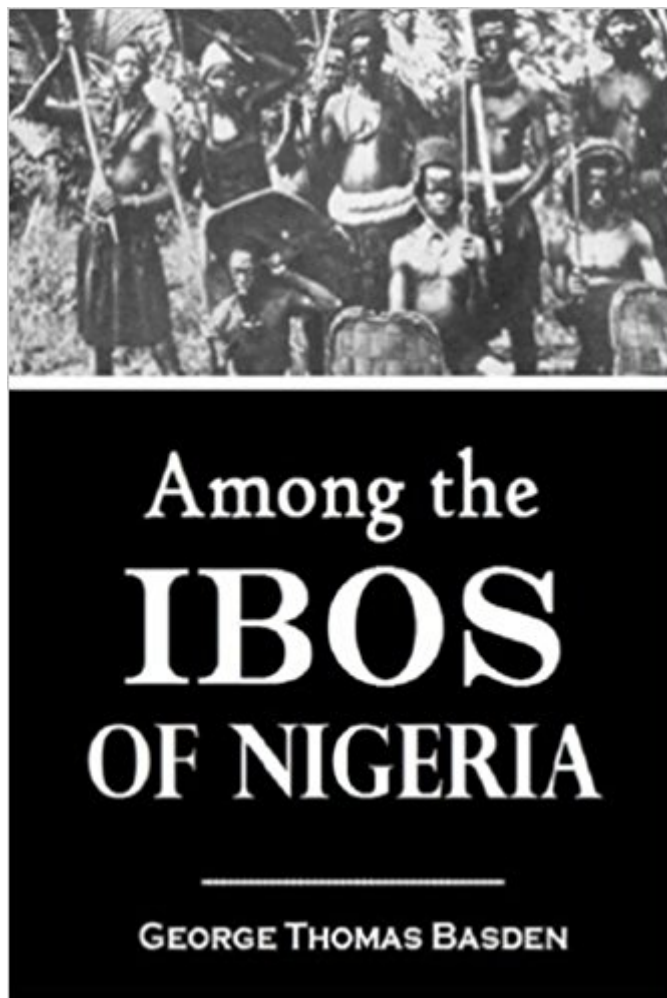


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# Among The Ibos Of Nigeria



## Synopsis

George Thomas Basden (1873–1944) arrived Onitsha, British Nigeria in 1900 with a goal – “to convert pagans to Christianity” – on behalf of the Church Missionary Society. In 1921 he published a book on his time in Nigeria – “Among the Ibos of Nigeria.” In Basden’s volume dealing with the Ibos of Southern Nigeria, the author has aimed at giving a fairly detailed, though popularly written, account of these interesting natives, and has succeeded in producing an instructive and attractive volume. He sounds a note of caution which may well be taken to heart by globe-trotters and stay-at-home amateurs who, with little or no experience, write books about native ideas and beliefs. He writes: “The longer one lives amongst West African natives, the more one is convinced that it is a practical impossibility for the European to comprehend fully the subtleties of the native character. Some white men claim to have done this, but my experience leads me to think that the claim can rarely, if ever, be substantiated with definite assurance.” This is an honest admission on the part of one who has lived long enough among the natives to realise the difficulties involved in the diagnosis of their mentality, and to recognise the fundamental difference between their “philosophy” and ours. The Ibo people, who form nearly one-half the population of Southern Nigeria, occupy the country lying mainly between the Niger and Cross rivers, a huge tract extending from the coast to 7° N. lat. There is a westerly extension across the Niger. The Ibos are not homogeneous, important variations occurring in the extensive area occupied. The environment varies considerably, from the low-lying swamps of the Delta to the higher land around Onitsha. The book is a timely one, since the indigenous customs are very rapidly undergoing changes, though in 1900, when Mr. Basden arrived there, primitive conditions still largely persisted. The general life of the Ibos is well presented. A man’s greatest desire in life is to advance his social status, and many crimes are committed in order to promote this advancement. Theft (to obtain the necessary funds), murder, and head-taking (as a sign of prowess) are very usually the outcome of this craving for higher titles. Cannibalism has been rampant, human flesh being regarded as a valuable food product. Polygamy is favoured equally by both sexes, and will be suppressed only with great difficulty. The first wife takes precedence of all the others, and is regarded as the legal wife, *anasi*, who is priestess of the household gods.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

