

## REVIEWS

### MEROE

*Meroe City: An Ancient African Capital: John Garstang's Excavations in the Sudan.* By LÁSZLÓ TÖRÖK, with contributions by I. HOFMANN and I. NAGY. London: Egypt Exploration Society, 1997. 2 vols., Part I, pp. xxx + 287; Part II, 153 figs, 243 plates. £90.00 (ISBN 0-85698-137-0).

These two volumes bring us the long-awaited publication of John Garstang's excavations at Meroe, central Sudan, 'capital' of the Kushite kingdom, carried out between 1909 and 1914. Concentrating on the core of the site, Garstang's work remains the only large-scale investigation of the heart of the 'royal city' and its major monuments, and still the most extensive work on any Kushite settlement site, more recent excavations at Meroe being largely confined to relatively small areas of the outer 'townsite' mounds.<sup>1</sup>

The first text volume is divided into seven parts, the first two providing an account of the excavations, the archives and finds, the preparation of this report and an interpretation of the development of Meroe within the author's vision of Kushite history. Part III, the core of the volume, presents the surviving records (preserved at the School of Archaeology and Oriental Studies (SAOS), Liverpool University, England), following Garstang's original sequence of site/building/find-spots, as used in the preliminary publications. Entries are usefully cross-referenced to previous publications, with notes on the surviving documentation and finds from individual loci, and a discussion of their significance. Parts IV–VI provide brief discussions of the (Egyptian) textual finds, descriptions of unprovenanced finds in the SAOS collections and material known only from photographs, and information relating to a small number of Meroitic and post-Meroitic graves Garstang investigated. Part VII contains a brief discussion of Napatan and Meroitic ceramics. The second volume contains figures with site plans, illustrations of finds and an impressive 243 plates, drawing on surviving glass negatives in Liverpool, which, among other things provide fascinating glimpses of these early excavations.

Amongst this material there will be much of interest for many different audiences, not only the still small group of specialists in Sudanese archaeology. We have here accounts of a remarkable series of temples, palaces and associated structures, and a mass of objects and finds, locally-made and imported, unparalleled outside the Kushite royal cemeteries. The technical inadequacies of Garstang's fieldwork may have left many questions about the structural remains and the stratigraphic sequence unanswered, but the finds provide many startling illustrations of the richness of Kushite elite culture. The character of the text and discussions very much reflect the author's background as an ancient historian with art-historical leanings, and much of the text is devoted to extensive commentaries, accompanied by abundant citations, benefiting from the author's extensive knowledge of Kushite arts and history, albeit less in tune with current archaeological practice. Whether this slightly unorthodox approach to archaeological publication is deemed fully successful will probably depend very much on the reader's interests and background. Certainly, it moves far beyond the presentation of Garstang's original data in often interesting ways. However, the wide-ranging

<sup>1</sup> P. L. Shinnie and R. J. Bradley, *The Capital of Kush* (Berlin, 1980).

discussions, on occasions tending to obscure the original records, can sometimes be frustrating. There is certainly much more yet to be learnt from further detailed analysis of the records, poor as they are; a reworking of Garstang's confusing composite multi-phase plans would certainly have been an asset for reinterpretation (at a more practical level, the separation of plans and figures from the descriptions of individual structures/contexts must also be regretted).

At a different level, some may also be disappointed to find that very little new light is thrown on the 'African' character of Meroe, the 'astonishing complexity and vigour of an ancient African culture' claimed in the introduction (p. xxi). The Sudanic African world in which Meroe lay is masked and relegated to an 'otherness', unrepresented or at least unrecognized in this material. The context within which the buildings and artefacts are discussed is also essentially that of the contemporary Egyptian and Classical world, not that of Sudanic Africa. While the nature of Garstang's interests has largely determined the character of the material recorded and presented here, such an interpretative perspective may prove unsatisfying for some archaeologists of the Sudan and other Africanists.

Despite the wealth of new material seen here for the first time, we are still little closer to answering many fundamental questions concerning Meroe and the material culture of the Kushite elite. What was Meroe? Are we seeing here the development of a true urbanism during the first millennium B.C.? How much does the 'royal city' of palaces and temples owe to external influences and how much to indigenous traditions of ritual and political power and their expression? How should we interpret the relationship between the material culture of the Kushite centre and the creation and maintenance of political structures and identities? What we see here is very much the culture of the 'state' and its elites, but its place within the wider context of undoubtedly complex social and political realities of this vast Sudanic kingdom remains largely unknown.

Notwithstanding some reservations concerning the more synthetic and discursive elements of the work, this valuable book adds considerably to the material record of ancient Meroe. Professor Török must be thanked for his diligence in pursuing this project and the Egypt Exploration Society for taking on its publication. There is clearly much still to be learnt from other material presented here and it seems likely that further analysis of the records will prove profitable. As such, this publication, while closing one chapter on the exploration of Meroe, also opens another. It must also be a depressing reminder of the vast amount of other information irrevocably destroyed by Garstang's industrial-scale 'excavations'. If we are tempted to applaud the splendid array of 'art-objects' and other material seen here for the first time, it should also be a powerful reminder that ninety years on, there is so much still to be revealed by modern archaeology at Meroe, and elsewhere in the Sudan. One may also hope that a glimpse of such archaeological richness may inspire new interest in this fascinating but still poorly developed research field.

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## REREADING PTOLEMY'S MAP

*Africa in Antiquity: A Linguistic and Toponymic Analysis of Ptolemy's Map of Africa, together with a Discussion of Ophir, Punt and Hanno's Voyage.* By W. F. G. LACROIX. (Nijmegen Studies in Development and Cultural Change, 28). Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik, 1998. Pp. xi+416. 20+1 loose map. DM 64 paperback (ISBN 3-88156-708-9).

This volume, written by an Africanist cartographic scholar, derives from his observation that one such map he had studied in detail (that of Duarte Lopes in 1591) largely presents information supplied by native informants such as travellers and merchants, and his conclusion that these informants employed their own linguistic terminology and were well acquainted with their world. Some of the toponyms on Lopes' map, he noticed, correspond linguistically and sometimes geographically to those in Ptolemy's *Geographia* of the second century A.D. (as preserved in multiple copies not earlier than the late Byzantine period).

This volume is his attempt to elucidate the geography and toponyms of Ptolemy's map by comparing them with present-day toponyms and regions, and with those recorded during the colonial period in the native languages of relevant parts of the continent such as Hausa and Swahili and their translated meanings, and so to review the Africa known to the classical world. In the present volume, he develops his 'map' from the basic and not unreasonable assumption that these recent and modern toponyms have an extensive and continuous history over two thousand years and have remained little changed linguistically or in their descriptive meanings. Such lengthy associations are well-attested elsewhere, not least in Britain.

All eight books of the *Geographia* are discussed, but Lacroix concentrates on areas of problematic toponymic identification, mostly south of the Sahara in 'Black Africa'. Other areas closer to 'home' are considered in less detail. Several appendices also discuss, in relation to his conclusions about the *Geographia's* names, the locations of the Biblical 'Ophir' and ancient Egyptian 'Punt' on the east African coast, and the mid-first millennium B.C. voyage of Hanno along the west African coast.

The benefits of investigating outside one's own discipline are the fresh insights and broader perspective, elucidating what might be considered an otherwise closed research world. Unfortunately, the drawback of doing this is that the 'outsider' is insufficiently versed in the 'closed' discipline fully to consider the effects these fresh insights may have, or to comprehend that a better understanding would obviate the insight itself. The volume under consideration is an example of this dichotomy. Lacroix has brought with him the wider perspective of experience in historical European cartography and some insights into possible (reasonable and in some cases probable) associations between these more recent geographers and the ancient world recorded by Ptolemy, and by the even earlier voyages of Hanno, Hatshepsut's fleet and Solomon's ships. However, he has not the experience in dealing with the multiple problems inherent in ancient sources, and often takes information at face value without putting it into context. It is clear, moreover, that he has made little or no attempt to collaborate with a classical scholar, who would have been able to contribute 'internal' understanding and elucidate the problems that might develop from new place-name identifications. Lacroix's approach is developmental and interconnected; if a key place-name identification is inherently incorrect for reasons unconsidered by him, the evidence for others he derives from that location also is tainted and would need to be re-evaluated.

Appendix III, discussing the location of Punt and especially the ancient Egyptian voyage there in the reign of Hatshepsut, is the topic most familiar to this

reviewer. It is incredibly frustrating to read, offering the occasional flash of considerable insight coupled with an overwhelming lack of even tentative research leading to a most basic understanding of ancient Egyptian iconography, language and culture, or of scholarly methodology in these fields. His bibliography includes the work of no relevant Egyptologist, and clearly he made no effort to consult one. To explain his basic errors would take far more space than is available for this review, but let me state that his ultimate conclusion – that Punt should be located around Delagoa Bay on the Tanzanian coast – is one of the most bizarre and inherently absurd I have ever encountered. It is difficult to believe that these errors are avoided in the remainder of the book. Nonetheless, it forces readers to review the possible drawbacks of their own assumptions and ‘closed’ research parameters.

In a short review such as this, it is impossible to go into detail, but classical scholars should take note of this volume and develop their own conclusions. Despite my reservations, this volume should not be immediately dismissed. Lacroix produces considerable evidence for his topographical identifications from an entirely new perspective, which should be considered by future scholars of the *Geographia*. Much discussion can ensue, and relevant information can be found there. But be prepared to wade.

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## A HISTORY OF PLANTAIN CULTIVATION

*Taxonomic–Linguistic Study of Plantain in Africa.* By GERDA ROSSEL. Leiden: CNWS Publications, 1998. Pp. xvi + 361. Dfl 50/\$25 (ISBN 90-5789-004-6).

In this 1998 Ph.D. thesis from Wageningen Agricultural University, Gerda Rossel seeks to apply a comparative approach to the taxonomics of plantains (*Musa spp.* AAB) and to a host of words naming plantains and similar plants. Rossel uses this approach to propose ‘a general theory of the history of the plantain in Africa and its migratory routes’ (p. 9). She also considers areas of diversification and some of the ecological, cultural and agrarian factors which shaped diversification. The genetic diversity of *Musa* and the variety of its vocabulary imply a complicated history, indeed they imply multiple histories. The summary offered here necessarily compresses these stories in the extreme.

Rossel argues that *Musa* came to Africa from India, spread across Africa and then extended to the Americas. In Africa, plantain spread from an ancient center of diversity in West-Central Africa to much of the rest of Sub-Saharan West Africa (p. 52). In East Africa, two different ecological zones – lowlands and highlands – shaped the development and spread of *Musa* there. At the northern Swahili coast, Arabic-speakers brought one cultivar as early as the period between 400 B.C. and 600 A.D. However, its use as a food crop probably began after 800 A.D. (p. 221). Another cultivar was introduced after the emergence of Proto Southern Swahili, perhaps sometime after 1100 A.D. East African highland bananas (*Musa spp.* AAA, p. 17) came still later, but probably before the sixteenth century. A still later wave of introductions occurred in the sixteenth century consequent upon European trading along Africa’s subsaharan coasts. Demographic shifts, political realignments and economic change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries increased highland banana cultivation (pp. 209–21).

The book contains five parts. It opens with brief statements on objectives, methodology (so brief as to be nearly useless) and the working hypothesis already quoted. Part 2 reviews the botanical taxonomy of *Musa*, ensete and plantain. Here Rossel proposes a link between ensete cultivation and the domestication of *Musa*,

one of the most valuable threads in her book (pp. 2, 44). In Part 3, Rossel considers the distribution of diversity in plantain and banana cultivars in Africa. Part 4 presents linguistic evidence for Musa and ensete. Part 5 attempts a synthesis of the taxonomic, linguistic and documentary evidence and makes recommendations for further research. Four appendices, with separate runs of page numbers, present raw vocabulary evidence for plantain and banana cultivars in East and West-Central Africa. There is no index.

Rossel has achieved a great deal here. She offers an instrumental history of the spread of Musa in Africa that rests on a monumental body of evidence collected over nearly a decade of research, including more than four years of field work in Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Madagascar and throughout East Africa. But her decision to pursue questions of origins and diffusion pushes the cultural dimensions of these stories to the margins. The realities of completing a Ph.D. thesis require this sort of streamlining, but a book might be expected to present a more complete set of arguments on the cultural history of Musa.

