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in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Carol Thompson. *The Asante Kingdom*. New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 1998. 64 pp. Ages 9-12. \$23.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-531-20287-6.

Reviewed by Akwasi Osei (Department of History, Political Science and Philosophy, Delaware State University)
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As the information age continues to explode, especially on the World Wide Web, there will be more choices for students to sample what is available. Given the history of serious bias in the presentation and representation of Africa, we need to be constantly vigilant about what is published. This is more so when the text is marked for a younger audience.

Carol Thompson's short, straightforward snapshot of the Asante of Ghana is a decent, initial introduction for kids who are living in a world that is much more multicultural than the world of their parents. It is a six-chapter overview of the kingdom from its consolidation in the middle of the seventeenth century to its incorporation as a part of present-day Ghana in the latter part of the nineteenth. It also includes a timeline, a glossary, a short section for further information, and an index.

The author's introduction is clearly stated: a general summary of the kingdom's beginnings, its conquests, its economic activities, and its dealings with the increasingly aggressive Europeans. The first chapter succinctly describes pre-kingdom cultures that were brought together by Osei-Tutu in the seventeenth century. There is no new information here; just a quick narrative of what led to the creation of the confederacy. The author's use of confederacy for much of the text may be misleading because the new kingdom organized under Osei-Tutu was quite centralized.

The remaining chapters continue this summary of Asante life—art, the creation of a real bureaucracy, and after the eighteenth century, Asante's expansion and subsequent conflict with the British. The author attempts to be balanced in referring to what made Asante great:

trading in many commodities, managing a huge empire well, creating large productive commercial enterprises, and maintaining a good army.

The author's discussion of the pivotal nineteenth century could have been better. There is a marked emphasis on the "warlike Asante" without an attendant reason why the kingdom had to resort to its army so often. It was clear in the beginning of the nineteenth century that the British were going to be more aggressive in their colonialist plans. The Asante rightly, and successfully, resisted with all their might, forcing a stalemate until 1900. Almost a century of war took its toll on the kingdom.

There are a few drawbacks to the text: first, are some typing mistakes such as the misspellings of "abusua"; and "asantehene"; in the text and in the glossary; and the need to make the "Timeline" section more about Asante markers as opposed to British. The use of contemporary photographs accompanying a historical narrative, however, may be the major drawback. It has the potential to continue stereotypes, especially given the target readership.

Nevertheless, I would give *The Asante Kingdom* a recommended rating. It is a short, relatively reliable narrative of the Asante for young readers.

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