

During this period, the Italians were in possession of a stretch of territory on a plateau including the town of Asmara, which they made capital of their colony of Eritrea. The Italians succeeded in occupying a large territory including Adigrat, Amba, Alagi and Mekele, and began advancing southwards. Beginning in mid 1895, Emperor Menelik, realizing the Italian long term intentions, was preparing for the eventual war with the Italians. He appointed Ras Alulá to command the Imperial Army.

The Ethiopian forces in March 1895 inflicted a humiliating defeat upon the Italians at the Battle of Adwa. Although Ras Alulá pressed to cross the Mereb river and drive the Italians out of Africa, Emperor Menelik did not insist on an Italian withdrawal from Eritrea.

Ras Alulá emerged during this crucial period in Ethiopian history as a formidable African leader, his deep sense of patriotism and uncompromising anti-colonialist stand contributed greatly to preserving Ethiopia's national independence.

By focusing on and discussing in greater details Ras Alulá's activities between 1875-1897, Erlich's monograph has shed light both on this crucial period and on one of the most persistent anti-colonial political figures of Ethiopian history.

Fassil Demissie
Dept. of Urban Planning
University of California,
Los Angeles

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The Transformation of Katsina: 1400-1883. Y.B. Usman. Ahmadu Bello University Press, Zaria, Nigeria, 1981. 267 pages, note on sources, bibliography, glossary (Hausa and Arabic), maps, charts, index. N 12.10.

Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria has long been considered one of the foremost Universities in West Africa. Its faculties of environmental and social sciences publish the valuable journal *Savanna*, its archaeological section carries out pioneering work in critical areas, and its Islamic scholars continue the centuries-old Islamic traditions of learning that once made the Sokoto Caliphate one of the most important Islamic empires of the 13th-19th centuries.

Thus it is no surprise that the Ahmadu Bello University Press History series is at the forefront of the changing perspectives of West African history. These works, by both Nigerian and foreign scholars, combine excellent scholarship with a

legible style. They are making important contributions to our understanding of the West African past. It is unfortunate that they are not more widely known and available in the United States.

The Transformation of Katsina will probably long remain the definitive interpretation of the history of that region. It is solidly based in all relevant written sources, primary and secondary, English, Arabic and Hausa. It also utilises the many and various oral historical interviews its author conducted at various times over several years. These interviews, both individual and group, are as well documented as the written sources. They are a major achievement and represent an important advance in our knowledge of the history of the Katsina area. Oral historical methodology is discussed, at the end, in a note on sources. This not only helps to understand the nature of the information available to Professor Usman, but will be valuable for future historical researchers in the region who want to know the best way to go about conducting interviews.

The book clearly demonstrates Professor Usman's skilful and judicious use of sources. By combining all of the many sources available to him the author was able for example, to show that available evidence does not support the common assumption that Katsina's fortunes declined as a result of the breakaway of the Maradi region following the jihad of Usman dan Fodio. He certainly demolishes the widely held idea that that jihad represented the conquest of Hausa by Fulani.

The book is to a large extent concerned with the refutation of the all-too-prevalent notion that African history is primarily the story of the movement and conflicts of various racial, ethnic, and "tribal" units. Such views, the most notorious of which is the now discredited 'Hamitic hypothesis', have long found favor among racist and colonial historians of Africa. This was prompted first, by the need to explain any African progress as having been influenced by 'white' racial groups, and second, by the urge to deny the possibility of consistent unity across ethnic boundaries (i.e., of African Nationalism or Pan-Africanism). In the course of detailing the history of Katsina, not only does Professor Usman manage to show that ethnic and racial paradigms of African history are inadequate to explain Katsina's history, but he also shows that such precolonial Nigerian scholars as Abdullahi dan Fodio had developed much more sophisticated paradigms than the colonial scholars who followed them.

But it is more than racism that has made ethnic and racial interpretations of the West African jihads so prevalent in Western scholarship. Such paradigms also fit common pejorative stereotypes of Islam. According to interpretations still prevalent among some scholars, Islam was a religion spread by the sword. It had no intellectual or moral content to it, but only

advanced through the cupidity and zeal of its warrior adherents, recruited from barbarous pastoral tribes. Simply substitute Fulani for Arabs and this paradigm of the spread of Islam is transferred from 7th century Arabia to 19th century West Africa. As late as the 1960's such interpretations were even being presented at Ahmadu Bello University itself, though by the remnants of colonial historians, not by Nigerians.

Professor Usman does not confront this religious bigotry as directly as he confronts the racism of previous interpretations. Yet his information and interpretation leaves little doubt that such prejudicial paradigms contribute almost nothing to our understanding of Islamization. He stresses the power as well as the diverse origins of the Muslim intelligentsia of pre-jihad Katsina. If they failed to construct their ideal society, it was not because they were interested only in self-aggrandizement. The difficulty of consolidating power in a territory still riddled with rebellion, and the powerful weight of a centuries-old monarchist tradition, made the slide back into centralised authority difficult to avoid. Nevertheless, Professor Usman details many of the social and economic reforms brought about by the jihad, in what he calls the shift from the Sarauta system of rule to the Emirate system.

John E. Philips
History Dept.
UCLA

CORRECTION

In volume 12, no. 2, it was incorrectly stated that MENELEK A. SESSING "is a Somali graduate student at UCLA in the African Area Studies Programme." In fact, Menelek is an American graduate student in International Relations. Our apologies for the error.