

LLOYD ARTHUR THOMPSON (1932-97): *IN MEMORIAM*

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Abstract. Lloyd Arthur Thompson (1932-97), one of the most respected classicists on the African subcontinent, devoted forty years of his life to the cause of classics in sub-Saharan Africa. The major events of his career and a list of his most important publications bear testimony to the immense influence he has had on scholarship both within and outside Africa.

This volume of *Scholia* is dedicated to Lloyd Arthur Thompson, one of Africa's most distinguished classicists of the twentieth century. Born in Barbados, West Indies, on 24th June 1932, Thompson was educated at Harrison College, Barbados, where he obtained an Oxford and Cambridge Higher Certificate with distinctions in Latin, Greek, Ancient History and Literature in 1950; the next year he achieved distinctions in the same subjects and was awarded the Hawkins Prize for *Proxime Accessit*, a competition for the prestigious Barbados Scholarship; and in 1952 he became the Barbados Scholar in Classics after obtaining his Oxford and Cambridge S-levels with distinctions in the aforementioned subjects. Thompson matriculated at St John's College, Cambridge, in 1953, winning a College Scholarship and College Prize in 1955 before being awarded his BA degree with distinction and a Thomas Exhibition in 1956; four years later he was awarded his MA degree.

After completing his BA degree Thompson married Alma Rosalind Platten on 1st September 1956. After marriage Thompson took up a position as an Assistant Lecturer in Classics at University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, an overseas college of London University, which later became the autonomous University of Ibadan in 1962. After a succession of promotions he was appointed Professor of Classics in 1967. During a career that spanned forty years at the University of Ibadan, Thompson held three Visiting Fellowships at St John's College and served as external examiner of Classics at the Universities of Ghana at Legon, Sierra Leone, the West Indies and Zimbabwe. He also held numerous administrative positions at the University of Ibadan, including three stints as Head of Classics and a period as Dean of the Faculty of Arts. He died in Cambridge on 28th August 1997 after a long illness; he is survived by his wife Alma, who lives in Cambridge, and children Kay, Nicholas and Richard.

It is for his achievements as a scholar that Thompson will be remembered most. From 1959-1994 he published numerous items, the details of which are

provided in his 'Publication List'.¹ His *Romans and Blacks*, published by Routledge in 1989, is probably the single most outstanding example of his distinguished contribution to classical scholarship. In this book Thompson argues forcefully that modern views of the ways that blacks were perceived in Roman society have been distorted by the preconceptions about 'blacks' that exist in predominantly 'white' societies; in a notable departure from previous scholars on the subject, he maintains that the Romans determined categorisation by the physical appearance of the individual person instead of according to modern notions of race involving categories such as 'black African' and 'white' with their respective group-statuses. There is arguably no greater testimony to Thompson's scholarly legacy than that *Romans and Blacks* is a book that must be consulted by any scholar examining the issue of race in classical antiquity.

The Times featured an eloquent obituary on Lloyd Thompson in its edition of 29th August 1997. It is a fitting testimonial to the standing he had in his profession and in the hearts of his colleagues and students, so I reprint it here with the Editor's permission, to supplement my brief summary of his career.

PROFESSOR LLOYD THOMPSON

Professor Lloyd Thompson, Professor of Classics at Ibadan University, Nigeria, 1967-95, died of cancer yesterday aged 65. He was born on June 24, 1932.

When Lloyd Thompson finally left the University of Ibadan in 1995, having joined the staff there less than ten years after its founding as Nigeria's first university, he was the longest-serving member of the academic staff. In nearly 40 years he had won enormous respect and affection from colleagues and students, and his special contribution was enhanced by his background and experience as a West Indian.

Lloyd Arthur Thompson was born in Barbados, and went to school at Harrison College, where the foundations of his classical scholarship and his sense of mischief were laid. In 1952 he was awarded the coveted Barbados Scholarship, and he read Classics with distinction at St John's College, Cambridge, with which he maintained lifelong connections. He began lecturing at Ibadan in 1956, in a strong department headed by John Ferguson, whom he succeeded in 1967.

