

West Africa before the Colonial Era: A History to 1850

By Basil Davidson

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This is a survey of pre-colonial West Africa, written by the internationally respected author and journalist, Basil Davidson. He takes as his starting point his successful text *A History of West Africa 1000-1800*, but he has reworked his new text specially for a wider international readership. In the process he offers a fascinating introduction to the rich societies and cultures of Africa before the coming of the Europeans.

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Editorial Review

Review

"This is an unusually compelling and impressive history of the cultures, societies and polities of a major region of the world before the advent of formal colonial rule." "An immensely valuable introduction to the pre-colonial history of West Africa [...] which deserves to be widely earmarked as essential by the drafters of reading lists." *English historical review*, 1999

From the Back Cover

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Basil Davidson

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before the Colonial Era

A History to 1850

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A History to 1850

Although essentially a new book in its own right, Basil Davidson's survey of West Africa before the European colonial annexations of the mid-nineteenth century takes as its starting point his earlier book, *A History of West Africa 1000-1800* (written in association with F.K. Buah and J.F.A. Ajayi), which was originally published in 1965. That was written primarily for readers in West Africa itself, and proved immensely popular, with sales totalling almost half a million copies. Now, Basil Davidson has rewritten, updated and expanded it, entirely reconceiving the earlier work specifically for readers outside Africa - to whom the richness and variety of the societies of pre-colonial West Africa are likely to be almost wholly unfamiliar.

Such readers could have no more clear or communicative a guide than Professor Davidson, who writes here with his customary warmth and vigour. He surveys the development and history of the peoples and empires of West Africa from earliest times (though the detailed treatment begins, as before, c.1000 AD) through to the mid-nineteenth century, when European colonial ambitions in Africa put a temporary end to the story.

West Africa, of course, is a vast area, covering a great range of climates and conditions (from the Sahara to the equatorial jungles of the south), and an equal range of peoples and cultures. It is not a single story that Basil Davidson has to tell, therefore, but many interlocking and overlapping stories. To that end, he provides narrative accounts of the key empires and cultures of West Africa, but sets them in their broader general context, as illuminated by the findings of both historians and anthropologists.

The text is richly provided with maps throughout, and a number of halftones bear witness to the wealth and sophistication of some of these societies.

The result is an impressive and vivid introduction to a region, and a time, still strangely neglected by the outer world. And yet it is a story that has wide resonances in that larger sphere - for West Africa was one of the key centres of the Slave Trade, and a large part of the populations of the African diaspora in the USA, the Caribbean and Latin America derive ultimately from the region. These are their roots, and this is their history. The many admirers of Basil Davidson's parallel volume on *Modern Africa: A Social and Political*

History , also published by Longman (Third Edition, 1994) will not be disappointed.

BASIL DAVIDSON's long and varied career - as historian, author, journalist, broadcaster, and academic - has been marked throughout by his fascination with, and dedicated service to, Africa, and her peoples and history.

Users Review

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