Aside from wishing Rossel's book had placed people at its center, a more revealing (and, perhaps, fairer) criticism can be offered. Rossel largely fails to exploit fully the capacity of comparative linguistics to produce rich histories of words and things, especially when those histories may be placed alongside other histories based on comparative taxonomy, environmental change and the archaeology of food production. She avoids grappling with the extant genetic classifications of African language groups and their sub-groups. However contested these classifications may be, especially those of the macro-levels of Niger Congo or even of Narrow Bantu, they rest increasingly on evidence other than lexicostatistics.<sup>1</sup> These classifications offered Rossel a chance systematically to hang her work in linguistics on historical frameworks of language divergence, divergences that form successive chapters of innovation and continuity against which she could have examined her valuable work on areal features. It must be stressed that Rossel does produce important reflections on evidence for loan-spreads, analogy and their areal forms (pp. 101–71). But she largely ducks the admittedly time-consuming task of reconstructing Musa or ensete vocabulary within available genetic classifications of African languages. Given that Rossel seems to recognize these powers of historical linguistics (pp. 101–6), her decision not to engage them fully left this reviewer wondering what might have been. It may well leave readers unfamiliar with or downright skeptical of historical linguistics comfortable with their skepticism.

In short, then, Rossel's book represents a monumental beginning, short on cultural history and short of the fullest exploitation of the available evidence. But the book succeeds provisionally in its search for the origins and 'migratory routes' of Musa in Africa. This reviewer hopes that later researchers, including Rossel herself, will develop the promise of this book.

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<sup>1</sup> Among many others, see Kairn Klieman, 'Hunters and farmers of the western equatorial rainforest: economy and society, 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1880', (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1997); Mary McMaster, 'Patterns of interaction: a comparative ethnolinguistic perspective on the Uele region of Zaire, c. 500 B.C. to A.D. 1900', (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1988).

## HISTORY AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF CASTES

*Les Castes de l'Afrique Occidentale: Artisans et Musiciens Endogames*. By TAL TAMARI. (*Sociétés africaines*). Nanterre: Société d'Ethnologie, 1997. Pp. 464. FF270 (ISBN 2-901161-50-2; ISSN 0293-9118).

Tal Tamari has given historians of Africa a precious institutional and intellectual history. This long-awaited and ambitious work tackles the very complex ethnography and history of castes in the heart of Francophone West Africa. Based on a substantially revised *doctorat d'état* completed in 1987, the author has worked meticulously through a wide body of published material correlated with significant interviews. In her preface she promises to take another portion of the doctoral thesis to constitute the base of a second volume, comparing the castes of West Africa with groups of endogamous specialists in other parts of Africa and India.<sup>1</sup>

The core area of Tamari's field work and of her hypothesis is Mali, which in her judgement is the entity of greatest convergence of sources and the probable point of origin of castes and the caste system. She works extensively with oral traditions and Arabic documents dealing with the Malinke and other core Mande (she uses the term Mandingue) peoples.

From this core, Dr Tamari has broadened her canvas to give her work more relevance and authority, mastering the relevant ethnographic and historical literature on all of the peoples who have caste hierarchies in West Africa comparable to the Mande: the Wolof, Fulbe, Tokolor and nearby peoples, as well as the Moors and Tuaregs; this in itself is a remarkable achievement. In her reading she covers a geographic area extending from Mauritania and the Malian Sahara in the north into Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire in the south, and as far east as Burkina Faso and Niger. Her methods are historical, anthropological, sociological and linguistic.

She makes her first contribution in a contemporary ethnography of castes in which she brings her vast reading together to describe the castes, their occupations, training and distribution. Her linguistic skills are evident here, helping to show that the names of the castes and their profiles are obviously closely interrelated across the different languages and ethnicities of the region.

She then moves on to historical issues: the first appearance of castes; a hypothesis for their origin; and hypotheses about how the system spread. She concentrates on the Mandingue, Soninke and Wolof as ethnic groups which were sources of dissemination of castes to other societies. She then focuses on three castes: the griots, the smiths and the leather-workers, and argues for their existence by 1300 A.D. The evidence for the griots is particularly strong, since they appear in the Arabic chronicles of travellers such as Ibn Battuta. She makes an excellent case for the centrality of griots and smiths based on their critical skills and knowledge and the relatively greater amount of source material on them. By this time in her closely argued case, she has ample recourse to oral tradition, particularly that of Old Mali.

She then moves to a second and bolder hypothesis about the origins of castes: the Mali of Sunjata Keita and the conflict between Mali and the Soninke state of Sosso. She argues that Sumanguru, the king of Sosso, enhanced his stature and power by his relation to a cult of smithing and to musical traditions, in particular that of the *balafon*, which at the time was not known in Mali. In her argument,

<sup>1</sup> Tamari wrote a short English summary of some of her work in 'Linguistic evidence for the history of West African "castes"', in David Conrad and Barbara Frank (eds.), *Status and Identity in West Africa: the Nyamakalaw of Mande* (Indiana University Press, 1995), 61–85.



Sumanguru did not belong to a caste at this time, nor did his nephew Fakoli Doumbia, nor did Balla Faseke Kouyate, the companion of Sunjata. When Mali defeated Sosso at the battle of Kirina, Sunjata and his court saw the necessity of containing the threat which the cult and traditions might pose to Keita power in the future. He also sought to rein in Balla Faseke, who had gained a great deal of knowledge, and thus power, during his travels and exile in Sosso. Mali then created caste structures for smiths and griots: hereafter they would be endogamous groups who would serve the dynasty and not be able to contend for power. The author argues that the epic traditions which have come down through the centuries project the history of castes back further in time, but in fact are a distorted way of placing their origin in the period of Sunjata.

Tamari then moves to the later history of castes (*c.* 1450–1900), from the time of the emergence of the griots, smiths and leather-workers to the spread of these castes and the development of other castes in the wider area. Here she privileges linguistic data, and is able to make a convincing case for the stronger indigenous development of castes among the Mandingue, Soninke and Wolof and for a more externally derived development among other peoples. She carefully covers the expansion of musical traditions and smithing and the accompanying castes among the Moors and Tuareg, and notes the higher incidence of castes in the southern Sahara – another indication of spread from south to north. She also traces dispersion into more southern and forest regions: a rather complete system among the Senufo, and more attenuated practice among the Dan and Temne. She suggests that the Wolof and Tokolor may have developed the caste system even further, using it to construct the various categories of noble and free people. She does not force her hypothesis of origin among the Mandingue on the Soninke and Wolof, leaving open the possibility that the institution may have developed independently among those two ethnic groups.

In constructing her hypotheses she makes arguments from the sources – those contemporary with the emergence of the structures where possible, but also frequently from oral traditions collected in the twentieth century. She also makes arguments from silence and absence: for example, the lack of evidence about caste structures in the Ghana kingdom or in Sosso. She reasons that Sumanguru and his father could not have usurped and exercised power in Sosso had the caste structure been in operation at that time. Then, to buttress her case, she brings in analogous structures: joking relationships, with their interdiction of marriage and formalizing of the links between the two groups; the relations between the ‘masters’ of the land and those who hold political power; and the continuing importance of ancient dynasties well after their power has waned, such as the Keita of Old Mali and the Sonni of Songhay.

The author devotes considerable attention to the nature of the first castes created in Old Mali at the height of its power (*c.* 1235–1399). Initially the link between caste and occupation was more limited than in recent times; the first members of castes were former aristocrats who had considerable religious power because of their participation in cults, particularly those related to metalworking. Over time, castes became more closely linked to particular occupations and the recollections of aristocratic origins were forgotten. The author argues, by analogy with the structures of joking relationships between clans, that the castes were endogamous from the beginning, and that they spread from the Mali court to provincial courts and then to the countryside.

Tamari devotes some attention to what she calls the ‘modernization’ of castes, by which she means developments in the twentieth century. A whole chapter is devoted to the Sahara, especially the Moors and Tuareg groups in the regions adjacent to the Sahel, and to Timbuktu, where she finds the relics of castes. She criticizes what she considers to be false theories of caste creation and dispersion,

and looks closely at instances where slaves and free have become 'casted', swelling their ranks, and where people of caste origin have become free. Many of these developments occurred in the turbulent nineteenth century, just before European colonial rule was established.

Dr. Tamari moves carefully and clearly along her route. She indicates when she is on firm ground and when she is working on the basis of intriguing but not fully proven hypothesis. Her analysis of source material is extremely important. She makes an elaborate categorization of the different kinds of oral tradition of value to the historian, as well as an analysis of the Arabic chronicles generated by outsiders and by the authors of the *Ta'rikhs* composed in Timbuktu.

This carefully argued, multi-disciplinary institutional history is a major contribution to the understanding of West African history. At every point the argument and level of certainty is set out. A glossary, a series of indexes, and a vast bibliography make it an extremely useful point of reference. *Les castes de l'Afrique occidentale* is an invaluable work and a bold interpretation of the origins and expansion of an important set of institutions; it is a major watershed in West African historiography.

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## REGIONAL HISTORY

*Histoire du Pays Gouin et de Ses Environs (Burkina Faso)*. Par MICHÈLE DACHER. (Découvertes du Burkina). Paris and Ouagadougou: SÉPIA-A.D.D.B., 1997. Pp. 188. FFfr 113.74. (ISBN 2-84280-013-3).

Although interest in local histories of the peoples of Sub-Saharan Africa has grown enormously over the last twenty years, much work remains to be done. This book makes a beginning by recording the history of the south-west of Burkina Faso. It constitutes a valuable contribution to the understanding of the regional political and population dynamics in pre-colonial and colonial times.

The argument of the book is constructed to a large extent around an analysis of the relations between Gouin and Dyoula. The expansion of the Dyoula kingdom of Kong, early in the eighteenth century, forced the Gouin to migrate to the north. They occupied an area enclosed by two important trade routes, connecting Kong with cities along the Niger. The struggles to control these routes and to secure trade, involving rivalry among the Dyoula kingdoms of Kong, Gwiriko and Kéné Dougou, dominated the regional history until the end of the nineteenth century. Dacher sketches a vivid and detailed picture of the often violent relations between the Dyoula and 'autochthonous' population groups (wars and raids, but also trade), while her analysis of the debate on the nature of the Dyoula politics is highly interesting. She concludes that the Gouin, although sometimes engaged in the Dyoula armies, succeeded in escaping submission by means of a slow and long migration in small groups facilitated by their acephalous and segmentary social organization. This was no longer possible when the French colonizers established Dyoula chiefs to rule the local population in the south-west of Haute-Volta. Now, the Gouin were subjected to a system of 'double domination' with the Dyoula chiefs enforcing colonial exactions and exercising a regime of terror. Whereas the pre-colonial Dyoula influence on the Gouin remained limited, the impact during colonial rule was more substantial, notably because of the introduction of 'poles of power' in a formerly 'egalitarian' society, and the triggering of migration to the Côte d'Ivoire and the Gold Coast. Although the revolts of 1914–16 marked the start of a period during which Dyoula chiefs were pro-



gressively substituted by autochthonous chiefs, abuses continued, and the last chapter shows how Dyoula-autochthon rivalries still dominated local polities at the advent of independence in 1960, when federalist and anti-federalist political parties opposed one another.

Dacher critically assesses the sources at her disposal. Not only does she discuss, in general terms and in relation to her extensive ethnographic knowledge of the Gouin, the merits and shortcomings of oral data, she also precisely situates written documents, makes initial sources explicit, and demonstrates how, in earlier writings on the region, the Gouin were often confounded with other population groups. Thus, the enormous difficulties one faces when attempting to reconstruct the history of a population group such as the Gouin, whose success in remaining autonomous for so long has as its reverse side its silencing in many historical narratives. The book draws mainly on written sources, and hence on testimonies from colonial administrators and Dyoula informants, which results in an account where kings, war and canton chiefs, and colonial administrators hold the stage. Although sensitive to the differential impact of colonial events in particular on the 'common' people, oral data are often merely illustrative and do not add much to a better comprehension of the consequences of events for the intricacies of social life. Also, the role of the 'common' people in the making of their own history remains veiled. Dacher seems to acknowledge this with her call for further oral inquiries.