Although Classics has declined in most English-speaking universities, there was a feeling in Ghana and Nigeria that only the best was good enough for Africa, and the classical tradition was perceived as important to university life. Classics had an honoured place, and Thompson played a large part in maintaining this at Ibadan. Because of his commitment to

¹ See below, pp. 5-10. Unfortunately I have not been able to provide complete details in some of the entries in this list; nor can I guarantee the accuracy of all the information provided. I thank Alma Thompson and J. A. Ilevbare of the University of Ibadan who have kindly assisted me in compiling Thompson's list of publications.

Africa, he became increasingly interested in the better understanding of the two cultures he had most at heart, the Romans and the black Africans. He collaborated with John Ferguson in writing and editing *Africa in Classical Antiquity* (1969), and in 1989 he produced his own book, *Romans and Blacks*, which was a deeply thoughtful study of what is and is not racist.

While democracy declined in Nigeria, Lloyd Thompson seized the opportunity of the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the world's oldest democracy, with the reforms of Cleisthenes at Athens, and organised a conference under the title 'Democracy, Democratisation and Africa'. Published in 1994, the papers in the book of that name constitute a challenge to the unhappy and undemocratic developments in African countries in recent years.

In 1956 Thompson married Alma Platten, whom he had met during his student days in Cambridge. Lloyd and Alma were uncle and aunt to successive generations of students, who filled their house and fed at their table. They both achieved profound insight into and affection for the young Nigerians, but never succumbed to any of the false values on offer. Lloyd was an approachable man who was friendly as well as wise.

He often acted as honest broker in difficult university affairs: people from every faction felt able to discuss their problems with him. Fearless and forthright himself, he never hesitated to express his views, even when it was dangerous to do so. His independent spirit enabled him to accept disruption and hardship with good humour and philosophic calm, and while he was disappointed to see standards decline in later years, he never gave way to cynicism or despair. Like all West Indians he was keen on cricket, and he captained the university staff team.

He is survived by his wife, a daughter and two sons.

© *The Times*, London, 29th August 1997

Publication List

1959

'Cicero as Politician: The Fight for Power and Glory', *Nigeria and the Classics* 2: 32-64.

1960

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1961

Review of H. H. Scullard, *From the Gracchi to Nero*, *West African Journal of Education* (December): 49.

1962

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'The Appointment of Quaestors *Extra Sortem*', *Proceedings of the African Classical Associations* 5: 17-25.

'The Antifeminism of Cato the Censor', *Phrontisterion* 1: 32-44.

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1963

'The Development of Democracy in Ancient Greece', *Phrontisterion* 2: 3-17.

1964

'Politics and the Political "Press" in Republican Rome', *Nigeria and the Classics* 7: 26-40.
'Classical Contacts with East Africa', *Phrontisterion* 3: 49-64.

1965

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'Cicero's Succession Problem in Cilicia', *American Journal of Philology* 86: 375-86.
'Foreign *Furiosi*', *Proceedings of the African Classical Associations* 8: 18-21.

1966

'The Classics in Nigeria: 1956-66', *Nigeria and the Classics* 9: 45-61.
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1967

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'Christianity in Egypt before the Arab Conquest', *Tarikh* 2: 4-15.

1968

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1969

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'Eastern Africa and the Graeco-Roman World to AD 641', in L. A. Thompson and J. Ferguson (edd.), *Africa in Classical Antiquity*: 26-61.
'Settler and Native in the Urban Centres of Roman Africa', in L. A. Thompson and J. Ferguson (edd.), *Africa in Classical Antiquity*: 132-81.
'Some Observations on Personal Nomenclature in Roman Africa', *Nigeria and the Classics* 10: 45-58.
'Pompeius Strabo and the Trial of Albucius', *Latomus* 28: 1036-39.
'The Kingdom of Kush and the Classical World', *Nigeria and the Classics* 11: 26-48.

1970

'Pliny *Ep.* II.11 and Lepcis Magna', *Nigeria and the Classics* 12: 55-67.

