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THE GROWTH OF NIGERIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY:
A PRELIMINARY SURVEY

Biodun Adediran
University of Ife, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In spite of G. R. Elton’s belief that “a philosophical concern with such problems as ... the nature of historical thought only hinders the practice of history”, few scholars would probably deny that reflections on the nature and practice of history have made immense contributions to the development of the discipline in western Europe. In Africa where the tradition of academic historical scholarship is relatively short, such reflections have scarcely begun. Nevertheless it is realised that there are occasional needs for stock-taking exercises in order to map out methodological strategies for future studies and relate the historian’s efforts to the needs and aspirations of the society. Before such an exercise could be embarked upon, however, a comprehensive account of all historical writings is necessary. Of recent, there have been attempts among Nigerian historians to do this, but the attempts have been confined mainly to highlighting “the inner problems of, and the conflicts in ... methods and conclusions”2 rather than in a broad survey of the trend of development as in this article.

PRE-LITERATE ANTECEDENTS

The beginning of modern Nigerian historiography dated to 1950, only ten years before independence from British rule. But the sense of history

and the need for it among Nigerian communities dated to long before the colonial period. History played a role in the traditional Nigerian societies. The belief was common that to equip oneself for life, man had to understand the past of his people. The past was seen as forming a continuous strand with the present and the future. History, as Professor Ade Ajayi succinctly put it, formed the central core in the overall socialization process of the individual from one stage of his life to another. But since these societies were not literate, what was known about the past was passed down to succeeding generations verbally in the various forms now referred to as oral traditions. However, with the advent of literacy, literate men in the various communities began to reduce to written form what they knew and what they could collect from others about the past of their own people. These various writings on local communities often referred to as 'local histories' or 'local chronicles' were the earliest attempts at writing in Nigeria by Nigerians.

LOCAL CHRONICLES

However, it will be wrong to assume that the tradition of writing 'History' in Nigeria only dated to the beginning of the colonial era. The tradition dated to as early as the 11th century A. D. when with Islam, Arabic literacy reached the northern fringes of the country. The literary tradition steadily grew in scope and in volume until the 19th century when with the outbreak of the Fulani Jihad, writing became one of the major preoccupations in northern Nigeria. Students of Nigerian and Islamic studies are familiar with such works like the Kano chronicles, the writings of Ahmad Ibn Fartuwa on Bornu empire, and that of Mohammed Al Maghili on Daural. There were also, Malam Said's History of Sokoto as well as the various volumes of local histories turned out by the Amirs and Ulama in the various emirates in the 19th century.

This tradition continued well into this century. Now impelled by increasing intercourse of the Christian European in Muslim politics, the various Ulama and Amirs continued vehemently to write the histories of their various communities not only in Arabic but also in various local languages. The longest and perhaps the most informative is the Tarikh Umara Baushe by Mohammed b. Idris al Sudani (1912). This was followed shortly by the Tabyin Amr Buba Yero a good account of 19th century history of Gombe. In 1931/32 some of the local chronicles were collated in two volumes and published as the Labaran Hausawa. Also, there were A Chronicle of Abuja (Zaria, 1954) and Abubakar Dokajji's History of Kano (1958). Most of these writings were originally in Arabic, but by the mid 1930s, the Zaria Translation Bureau which became the Gaskiya Corporation had taken it upon itself to translate into Hausa and English such works written in Arabic.

One of the earliest works in the local language was Akiga's work on the Tiv of central Nigeria. Akiga was one of the first Tiv to come under the influence of European Missionaries. He travelled widely in his native Tivland and formed the idea of putting down the history and customs of his people "in order that the new generation of Tiv, which is beginning to learn this new knowledge, should know the things of their fathers as well as those of the present generation". Originally written in Tiv language, Akiga's story (1924) was published in English as early as 1939. It treats in detail, the history and institutions of the Tiv and as Daryll Forde commented it is a "valuable document for its portrayal of an early phase of culture contact and for its invaluable contextual accounts of traditional rituals and beliefs". The book resulted from painstaking collection of oral traditions by Akiga. In the work he traced the origin of the Tiv people and described some of their cultural features. Akiga's vivid description of customary practices like marriage customs, treatment of diseases and different societal organisations has endeared the work not only to historians but also to anthropologists and ethnographers. Some of the traditions he had learnt very early in his youth from his father and from the old people in the community. The value of Akiga's work is heightened by his inclusion of the names of the people from whom he collected the traditions.

