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إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

The Emergence of Islam in Eastern Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper is an aspect of a wider research project on the introduction of Islam into Eastern Nigeria, the only region in Nigeria that was not touched by the nineteenth century Islamic jihad and subsequent efforts to extend the borders of Islam in the country. The reputation of Eastern Nigeria as a purely Christian region survives to the present (Ottenberg, 2006) despite the emergence, few decades ago, of a modest population of Muslims in Igboland—the dominant and most populous ethnic group in the region. One consequence of the success of Islamic proselytization in Igboland in particular is the current discourse among Nigerian Muslims suggesting that Islam might have been spread in the Igbo territory of Eastern Nigeria in the nineteenth century or earlier. The present article examines this claim and also engages the historical development of Islam in Eastern Nigeria. It relies on oral, archival, and written sources. The findings of this research have far reaching implications for scholars of religious history and to social scientists in the areas of policy planning, formulation, and execution.