

Fall 1978

Ifa Divination Poetry by Wande Abimbola

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Recommended Citation

Smith, Pamela J. Olúbùnmi, "Ifa Divination Poetry by Wande Abimbola" (1978). *Goodrich Scholarship Faculty Publications*. 37.
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Nigeria

Wande Abimbola, ed. & tr. *Ifa Divination Poetry*. New York. NOK. 1977. x + 170 pages. \$12.50.

Until the publication of Wande Abimbola's *Ifa Divination Poetry* much of the scant information available on the fascinating but complex Ifa geomantic system, commonly identified with the Yoruba of Western Nigeria, has been limited to the general comments of anthropologists and folklorists, whose studies of the system have been less significant parts of larger studies. *Ifa Divination Poetry* is the product of long years of apprenticeship, diligent data collecting from renowned Ifa priests and research. This literary work is appropriately divided into two parts. The first part is a brief history of the elaborate system of divination and an introduction designed to familiarize the general reader with a structural, stylistic and thematic analysis of Ifa divination poetry. Part two consists of textual material—sixty-four poems of Ifa presented in their Yoruba original version and adequately annotated in English translation.

The significance of the Ifa geomantic system in the daily lives of the Yoruba especially cannot be overstressed. As noted by the author, Ifa is theology, it is philosophy, it is the bulk of Yoruba oral literatures. Ifa is indeed the "fund formation" on Yoruba history, mythology, world view and value system. The divination poems/chants, "valued by the Yoruba as the guardian of Yoruba culture," are themselves "historical storehouses" of all that is significant in Yoruba culture.

Ifa Divination Poetry is in many ways a literary godsend for Africanists abroad who have expressed legitimate concern over the problematic inadequacies of literary criticism of modern African literature posed by the paucity of African oral literature in translation. To this end Abimbola makes no lofty claims in this general introductory study. *Ifa Divination Poetry* is, as the author states in the preface, a general study "designed to meet the needs of the general reader . . . who wants to inform himself about the richness of African oral poetry." *Ifa Divination Poetry* is a pioneer study which, I hope, has paved the way for further in-depth research into the linguistic and stylistic structure of this rich body of traditional African literature.

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