The most well-known of the Northern Nigerian local historians, however, is Alhaji Junaidu, the Wasimi of Sokoto; a man who belongs to a family with a long tradition of Islamic scholarship. Most of his works deal with Islamic history and culture. Two of the well-known ones are the Tarikh Fulani (Zaria 1957) and the Mujaddadi Shehu Usman dan Fodiye (1953).

In Southern Nigeria, the tradition of writing history by indigenes is comparatively recent. European visitors from the last quarter of the 15th

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century provide massive written materials of immense historical value especially on the coastal peoples. In the 19th century, as the Europeans gradually paved their way into the interior, more writing by travellers, traders and missionaries were produced. But among the indigenes themselves not much literary activity went on until the second half of the 19th century. However, the first attempt by a Southern Nigerian to write down the history of his own people was made in the 18th century by Olaudah Equiano whose account titled, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, written by Himself, is quite useful both for a reconstruction of the pre-colonial history of the Igbo society and for getting a vivid picture of the horrors of the Atlantic Slave Trade at its peak. It was in fact very popular in its time, having eight English as well as German and Dutch editions.

Later in the 19th century, indigenes who had acquired literacy as a result of their interactions with European missionaries and traders began to write. Notable among these was Samuel Ajayi Crowther who wrote *A Grammar and Vocabulary of the Yoruba Language* (1852), *Journal of an Expedition Up the Niger and Tsadda Rivers* (1855) and with J. C. Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger* (1959). These set the pace for many other indigenes who started to document their experiences in various parts of Southern Nigeria.

The Rev. Samuel Johnson's monumental work, *The History of the Yoruba* (Lagos 1921) is of course universally acknowledged as a very example of the local histories. Though the book was not published until 1921, it was completed by 1897. Although the bulk of information in the book was only on one of the over fourteen sub-ethnic groups of the Yoruba, it became something like an encyclopaedia to colonial officials in different parts of Yorubaland. Literate men all over Yorubaland were quick to realise the danger which the use of the book by colonial administrators posed to the status of their own sub-group. As a result these men began to collate the traditions of their own people in order to do for their own communities what Johnson had done for Oyo. Thus within three decades of the publication of Samuel Johnson's *History*, virtually every sub-group of the Yoruba had produced its own corps of local historian. Of these Chief Ojo Bada and Aladeeni Kenyo are perhaps the most prolific. Kenyo for instance took up his historical writings on a full-time basis and travelled widely in Yorubaland purposely to collect oral traditions which he recorded in the over twenty volumes he has to his credit.

Immediately to the east of the Yoruba country, Chief Jacob Egharevbé the 'historian' of the Benin empire successfully pushed other local historians to collect oral traditions which he recorded in the over twenty volumes he has to his credit.

17 See Ikime, O (ed.) 1980, *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Heinemann, Section IV.
18 However because of the long tradition of Arabic literacy in the North, the chronicles there have received more attention than those from the south: for instance as early as 1899, the *Tarih al-Sudan* had been published in Paris with a French translation.
when most of them were produced, colonial administrators regarded them as mere fairy tales. In any case, they did not see the need for any history other than that of Britain; hence, they did not encourage the production of local history books. Despite over two decades of Nigerian independence not much has been done to correct the situation. The main reason for this is that African historiography has not succeeded in freeing itself from western traditions. Until very recently, there was much scepticism in western historical circles as to the use of any material other than written documents in historical reconstruction. As many of the local historians were barely literate, and as they depended substantially on oral traditions, the doubt as to the authenticity of their accounts is always exercised. At the base of all these is the fact that western historiographers could still not believe that pre-colonial Africa had any history worthy of study. The point was clearly made as recently as 1965 when the translator of Akiga's story Ruper East emphasised that "although Akiga set out to write a history of the Tiv, he has not successfully done this because the Tiv, like most African tribes, have no history in our (i.e. western) real sense of the word".

Like any other source of historical information, the local chronicles have their own limitations. The main source of the histories, was local traditions which an investigator needs special skill to handle. The local historians did not possess this skill. It would not have mattered much if the local historians confined themselves only to recording the traditions they collected; but they made attempts to interpret. This they failed to do satisfactorily. At best what most of them did was to collect different variants of a tradition and pick the one which appeared to them to be the most credible. In addition, they often offered explanations, made personal comments and above all synthesised information collected from different sources. All these make it fairly difficult to know where the original accounts stop and where the writer's personality comes in.