What is referred to as the Gouin region is inhabited by an ethnically diverse population. While focusing on the Gouin, Dacher succeeds wonderfully well in demonstrating the interconnectedness of their trajectories with those of other population groups. An important merit of the book is, moreover, its careful contextualization of ethnicity. In several instances the author demonstrates how ethnicity was strategically deployed and how ethnic affiliation was partly related to political office and economic occupation. Furthermore, this study emphasizes that the history of a migrating people such as the Gouin is marked by processes of confrontation, blending and assimilation with people encountered on the way, and that mobility patterns of different population groups are closely intertwined. These are issues of primary importance also in present-day Burkina Faso, where geographic mobility continues to constitute an essential factor in people's lives.

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## ROYAL WOMEN IN DANHOME

*Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey.* By EDNA G. BAY. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1998. Pp. xiii + 376. \$55 (ISBN 0-8139-1791-3); \$19.50, paperback (ISBN 0-8139-1792-1).

Un ouvrage de plus sur le Danhome. Que peut-il nous révéler que n'auraient pas signalé les dizaines d'études consacrées à ce royaume depuis le dix-huitième siècle? C'est dire que la tâche de Edna G. Bay est ardue, de vouloir produire une étude intéressante sur ce royaume. Il faudrait en effet aborder le Danhome sous un aspect inédit pour espérer retenir l'attention des universitaires et chercheurs, déjà largement instruits sur l'évolution politique, économique, sociale et culturelle de cet état. L'auteur semble avoir gagné la première partie de son pari en choisissant un créneau peu usité. Le titre en rend largement compte et rive l'attention du lecteur: *Les épouses du léopard. Genre, politique et culture dans le royaume du Danhome*. D'emblée la problématique nous positionne au coeur du problème. Le

Danhomé semble avoir été un état dans lequel les femmes ont joui d'extraordinaires pouvoirs et disposé d'une large autonomie d'action, des atouts qui en feront des interlocutrices incontournables dans les rouages de la vie politique, religieuse, économique et sociale du royaume. Pourquoi cette influence a-t-elle presque disparu avec l'intrusion du régime colonial? Pourquoi, au vingtième siècle, le pouvoir des femmes a-t-il été cantonné au domaine religieux? Nous voici au coeur d'un débat passionnant.

En dehors de cet objectif principal, l'ouvrage entend plus généralement jeter un regard neuf sur les institutions étatiques et leur fonctionnement, principalement la monarchie et le palais en tant que centre de décision, ainsi que les hommes et les femmes qui l'animent.

Notre analyse portera essentiellement sur l'importance et le rôle des femmes au Danhomé, et les origines du Danhomé. Concernant ce dernier point, l'auteur a tenté, à travers une relecture des mythes fondateurs du royaume, une nouvelle interprétation des faits. Elle n'innove certes pas en la matière, les faits et les versions évoqués étant déjà connus par ailleurs. Versions officielles et versions périphériques insistent sur le rôle fondateur de Tado, berceau historique des Aja, comme point de départ des Agasuvi. Or, le culte d'Agasu – le léopard – existerait sur le plateau d'Abomey avant l'arrivée des Alladohonou. Le culte du *Kpo* – léopard – y est associé aux Gedevis, premiers occupants du plateau, et dont serait issu Dakodonu, premier titulaire du trône. Adonon, la première *Kpojito* (littéralement: la mère du léopard) – en fait une sorte de reine-mère aux pouvoirs étendus – serait, selon certaines versions, un autre nom d'Aligbonon, 'la princesse de Tado', mère d'Agasu. Cette primauté des Gedevis se lit à travers la prééminence de l'*Agasunon*, grand-prêtre du culte du léopard, sur le roi lors de certaines cérémonies rituelles. Il y aurait eu, lors du règne d'Agaja, récupération par le pouvoir fon de l'histoire des Gedevis pour s'approprier idéologiquement et politiquement ces personnages importants du passé des premiers habitants du plateau.

Mais l'objectif primordial affiché par l'auteur demeure la mise en lumière du rôle éminemment important des femmes au Danhomé. Ce qu'elle réussit assez bien en nous faisant découvrir (ou redécouvrir):

- Le *Kpojito*, une fonction dévolue aux femmes, souvent d'origine roturière, à la cour des rois
- Le rôle des princesses qui, contrairement aux autres femmes, quand elles se marient, demeurent membres de la famille royale ainsi que leur progéniture
- Les ministres ont leur équivalent féminin. Mais leur rôle n'est pas clairement défini
- Une femme pouvait, tout comme un homme, occuper les fonctions de chef de famille ou diriger un couvent
- La fonction de *daklo* (intermédiaire entre le roi et ses invités lors des audiences) est traditionnellement occupée par une femme
- Sans oublier les amazones et leur légendaire bravoure

On est certes loin du compte si l'on songe au titre – accrocheur – de l'ouvrage qui laissait penser que toute l'étude serait consacrée à ce sujet. Mais les divers aspects évoqués ont été traités à travers une grande maîtrise des données, notamment orales, qui sont bien analysées.

Quelques remarques sur la forme. On relève quelques erreurs dues sans doute aux normes et habitudes anglo-saxonnes: l'Université du Bénin (au Togo) est différente de l'Université Nationale du Bénin (République du Bénin). L'usage du toponyme Dahomey pour désigner indistinctement le royaume précolonial (plus couramment *Danhomé* ou *Danxomé* chez les chercheurs africains) et la colonie française. L'usage de rejeter les notes à la fin de l'ouvrage est certes bien commode pour l'éditeur et l'imprimeur, mais peu pratique pour le lecteur.

Au total, une bonne étude avec quelques touches originales.

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NICOUÉ L. GAYIBOR

## WOMEN IN COMBAT

*Amazons of Black Sparta: The Women Warriors of Dahomey.* By STANLEY B. ALPERN. London: Hurst, 1998. Pp. xii + 280. £35 (ISBN 1-85065-361-5); £12.95, paperback (ISBN 1-85065-362-3).

One of Dahomey's most notable accomplishments was its institutionalization of female combat troops over a period of at least 60 years, and perhaps significantly longer. There is no comparable documented record elsewhere in world history of women in armed forces. One would expect Dahomean women soldiers to figure prominently in both military and women's history. The fact that they do not is an intriguing question that is itself worth examination.

This is the first book-length study in English devoted solely to the Dahomean women's army. Meticulously researched, it utilizes the classic published sources supplemented by archival records and difficult-to-find articles. In 21 chapters that range from 2 to 25 pages in length, Alpern explores themes that include origins, recruitment and training, uniforms and arms, battles and rewards, housing and ceremony, off-the-battlefield life and sexuality. The final six chapters follow the Dahomean women's forces through specific engagements from the 1830s through their defeat by the French in 1892. The treatment is descriptive, and all is painstakingly documented, even to the point of careful notation of discrepancies between published and draft journals of travellers.

The text is marred by the author's uncritical acceptance of the accounts and attitudes of his nineteenth-century sources. Terminology is striking and irritating. Women soldiers are called not only amazons but also warrioresses, soldieresses, huntresses, and archeresses, with Alpern drawing the line only at Richard Burton's talk of bayoneteeresses. The dated terminology goes beyond military roles, in phrases describing the lack of a concept of 'female bachelorhood', the propensity of young women to seek out 'young blades', and the description (twice) of the mixed-race commander of the French army of conquest as an 'octoroon'. Like many of his sources, Alpern highlights exotic and negative stereotypes both of women and of Africa. Basing a chapter on an Italian missionary's account of a mock attack performed at court, for example, he provides a sexualized description of a commanding officer: 'She was aged about thirty, slender but shapely, proud of bearing but without affectation. With her figure, European-type features and vivacious movements, the priest mused, one might have taken her for a Virgilian huntress... had it not been for her deep black color' (p. 15). The book is peppered with similar passages.

Alpern might have strengthened his account by evaluating evidence more rigorously and providing deeper context for his subject. He shows good judgement about his sources, expressing reservations like a cautionary 'if we can believe traditions gathered eight decades after the French conquest' (p. 99). Yet he seems to omit almost nothing found in archival and published accounts. For example, he cites an early twentieth-century source which claims that two-foot-long knives modelled on European straight-edged razors were used to excise enemy genitals, at the same time explaining why that was highly unlikely (pp. 66–7). Though he understands that there were both military and civilian women resident in the royal palaces, a distinction that is often difficult to discern in the sources, he tends to accept nineteenth-century writers' common designation of all women in the

palaces as 'amazons'. As a result, a chapter on 'Earning a living', with descriptions of menial enterprises carried out by palace inhabitants, many of whom were unlikely to have been soldiers, stands in awkward contrast to a chapter on 'A privileged life', which stresses soldiers' ownership of slaves who performed 'the menial tasks that were the common woman's fate' (p. 50). Finally, more context, particularly in the later chapters that deal with military engagements, would have enriched the story. For example, the male portion of the military, which was consistently larger than the female, is only mentioned in passing, and often only to support arguments about the women warriors.

A book that is evidently intended for a popular western, and specifically American, audience, *Amazons of Black Sparta* in the end distances us from the women soldiers of Dahomey. By insisting on linking the Dahomean warriors with myths of woman-dominated societies of antiquity, Alpern is unable to acknowledge that this was ultimately a modern army that engaged the forces of an industrial state. This not-so-distant example of women in combat deserves better.

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EDNA G. BAY

### ETHIOPIAN CHURCH HISTORY

*The Missionary Factor in Ethiopia*. Edited by GETATCHEW HAILE, AASULV LANDE and SAMUEL RUBENSON. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998. Pp. 215. £24, paperback (ISBN 3-631-33259-9).

This valuable collection of articles on Ethiopian church history deserves a warm welcome. It is wide-ranging, informative and includes a helpful diversity of viewpoints: Ethiopian Orthodox, Ethiopian Catholic, Ethiopian Protestant and missionary Protestant, that is to say Scandinavian. There are, however, some serious gaps, the most significant being the lack of extended Ethiopian Orthodox comment on the twentieth century. But the absence of any Catholic missionary voice reflecting on the modern Catholic presence in the non-Amharic south and west is also a pity.

Nevertheless a series of studies ranging from the middle ages to the late twentieth century that provides a sense of Ethiopian Christian history as a whole is exciting in itself, made more so by the quality of the best essays. Particularly valuable are Samuel Rubenson's study of the Abune Selama and Ezra Gebremedhim's account of Aleqa Taye, two highly contrasting nineteenth-century figures.

The underlying theme of the book is the discussion of what role 'missions' can fulfil in a country where there is an ancient and remarkable Christian church. It is a theme relevant for various other areas of eastern Europe and Asia where Catholics and Protestants have endeavoured to convert or reform an existing oriental Christian community. A first range of issues relates to how far this can be justified by the 'corruption' or 'heresy' of the church in question. Refusal to accept the authority of the Council of Chalcedon was, it seems, a far more serious matter for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jesuits than for twentieth-century popes. Circumcision was unacceptable then, acceptable now. Ecumenical tolerances have thus advanced a great deal, though nineteenth- and even twentieth-century Protestants could still find Ethiopian Orthodoxy so unacceptable in its practices, particularly Mariological, that despite initial intentions to work within and not against the established church, they inevitably came to create congregations of their own.

The behaviour of Justin de Jacobis, the nineteenth-century Lazarist who sympathised more with Ethiopian-style Christianity than almost any other

westerner, was precisely the opposite. While he did deliberately create a separate Ethiopian Catholic Church, submissive to the pope, he kept it most emphatically Ethiopian. In some ways that naturally pleased Ethiopian religious sentiment, but was in its own way actually more threatening. However few later Catholic missionaries have lived up to his ideals or failed to 'latinize' to a considerable extent, as the two chapters by Tekeste Negash and Ayele Teklehaymanot make clear.

Still more intractable issues arise in regard to all those parts of Ethiopia, especially south and west, where the Orthodox Church is hardly present and people have seen conversion to it as tantamount to Amharicization. What is seen as a desirable 'Ethiopicization' of a foreign 'westernized' church by one pair of eyes appears an unwelcome 'Amharicization' of a more locally indigenized church to another. The complexities of the missionary impact, considerable enough anywhere in Africa, are here at their most intricate. In a final chapter, Aasuly Lande appeals for the avoidance of moral criticism. Each group of missionary Christians from sixteenth-century Jesuits to twentieth-century Protestant fundamentalists or ecumenists is embedded within its own parameters of faith and appropriate religious behaviour, as are the long-suffering Ethiopian Orthodox themselves. No side should be subjected to wholesale denunciation, frequently though that has happened in the past. This set of studies, while far from definitive, should do much to explain why.

