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The Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria are exceptional for the copresence among them of three religious traditions: Islam, Christianity, and the indigenous orisa religion. In this comparative study, at once historical and anthropological, Peel explores the intertwined character of the three religions and the dense imbrication of religion in all aspects of Yoruba history up to the present. For over 400 years, the Yoruba have straddled two geocultural spheres: one reaching north over the Sahara to the world of Islam, the other linking them to the Euro-American world via the Atlantic. These two external spheres were the source of contrasting cultural influences, notably those emanating from the world religions. However, the Yoruba not only imported Islam and Christianity but also exported their own orisa religion to the New World. Before the voluntary modern diaspora that has brought many Yoruba to Europe and the Americas, tens of thousands were sold as slaves in the New World, bringing with them the worship of the orisa.

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J.D.Y. PEEL (1941–2015) died shortly before this book went to press. He was Professor Emeritus of Anthropology and Sociology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. This is his last major work.

The Anthropology of Christianity

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