Another major weakness of the local chronicles is that since the authors were literate, they had the opportunity of consulting earlier books and as such many local histories were influenced by earlier histories on other communities. This is quite noticeable in most local histories produced in Yorubaland after the publication of Rev. Samuel Johnson's History of the Yorubas in 1921. In fact most of the post-Johnson chronicles degenerated an almost verbatim quotation of the History. Likewise many chronicles in Northern Nigeria easily fell back on the classical works produced during the Jihad especially on Mahammed Bello's monumental Infaq al Mansur.

Perhaps the most significant weakness of the local chronicles is the fact that most of them are patriotic in motivation and as such are favourably biased towards their various communities. Really, many of the local histories were produced under circumstances which tend to detract from the authors level of objectivity. As indicated earlier, the impetus at the turn of the 20th century was given by the desire to show that the peoples of Nigeria had a past they could be proud of. Then with the nationalist agitations and inter-communal rivalries over various political claims, more of the local histories were turned out. Steadily with the increase in number, they took the form of political propaganda. Even though those who wrote during the first quarter of the 20th century had the rare opportunity of describing what they witnessed on the eve of European colonial Rule, one cannot rule out the possibility of patriotic exaggerations out of a nostalgic feeling for the pre-colonial era. Thus it would appear that those who have treated the local histories with apathy are not unjustified.

Despite their limitations however, the local chronicles cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand. Even though the local historians were amateur investigators, their works have become, in many respects, indispensable. Most of the local historians had access to local traditions which might otherwise not have been available today. For instance those who wrote before the fourth decade of the 20th century probably started collecting oral traditions during the last years of the preceding century. They presumably interviewed men who were born at the turn of the 19th century and who could still recollect vividly what happened in that century as well as what they had been told about the pre-19th century period. As such, the local histories can extend the frontier of the knowledge of the past considerably.

In some cases, the published local histories have become authorised versions of local traditions and as such have succeeded in forcing the people to forget other versions of their traditions, at least on normal occasions. Indeed for many communities, the local chronicles have become the most primary sources available to the modern researcher.

Thus, the local chronicles should be accepted as materials from which a more authentic history can be reconstructed. However, the conventional historian should be ready to use his special skills to the utmost. First he has to be very critical when dealing with the accounts. Secondly, a researcher should not content himself with just oral and written with as many as available of the local works on his areas and on the neighbouring countries to enable him do a detailed comparative analysis of the traditions recorded. Lastly, nothing should stop him from seeking access to fresh oral traditions wherever available. There is no doubt that if handled with the necessary care with which all historical source-materials should

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be handled the best can be made out of the hitherto dreaded local chronicles.

**COLONIAL HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Not only indigenes wrote or attempted to write local histories during the age of the 'Local chronicles'. For a variety of reasons and in spite of the fact that Colonial Rule in Africa was based partly on an ideological brainwashing which denied that the African had a valid past, European colonial administrators began to write about the past of Nigerian communities which they came in contact.

The exercise had some precedence in the anthropological accounts of the 19th century travellers, trader, explorers and missionaries. As colonial Rule firmly took root, the significance of the 'histories' of the various Nigerian peoples grew in the metropolises this was mainly because they came in handy in providing some background knowledge about the various communities for the freshly-recruited administrative officers who were being sent to the field almost every other day. The outbreak of the Aba riots in Eastern Nigeria in 1929 convinced the British colonial government that a thorough knowledge of the history and customs of their subject peoples was necessary. Thus from 1930, attempts to write the history of Nigerian communities ceased to be just one of the usual exuberances of the over-zealous traveller or administrator. There was a conscious attempt, an official policy, that knowledge of the past should be documented. This was what drove many colonial officials to writing history. Officials in the field were asked to write 'historical notes' or 'Intelligence reports' on their areas of operation.

Specific instructions were issued out as to the procedure to be adopted and the scope the reports should cover. As the Secretary of Southern Provinces wrote in a memorandum to the Resident of the Oyo Province, the various colonial administrators were required “to endeavour to trace and set out briefly the history of the people and nature of their indigenous institutions”. They were also “to ascertain, as far as possible, what remains of these institutions”. The reports that emerged from the exercise were indeed fairly comprehensive. Usually each was divided into six broad sections: Introduction, Geographical features, History, Government, Judiciary and Economics. In Northern Nigeria, some of these reports were later expanded and published as the *Gazetteers of the various Provinces*.

