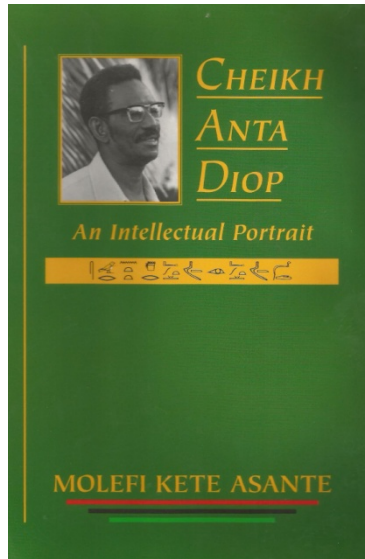


## ***Cheikh Anta Diop: An Intellectual Portrait, A Gem in the Mist of the Pile***



Asante, Molefi Kete, *Cheikh Anta Diop: An Intellectual Portrait*. Los Angeles, California: University of Sankore Press, 2007, ISBN: 978-0943412269, preface, references, index, pp.144; reviewed by Itibari M. Zulu (executive editor *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*).

Considering the volume of books published every, some will be overlooked for a host of reasons. However, within particular corners of knowledge one would accept scholars and academics to alert readers to a gem in the mist of the pile. One such book is *Cheikh Anta Diop: An Intellectual Portrait* by Temple University professor and chair of the department of Africology and African American Studies [architect of the first Ph.D., program in African American Studies], Molefi Kete Asante [also author of *Maulana Karenga: An Intellectual Portrait* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009), published in 2007 by the University of Sankore Press (Los

Angeles, California), a book and personal profile that has gone without a substantial review anywhere (except *Ghanaweb.com*, 4-20-16, and *Great African Thinkers: Cheikh Anta Diop* edited by Ivan Van Sertima [New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1987 via the *Journal of African Civilizations*, vol.8, no.1, June 1986). Hence, an unfortunate circumstance considering Cheikh Anta Diop's multi-disciplinary/trans-disciplinary competence (history, archeology, physics, sociology, linguistics, etc.) and approach (Diopian historiography, which places Egypt at the beginning, both chronologically and conceptually of African civilizations), and as one of the first historians to articulate a decidedly African-centered point of view on human knowledge and culture. Thus, the hope of this review is to [direct](#) new readers to this valuable work for anyone considering or actually engaging in Diopian perspectives or methodologies.

The book consists of a preface, introduction, and five chapters (concerning Cheikh Anta Diop's life and times, knowledge and politics, archaeology, culture, Afrocentric paradigm, unity and renaissance) that stands alone as one of the few book length exercises on Cheikh Anta Diop of the Republic of Sénégal, designed to make its content '...accessible to general as well academic audiences (p.x)'. One would expect that an intellect such as historian, physicist, anthropologist, archeologist, politician, and African-centered theorist Cheikh Anta Diop (1923-1986) to be recognized in all circles, but according to Asante, in a mixture of petty jealousies, intellectual insecurities, and the fear of losing a hegemonic hold on African people, caused an animosity toward this important scholar. Thus, it would have been one thing had his critics confronted him on the arguments.

But it was another thing to attack him personally, morally, or on the basis of some political agenda (p. x). Then, in 1994, Diop's first work was translated into English, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (edited by Mercer Cook), and thus it gained a much wider audience (especially in the African American scholar-intellectual-activist community) as the book (now in its 30th printing) proved that archaeological and anthropological evidence supported his view that the Pharaohs of ancient Egypt were African. In the process, he also outlined how European archaeologists before and after the decolonization of Africa had understated and continued to understate the extent and possibility of African civilizations.

Hence, Asante argues that Diop understood that a central task would be to uncover the truth about Africa in all the disciplines of human knowledge (p.xiv), and engage in the study, dedication, and intense struggle for truth that has emerged as the inherited task of those who understand the awesome change that he single-handedly created in the academic world. Hence, Asante also states that “Diop was an intellectual because he understood that the premises of research and scholarship as an openness to all forms of knowledge [involving], comprehensive reading and study, and critical analysis [and thus, he did not let Western scholarship dictate to him; he studied it, mastered it, and then demonstrated its racist bias (p.30)”. And, also important in the author’s assessment is that Cheikh Anta Diop was responsible for maintaining an African idea of history, which included documents and archaeological records (p.84), and that there is also a Diopian notion argued by Arna Mazama in *The Afrocentric Paradigm* (2003) that Diopian advocates must retake the writing of history as a part of a paradigm for overcoming the legacies of enslavement and that such a battle plan for African intellectuals must be executed with academic integrity, methodological soundness, and social responsibility. Additionally, readers learn that Diopian historiography is based on the fact that African people are central to their story and that no one can tell the African story better than African people (p.100), and that Diop sought to open the vision of the public, to view the varieties of African history and culture from the standpoint of the African ethos.

In contrast, the arena of research Asante argues that Diop was one of the first African scholars to embrace the scientific method to prove that Africa was the origin of the humankind, and that Diop knew that there would be other discoveries or disclosures in Africa that would further establish it as the homeland of the humankind (p.41). Hence, Diop was eager to demonstrate through careful research and investigation in history that all cultures of Africa could be connected through concrete reference to historical phenomena (p.33). Therefore, Asante argues that the research agenda for African scholars in the next generation is full; however, it cannot be an agenda driven by the granting agencies of the West; but rather an agenda created in the research interest of Africa (p.41).

Beyond a simple profile, this book provides a concise manifesto on Cheikh Anta Diop, and unlike other works, here Asante nails his contributed and ideas that presents readers with content that argues (1): the mastery of languages was one of the key elements in Diop's quest as an intellectual (p.31); (2) the falsifications about African history and culture should not be able to continue without challenge (p.130); (3) Cheikh Anta Diop is in a class alone by virtue of his struggles and victories in forcing the academy to pay attention to the work of African scholars who were not supported by the universities, but who nevertheless, had prepared themselves as well as any of those who taught in the universities to delve into research. In this sense, Diop was a model for activist committed to scholarship (p.23); he can be said to have been one of the first historians to articulate a decidedly Afrocentric point of view (p. 81), as he argued more than any other African intellectual of his time for the uniting of Africa. And moreover, Asante states that Diop was a visionary, seeing all the possibilities of unity, and hoping that the political leaders would have the ability to participate in that vision (p. 34), and what Diop accomplished in his works was a way to destabilize the Eurocentric construction of the ancient world and to open up the possibility of another way of seeing.

For those who wish to discover more about on Diop's 'two cradle theory' popularized by Vulindlela Wobogo in regards to its acceptability to theory formation, they may be disappointed because the book in general doesn't discuss the theory in terms of its utility in research. Thus, they can turn to Troy D. Allen's 'Cheikh Anta Diop's Two Cradle Theory Revisited' (*Journal of Black Studies*, March 2007); 'Diops Two Cradle Theory of Origin of White Racism' (*Black Books Bulletin*, vo.4, no.4, 1976), or 'Cold Wind From the North: The Pre-historic European Origin of Racism, Explained by Diop's Two Cradle Theory' by Vulindlela Wobogo (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform (2015), or other sources to understand how Diop's two cradle theory can contribute to the content, assumptions and organization of knowledge within Africology.

The life and times of the Cheikh Anta Diop need to be more commonly known in our circles, and beyond, as we work to make African history a living process that can inspire generations to act upon what they learn and know.