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ADRIAN HASTINGS

## SLAVERY IN CAMEROON

*Slave Settlements in the Banyang Country, 1800–1950.* By E. D. S. FOMIN and VICTOR JULIUS NGOH. Limbe: University of Buea Publications, 1998. Pp. vii + 115. No price or ISBN given.

Historians in Africa exercised considerable restraint in participating in the vivid and controversial debates about slavery in Africa, debates lasting for more than three decades now. Moreover, the curricula of most African universities allow for teaching about slavery only in the context of the transatlantic slave trade. Thus this booklet on slave settlements in Banyang (now part of the South-west Province of Cameroon) deserves attention. It was researched and written by two Cameroonians who live and teach under often precarious conditions in their home country, and it was published locally – these days unfortunately an exceptional case for an academic book in this part of the world.

Especially during the nineteenth century, the Banyang were deeply involved in the local long-distance slave trade between the Central Grassfields and the Atlantic Coast of Cameroon. Although they were primarily slavers, the Banyang retained a large number of slaves within their society. Fomin and Ngoh mainly focus on the creation, the organization and the functions of the settlements in which the slaves were segregated. The book offers interesting material, although it suffers from a number of shortcomings. The authors claim, for example, that 'the Banyang slave settlements were the most conspicuous structural organization of slavery in Cameroon', but surprisingly do not employ a comparative perspective in order to support this point. The book also contains some contradictory statements about the extent to which Banyang slaves were exploited by their masters.

What is perhaps most valuable about this study is that the authors provide us with another case of the 'slow death for slavery'. Based on material from the still very much under-used National Archives in Buea and on interviews, they show that in this part of Cameroon, slavery remained an important feature during the

first decades of colonial rule and was never seriously attacked by the Germans or by the subsequent British colonizers. In Banyang society, the descendants of slaves often have become more prosperous than the freeborn. Still, the stigma of slave origin could never be fully erased. As in many other parts in Africa, even to this day, it is considered highly impolite, even dangerous, to speak openly about the servile origins of any resident, although everyone knows that a considerable part of the 'indigenous' population is descended from slaves.

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ANDREAS ECKERT

### AFRICAN PASTORS WRITE HISTORY

*The Recovery of the West African Past: African Pastors and African History in the Nineteenth Century: C. C. Reindorf and Samuel Johnson.* Edited by PAUL JENKINS. Basel: Basel Mission Bookshop, for Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1998. Pp. 212. DM45 (ISBN 3-905141-70-1).

This collection of essays contains seven papers originally presented at an international seminar held at Basel, Switzerland, 25–27 October 1995, in centenary celebration of the publication of Carl Christian Reindorf's *History of the Gold Coast and Asante* (Basel, 1895), and, in part, to build upon an extract from Raymond George Jenkins' discussion concerning Reindorf in his Ph.D. dissertation 'Gold Coast historians and their pursuit of the Gold Coast past, 1882–1915', (University of Birmingham, 1985). The editor attached Jenkins' extract as an appendix to this work and obtained two additional contributors who discussed Samuel Johnson and his importance as an initiator of African history by Africans or persons of African descent. The editor also includes a 'unified' bibliography of works cited, but does not include an index.

After a brief introduction, these essays appear in three sections. In the first, Peter Haenger and John Parker discuss aspects of Reindorf's character/temper and responses to his identity as African or 'mulatoo' within white mission and colonial establishments. In section two, essays on the question of accommodation or dialectic between Christianity and indigenous culture are reflected in the writings of Reindorf (by Thomas Bearth), of Johnson (by J. F. A. Ajayi) and mainly of Johnson but with some comparison to Reindorf (by J. D. Y. Peel). The third group of essays, by Emmanuel Akyeampong, Adam Jones, T. C. McCaskie, and Albert Wirz, all focus on Reindorf the historian. Of the nine papers, plus the extract from Jenkins' dissertation, only one focused only upon Johnson and only one attempted to draw a comparison between these two historians.

While all the essays in this collection are worthwhile in their own right, the question remains about the precise topic of this collective effort. What was the intended subject – Reindorf, Johnson, Reindorf and Johnson, Jenkins, the role of African pastors in writing history, or the Basel mission? If any one of those topics was the intended focus, then all contributors missed their target to some degree. Even the editor seemed uncertain, describing the seminar itself as 'an act of historical *Wiedergutmachung*', or 'we are sorry'. The essays by Ajayi and Peel on Johnson are indeed excellent, but they seem to have been artificially added, perhaps to broaden the subject's scope. The rest of the papers, with perhaps the exception of Jones, seem to have been written for the conference. As with all conferences and their products, one can endlessly debate whether such papers can ever be rewritten sufficiently to serve another and equally laudable purpose. This is a better-than-average attempt, but there remain uneasy differences, qualitative unevenness and a lingering impression that at least one author had never read Reindorf before receiving his assignment to write an essay.



Aside from Ajayi's and Peel's interesting essays, Haenger provides a fascinating peek into Reindorf's world of social relationships and especially those involving slavery and pawnship. Parker's tightly written and occasionally frustrating essay serves as a good short biography for Reindorf and reminds us that oral sources, once written and published, have a tendency to acquire the status of authenticated sources. Bearth focuses on Johann Christaller, a linguist whose principal interests were with *Twi* and *Ga*, who was Reinhold's collaborator in his *History*, and details his influence upon Reindorf's use of local words, something unusual for the 1890s. Akyeampong's essay focuses on the detail of Reindorf's narrative, and only another Reindorf authority can adequately analyze this essay. Jones, in typical Jones style, places Reindorf in his time, his ethnic group and the attitudes expected of his class and rank, and especially in the world of German missions. Of the contributors, McCaskie is clearly the best Reindorf scholar, but even he seems to be more interested in what Reindorf says than he is in Reindorf the historian. And, for those of us who don't understand Akan, he ends with an Akan expression, which he does not bother to translate. Wirz is fascinated with the topic, if only a bit belated in his introduction to it.

Non-Ghanaian specialists will appreciate this short introduction that discusses Reindorf from several perspectives and draws some comparison with Johnson, effectively placing both against a larger African landscape.

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BRUCE MOUSER

## WARFARE IN COLONIAL AFRICA

*Wars of Imperial Conquest in Africa, 1830-1914.* By BRUCE VANDERVORT (Warfare and History). London: UCL Press, 1998. Pp. xviii + 274. £45 (ISBN 1-85728-486-0); £13.95, paperback (ISBN 1-85728-487-9).

Bruce Vandervort has provided a valuable service in this brief survey of the military side of colonial conquest in Africa. He reviews the literature on colonial conquest in Africa, using both Africanist and military history literatures, and seeks both to provide a general explanation for the conquest and to evaluate the results of the methods used in the conquest on African and European militaries. The book breaks no new ground but could serve as a useful, if limited, teaching tool.

Vandervort's analysis begins with a brief overview of the state of military studies about Africa. He claims to place himself in the camp of the 'new military history' which seeks to place war in a social context. He then explores that context by outlining the military structures of African societies in the nineteenth century. He follows with a review of the scramble for Africa, concentrating on the motives and capabilities of the European powers that claimed portions of the continent. The bulk of his book is taken up in a chronological study of conquest, beginning in 1830 with the French invasion of Algeria and ending with the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911. He concludes with a few remarks on the creation of colonial military establishments, their service in the wars waged by the imperial powers in the twentieth century, and the legacy for post-colonial African states of those institutions as well as for European militaries on the eve of the First World War.

Given the breadth of the topic and the compactness of the volume, one hardly expects that every significant campaign could be covered in detail (for example, little mention is made of German actions anywhere on the continent before the Herero and Maji Maji uprisings in 1905). More seriously, Vandervort's commitment to a broader analysis of warfare in colonial Africa has limitations which raise serious questions about his conclusions. He argues that the ability of

Europeans to recruit indigenous forces gave them their greatest military advantage, followed closely by the inability of African leaders to make large and firm enough alliances in the face of European attacks. He downplays the significance of technical differences, noting that African militaries often defeated better armed European-led forces in battle, that machine guns of various sorts did not come into wide use until after 1900, and that both African and European-led militaries faced difficult logistic problems in keeping troops in the field healthy and fed. As relevant as all of those factors are in general, and as much as the importance of such factors varied in particular cases, it creates a false dichotomy to argue that 'serious shortcomings on the African side...contributed at least as much to the African defeat as did superior European firepower' (p. 55). The author seems to lose sight of his goal of contextualizing military conflict by limiting technology in this instance to firepower.

Vandervort's book provides a brief introduction to the scope of military activity involved in the European conquest of Africa. His work could play a fruitful role in undergraduate classes, especially coupled with specialized readings on specific cases, but Africanists will find little new here as well as some jarring notes. Vandervort consistently uses the term 'tribe' in the vague and misleading manner of most non-specialists, and it seems odd to see African historiography broken down into 'Anglo-American', 'African' and 'non-English' schools.

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GREGORY H. MADDOX

## COLONIAL LAND LAW

*Our Laws, Their Lands: Land Laws and Land Use in Modern Colonial Societies.*

Edited by JAP DE MOOR and DIETMAR ROTHERMUND. Münster, Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1994. Pp. 172. \$38 (ISBN 3-8258-2097-1).

Debate and conflict about issues relating to access to land and its resources has been a central theme in the history of many countries in the world. Increasing pressure on resources means that the landless are increasingly looking to history to justify claims to land that was alienated during the colonial period. A collection of papers which explores the ways in which colonial powers exported and applied new legal frameworks which challenged or changed existing conventions about land addresses a crucial topic; it is therefore particularly unfortunate that this volume leaves the reader feeling unsatisfied.

The problem with this book lies in its structure. The title tempts the reader to expect wide ranging conceptual debates about the clash between local and imported systems of land law, which would include a comparative assessment of the impact of different forms of European colonialism and factors which produced regional variations. The raw material for such a work is indeed here, as there are some interesting case studies. However, the book opens with an introductory chapter just four pages long which is inadequate to signpost the themes that a reader should look out for in the diverse chapters that follow. It is clear that such concerns were addressed in the discussion that followed the presentation of each paper at the conference that precipitated the book. However, these critical debates have merely been summarized and reproduced in a brief section at the very end of the volume. The reader is thus given criticism of a paper at a considerable distance from their reading of it. The debate should rather have been the basis for the revision of the original conference papers and a more substantial introductory essay. It is unfortunate that the book's structure gives the reader the impression that the book is a product of the recent 'pressure for publication' in the academic

world. There has been inadequate editorial intervention and the apparent lack of revision is particularly surprising given that the book was not actually published until three years after the original conference.

The broad sweep of issues that might have been more effectively dealt with is largely covered in the comments and final statement to the conference made by Gordon Woodman. Woodman raises three areas of interest that deserve further exploration. Firstly, he points out that the case studies presented at the conference are in fact 'a survey of failures' that actually reveal the 'essential weakness of the colonial state' in its ability effectively to impose colonial land law. In his own paper, focusing on Ghana and Nigeria, he argues that it is more accurate to talk of 'the creative use of imported law' than of 'legal colonialism'.

Secondly, an exploration of the variation in the gap between policy and practice would lead to further discussion of differences between the colonial powers and the context of competition between different interest groups in which colonial legislation was drawn up. The case studies in the volume cover all the major European colonial powers except Portugal, and suggest ways in which this theme might have been developed. Woodman's final major point is that the conference contained no paper on areas such as southern Africa that experienced large-scale European settlement in rural areas. A contrast between the application of land law in these regions with those covered by the papers in the book seems another constructive direction for future research.

One might add that the legalistic slant of the papers might have been complemented by a paper that discussed the symbolic impact of the changing meaning of 'land' as contained in new colonial land laws. As Dietmar Rothermund points out in the introduction, 'Almost everywhere outside Europe land itself was not considered a marketable commodity' (p. 1). The impact of legal boundaries of ownership were bound to have had a particularly profound impact on communities which had practiced a system of 'shifting cultivation' or pastoralism.