The academically inclined among the administrators took the opportunity to write and publish books. The exercise gained some vigour with the establishment of a department of Anthropology in Lagos after the first World War and with the arrival in Nigeria of a corps of newly recruited young administrative officers who had got some dint of social anthropology in Britain before joining the Colonial Service.

In spite of the precautions taken to obtain as authentic information as possible, the quality of the writing was affected first by the fact that the exercise was prompted by a desire to make colonial rule succeed and secondly by the fact that the compilers and writers were not trained researchers or historians. Consequently the nature of the materials they collected as well as their approach to history-writing leaves much to be desired. Lacking the basic training in historical methodology, most of them portray weak analysis of historical concepts. Their works show equally weak analysis of information or the understanding of the interplay of causal factors. As a result, most of them took solace in the Hamitic hypothesis to explain the socio-political systems of Nigerian societies.

Of the various administrator-turned-scholars, C. L. Temple, H. R. Palmer, C. K. Meck and P. A. Talbot are notable outstanding.

C. L. Temple was a typical hardworking and zealous British official. Early in his career in Northern Nigeria, he took the task of compiling notes on the various peoples he came in contact with very seriously. Even then his *Native Races and Their Rules* (first published, 1918) is nothing better than a collection of “ponderations” on the problems of administration as he himself described it. The other book jointly compiled with his wife, *Notes on the Tribes of Northern Nigeria* (1919) is also a mere collection of information scattered in some obscure reports. None of the two books can actually be said to have shown clear understanding of historical issues. Furthermore, the books show that despite the fact that Temple had a long career in Northern Nigeria, he did not understand the nature of Hausa — Fulani Society.

What Temple attempted to do for Northern Nigeria, P. A. Talbot tried to do for the South with his four volumes on *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (1926) of which only the first volume, subtitled “Historical Notes” is relevant here. Like Temple's work, Talbot's history was a mere compilation of information collected, in this case, during a census exercise.

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22 See Pages, J. D. "Continuity and Change" op. cit.
24 Secretary, Southern Provinces, Enugu to Resident Oyo Province 24th Sept. 1931, Memo. In Oyo Prof. 1 File No. 32 National Archives, Ibadan, Nigeria.
he himself admitted the work was hurriedly done and solely dependent on official documents. Consequently, Talbot forced some half-baked preconceived ideas into his reconstruction of the people’s past. Through out the work, Talbot made no pretensions as to his unequivocal acceptance of the Hamitic hypothesis as a basis for explaining the origins of Nigerian peoples. As far as he was concerned, Nigeria was “peopled by tribes, many of which have only recently come under settled rule”\textsuperscript{27} and “the principal foreign influence ... was undoubtedly that of Egypt”\textsuperscript{28}.

This belief in an overwhelming foreign influence on Nigerian societies directly led to another characteristic of colonial historiography, that of applying foreign models especially those of Egypt and Graeco-Roman civilizations to Nigerian societies. The most notorious in this regard was probably R. E. Dennett who in his Nigerian studies found it expedient to apply the Graeco-Roman type of government to explain the socio-political organisations of Nigerian peoples. C. K. Meek’s A Sudanese Kingdom (1931) can also be taken as illustrative of this tendency. For him, parallels existed in almost all spheres of Nigerian socio-political set-up and those of ancient Egypt.

The first thing clearly noticeable in all the “histories” which emerged from this exercise is that the conception of the word “history” as applied to Nigeria as well as the approach to the subject were quite different from what obtained in western Europe. These abysmal differences marked all the histories written before 1950 into a distinct class. Nigerian societies were still looked upon as “anthropological units” which had been static all along but which from then would be compelled to change with the advent of the ‘civilising’ missions. Nigerian history was equated with anthropology and ethnography, it was concerned, not changing societies but with static and primitive ones whose frontiers of the past could hardly be extended beyond the advent of the Europeans. The prejudice was succinctly put by A. J. Tremeaune when he said that “the native is certainly not the equal of Europeans (but) he is still worthy of consideration”\textsuperscript{29} presumably in order to show how much “uncivilised” he was. The titles of some of the books complete the story: How Natives Think, The Sexual life of Savages, Tailed Headhunters, At the Back of the Blackman’s Mind.

