or wives for their king, in accordance with the most elementary rules of intertribal etiquette, we can imagine that the English were justly condemned as barbarians and savages who knew no better.

Any non-African historian who tries to describe and interpret African history without a sound knowledge of, or regard for, African culture and society cannot escape showing in his work the defects and limitations of the Matabele indunas' account of England. And yet many books about Africa have been written by people who saw things only through Western eyes. And some are still being written today.

How then, should one who knows little or nothing about African culture or society prepare for a career in African history? The spectacular progress made in this field in the last decade is due not only to the contribution of historians but also to the labor and research

of non-historians. The best preparation that one can have for a career in African history seems to be, first and foremost, a good liberal education, strong in the sciences as well as in the humanities. This should enable one to be conversant with the general principles of the other disciplines to which historians must turn for confirmation of their findings. It is appreciated, of course, that more than one lifetime would be required for one to be an expert in all these disciplines. So most students will be content to follow, intelligently, the research and findings of these disciplines so as to compare, relate, and correlate them with conclusions of the historian.

Archaeology, anthropology, anatomy, linguistics, biology, musicology, physiology, and sociology are only some of the disciplines whose researches the African historian must try to be conversant with. A trained historian who is also competent in one of these related fields will find this additional expertise very useful in his own research.

How do these disciplines actually contribute to our knowledge of African history? Well, much of the evidence on which the growing store of African history is based was unearthed, literally, by archaeologists. They dug up the evidence. When the discovery was a skull or a bone, an anatomist was brought in; when it was a coin, a numismatist was consulted. A piece of paper or stone with a strange inscription was submitted to a paleographer to decipher. Sometimes the artifacts were buildings with tools, weapons, furniture, and implements. From these, anthropologists are able to tell us something about the people and the kind of life they led.

Through the dating methods known as carbon 14 and potassium argon, physicists are able to estimate the age of some artifacts. This gives us fairly reliable dates. Historians study the written records as well as the oral tradition of the people. The biologists tell us whether the crops grown in the area are indigenous and, if not, suggest where, when, and how they came to the area. Migration trends are thus studied.

Linguists tell us which groups of people speak languages originating from a common tongue and suggest how long the various users have been separated from each other. The musicologists compare the music of these peoples for similar trends. It is abundantly clear, therefore, that the sum total of the body of knowledge we call

African history is not the product of the historian laboring alone, but the contribution of a number of disciplines. It is the historian, however, who gathers, sifts, and finally pieces the evidence together.

In trying to acquire a more intimate knowledge of African society and culture it is important to bear in mind that Africa is a large continent of some 11,700,000 square miles larger, in fact, than the United States, China, and Russia put together, and that it has a population of about three hundred million, grouped in tribes speaking hundreds of different languages. There is no single language common to the whole of Africa even though Hausa, Swahili, and Arabic enjoy wide usage. Therefore, while one must of necessity generalize about African culture and society there is a great diversity.

There is hardly anything one can say about Africa or Africans, as a whole, for which an exception cannot be adduced. A student of African society and culture will, obviously, do well to confine himself to a specific region, people, tribe, or clan. There is now available a fair amount of literature on a number of these.

A relatively new source of information is the African novel, and quite a few are now being published every year. Some of these authors have depicted the pre-European society of their land as only Africans can and have provided non-Africans with an easy and enjoyable way of inbibing the culture.

There are also readily available a number of good films on African societies. Carefully selected, they can be used to great advantage.

NOTES

1. H. Trevor-Roper, *The Rise of Christian Europe* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), p. 1.
2. Sir Phillip Mitchell, "Africa and the West in Historical Perspective," in *Africa Today*, ed. G. C. Haines (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 3.

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com