1971

'A Passage in Cicero Relating to Prosecutions *Repetundarum*', in *Studi in onore di Edoardo Volterra* 2 (Studies in Roman and Oriental Law in Honour of Professor Edoardo Volterra [Rome: Giuffrè]): 478-85.

1972

'Africans in Roman Britain', *Museum Africum* 1: 28-38.

Review of M. Crowder, R. J. Cootes and E. L. Snellgrove, *Ancient Times: A Junior History for Africa*, *Museum Africum* 1: 86-87.

1973

An Introduction to Latin Syntax (Department of Classics Occasional Publications No. 1 [Ibadan: University of Ibadan]).

1974

'Some Classical Thoughts on Nation-building', *Orita* 8: 114-23.

Pliny and Martial: An Annotated Selection of Letters and Epigrams (Department of Classics Occasional Publications No. 4 [Ibadan: University of Ibadan]) xvii+ 104 pp.

1975

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1978

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(With J. E. Ifie), 'Rank, Social Status and Esteem in Apuleius', *Museum Africum* 6: 21-30.

1979

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1980

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1981

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1983

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1984

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1985

A Junior Latin Wordlist (Department of Classics Occasional Publications No. 10 [Ibadan: University of Ibadan]).

1987

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Anglice Reddenda: Exercises in Latin Unseen Translation (Ibadan: Floridula Publications).

A Latin Prose Reader (Ibadan: Floridula Publications) viii + 107 pp.

1988

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'Romans and Ethnic Stereotyping', *Proceedings of the Classical Association of Nigeria* 7: 59-77.

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'Sparta: An Ancient Example of Racism', *Proceedings of the Classical Association of Nigeria* 7: 1-10.

1989

Romans and Blacks (London: Routledge/Norman: University of Oklahoma Press) xii + 253 pp.

Intermediate Latin (Ibadan: Floridula Publications).

A Concise Latin Dictionary (Ibadan: Floridula Publications).

1990

Principia Syntaxis Latinae (Ibadan: Floridula Publications) iii + 65 pp.

Pliny: Select Letters, with Introduction, Notes and Vocabulary (Ibadan: Floridula Publications).

1991

Basic Latin Grammar, 2nd edition (Department of Classics Occasional Publications No. 8 [Ibadan: University of Ibadan]).

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1993

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1994

Ed., *Democracy, Democratization and Africa: Essays in Commemoration of the 2,500th Anniversary of the Ancient Greek Discovery of Democracy* (Ibadan/Enugu/Abuja: Afrika-Link Communications) xvi + 270 pp.

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Requiem for Lloyd
(Segun Ige²)

Worms for lunch, toads for supper.
Lloyd O Lloyd,
On your celestial journey
Do not take a bite,
For Heaven's staple food does merit your taste.

As the mighty Atlas can do no better
Than hold the world upon his shoulders,
So cannot Zeus delight himself more than cast
His thunderbolts from the high Olympus.
The cryptic riddles of Apollo,
That led Oedipus to a royal tragedy,
Led Cicero to find his destiny in the spoken word.
And whatever spirit led you to build lives in a classical fashion
Must be the spirit that now ascends the celestial zones.

These old bones that gather to the elders
The creaks thereof are sweet songs of triumph;
If the grey beard that graced many hearts with wisdom
Can comb the highway which you now journey,
Then ride safely your unicorn to the heights above.
Should the sumptuous feasts of heaven be delicious in taste,
Let Johnny Walk(er) the morsels down your transfigured throat.
Whether garlands of triumph or wreaths of victories,
Delicately stride the aisles to take your own.
The rollercoasters of Heaven and the Porsches that zoom past
Would mean the least to you, for in them is not your delight.
But the chivalric spirits that ascend along
Will swoop about your air with songs to greet your ghost.
But this one thing remember:

Worms for lunch, toads for supper.
Lloyd O Lloyd,
On your way to heaven
Do not take a bite,
For Heaven's staple food does merit your taste.

² One of Nigeria's talented young poets, Segun Ige was an undergraduate and postgraduate student of Lloyd Thompson at the University of Ibadan; his MA thesis on Cicero was supervised by Thompson.