As a corollary to this subjective conception, no serious or systematic approach was adopted towards the study of the various Nigerian communities. Though as J. H. Kirk-Greene\textsuperscript{30} pointed out, Lord Lugard specifically chose as his Lieutenants, men who were capable of conducting some study into the histories of the various Nigerian peoples, what obtained in practice was far from what Lugard himself probably envisaged. Even in Northern Nigeria where something like a serious attempt was made in the Gazetteers, to write the history of the various emirates, the exercise was carried out only as a pastime; something that the academically-inclined administrator engaged in during his leisure.

Thus the various works produced were not actually based on real research but on haphazard collection of traditions, personal observations of the authors who themselves were not practitioners or professionals in the art of history — writing. Consequently, most, if not all, of the works exhibit weaknesses that make it very difficult for one to accept them as real history. A casual look at any of the works will quickly reveal a lack of distinction between various academic disciplines. All sorts of materials: History, Religion, Sociology, Linguistics etc. were lumped together and presented as the histories of the various communities. In fact so close are these works to anthropology that it will not be wide off the mark to say that the history of the colonial period was more than mere anthropological studies. The colonial writers looked at their subjects as static and their writings showed no evidence of internal changes or development. As Thomas Hodgkin aptly described them, they did not “do more than report on contemporary state of the societies which they encountered: they combined in varying proportions, the qualities of journalists and amateur sociologists”\textsuperscript{31}.

The bulk of the source-materials used, derived from oral traditions often collected in haphazard fashion, and the writers observation of some cultural survivals. Most of what the administrative officers heard or saw could hardly be said to represent actual historical occurrences. It is common knowledge that oral traditions cannot be accepted at face value as most of the colonial historiographers did. Oral traditions, before they can become meaningful have to be systematically collected and analysed. More often than not, colonial officers collected information second hand from messengers, court clerks, and interpreters whose level of comprehension of the communities’ traditions can be called to question. There was also the issue of language barrier and the problem of translating from the various local languages to the English Language by interpreters whose knowledge of English was inadequate.

Despite these weaknesses however, colonial historiography is very important in the tradition of history writing in Nigeria. They should be looked at not as history per se but only as source-materials. In this regard, an awareness of these weaknesses should not discourage the use of the materials, rather, it should sharpen the usual critical appraisal of historical source-materials. There is hardly any doubt that the works in this class

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid P. 21.
\textsuperscript{30} The Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria, Frank Cass 1972, p. x.
are very valuable as source-materials especially of the colonial history of Nigeria. However, the farther backwards one goes the more cautious one has to be in handling materials produced by the colonial historiographers.

The weaknesses of colonial historiography affected the *history* written by others during the colonial period. With the domineering attitude of colonialism, especially in the political and education spheres, it should not be surprising that the Nigerian local historians easily took over most of the features of colonial historiography. Thus most of the local chronicles which emerged after 1920 exhibit characteristics which mark them in the same class as the anthropological writings of the early 20th century. So strong was the influence of colonial historiography that the weaknesses continued to recur for long.

THE BEGINNING OF ACADEMIC HISTORICAL STUDIES

By 1950 it became difficult to deny that Nigerian communities had history even though some prejudices still existed as to what constituted the history of these communities and how to retrieve the knowledge of their past. However, a number of developments forced even the greatest sceptics to accept the fact that the hitherto non-chalant attitude towards Nigerian past necessarily had to change. It became clear that Nigerian history was worth serious attention from academic historians with the tools and techniques of historical explanation and that it should be the exclusive preserve of arm-chair historians of the first half of this century.

Paradoxically, the first factor that forced this change of attitude would appear to be the various attempts made to write the history of Nigerian peoples at the beginning of this century. The works of the local historians, the British missionaries, and administrators as well as the various attempts made to collate available ethnographic data about Nigerian peoples suggested the possibility of studying Nigerian history in the Western sense. This was further reinforced by archaeological finds in Olok and Ife which made it clear that the horizon of Nigerian history could extend far beyond the 19th century and that the approach to Nigerian history necessarily had to differ from that adopted towards contemporary Western societies with longer traditions of literacy. It became evident that the post-Renaissance tradition of equating documentary evidence with history could not be tenable in Nigeria and that other types of documents, other than written, could be adequately used to study historical processes in pre-colonial Nigerian societies.

