



LAGOS: A History In Pictures, 1861 to 1961

In August 1961, Onuora Nzekwu edited a Special Centenary Supplement of Nigeria Magazine, No. 69 (a quarterly publication for everyone interested in Nigeria and its peoples, and edited by Michael Crowther and published by the Federal Government of Nigeria and printed by A Brown & Sons, Hull, England).

At the time, the quarterly had been published for over 20 years, and was headquartered at the Exhibition Centre, Marina, Lagos.

This edition, No 69 was dedicated to LAGOS and highlighted the history of the city from 1861 to 1961, thus celebrating the Centenary of this great city.

The magazine, consisting of many advertisements which showed that Nigeria had once been great, with potential, started with a short preface and then several chapters as thus:

- The British Occupation of Lagos, 1851-61, A Critical Review by J F Ade Ajayi
- The Beginning of Modern Lagos, Progress over 100 years, by N S Miller
- Traditional Kingship in Lagos by Dr J Olumide Lucas
- Lagos - Nigeria's Melting Pot by Akin Mabogunje
- Brazilian Influence on Lagos by A B Laotan
- Nigeria's Finest Moment by Cyprian Ekwensi
- King Eyo Honesty II of Creek Town by J V Clinton
- Nigeria as seen by Leo Africanus, 1526 (A Note by M Raymond Mauny of Ifan, Dakar)
- Book Reviews.

I cannot reproduce all the articles in this Magazine, but I have decided to make it a historical pictorial journey, to remind us of our former greatness. Maybe one day at a time, I will reproduce the various fascinating and interesting articles which I am proud to be in possession of, after a world-wide hunt.

The preface started like this:

"On 6th August, 1861, the small Yoruba Kingdom of Lagos was ceded to Britain by its ruler, Dosunmu (wrongly spelt and called, Docemo). Though Britain had been active in Lagos for at least fifteen years beforehand, as well as in many other parts of the Coast, this was the first time they occupied land in what is now the Federation of Nigeria. Today, one hundred years later, Lagos is the capital of the largest independent nation in Africa. From these small



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beginnings in 1861, Lagos has developed into an international commerce centre, with a vast port and a population of over 350,000 people. This special centenary supplement is an attempt to present some of the factors that led to the occupation of Lagos, its subsequent growth as a commercial and political capital culminating in the achievement of Independence on 1st October, 1960, when Lagos, as capital of the Federation, was the focus of the nation's celebrations."

In this remarkable and excellent historical journal, it is important to reproduce here that the great historian, Prof J F Ade Ajayi debunked the theory and the belief that the British bombarded Lagos because it was a notorious "slave depot" in 1851 or annexed it in 1861 because "the permanent occupation of this important point in the Bight of Benin is indispensable to the complete suppression of the slave trade" or the assertion that Britain acquired Lagos "reluctantly and almost under duress". Or that "because the local ruler had revived the slave trade and reduced the flow of legitimate commerce to a trickle"

J F Ade Ajayi contended that "it is at best a half-truth to say Lagos was bombarded in 1851 because it was a "notorious slave depot". The anxiety of the British to intervene in Lagos was not just the philanthropic desire to destroy the slave trading activities of the Portuguese and Brazilians there, but also the economic desire to control the trade of Lagos from which they had hitherto been excluded and from where they hoped to exploit the resources of the vast country stretching to and beyond the Niger"

In fact, the background to the British intervention in Lagos is the international rivalry that existed between the various European Powers to control the trade of important areas in West Africa..... Thus there was a strong commercial interest in Britain's struggle against the slave trade. That is to say, the overseas slave trade, for the internal slave trade which was necessary for the development of legitimate trade was tolerated till the railways and wage labour made it unnecessary, J F Ade Ajayi wrote.

The dispute in 1811 between Akitoye and Kosoko, long before Britain started trying to divide African rulers into those for and those against the slave trade, was also a factor in the British intervention and eventual annexation of Lagos by the British.

I will endeavour to reproduce the whole article at a later date.

I would like to dedicate this effort in reproduction to the late Chief Gani Fawehinmi (1938 - 2009), who, though not an Isale-Eko man, lived most, if not all his life in Lagos, and contributed



immensely to the rich history and development of Lagos and Nigeria. May his soul rest in perfect Peace.

Eko o ni baje o.

(Please note that I am not from Lagos, but an Ibadan man; however, the history of Nigeria has always been my interest and hobby)

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