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Anita J. Slack, Editor

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*African Kingdoms: An Encyclopedia of Empires and Civilizations*. Edited by Saheed Aderinto. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017. 363 p. Acid-free \$71.20 (ISBN 978-1-61069-579-4). E-book available (978-1-61069-580-0), call for pricing.

*African Kingdoms: An Encyclopedia of Empires and Civilizations* succeeds in filling a gap in the literature by providing a centralized, concise, and accessible overview of ninety-one African kingdoms before the 1880s, focusing on how "states, kingdoms, and empires in precolonial Africa provide a clear window into the sophistication of African political, social, religious, and cultural institutions before the era of colonialism" (xi).

The volume begins with a brief introduction and timeline, followed by alphabetical entries and concluding with a handful of primary documents. The introduction provides the reader with historical, social, and political frameworks with which to understand the entries that follow, with specific attention paid to the importance and influence of oral traditions in Africa and its history, and the role that previous scholarship has played in shaping our understanding of African history. The entries themselves are succinct, with most spanning a mere two pages, and narratively describe the history of a kingdom and the role the kingdom played in the history of its region and present-day country; as the editor notes, they "attempt to trace the foundation of each kingdom, empire, and state to both internal and external political developments" (xi). Specific rulers and places are noted but not cross-referenced, and each entry includes several citations for further reading. While straightforward in its organization, readers unfamiliar with the history of Africa and its kingdoms may find themselves wishing for additional support in the form of thematic essays or entries on topics such as trade or the spread of Islam. Maps are also a disappointing omission; with the exception of a few black and white photographs, there are no visual aids to assist readers in developing their understanding of the movement of the people and kingdoms of Africa's past.

As the editor of this encyclopedia notes about the existing literature on the subject of African kingdoms, "most [African history textbooks] treat African kingdoms cursorily and as part of a general survey of Africa," while scholarly monographs on specific kingdoms "are largely unsuitable for nonspecialist audiences and high school and college undergraduate students who need an accessible body of knowledge" (xiii). This volume succeeds in filling this gap, and does a good job providing an entry point for further study, perhaps with Willie Page's *Encyclopedia of African History and Culture* (Facts on File, 2001) or one of the many titles included in the ancillary reading list provided in the encyclopedia itself. *African Kingdoms* is a timely addition to the literature and provides an accessible entry point to African history for students and readers through the undergraduate levels.—Kristin Henrich, Head, User and Research Services, University of Idaho Library, Moscow, Idaho