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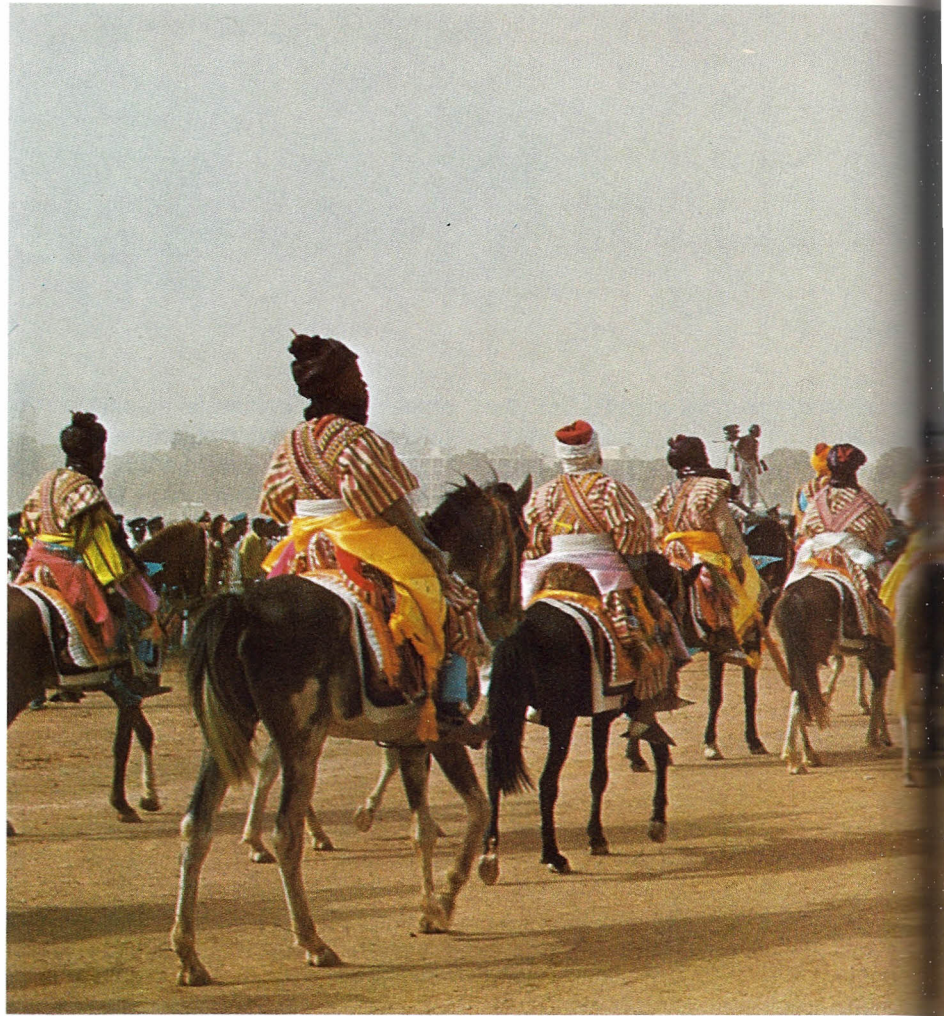
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Durbar Time At Kaduna



Photography and Text By Abdulkadir N. Said

Like a procession of ancient warriors returning home from a victorious engagement against the enemy, the horsemen and the footmen paraded before modern-day African heads of states in one of the most breathtaking pageantry in contemporary Africa. They were staging a Durbar – an ancient tradition in which the subjects of a kingdom paid homage to their rulers by engaging in a carnival-like procession.

The participants sported colorful Nigerian costumes that ranged from the traditionally-bright robes to tightly-fitting uniforms of armies that once protected the life and property of feudal rulers of another era. They brandished shiny sabers, daggers and an assortment of armaments of war from ancient times. The sound of trumpets and drums filled the atmosphere. Indeed, it was a magnificent re-enactment of the diverse but rich cultural heritage of Africa. For those participants of FESTAC who travelled from Lagos to the northern city of Kaduna—a distance of approximately 600 miles—it was an experience of a lifetime. It provided a rare glimpse of a tradition that most people read about only in history books – perhaps view it in superficial imitations by Western moviemakers.

The Grand Durbar at Kaduna was a significant part of an era when African societies paid homage to Kings, Emirs, Princes and an assortment of feudal rulers.

For five continuous hours, as the African harmattan wind blew a cool but dusty breeze toward the spectators, leaders of traditional northern Nigerian societies from nine states led their contingents past the grand stand—riding graceful Arabian stallions and displaying royal exuberance. At times, it was difficult to distinguish who was paying homage to whom—particularly when those same descendants of royalty who led each state's contingent are



known to be as politically powerful and economically comfortable as some of the assembled heads of states.

The contrast between the old world of color and splendor (serfdom too) and the modern world of motorized frenzy was evident at one end of the grand stand, where large numbers of custom-built Rolls-Royce and Mercedes-Benz cars could be seen vying for positions—apparently to whisk off the very men (and some women) who were leading each contingent on horseback. Of course, the rest of their followers continued on to demonstrate more martial prowess to the spectators who seemed awestricken by the re-enactment of a tradition of historical significance.

In all, 3,000 horses and 10,000 individuals took part in the exciting pageantry. There were camels, too, carrying war drums and riders who chanted verses from the Moslem holy book, the *Koran*. And the horsemen from each of the nine states distinguished their agility by displaying perfect horsemanship. Yes, there were dancers, singers, and acrobatic presentations with each contingent—each making a successful attempt to mesmerize the thousands of spectators and the distinguished guests.

The Durbar, indeed, was an outstanding presentation of the month-long festival of arts and culture for which Lagos was the main venue.

Appropriately, the Grand Durbar was the host country's way of sharing the rich culture of the people of Nigeria with the rest of the Black world. It was a fitting tribute, a mind-boggling experience that, for sure, left a lasting impression on those who were able to view and appreciate the spectacle.

Yes, it was out of sight! □