The case studies in the book will be of interest to those with a specialist interest in legal history or land issues in the countries covered. Individual contributions concentrate on Ghana, Nigeria, Camerons, Surinam, India and Indonesia, whilst others provide a broader survey of Francophone West Africa, Belgian Central Africa and Latin America. The papers by Woodman and by Eckert are particularly effective in demonstrating the extent to which local actors played a significant role in the evolution of legal practices regarding land in West Africa. However, the most positive contribution of the book is perhaps the way in which its contents suggest new items for the research agenda. It is to be hoped that future collaboration between the network of historians involved in this publication will be able to build on the collection of case studies they present.

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JEREMY SILVESTER

## FRENCH COLONIAL POLICY

*A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930.* By ALICE L. CONKLIN. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998. Pp. xiii + 367. £37.50/\$55 (ISBN 0-8047-2999-9).

Alice Conklin has reviewed the papers and the careers of the governors general of French West Africa, 1895–1930, with a focus on the evolution of their ideas and policies. The six governors general were Ernest Roume, William Ponty, François Clozel, Joost van Vollenhoven, Martial Merlin, and Jules Carde. Conklin reviews their policies through the prism of a French civilizing mission. As she portrays it, the implementation of that mission emphasized policies of assimilation until, in the

course of World War I, an emphasis on association came to predominate. Her review of colonial policy at the federation level is a welcome addition to the literature on government in Africa.

In an early chapter, the author explicates the idea of the French civilizing mission through the Napoleonic adventure in Egypt, leading to some nice comparisons between French colonial policy in Egypt and in West Africa. In her hands, the debates on the nature of a republican empire, on the universality or national specificity of French culture, and on racial and cultural hierarchy are all intertwined and contained within the term 'mission civilisatrice'.

Conklin intends that her analysis link the administration in Dakar with France and West Africa. The government general is personalized in the text as 'Dakar', and its evolving approach is contrasted with that of 'Paris'. In practice, however, there is no specific focus on Paris in the book; nor is there archival work on officials there equivalent to that in Dakar, nor much text on debate between Dakar and Paris. The author's hypothesis that the ideas and actions of Dakar became significant in the development of the metropole, while attractive, does not benefit from a sustained test.

Conklin gives more attention to documenting a turning point in colonial policy. She argues that assimilation gave way to association during World War I, as exemplified by the growing effort to appoint chiefs from traditional ruling families. Her chronology of the successive dominance of policies is plausible overall. Conklin cites the relevant local studies, but relies insufficiently on them and thus exaggerates the change in policy. First, she does not account for how much the individual chiefs and their offices had changed after decades of French rule. She downplays the administrative practice, in recognizing chiefs, of supporting one ruling-family faction against another on political grounds. Second, she downplays the political campaigns of African citizens and would-be citizens of France. These activists developed an African rhetoric of the republic, criticizing the colonial government for playing the role of the *ancien régime*. Their growing force provided one major reason for the administration to strengthen the chiefs as an alternative.

Conklin's portraits of the governors general and their political principles are nicely detailed. Yet, rather than provide a picture of the full bureaucracy of the government general and its functioning, she focuses on the governors general alone. For instance, she gives little emphasis to fiscal affairs: she describes AOF's initial loans, just after 1900, but does not follow up the story of what happened with loans, with taxes and expenditures. The costs of war, inflation and deflation all had dramatic impact on the situation of the governors general after 1914 and, one would think, on their policies.

In sum, Conklin has used her researches in the Dakar archives to argue effectively that French West Africa was guided by a coherent ideology, enunciated by successive governors general, which evolved in large part through its own internal logic. The author did not find sufficiently specific ways to show the links and tensions of this ideology either with those of metropolitan France and the national government, or with the various African political communities it governed. But she has revealed the centrality of the governors general and their administrative tradition, and has set the framework for further research.

## THE BODY IN QUESTION

*The Anatomy of Power: European Constructions of the African Body*. By ALEXANDER BUTCHART. London and New York: Zed Books, 1998. Pp. xiv + 220. £42.50/\$62.50 (ISBN 1-85649-539-6); £14.95/\$22.50, paperback (ISBN 1-85649-540-x).

The representation and institutional control of the bodies of Africans was a major theme in the encounter between Western European and African societies, a fact which Africanist scholars have been slow to recognize and even slower to study. In *The Anatomy of Power: European Constructions of the African Body*, Alexander Butchart tackles this rich vein of evidence and experience. His analysis is frequently interesting and useful, and at times, markedly original. However, this book will ultimately and unfortunately serve as Exhibit A for overwrought Africanists who fear the spread of what they often misleadingly characterize as 'postmodernism'. In this case, their fears are warranted. I have seldom read a work more handcuffed by needless theoretical rigidity, or more afraid to explore the complexities of its own subject matter.

Butchart's study pursues a rigorously Foucauldian approach to the history of the European construction of 'the African body'. This strategy has the basic peculiarity that it is a relentlessly systematic application of a profoundly anti-systematic thinker. However, the scope of the book also exposes fundamental problems with its evidentiary foundation. For example, Butchart unwisely chooses to extend the authority of his analysis to cover all European constructions of African bodies, even though he acknowledges that most of the texts that he uses to reconstruct that discursive field are from or about South Africa. His account of the transition from the Renaissance's 'African body' to what he calls the taxonomic body, numerous early modern narratives of Portuguese, Dutch and French travellers are given short shrift in comparison to those written in English – an omission repeated with later eras and later colonizers.

Similarly, Butchart's sweeping characterizations of the secondary literature are based on a relatively limited range of works. Megan Vaughn's work on illness is referred to several times (and strangely chided for its insufficiently Foucauldian perspective), but relevant works by scholars like Luise White and Nancy Rose Hunt – published contemporaneously with some of the other works cited – go unmentioned. Therefore, when Butchart offers his strongly utilitarian and reductionist reading of the available scholarship, a reading that indiscriminately lumps the work of scholars like Maynard Swanson and Randall Packard into a common discursive domain with colonial authorities, it comes off all the weaker. With both primary and secondary works, the omissions are notable only because Butchart insists on a perspective of unlimited scope and authority. Less magisterial arguments would demand less exhaustively comprehensive command of the relevant material.

There are more critical issues at stake here. The attribution of all representations of African bodies to a single and unitary discursive mode of power completely flattens out contradictory and divergent representations of African bodies within the colonial archive, as well as the complex and uneven relationship between those representations and institutional practice in the colonial era. It is hard to see why Butchart dwells in detail on the precise content of particular passages to be found within the archive: he already knows what he will find there before he begins to read.

The book also avoids a serious engagement with what Foucault called 'governmentality'. Foucault recognized that different discourses exercised different and often quite particular forms and degrees of institutionalized authority.

For all that Butchart terms his book an anatomy, he rendering of various constructions of 'the African body' ultimately tends to reduce all such constructions to an undifferentiated mass whose forms of authority were more or less boundless and monolithic. He traces missionary discourses, medical discourses, managerial discourses, discourses of urban planners, and yet, because he so strongly rejects the social historians' account of the institutions that generated these discourses, he has no real way to appreciate or explain the different purposes that each might have served, their correspondence with particular and constrained modes of power in African colonial societies.

The most frustrating missed opportunity is the failure to explore one of the most profound absences in Foucault's own work, namely what happens when two disparate epistemic formations meet and conflict contemporaneously (as opposed to one episteme succeeding the other over a period of centuries). Despite Ann Laura Stoler's recent attempt to explore the implications of colonialism for Foucauldian ideas about power,<sup>1</sup> a great deal remains to be said on this subject. This book does nothing to fill that gap: in fact, it characterizes such an investigation as theoretically retrograde. Perhaps the most banal and superficial scholarly critique in Africanist circles is to complain that a work lacks 'African voices', so I do not wish to be misunderstood here. The problem in this instance is not so simple. The irony is that because Butchart lumps together virtually all scholarly work and colonial texts together within a common discursive domain that names 'the African body' as the subject of a particular form of power, his own categorical and deliberate failure to consider the different and diverse ways in which African societies made bodies the subject of various indigenous regimes of power and truth makes him subject to the force of his own stringent critique of discourses about 'the African body'. Unfortunately, Butchart acknowledges this very point in his conclusion, and describes his book as a 'tactic of provocation' which he admits is no more outside 'the loop of power' than anything it comments upon. This makes the book less a provocation that opens new lines of inquiry than an ouroboros, a snake that swallows itself and leaves little trace of its existence.

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TIMOTHY BURKE

### PROBLEMATIZING ETHNICITY

*Die Konstruktion von Ethnizität: Eine politische Geschichte Nord-West Ghanas, 1870–1900* [*The Construction of Ethnicity. A Political History of Northwestern Ghana, 1870–1900*]. By CAROLA LENTZ. (Studien zur Kulturkunde, 112). Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, 1998. Pp. 690. DM 128 (ISBN 3-89645-207-x).

It has by now become a commonplace to regard social identities – from the community through the ethnic group to the nation – as 'produced', 'constructed' or 'imagined'. However, few historians have taken seriously the task to show, in a truly comprehensive manner, how these 'constructions' have actually emerged over time. In her book about the political history of the Dagara in Ghana's Upper West Region, Carola Lentz studies these processes. She does so in a theoretically well-founded way, and at a historical and analytical depth that is breathtaking.

Lentz studies ethnicity as a product not only of administrative, anthropological and missionary intervention, but of local agency as well. While both sides are always present in her analysis, their relative strength over time is already indicated by the

<sup>1</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, 1995).



titles of the two sections of the book: the 'colonial transformation of the political landscape' up to the late 1940s; and the 'appropriation and revision of colonial constructs' in local politics later on.

The first section sets out with an analysis of 'local concepts of social belonging and territoriality' (p. 48) during the second half of the nineteenth century. Lentz paints a picture of 'a complex network of alliances and enmities between political units with different territorial reach and comprising different degrees of permanence in their internal power relationships' (p. 89) without clear-cut ethnic identities and boundaries. She then analyzes in great detail the construction of the ethnic landscape by British colonial officers and government anthropologists. While their perceptions and theoretical starting points differed markedly from each other, leading to intense debates within the colonial service, their administrative practice remained rather straightforwardly oriented towards stabilising colonial rule. However, Lentz does not limit herself to the study of the colonial discourse about 'tribes' and how to rule them. She also writes a micro-history of colonial occupation, administrative (re-)structuring and African reaction. She looks at the ways individual chiefs were made, and how they made themselves; at the codification of 'custom' and 'tradition' during native authority conferences in the 1930s; at the symbols of colonial power; at the role of migrant labour in the formation of an ethnic identity; and at the Catholic church that created parish boundaries which were often different from administrative definitions of 'tribal' territories and 'native states'.

The second section of the book begins with an analysis of the new discourses about ethnicity which evolved in the 1950s, the era of the 'Ethnographic Survey of Africa' and of Jack Goody's research in the area. Lentz analyses how local government reform, as a central aspect of the early policies towards decolonization, operated at the grassroots level in an area far away from the centres of nationalist political activities, resulting in practice in the dominance of the chiefs in local politics that in many ways still continues today. The 1950s were 'the time when politics came' (p. 456) to Northwestern Ghana. In contrast to experiences from other parts of Africa, party political conflict in this area did not evolve primarily along ethnic boundary lines, but frequently cross-cut them, and political parties were not able simply to instrumentalize ethnicity for their own purposes. However, conflicts – about land access and taxation, between competing communities, and between strangers and those regarding themselves as 'indigenous' – were numerous. Struggles for political hegemony – between the chiefs, and between the parties – resulted in several rounds of restructuring of local administrative and political units. Lentz ends her book with a detailed analysis of the organizational landscape that evolved in the 1970s and 1980s. Local and ethnic associations were formed which, once again, redefined the concepts of local and ethnic belonging, and they constructed ethnic identities by means of cultural displays and appeals to 'unity and development'.

Lentz shows convincingly that the stale debate between 'primordialist' and 'instrumentalist' theories of ethnicity can be overcome by empirical historical case studies (p. 627) which accept that the 'contents' or meaning of 'ethnicity' – like that of 'nation' – differ considerably in different parts of the world, despite the use of the same term. Lentz shows the many facets of ethnicity: a colonial construct adapted and reconfigured by the very people on whom this construct was imposed; an instrument employed in political struggles 'outside', but also an instrument to integrate a community 'within'. At the same time, her book extends into numerous other fields. It analyzes the operation of the colonial and post-colonial state at the grassroots level. With an extensive treatment of debates among colonial administrators and anthropologists, it links the history of a rather marginal area in West Africa with the history of anthropology as a discipline. And it provides a

fascinating account of the debates among historians and intellectuals about local, lineage and Dagara history in relation to the formation of an ethnic identity.