The political climate in the country also contributed to the development of Nigerian historical studies. As from the 1940s, with nationalist agitations, Nigerians began to emphasise the need to study Nigerian history if only to forge national consciousness among the diverse peoples of the country.

As the first institution of higher learning in Nigeria, the burden fell on the University College, Ibadan, to transform these ideals into reality. With the establishment of that institution in 1948, the necessary springboard for serious historical scholarship in Nigeria was created. However, because of her very strong ties with the University of London, Ibadan's contributions during the first quinquennium (1948-53) was quite understandably minimal. But with the introduction of an Honours degree course in history in 1952 and with Nigerians taking up academic appointments with the University, Ibadan, as Professor A. E. Aifego has aptly put it, quickly transformed herself into a 'laboratory' in which an essentially Nigerian approach to historical scholarship was worked out.

Ibadan's initial concern was to reinterpret the colonial history of Nigeria. Thus the first few monographs that grew out of the newly inaugurated Graduate School in the early '60s were on the activities of the Europeans in Nigeria covering mainly the 19th and early 20th centuries. However with the establishment of the Institute of African Studies, more emphasis was laid on the pre-colonial era. Attempts were made to document and publish some oral traditions, indigenous songs, rituals etc. in order to preserve them. Also with the establishment of a Centre for Arabic Documentation, attempts were made to collect and translate into English as many as possible of the Arabic documents extant in Northern Nigeria.

Apart from this extensive fieldwork, Ibadan has made a name for herself in historical studies in at least two other ways. First is the inauguration of the *Ibadan History Series* through which the results of research, especially those conducted by students of the Graduate School, are made known to the outside world. All the works emphasise the use of hitherto unconventional source-materials like oral traditions and the need for an interdisciplinary approach to historical studies in Africa.

Secondly, there are various ambitious interdisciplinary research projects embarked upon to retrieve the pre-colonial history of the peoples of Nigeria. There were, for instance, the Eastern Nigeria History Research Scheme, the Benin History Research Scheme and the Northern Nigeria History Research Scheme all of which called for cooperative ventures by anthropologists, ethnographers, historians, linguists and others. In commenting on one of these schemes (the Benin History Research Scheme under the direction of Professor K. O. Dike) R. E. Bradburdy said: "It was set

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up as an experimental interdisciplinary study in response to the growing
and deeply felt need for a reconstruction of African history as something
more than the history of European interaction with and influence upon
African peoples.\textsuperscript{35}

One of these ‘experimental projects’ that deserves special mention is
the Yoruba History Research Scheme inaugurated in 1956 by the
government of the then Western Region under the directorship of Professor
S. O. Biobaku, then Registrar of Ibadan University College. This project
is significant as a symbol of the growing awareness in Nigerian political
leaders on the eve of Independence of the need for history and of their
realization of the great damages done to the image of Nigerian past by
decades of factual misunderstanding and historical misinterpretation.

However for a variety of reasons, the initial enthusiasm with which
these experimental projects started off in the late ‘50s soon died down.
As a result most of the projects had very minimal and rather discouraging
results. But the bold attempts contributed to the upsurge in historical
studies especially in the years immediately following Nigeria’s independence.
In fact all the newly established Universities in the early 1960’s
quickly followed the tradition of establishing Institutes or Centres to look
into aspects of Nigerian pre-colonial history through an interdisciplinary
approach.

One of the disciplines that has since gained reputation for its contribu-
tion to the ever growing knowledge of Nigeria’s past is archaeology.
From the late 1930 onwards spectacular archaeological finds in various sites scattered
all over the country, especially those at Ife and Nok geared up interest
in historical studies. These initial finds, most of them accidental, also
led to archaeological studies being taken up in a more serious way. From
the 1930s up to the present time, archaeological work were rapidly trans-
formed from the ‘treasure-hunting’ exercise of the colonial administrators
to a more conventional ‘knowledge hunting’ exercise. The various research
projects already mentioned involved serious archaeological works, the
systematic study of archaeology since then has been of immense help in
elucidating the precolonial culture history of various Nigerian peoples.

By now, it is universally acknowledged that there is nothing in oral
tradition which makes it intrinsically less valuable than written documents.
This reliance on oral tradition is part of the new approach to African studies
worked out in the late ‘50s and early ‘60s.

