
The Zaghawa: Past and Present

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The Zaghawa: Past and Present. By Mahmoud Abbaker Suleiman and Mohamed Ali Abbaker .Suleiman. Kuwait Publishing House, 1988



A Review by Abdullahi Osman El-Tom

Zaghawa readers are fortunate to avail of the Arabic Book "The Zaghawa: Past and Present" authored by the two brothers Mahmoud and Mohamed Ali Suleiman. Like many other Arabic publications, the book had long gone out of print and was hard to obtain in any other means. The authors are to be commended for making this important publication available for us in a PDF form at:

<http://www.sudanjem.com/Zaghawa%20Past%20&%20Present%20First%20Edition.pdf>

This book is unique in several ways. Firstly, the authors themselves are Zaghawa and command intimate knowledge of the group and personal experience of life and culture of the area. Secondly, this is a well-researched book. Its information is a product of painstaking work among knowledgeable Zaghawa, many of whom are unfortunately no longer with us. Thirdly, the book is by all means encyclopaedic in the sense of .spanning through almost every important aspect of Zaghawa life

The book falls under 244 pages and consists of five chapters, each of which contains several headings. It is jamboree for diverse readers including historians, political scientists, folklorists and linguists. Those who are interested in colonialism, nation-state formation, nomadism, kinship and traditional medicine will also find this .book good to read

The web launch of the book comes at a sad time in the history of the Zaghawa, Darfur and Sudan at large. The entire region of Darfur is now enmeshed in a struggle in which the Zaghawa are central. Had our leaders paid some attention to this book, they could have perhaps avoided the current war. The book details injustice visited on the Zaghawa and others in the area and gives a good account of early resistance to such injustice. Moreover, the book also shows the Zaghawa as an ethnic group endowed with high level of consciousness about their rights, coupled by their readiness to fight for their cause. These are the very messages that are clearly spelt out .in the book and which our leaders have so far failed to grasp

But in as much as the book could have inspired our national leaders to stop the current Darfur war early on, the book could have also instigated a cause for national unity. Folklore of the Zaghawa and particularly child stories and youth entertainment show remarkable cultural affinity between the Zaghawa and other ethnic groups in central and northern Sudan. With apt use, such commonality could have served as blue print for inclusive .national culture and a cohesive Sudanese identity

Needless to say, the authors' publication is not the only important book on the Zaghawa. It however surpasses others by its wholistic approach to the Zaghawa, their life, history and culture. Other authors opted to focus on one or two aspects of the Zaghawa and that is a legitimate approach. Readers who are interested in those other writers are referred to: M. Tobiana and J. Tobiana, Jerome Tobiana, Sharif Harir, Fouad Ibrahim, Helmut Ruppert, Musa Abdel Jalil, Tigani Mustafa, R. S. O'Fahey, Alex De Waal, A. Abdel Magid Ibrahim, Abdullahi .El-Tom and others

Finally, Mahmoud Suleiman has also published two other books on the Zaghawa: "The autobiography I wrote begins at a Zaghawa village in Darfur", published by Authorhouse, London, 2010, (in English) and; "Beria, the .(language of the Zaghawa", published by Dar al-Hikma, London, 2005 (in Arabic

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