Lentz's book is an extraordinarily well-researched and rich study. Without devoting extensive space to reviews of existing literature, the book has a clear theoretical framework that organizes the presentation of the massive empirical evidence. The publication of an English translation would allow it to make the impact it deserves.

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## ECOLOGICAL HISTORY

*Reframing Deforestation: Global Analysis and Local Realities: Studies in West Africa.* By JAMES FAIRHEAD and MELISSA LEACH. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. Pp. xxv + 238. £50 (ISBN 0-415-18590-4); £17.99, paperback (ISBN 0-415-18591-2).

In *Reframing Deforestation*, James Fairhead and Melissa Leach present a vigorous challenge to policymakers to reconsider the progressive, unilinear analysis of deforestation that has prevailed in forest-policy literature on West Africa from the early colonial period to the present. This analysis, Fairhead and Leach argue, has frequently led to environment and development policies that have erroneously blamed local people for deforestation, excluded them from resource management, and damaged their livelihoods. A more accurate portrayal of West African forest history would instead recognize that forest-savanna dynamics are not one-way processes, that some forested areas were savanna in the past, and that local people have played a significant part in enriching the forest and savanna.

Fairhead and Leach do not deny that the forest zone of West Africa has undergone deforestation, but they argue that 'deforestation during the twentieth century has been significantly exaggerated in every country' they examine in their study (p. 183). They note that in the six West African countries (Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana, Benin, Togo, and Sierra Leone) under consideration, the orthodox estimate for forest area lost since 1900 is between 25.5 and 30.2 million hectares. Yet their systematic re-evaluation of the figures dramatically reduces deforestation by about two-thirds, suggesting actual losses of 9.5 to 10.5 million hectares (p. 183).

In separate chapters, Fairhead and Leach review the deforestation literature of each country and show why the orthodox figures for deforestation are wrong. They argue that much of the exaggeration of deforestation can be attributed to erroneous assessments of the extent of forest cover at the end of the pre-colonial period. Unwarranted present-day assumptions that in 1900, forest existed throughout the bioclimatic 'forest zone' have greatly inflated deforestation rates. Likewise, vague or changing definitions of what constitutes forest have contributed to deeply flawed deforestation statistics; some studies for example exclude all farmland and palm and kola orchards within forest confines while others do not. Such errors, Fairhead and Leach argue, are the result of the uncritical and selective use of data such as air photographs or previous forest estimates, the practice of deducing vegetation history from present vegetation forms, and the failure to consider thoroughly historical and social anthropological data.

In case after case, Fairhead and Leach show that there is enough contrary evidence to question not only the rates but to undermine the deforestation analysis that sustains them. This deforestation analysis assumes the existence at time of an ecologically-balanced pristine forest that was lightly populated or had no settle-

ments at all. It sees the presence of humans in the forest zone as disruptive of that equilibrium. Deforestation, it is held, has been caused by progressive population growth or the migration of populations into the forest zone resulting in the clearing of new land for farming; in some cases this process is dated to as late as the beginning of the colonial period (for instance, in Liberia and Ghana). But Fairhead and Leach counter that some areas deemed lightly populated in the past in fact sustained sizeable farming communities, and that periods of depopulation as well as of population growth have shaped the forest history of West Africa. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, for example, there is considerable historical evidence of depopulation at the beginning of the colonial period as a result of colonial wars, while in Ghana the forest zone population may well have been larger in 1800 than in 1900.

Fairhead and Leach also systematically rebut the view that savanna has been created by farmers chipping away at the northern margins of the forest. Bringing together what might have been dismissed as isolated cases – their own work in Guinea and material from each of the other countries considered – they show over and over again that patches of forest in the savanna zone previously seen as relics of forest are very likely anthropogenic and part of careful efforts by farmers to enrich their environment. In a number of cases, it appears that forest now exists where there was savanna in the past. Instead of a progressive, human-induced deforestation, Fairhead and Leach suggest that the forest history of West Africa is characterized by complex, multidirectional population–vegetation dynamics that included periods of forest retreat and expansion resulting from climate change, human actions and population movement, growth and decline.

*Reframing Deforestation* raises broader questions about why this analysis of deforestation became entrenched during the colonial period and why it has persisted more recently in spite of new interpretations of forest history in West Africa. Fairhead and Leach point to tight networks among French and British experts during the colonial period which encouraged the emergence of a pan-West African orthodoxy. This orthodoxy, institutionalized within forestry administrations and policies, was reinforced by prevailing views of West African history which saw the onset of colonial rule as unleashing dramatic forces of change – including population growth and agricultural innovation – leading to rapid transformations in land use.

Fairhead and Leach see little change in the prevailing orthodoxy among policymakers in the last forty years, in spite of independence, extensive historical research and new approaches to ecology that have abandoned the notion of 'equilibrium' in nature. In seeking to explain the resilience of deforestation analysis, Fairhead and Leach point to such immediate reasons as the fact that a generation of botanists and foresters had already been trained in ways that did not prioritize detailed historical research. Likewise, independent governments did not change their inherited colonial forestry codes: some in fact were able to consolidate power and enforce these codes more vigorously than before. More fundamentally, Fairhead and Leach, drawing on the work of Emery Roe, argue that the deforestation 'narrative' has persisted because it simplifies a complex situation and facilitates action. In particular, they make the case that 'the strength of deforestation analysis lies in the interstices of disciplines'. Forest research relies on expertise from both the natural and the social sciences and analysts from a particular discipline tend 'to rely on simplifications from other disciplines to frame their broader research questions and trajectories' (p. 190).

Fairhead and Leach do not purport to provide definitive answers to the questions they raise about deforestation in West Africa. Their study shows that much research remains to be done on each of the cases they discuss before we will fully understand the historical and present-day dynamics of land use and

population in West Africa's forest zone. But their thorough, devastating and convincing critique of accepted wisdom about deforestation in West Africa effectively alerts social scientists and policymakers to the pitfalls in the collection and interpretation of evidence that their predecessors have not always avoided.

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MONICA M. VAN BEUSEKOM

## LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND SCIENCE

*Science and Power in Colonial Mauritius*. By WILLIAM K. STOREY. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997. Pp. viii + 238. £40.00 (ISBN 1-58046-015-1).

Colonialists liked to justify their rule in terms of bringing the benefits of modern science to benighted savages or uncouth settlers, a myth which is exploded in this fine study by William Storey. He demonstrates in detail the complex interplay in the development of useful knowledge about sugar canes, essentially between metropolitan scientists, the largely self-taught local elite, and Creole or South Asian smallholders. In a striking aside, he shows that New Guineans knew about the fertility of canes long before European scientists. The late nineteenth-century shift from collecting varieties of cane to breeding them in agricultural stations moved the balance of power towards scientists and away from folk knowledge, albeit not always decisively. The Franco-Mauritian elite fought tenaciously to maintain its input into the control of science, a fight made all the more bitter by the sense of being a conquered people. Similarly, the practical common sense of Creole and South Asian smallholders often gave a particular twist to the outcome of scientific advances. Their championing of the Uba variety of cane ultimately turned out not to have been as conservative and ill-judged as colonial officials and Franco-Mauritian planters alleged, as high-fibre varieties meant greater resistance to cyclones and more fuel. This made it all the more exploitative to have financed agricultural research in part from taxes paid by peasants, while keeping them out of decision making, and for a long time even refusing to let them benefit from the research.

For all this, peasant knowledge remains somewhat undervalued in this book, because of a lingering belief in the superiority of the estate. Estates may have achieved higher yields, but at what cost? Economies of scale lay in the sugar factory, not in the cane fields. The notion that small producers were less efficient and produced at a higher cost, which is occasionally put forward, runs contrary to Storey's own account of cane fields being progressively divided up and sold or leased to smallholders. Moreover, the author does not combat with sufficient vigour the myth propagated by settlers and officials that Chinese and Indian traders were parasitic 'usurers'. In reality, they were the essential economic and intellectual link between the peasant and the wider world, the guarantors of the maximum efficiency of smallholders, as long as competition between traders was strong. Co-operative credit banks, the universal panacea in the view of colonial officials around the tropics, met with the usual fate of marginalization in Mauritius.

A more systematic concentration on the 'commodity chain', from field to consumer, would have been helpful. For example, there is a passing reference to *surra* killing many draught animals in 1901–03, but no systematic discussion of the transport system, whether in the island or on the high seas, where the imperial authorities allowed the iniquitous 'conference system' of shipping cartels to develop. Science and technology were used as justifications for the 'conference system', as well as for the way in which sugar was grown. A related weakness is that the author fails to explain why there was so little economic diversification, and why

Mauritius therefore remained so vulnerable to the vagaries of the world sugar market and colonial protectionism. Less background, less institutional history, more on the commodity chain, and more on alternative economic activities would have made this a more rounded book when it comes to understanding Mauritian economic history. Nevertheless, the spirited attack on ethnocentric accounts of scientific diffusion, which is the campaign waged by Storey, is an extremely valuable corrective to an older generation of imperial history. The book thus merits an audience well beyond scholars dedicated to Mauritius.

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## GHANAIAN MEDICAL HISTORY

*The Evolution of Modern Medicine in a Developing Country : Ghana, 1880–1960.* By STEPHEN ADDAE. Edinburgh, Cambridge and Durham, NC: Durham Academic Press. 1996. Pp. xii + 523. £32.50 (ISBN 1-900838-05-2).

This is a landmark book by a Ghanaian scholar who holds doctorates in both medicine and history and today occupies a chair as Professor of Physiology at the University of Ghana Medical School. Stephen Addae is also known for his specialized research on the sickle cell disease and several other scientific topics. The product of painstaking scholarly work carried out over many years in both government and medical archives, this book commands attention for its detailed technical and scientific grasp plus the broad sweep of its coverage – both as to time and subject matter.

This is the first general survey of health, illness and mortality in Ghana in all of its dimensions and ramifications. Dr Addae has covered a wide range of the leading issues in the epidemiological and therapeutic, as well as the public health and policy sectors of Ghanaian medical history. The beginning student will learn much about the major diseases of West Africa from this book. Addae offers separate chapters on malaria, smallpox, trypanosomiasis, yellow fever, influenza, cerebrospinal meningitis, respiratory tract diseases, tuberculosis, yaws and leprosy. Several serious maladies – onchocerciasis, bilharzia (schistosomiasis) and guinea worm – are treated more briefly in conjunction with chapters on administrative topics such as Medical Field Units. In summarizing the effects and treatment of these causes of ill-health in Ghana, Addae relies to a large extent on the annual reports of the medical and sanitary department of the Gold Coast coupled with Scott's *Epidemic Diseases in Ghana, 1901–1960*. Owing to the greater availability of colonial administrative and demographic records, many of the most intricate historical sections of the book cover the first half of the twentieth century.

The book is far more than a conventional history of patterns of sickness and mortality. One of its strengths in comparison with previous surveys of health in Ghana lies in Dr Addae's presentation of important new institutional material on the work of modern African doctors and research scientists, based in part on direct interviews with many of the leading actors and eye-witnesses to history. Anyone who wishes to understand the full range of contributions by West African doctors in the modern medical histories of Sierra, Leone, Ghana and Nigeria must henceforth consult this book, along with earlier studies of first generation physicians by Adell Paton, David Patterson, Christopher Fyfe and others.

One of the many heroes of Addae's story is Dr Charles O. Easmon, first Dean of the University of Ghana Medical School. Because the government of Kwame Nkrumah, partly for political and ideological reasons, turned down early opportunities for close institutional relationships with British and American medical

schools in the 1950s and 1960s, Easmon established the University of Ghana Medical School almost single-handedly, with the professional support of what was then a small core of Ghanaian medical practitioners, and with very limited external financing. The School turned out its first graduates in 1969 and has been a success ever since. We learn here of the work of Drs F. T. Sai, E. Evans-Anfom, J. K. M. Quartey, K. A. Oduro, E. A. Badoe, S. R. A. Dodu, J. K. M. Quartey, F. I. D. Konotey-Ahulu, and many others. Leading expatriate researchers in tropical medicine also make their appearance. Throughout this substantial volume Dr Addae is balanced in his evaluations. He dedicates his book 'to all medical officers, British and African, by whose great work modern medicine is an established feature of life in Ghana and other former British West African colonies'.

