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The Religions of Africa at Bayreuth University

N.B.: The data for this contribution were taken from <http://www.bayreuth.de> and <http://www.uni-bayreuth.de/Afrikanologie/IAS/>, and from the paper by Asonzeh F.-K. Ukah, 'The Study of Religions in Africa: The Bayreuth Traditions', which he read at the conference 'European Traditions in the History of the Religions of Africa' at Schloss Thurnau, *Wissenschaftszentrum* of the University of Bayreuth, in Germany, from 4 to 7 October 2001 (JP).

Bayreuth is a small town of 74.000 inhabitants in the region of Ober-Franken in the federal state of Bavaria in the South of Germany. Its university is young and small: it was founded in 1972, began teaching in 1975 and has now 8.000 students. Being young and small may, however, be an advantage. As Germany lost its colonies in Africa after World War I, 'African Studies' failed to develop in German universities. They are absent from them even now, except in Bayreuth, which is the only university in Germany with a young, but large and well-developed, Institute of African Studies (IAS).

IAS was founded only in 1991. It co-ordinates the teaching on, and research in, Africa of four of its five faculties. IAS also has an Africa Centre, the Iwalewa-Haus, which is famous for its African cultural events and its collection of African cultural items. IAS also has a library with 50.000 books and 240 periodicals on Africa. It has currently two Visiting Professors from Nigeria, the economist Prof. N.I. Ikpeze from the University of Nsukka, and the historian of Christianity in Africa, Prof. O.U. Kahlu, from the University of Nigeria and the Centre for the World Religions of Harvard University. In addition, two more professors from Nigeria, one from former Zaire, now Congo, and one from Ivory Coast/USA are also staying at Bayreuth University for teaching and/or research. IAS is a member of AEGIS, a network of universities in Europe specialising in African Studies. It maintains research partnerships with several universities in Africa, notably in West Africa, the Sahel and East Africa: e.g. with the universities of Dakar, Abidjan, Lomé,

Cotonou, Ouagadougou, Khartoum, and Nairobi, and with a research centre on 'Local Knowledge' at Bamako.

Two of the four faculties of Bayreuth University are particularly important for the study of the religions of Africa, to wit that of *Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaften* ('Linguistics and Literatures' [of Africa]), and that of *Kulturwissenschaften* ('the study of [African] cultures'). In addition to other academic staff, the former has a professor in 'Africanology' – or African Studies –, two professors in African Languages, three in the study of the various literatures of Africa (indigenous, francophone and lusitophone, and anglophone), two in African Islam, and one in Arabic Studies.

The latter has a professor in *Religionswissenschaft* (the academic study of [African] religions), and another in 'religious socialisation'; two in Ethnology and one in Social Anthropology; one in the History of Africa, one in Medieval History, and one in Modern History; and, lastly, one in the Sociology of Developing Nations, and other academic staff.

Undergraduate and graduate degree courses are offered in Swahili Studies, and in African Studies. The former comprises an intensive training in Swahili and Arabic. The latter is wide ranging. It offers courses in African Arts, in particular modern African arts; in African literatures, oral as well as written ones, particularly the Swahili one; in African languages, with an emphasis on Swahili, Hausa and Bambara; in the Anglophone literature of Africa; in the Socio-Linguistics of Arabic in Africa; in African Ethnology, with an emphasis on the Sahel, and the Swahili area of East Africa; in African History, particularly of West and East Africa; in Islam, especially in Senegal, Nigeria and Sudan; in Modern History, with an emphasis on the former colonies of Germany in Africa; in African systems of law, especially in Benin, Ghana, Togo, Namibia and South Africa; in the Study of the Religions of Africa, with an emphasis on the interaction between Yoruba culture in Nigeria and Christianity, the 'Independent Churches' and 'New Religious Movements' in Nigeria; in the Social Geography of Africa, in particular of Egypt, Sudan, Somalia, Kenya, Tanzania and Tunisia; and in the Political Economy of Africa, especially of Nigeria, Tanzania and South Africa.

The two core departments devoted to the study of religions in Africa are the Department of Islamology, and that of 'Science of Religions'. The former was established in 1984 and chaired by Prof. Jamin M. Abun-Nasr, who had been trained in Beirut and Oxford, and had taught in African universities (Legon, Freetown, Ibadan) and in Berlin, till 1997. Its focus from 1984 to 1990 was on Islam in Nigeria. Its results appeared in a volume, edited by Abun-Nasr, entitled *Muslims in Nigeria* (1993). The next project, from 1990 to 1995, focused on Islam in Nigeria, Senegal, Egypt, Morocco and Mali. The current research project, under the new chair, Prof. Rainer Oßwald who specialises in Islam in Mauretania, focuses on Islamic education in East Africa in the context of globalisation, in particular as it develops in Zanzibar and Mombasa.

Students are involved in these research projects. They are therefore required to master either Swahili or Hausa, to spend much time in African societies in order that they may become their 'home away from home', and to develop partnerships with African students and scholars. The latter come to Bayreuth in exchange programmes, especially to work in the Islam in Africa Archive of the Department.

The Department of *Religionswissenschaft* was founded in 1986 and is chaired by Prof. Ulrich Berner. Its focus in teaching and research is on Christianity in Nigeria and its relation with the indigenous religions of Nigeria. It pursues that research in particular by inviting Nigerian scholars, such as Jacob Olupona in 1989, Osmund Anigbo in 1989-1990, Emefie Ikenga-Metuh in 1992, David Olayiwola in 1993, Friday Mbon in 1994, Cyril Imo, also in 1994, and Umar Danfulani in 1996-1997. In the context of the research programme 'Identity in Africa', Afe Adogame and Justin Omoyawojo, did Ph.D research on the processes of charismatisation and institutionalisation in two Nigerian Independent Churches (cf. Afe Adogame, *Celestial Church of Christ: The Politics of Cultural Identity in a West-African Prophetic-Charismatic Movement*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999). Another African scholar of religions who obtained a PhD at Bayreuth University is John Khamalwa from Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. His thesis examined problems of inculturation in initiation rituals among the Bamasamba of Uganda.

The present research of the department focuses on African Christian movements in Nigeria and Germany, with Afe Adogame investigating the interface between migration and religion in Germany, and Asonzeh F.-K. Ukah concentrating on the Redeemed Christian Church in Nigeria.

In both the study of African Islam and African Christianity, processes of transformation are examined in the context of the rapid and deep socio-economic and political changes in Africa in the past two centuries and now.

A major handicap for Bayreuth University, and German Universities generally, in their effort to contribute to the training of academic manpower for African universities is the German language, which takes African scholars a long time and major effort to master.