

Migrations, Identities, and Transculturation in the Coastal Cities of Yorubaland in the Second Half of the Second Millennium

An Approach to African History through Architecture

BRIGITTE KOWALSKI OSHINEYE

Introduction

Studies of African architecture are rare, and many lacunae remain in the few works in this area. The architecture of African historical centers is in peril, and historical buildings are being destroyed as a result of economic activities, development projects, and land speculation. For example, the majority of the finest historical buildings on Lagos Island have been demolished and replaced by modern towers that reflect the current dynamism of the city.

Built during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these historical structures, called Afro-Brazilian buildings, are generally associated with colonial architecture. However, on closer examination, the word “colonial” appears justified only in reference to the features of colonial Brazilian architecture that distinguished the buildings. This architecture owes its features to freed slaves returning from the Americas. These ex-slaves, most of whom resettled in the societies from which they had departed, especially in the coastal region of West Africa, introduced new ways of life and new architectural styles acquired from the lands of their sojourn overseas. By examining patterns of international and interregional migration and of settlement, it is possible to detect and understand the cultural mix that contributed to and enriched Yoruba culture in the coastal region, especially in terms of architecture.