Addae concludes his engaging narrative by assessing the effectiveness of medical and sanitary services in Ghana at the present time, no easy task given the fact that 'one of the saddest features of post-independent Ghana has been the neglect of public records'. Nonetheless, he demonstrates statistically that Ghana has made great strides between 1960 and 1994, first in the increase in numbers of hospitals (from 39 to 69), in numbers of hospital beds (from less than 3,000 to over 13,000), in patients treated per year (from 833,000 to 5,800,000), in the number of trained doctors (327 to 1,445) and in overall life expectancy (from 40 to 57). Facts such as these should receive greater attention by generalist historians when comparing the period of colonialism with the achievements of the post-independence decades. The key challenges now facing the nation, he concludes, fall mainly into the category of preventive and promotional medicine. If there is a primary obstacle it is, as he underscores in Chapter 4 and again in Chapter 28, 'the relentless pressures on health facilities' caused by rampant population growth and urban overcrowding since independence. Ghana's population rose from 7.7 million in 1960 to 16.6 million in 1994. As Dr. Addae sums it up: 'The exploding population neutralizes whatever is done to improve sanitation. And the huge legendary inertia in the administrative system has assured that new measures become obsolete as soon as implemented'.

In conclusion, the thorough coverage and professional analysis of issues in this book are excellent. Generalizations are strengthened, whenever possible, by statistical tables in the body of the text and appendix. If there is a criticism to be made, it is that the book does not take account of a number of more recent articles and books by other scholars working in the field of West African medical and public health history; in some other instances too, important monographs are listed in the bibliography but their specific insights are not incorporated in the text or notes.

All in all, though, this book lays the broad framework for further detailed investigations of specialized research into almost every conceivable topic and question in Ghanaian medical history; it will undoubtedly remain the standard reference work for all who venture into this field for many years to come.

*Purdue University*

RAYMOND E. DUMETT

## DIPLOMATIC FACILITATOR

*Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an End to Empire.* By CLYDE SANGER. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press; Montreal: McGill-Queen's University, 1995. Pp. xxi + 498. £25 (ISBN 0-85323-902-2); \$49.95 (ISBN 077351-303-5).

The task of any biographer of Malcolm MacDonald is not an enviable one. The lives of offspring who lived in the shadow of more celebrated – or sometimes more reviled – fathers poses a special psychological complexity. Then there is the matter



of personality. The younger MacDonald was a person whose outward affability was matched to an instinctive turning away from any intimate engagement with other people, even with his own close family. In professional life he was not a decision-maker, whereby the writer may hope in reconstructing the decision to penetrate the individual behind it. He was rather a facilitator, part of the grease in the flywheel of British colonial and Commonwealth policy (occasionally including Africa) from the mid-1930s onwards.

In facing up to his slippery task, Sanger succeeds as well as any biographer of MacDonald junior could hope. The pattern of Malcolm's career was mirrored in the sad political fate of Macdonald père. Ramsay, after the 'betrayal' of Labour in 1931, stayed propped up as Prime Minister long after his own prestige and faculties had begun to wane. Malcolm's political fortune became mortgaged to his father's construct, National Labour, the very bogusness of which as a political phenomenon was summed up in the fact that virtually all its leading members were government ministers, Malcolm himself gaining junior ministerial rank in the Dominions Office before being appointed Secretary of State for Colonies in 1935.

MacDonald was a talker, not a doer, but in colonial policy talking, after all, has its place as a way of jollying people along, deflecting antagonism, dispelling fears (justified though they might be) and generally giving a gentle push in the desired direction. Of course, those directions might change as national interest demanded, and MacDonald had no trouble changing with them, as the Zionists found to their cost in the realm of Palestine policy during the later 1930s. Probably MacDonald's most authentic achievement as Colonial Secretary was to keep talking to Eamonn de Valera as leader of the Irish Free State, when some of his colleagues were tempted to resort to punitive measures against a regime in Dublin which refused to play by Commonwealth rules.

After the war, the special utility of MacDonald in British officialdom overseas became set in stone, so that thereafter he was used in such varied tasks, and usually with titles indicating a 'roving' commission, to deflect the fears of the sultans when briefly faced with the much-disliked Malayan Union after 1946, and to encourage harmony and co-existence between different racial groups ('nation-building') through the Communities Liaison Committee in Malaya during the Emergency; to get on better terms with Nehru as High Commissioner in Delhi once a slump in Anglo-Indian relations had set in by 1955; as co-chairman of the Standing Laos Conference during 1961-2, to keep everybody at the table talking about anything, on the sensible grounds that otherwise they, or their followers, would certainly take to the killing-fields; as Governor in Nairobi from January 1963 to 'top-and-tail' the final stages to independence, and not least to pacify the concerns of KANU politicians as to the likely fate of the 'regionalist' constitution; and finally, as Britain's Special Representative in East and Central Africa, to do whatever he could to clothe the nakedness of the British position as revealed by events in Rhodesia, and the gathering internal crisis in Nigeria.

Readers of this journal will be most interested in the sections concerning Africa. Sanger includes very little on African colonies when dealing with MacDonald's ministerial career in the 1930s, and with some cause, since as Colonial Secretary a high proportion of his time was taken up with the troubles in Palestine. Insofar as MacDonald had an explicitly African career, it was between 1963 and 1969. This is, in fact, the weakest part of the book, since it engages ineffectively with the great complexities of the situations into which MacDonald was intruded. Yet the surface nature of the treatment in no small part reflects the conduct of MacDonald himself. Few senior people around him at the time admired his handling of the final stages of Kenyan decolonization, and as Special Commissioner thereafter some colleagues were denigrating. The truth is that MacDonald was best when he could present himself as the sympathetic, even charming, face of British power. When there was

no real power left, as increasingly in Kenya, and above all later still regarding Rhodesia and Nigeria, MacDonald had few personal resources of temperament or intellect to signify very much at all.

Marjery Perham, speaking of Kenya's independence ('*majimbo*') constitution, once asked MacDonald if he regretted the experiment, even though it was bound to fail. MacDonald simply replied: 'It was a very good transition device'. He could have been describing the essence of his own career, and the very concision of the phrase indicates that perhaps he knew it very well. He was practised at humanizing the particular kind of transition denoted by decolonization, though to what exact purpose, other than the general cultivation of 'goodwill', was not entirely clear. Still, jaw-jaw is better than war-war, and goodwill is certainly better than its opposite. MacDonald was not a statesman of stature, but, despite his sometimes showy egoism, his motives were honest enough. This is Sanger's commonsensical if unexciting conclusion, and one that any reader of this book is bound to draw.

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### WARFARE IN PORTUGUESE AFRICA

*Counterinsurgency in Africa: The Portuguese Way of War, 1961-1974.* By JOHN P. CANN (Contributions in Military Studies Number 167). Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 1997. Pp. xvi + 216. £46.50 (ISBN 0-313-30189-1).

In the fifteen years since Portugal's military withdrew from its African colonial territories scores of books and articles on the wars have been published by scholars, journalists, combatants and politicians. It is indeed an opportune time to revisit Portugal's experiences with African insurgency, counterinsurgency and decolonization. The Portuguese military's perspective on the colonial wars is as important as that of the range of African insurgents, Portuguese politicians and others who were directly engaged. All parties to the colonial wars, however, existed in dialectic with one another and struggled in the context of the times – one cannot extract an imagined military possibility from the context of its historic moment.

*Counterinsurgency in Africa* is a contribution to 'military studies'. Cann intends to present the history of Portugal's generation of colonial wars from the perspective of the Portuguese military (p. xiii). He interviewed a range of military officers, about evenly divided between colonels and generals. Cann conveys the view from the top and does so fairly uncritically as evidenced in his opening assertion: 'The Portuguese military achieved outright military victory in Angola, a credible stalemate in Guinea, and, with additional resources and spirited leadership, could have regained control of northern Mozambique' (p. xiii). Historians are on firmer ground reconstructing and analyzing past events than they are speculating about what might have happened. The assertion suggests some of the book's problems.

The author sets an ambitious agenda. First, he analyzes a generation of Portuguese wars waged in three very different and distant African colonies, as well as the Portuguese military's recruitment, training, logistics, intelligence gathering, counter-insurgency propaganda and political strategies to support the war effort in both the metropole and the colonies. Second, he seeks to place Portugal's overall experience in comparative perspective with prior and contemporary insurgencies faced by British, French and United States militaries as part of a third goal, to identify a specifically Portuguese 'way of war'.

It is difficult to address such a complex and broad agenda in under two hundred pages. On the first point, regional and topical coverage is frustratingly uneven.

Angola receives more textured treatment than Mozambique and Guinea. The potentially promising sections on the Africanization of counter-insurgency and intelligence work barely move beyond simply identifying and locating the categories of African troops and intelligence strategies. Cann supports his narrative with maps, tables, statistics and sources that reflect military concerns, but analysis is again sacrificed. Why do Portugal's conscription delinquency rates rise so sharply, almost doubling in less than a decade (p. 89)? What did those very high rates, one in five by 1970, mean for the military, for the metropole and for the Angolans, Mozambicans and men from Guinea who were increasingly recruited to uphold the battle to remain under Portuguese colonial control? Did it matter at the time, and does it matter now, that 42 per cent of the military recruits in Angola, over half of those in Mozambique, but only about a fifth in Guinea were 'local' men by the last half decade of the wars?

On the second point, Portugal is often neglected in comparative treatments of African colonial insurgencies and decolonization. Although comparative perspective with British and French colonial insurgencies is apt and welcome, comparisons with the American debacle in Viet Nam seem less useful and compelling. On the third point, Cann consistently develops the specificities that distinguished Portugal's counterinsurgency experience in Africa. His contribution is to Portuguese military and colonial history rather than to the histories of Portugal's former African colonies.

The book will be embraced in Portugal, where the parade of celebrations marking the five-century anniversary of Portugal's maritime expansion prepared audiences for Cann's reinterpretation of the colonial war experience in a more positive light. Cann even tells us that Vasco da Gama 'discovered' Mozambique (p. 14). The book reminds us of the hollowness of Portugal's claim of metropole and overseas unity in the colonial era. Cann highlights the military's efforts to protect 'the people' in Angola, Mozambique and Guinea from the insurgents, but he makes it clear that the people who count are the Portuguese. He confirms that the Africanization of the armed forces 'kept the conflict subdued and low tempo by moving a large portion of the conscription and casualties away from the *metrópole*' (p. 87).

The book conveys a fairly uncritical reconstruction of the Portuguese military elite's narrative. Cann concludes, for example, that '[w]hile [Portugal] lost its colonies, it did not lose them because of military reasons' (p. 187). He fails to acknowledge that neither could Portugal have saved the colonies by military means. Portuguese soldiers, who were, after all, only in Portugal's African territories because Africans had resorted to armed force to redress their grievances and claim political rights, could not turn the situation around through force of arms, or through Portugal's 'hearts and minds' campaign. Cann extensively documents his point that 'Portugal...changed its Army to fit the war rather than trying to change the war to fit its Army' (p. 73). No doubt that was sensible. Portugal would have been better advised to change its political policy to fit the era of decolonization rather than try to fit the decolonization process to fit its politics.

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JEANNE MARIE PENVENNE

## A HISTORY OF PATRIMONIAL POLITICS

*Comrades, Clients and Cousins: Colonialism, Socialism and Democratization in São Tomé and Príncipe.* By GERHARD SEIBERT. Leiden: Research School of Asian, African and Amerindian Studies (CNWA), no. 73, 1999. Pp. xiv + 465. No price given (ISBN 90-5789-017-8).

Gerhard Seibert's work is an immensely detailed account of the political development of São Tomé and Príncipe (STP) since independence. That this text was a doctoral thesis should be borne in mind by the reader, because it is easy to be overwhelmed with the minutiae of 25 years of political life. However, the book starts with a very good historical survey and each chapter has a substantial concluding section in which the main facts and arguments are summarized. These sections can be read in isolation from the rest of the text and are extremely helpful in coming to grips with this important book.