For the past two years, I have focused on "Among The Ibos of Nigeria" (1921) with special attention. George T. Basden was a missionary and "amateur" anthropologist who came to the Onitsha, Nigeria area from Liverpool, England, in September 1890. He lived among the Ibos (Igbo) culture for several decades. Basden's personal and often detailed perspectives of life among the "Ibos" remains one of the hallmark writings that severely influenced anthropology and ethnographers, not only during the previous heyday of "armchair" anthropology, but his written \*ground zero\* account remains in effect even today. He was known as a gifted photographer, and for countless photographs taken during his life around Onitsha. Ironically, this publication provides but a mere select few photos. I wonder why. As a collector of African cultural and historical-art, I find Basden's collective of perspectives strangely influential, particularly his riveting accounts in Chapter X "Death and Burial Rites and Ceremonies". He has provided some interesting early insights concerning IKENGA Sculptural Figurative carvings that rivals much of the conjecture and psychobabble that such figures are professed to be. Matters concerning "Courtship and Marriage", "Polygamy and Slavery", "Trade and Currency", Arts and Crafts", "Sports and Pastimes", as well as "War and Weapons" are certainly worthy of deeper examination against accepted assumptions and norms. And, Basden's comments about Ibo "Etiquette", "Folklore and Proverbs" also resonate, revealing a complex order of civility and reason few have come to understand. As early as 1880-1929 and the advent of Christianity, Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries and Catholic 'White Fathers', operated in tandem with compulsory evangelical conversion campaigns - including gender role processes. Evangelical Christians were neutral about conversion of Muslims, knowing the risk of attacks from the Arabs, as well as failures involved. Christendom irrationality began a prolific downward spiral towards cultural imperialism in Nigeria, just as it spanned the globe. The monotheistic religious \*road to perdition\* claimed enlightenment, not only towards Africans, but according to Arab and European legend, came bearing gifts of higher culture

and civilization. Yet, most Igbos (as with other sub-Saharan cultures) have always been aware of their Hebrew origins (not Jewish as titled);

RE-EMERGING: The Jews of Nigeria

The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity. There is no such historical relevance about "black" African Jews, this is revisionism to say the least. A snippet of Basden's long-winded cessation: "Literature is not his profession", and that there are "probably errors which will need rectification. It would be sheer presumption to expect otherwise, for the longer one lives amongst West African natives, the more one is convinced that it is a practical impossibility for the European to comprehend fully the subtleties of the native character. Some white men claim to have done this, but my experience leads me to think that the claim can rarely, if ever, be substantiated with definite assurance. The depths may be sounded at times, but only by accident, and on most of such occasions the inquirer does not recognise that he has actually tapped the inner consciousness of the native. Let not this be thought strange, for the black man himself does not know his own mind. He does the most extraordinary things, and cannot explain why he does them" ...As a twin, the matters expressed in Chapter V, "Child Life" were initially vexing and controversial. Basden explained that among the Ibos, the birth of twins was a calamity of the first magnitude, and spelled disaster - a curse for the (unfortunate) mother and "twins" equally. The anterior motive and belief was that mankind was ordained to procreate by single births, not as animals. For a woman to bear more than one child degrades humanity on the level of brute creations (dogs, goats, felines) or wild animals. This filled the Ibos with indescribable disgust. Clearly, this is not the only documented source on "the Ibos" around Onitsha, Nigeria. No one should confuse the devised scheme involving carving up and the subjugation of the Congo and West Africa during the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, which regulated European colonization and trade for the "New Imperialism" period. This coincided with Germany's sudden emergence as an imperial power, and many far reaching affects. The problem is, the over-all scheme was arrogantly and grossly miscalculated, having gone terribly awry from the beginning. "the polished way to lie involves telling the right amount of truth at the right time, then to shut up (and maintain utter silence)"

good book...

Having this text reprinted and available was crucial to my research. 5 stars!

fastidious one - Great review! Extremely eloquent message about the jaundiced eye of the author of this book. It was so disingenuous of George T Basden to have walked among this people as their

"friend", yet covertly writing such extremely unfavorable views about their culture. Views that only messaged the egos and self-righteousness of the already prejudiced eyes of those who read it. Views that would be widely published, and quickly and easily embraced by these same cretinous adversaries of melanated people. These same xenophobic, classist, imperialist attitudes exist even to this day especially among those have the power, and/or the money to actually, prolifically, forward their agenda.

A very informative documentation on a people often neglected and maligned by history. The Igbo nation is a unique breed of people that live in present day Nigeria, and one of the three dominant tribes in the country.

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