Two men who did much to pioneer the new approach are Professors
Kenneth Dike and Saburi Biobaku. Dike was the first Nigerian academic
historian to join the department of history at Ibadan. He quickly rose to
the position of Head of Department and later Vice-Chancellor of the
Institution. His contributions to the building of the department of history
cannot be over-emphasized. As Vice-Chancellor, Dike threw in his weight
to build a viable post-graduate school which has continually turned out the
various monographs under the Ibadan History Series. Professor Dike was
one of the earliest advocates of the need to use locally available source
materials to extend the horizon of the history of African peoples. This
he clearly demonstrated in his major publication to date Trade and Politics
in the Niger Delta (Oxford, 1956) in which he stressed the significance of
local materials (largely oral traditions) in his analysis of the internal politics
of the Niger delta city-states.

Likewise in his The Egbas and their Neighbours (Oxford, 1957) S. O.
Biobaku carefully blended various source materials to reconstruct an interesting and understandable account of a young Nigerian state. However, it was
as Director of the project into Yoruba history set up by the old Western Region
government in 1956 that Biobaku quickly established himself as an expert in the new methodological approach to African history.

One body adequately epitomizes the growth of Nigerian historical studies is the Historical society of Nigeria. Inaugurated in 1956 by a
handful of ambitious men, the society has since provided a suitable intel-
lectual climate for the growth of Historical studies in Nigeria. It provided
a forum for discussing results of various researches and for outlining
necessary tactics and techniques that could be adopted for further historical
study. At the onset, the Society did much in advocating vigorously that
Africa has a history worthy of investigation. It has also been of immense help in disseminating historical knowledge of Nigeria (and indeed of Africa) to the outside world especially through its two journals, The Journal of
Historical Society of Nigeria (first published in 1956) and Tarikh (1966)
which are of high scholastic repute. In fact by 1971, the society was
strong enough to embark on a laudable project of writing a ‘comprehensive
history’ of Nigeria from the earliest times to modern times. This project
has recently been published\textsuperscript{36} and demonstrates that the frontiers of
Nigerian history can be pushed farther backwards than the first millennium
A.D. Apart from these, through a series of national workshops, the His-
torical Society of Nigeria has made legitimate attempts at providing necessary
guidelines for the improvement of the standard and type of history
taught in the country in order to make it more relevant to the Nigerian
situation.

However, though by the early 1970s there were many academic Nige-
rian historians, yet not much has been achieved in the task of showing that
the history of Nigerian peoples is ‘something more than the history of
European interactions with and influence upon’ them. Apart from esta-
ablishing the fact that Nigeria had history before the advent of Europeans
and apart from demonstrating the possibility of recapturing an image of
the Nigerian past, the actual duty of exploring this past with concretely

\textsuperscript{35} Bradbury, R. E., \textit{Benin Studies op. cit.} p. 3.

\textsuperscript{36} Published as the \textit{Groundwork of Nigerian History op. cit.}
tangible results is still left untouched. This is because much of the research so far done were concentrated on the colonial period.

One major reason for this as mentioned earlier, is the nationalistic desire to reinterpret colonial history, a move pioneered by the Ibadan School of History. Another important factor is the fact that the abundance of written material and the availability of easily analysable oral evidence on the 19th century make that period easier and quicker for researchers especially those working towards higher degrees. Added to this is the post-independence sceptical attitude towards the Humanities in developing nations which in turn diminished the amount of attention paid to historical research in Nigeria. In fact while political leaders continually stress the need for technological advancements as opposed to ‘breaking new ground’ in the Humanities, there are many Nigerian professional historians who themselves prefer contemporary history to that of the distant past.

Lastly the fact that Nigeria lacks adequate personnel in various fields has continually made the demand on historians very great. Thus, often after acquiring the basic training up to the graduate level some historians could have embarked on postgraduate studies easily ‘drop out’ in preference for lucrative employments in the Civil Service or in the private sector of the economy. The very few who eventually go on to take higher degrees do not often stay long to carry on research, for after a few years in a University classroom (or a Research Institute) they go about hunting for more lucrative administrative jobs either within the University or even outside it. The result is that Nigerian academic historians of today have found themselves gyrating much in the same orbit as the ‘founding fathers’ about three decades ago. One only hopes that with the creation of more Universities and with the increasing insistence on the need for ‘cultural revival’ more progress will be made in the task of elucidating the pre-European past of Nigerian peoples.