

THE NORTH AFRICAN ART NEXUS : CROSS-CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIAN ART TRADITIONS

Aderonke Adesanya

Existing studies on the subject of African Art have tried to conjecture a relationship between the images and subject matter of North African rock art on the one hand, and the artistic traditions from other parts of the continent on the other hand. Similarly, attempts have been made to establish a link between this rock art and some facets of contemporary cultural practices of some societies in Africa. These efforts, no doubt, have contributed to existing knowledge in the area of art-historical study. However, it is observed that there exist fundamental critical gaps, which critics either ignored or have failed to address adequately. These, among other reasons, foreground the present enquiries on the development of African culture, which his paper is preoccupied with, in particular, the theory of diffusion from one part of the continent to the other. It is argued that the arid or dry region of the Sahara was once wet and more habitable before desertification and harsh encroachment forced the inhabitants of the region to migrate to other parts of Africa, southward to West Africa and eastward to Egypt. What implication do such flows have for the culture of Egypt and West Africa, and Nigeria in particular?

Using art-historical and archaeological evidences, this study starts on the premise that the culture of West Africa and Egypt might have their root in the cultures of the Sahara region. It argues that the migration from the Sahara is partly responsible for the similarities noticeable in the rock art of Nigeria and those of the mountainous region of the Sahara. It identifies some artistic and cultural similarities, which exist between Egypt and some cultures in Nigeria that we have identified in this study. It concludes that such linkages have roots in the migrational cum cultural flows from the Sahara and therefore, could be used to build up and or redefine the data germane to the writing of the history of the art on the continent.