

Kwame Nkrumah at the Congress of Africanists

(From the speech *Africanism and Culture* given at the Congress of Africanists, Accra, Ghana, December, 1962)

If we have lost touch with what our forefathers discovered and knew, this has been due to the system of education to which we were introduced. This system of education prepared us for a subservient role to Europe and things European. It was directed at estranging us from our own cultures in order the more effectively to serve a new and alien interest.

The central myth in the mythology surrounding Africa is that of the denial that we are a historical people. It is said that whereas other continents have shaped history and determined its course, Africa has stood still, held down by inertia. Africa, it is said, entered history only as a result of European contact. Its history, therefore, is widely felt to be an extension of European history. Hegel's authority was lent to this a-historical hypothesis concerning Africa. And apologists of colonialism and imperialism lost little time in seizing upon it and writing wildly about it to their heart's content.

To those who say that there is no documentary source for that period of African history which pre-dates the European contact, modern research has a crushing answer. We know that we were not without a tradition of historiography, and, that this is so, is now the verdict of true Africanists. African historians, by the end of the 15th century, had a tradition of recorded history, and certainly by the time when Mohamud al-Kati wrote *Tarikh al-Fattash*. This tradition was incidentally much, much wider than that of the Timbuktu school of historians, and our own Institute of African Studies here at this University, is bringing to light several chronicles relating to the history of Northern Ghana.

The Chinese, too, during the T'ang dynasty (AD. 618-907), published their earliest major records of Africa. In the 18th century, scholarship connected Egypt with China; but Chinese acquaintance with Africa was not only confined to knowledge of Egypt. They had detailed knowledge of Somaliland, Madagascar and Zanzibar and made extensive visits to other parts of Africa.

The European exploration of Africa reached its height in the 19th century. What is unfortunate, however, is the fact that much of the discovery was given a subjective instead of an objective interpretation. In the regeneration of learning which is taking place in our universities and in other institutions of higher learning, we are treated as subjects and not objects. They forget that we are a historic people responsible for our unique forms of language, culture and society. It is therefore proper and fitting that a Congress of Africanists should take place in Africa and that the concept of Africanism should devolve from and be animated by that Congress.

Between ancient times and the 16th century, some European scholars forgot what their predecessors in African Studies had known. This amnesia, this regrettable loss of interest in the power of the African mind, deepened with growth of interest in the economic exploitation of Africa. It is no wonder that the Portuguese were erroneously credited with having erected the stone fortress of Mashonaland which, even when Barbossa, cousin of Magellan, first visited them, were ruins of long standing.