STP is arguably Africa's smallest and poorest country and suffers from problems familiar to many of its neighbours – low levels of skills and productivity, lack of investment and declining prices for a narrow range of exports. To these have to be added the additional problems caused by isolation and diseconomies of scale. Ruled after 1975 by the MLSTP under president Manuel Pinto da Costa, the single-party state was abandoned in 1989, when free elections led to a peaceful change of government in 1991 and to the election of Miguel Trovoada as president. However, since independence the country has become steadily poorer as its population has grown along with its mountain of debt.

The account of STP politics, which in places almost becomes a day-by-day account, is made coherent by the underlying thesis that the ruling island elites, closely interlinked by marriage, have treated the resources of the island and more recently international aid as personal property, as a resource to be commandeered by the rulers for their personal benefit. Corruption has not only been rife but is openly practised by all politicians of all parties. Party politics has become little more than a competition to secure control of what resources the island communities can muster. This corruption in political life is minutely detailed – dollar salaries, first-class air fares, ministerial cars, illegal contracts and simple theft. 'Changes of government were repeatedly accompanied by the usual wave of illegal appropriation of public property by outgoing ministers who took complete sets of office equipment and everything else that was not nailed down' (p. 242).

Seibert avoids being too moralistic about this corruption which he sees as almost inevitable given the network of patrimonial and family relationships on which society depends, and salaries that are so low that people cannot live on them. Moreover he points to some positive aspects of the political culture, the generally peaceful nature of politics, the lack of violence and, since 1991, the considerable transparency and willingness to be open about the political process. Seibert points out that the clue to understanding STP is to understand the nature of the *forro* elite – the small group of ruling families who dominated island affairs from the late sixteenth century to the 'second colonization' in the middle of the nineteenth century. The dominance of the *forros* is geographical as well as social and economic. They live in the townships clustered near the city of São Tomé in the north, while the rest of the population lives dispersed on the old cocoa plantations. This geo-social structure was unchanged by independence. The *roças* (plantations) remained as nationalized enterprises and the social divisions of plantation life survived, with the *forros* taking over from the Portuguese as administrators. Modern politics, Seibert emphasizes, is very much a return to politics as it was before the nineteenth century. This has meant that independence has not really empowered, even if it has enfranchised, the majority of the population whose

origin lies in the contract labour imported by the Portuguese from Angola and Cape Verde.

Unfortunately the *forro* elite which took over in 1975 was young and inexperienced and has lacked the education and the skills either to run a planned economy, which was attempted for fifteen years under Pinto da Costa, or to provide the environment in which liberal capitalism or offshore economic activity might develop. At independence there were only five people with university degrees in the administration, and the incompetence with which the country has been run is described unsparingly. Here, for example, Seibert describes what happened to the cocoa plantations under the rule of the MLSTP (p. 139):

Although the national economy was based entirely on agriculture, only 22 per cent of the total investment in the period 1975–87 supported this sector. Regarding the estates, there was no book-keeping, their assets were not known, the bureaucracy did not function, the wages were in arrears for months, the soil was not fertilised, there was no shade management or any phytosanitary control. Cocoa seedling nurseries had been abandoned. The Agricultural Experimental Station at Potó established in 1960 was in poor condition, lacked equipment and most of its underqualified staff had no defined functions. The cocoa rotted in the storehouses where it was kept awaiting export... because there were no sacks for transport.

Given these conditions it is difficult to see STP becoming a West African Mauritius.

Seibert is acutely aware of the current debate about corruption, patrimonial politics and development aid. His study treads carefully between the dangers of a crude censuring of corruption and incompetence and an understanding, and therefore a condoning, of the activities of a patrimonial society. He paints a picture that is not encouraging to aid donors. In 1991, when the first democratically elected government took over, foreign debt stood at 322 per cent of GDP; the state owed the National Bank \$50m; \$1m was owed to the UN and the country had lost voting rights in ten international organisations; the Lisbon embassy owed \$500,000; moreover the country ran huge budget deficits and financed its day-to-day activities by the inflationary creation of money. Liberal democracy made little difference and in 1996 government ministers spent more on travelling abroad than on the salaries for the whole civil service. These facts show why, inexorably, a form of creeping 'Bretton Woods imperialism' has been returning to Africa and why it has been proposed that in future aid will be administered, and government finances will be audited, by outside agencies.

Seibert is meticulous in his pursuit of coherence and explanation. His book is a worthy successor to Francisco Tenreiro's masterly account of the islands written in the 1950s and absolutely indispensable for anyone studying the problems of contemporary Africa.

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MALYN NEWITT

## POLITICAL CAREER OF A DICTATOR

*Dark Age: The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa.* By BRIAN TITLEY. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997. Pp. xvii + 258. £22.95 (ISBN 0-85323-712-3).

*Dark Age* details the political career of the notorious Jean-Bedel Bokassa, one-time Emperor of the Central African Empire (now the Central African Republic). From the very first lines of the book, Brian Titley grapples with some of the most disturbing accusations of Bokassa's reign as emperor; he sets as his task to

'disentangle fact from fiction, fantasy, folklore, and sheer fabrication' (p. x) and to 'reconstruct as accurately as possible' Bokassa's career (p. xi). Concepts of neopatrimonialism, clientism and the search for legitimacy, Titley contends, underpinned Bokassa's motivations and activities over his career. Bokassa was able to consolidate and exercise such authority in the Central African Empire, he argues, through a variety of pragmatic calculations: he forged extensive networks of influence through clients and wives, eradicated all governmental institutions that would allow political rivals to express their dissent, personalized all resources of the state, and juggled political alliances at different historical moments first and foremost with France, but also with Libya, China, and a host of other countries. In the end, Titley concludes, Bokassa was certainly no worse than his post-colonial contemporaries. The author ultimately argues for the usefulness of this sort of biographical study as a means of 'restor[ing]...human agency' to the writing of contemporary history (p. xi).

The book certainly makes for an engaging read. Titley has drawn from a wide variety of sources, including news accounts, videotapes and a francophone literature on Bokassa and the Central African Republic's contemporary history. He also conducted a series of interviews among some Central African elites and French military advisers, lawyers and associates of Bokassa. In so doing, he makes available to readers of English a valuable narrative of Bokassa's career and of France's post-colonial relationship with one of its former colonies, fragments of which have previously been available only in French.

The book suffers from a few shortcomings. While Titley aims for an 'accurate reconstruction', his handling of evidence sometimes works against his intentions. Citations in this work can be cryptic at times, making it extraordinarily difficult to assess the evidence that the author offers. How, for instance, is one to assess endnotes that read 'Interviews with several informants, Bangui' (see notes on pp. 223, 224, 231)? This criticism may sound trivial, for Titley was obliged to protect the identities of some informants. But the lack of specificity underpins a much more significant problem: Titley does not consistently reveal enough about his written or oral sources to illuminate how he constructed his narrative (pp. 134–5) or to justify convincingly why he gives credence to some sources and not to others (see, for instance, his discussion of Bokassa's involvement in the beating and imprisonment of schoolchildren on pp. 108–124, 216). In addition, much of his evidence appears to come from elite (written or oral) accounts of Bokassa's career. Blanket claims about what 'Central Africans' believed or perceived at particular historical moments are thus not entirely convincing (see pp. 68–9, 80, 137–8).

But the book's greatest weakness lies in its failure to develop sufficiently the broader historical and cultural context in which Bokassa accumulated, wielded and lost his power. To be sure, Titley does offer a brief chapter sketching out French colonial rule in Ubangi-Shari. But whereas Titley argues that French rule virtually decapitated older political traditions (p. 209), I would suggest that Bokassa's political strategies, actions, and demise reflect some important historical continuities with highly fluid patron-client relations in nineteenth-century equatorial Africa.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Titley's account lacks a careful assessment of how equatorial Africans have understood and exercised political power, and of the intimate relationships they have long forged between political power and occult forces.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, a historically, culturally grounded understanding of political power –

<sup>1</sup> Jan Vansina, *Paths in the Rainforest: Toward a History of Political Tradition in Equatorial Africa* (Madison, 1990); Elisabeth Copet-Rougier, 'Du clan à la chefferie dans l'est du Cameroun', *Africa*, 57 (1987), 345–63.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Geschiere, *The Modernity of Witchcraft: Politics and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* (Charlottesville and London, 1997).



some of what Titley has dismissed as 'fiction, fantasy, folklore, and sheer fabrication' – might have been the most illuminating evidence that he could have used to explain Bokassa's political career.

Specialists of equatorial and francophone Africa may find this work useful to compare the motivations, strategies, and activities of various dictators and their relationships with France, but its lack of a theoretical, historical and cultural foundation may leave general readers with little more to hold their interest than an absorbing narrative of Bokassa's career.

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TAMARA GILES-VERNICK

## SOMALI CRISIS

*Mending Rips in the Sky: Options for Somali Communities in the Twenty-first Century.* Edited by HUSSEIN M. ADAM and RICHARD FORD. Lawrenceville, NJ: Red Sea Press, 1997. Pp. xxvi + 673. £17.99, paperback (ISBN 1-56902-074-4).

Few of the 41 contributions which make up the ten sections of this large volume are scholarly or historical in any conventional way. Sections One and Four consist largely of political speeches and analyses or long surveys of political events in Somalia before and after the deposition of Siyad Barre in January 1991. Some contributions deal with the role of the opposition movements (especially the SNM [Somali National Movement] in the north) and almost all examine options for future governance. All articles have something to say about clans, even though the authors disagree about the exact political function of the clans in a future Somalia. The concept of local authority they use lacks clarity, as do their references to clan rule as 'democratic', a term that remains undefined. None of the contributions gives sustained attention to what the shape and powers of a unified Somali state might be, even though some authors pay lip-service to such a state. It is striking that several of the contributors (including the Somali editor, who helped formulate the political program of Barre's 'socialist' party, and three ex-ministers) were for more than a decade deeply involved in the very military dictatorship they now criticize. It was during their tenure that the regime institutionalized the destructive clannism that exploded into violence during the civil war. Yet, they do not reflect on this involvement or on when and why they believe things went wrong; they sidestep the political and intellectual accountability that could guide the strategies for the future that are the subject matter of this book.

Sections Two and Five mostly deal with kinship and clans and their relevance to future governance. Three contributors are critical of clans, as they now exist, as political building blocks. However, Farah and Lewis here reiterate their well-known stance that traditional lineage leadership is the solution to peace and stable governance. Striking is the absence of any clear definition of lineage leader and of how such a figure would differ from a warlord. In either case the claim to authority seems to be based on *de facto* power and only partially on position in the lineage structure as such. Moreover, this lineage-based claim to authority might be populist but is not democratic, as it is not representative of the constituency it claims to represent through an elective process. Such lack of clarity is dangerous because it might allow those who gained power in the past via the state now to help themselves back into the saddle by way of the clan.

Section Three consists of articles about groups in the agricultural south who were (and are) discriminated against as belonging to the so-called Bantu-groups or were harshly exploited by the Barre government's agricultural regime. Important also is the still provisional analysis by Marchal of those Somali youth (the *mooryaan*) who carried out so much of the violence and destruction. Sections Six

and Seven contain reports, analyses and proposals dealing with NGO activity among both the Somali diaspora (e.g. in Canada and Kenya) and among displaced Somalis in Somalia. This subject represents a new and developing area of study. Section Eight focuses on the Somalis of the Ogaden and Djibouti, and contains an excellent analysis by Schraeder of the build-up of political and military conflict in the Republic of Djibouti.

Sections Nine and Ten, together with Sahnoun's contribution in Section Five, examine the international context of the Somali crisis and criticize the nature of the U.N. intervention, the mistakes made by the NGOs, and the failure of Italy to play a constructive role. It is striking that only Ahmed Qassim and Shamis Hussein touch upon a critique of the American role: that the United States failed to stop arms supplies to the dictator, failed to open a constructive dialogue with the opposition, and thus failed to prevent bloodshed by helping the dictator leave. The lack of attention given in the book to the role of American foreign policy and involvement is surprising because this volume was largely financed by the U.S. Institute of Peace, a research arm of the U.S. Congress. It sponsored the two conferences from which this volume arose, had several of the contributors (including the Somali editor) associated with it as resident fellows, and assisted with the editing and production of the book. The piece by Robert Oakley, former ambassador and later special envoy of Presidents Bush and Clinton to Somalia, avoids any critical reflection on the processes in which he was intimately involved. Oakley's essay is not only insultingly casual, but also glosses over how the Americans undermined certain United Nations initiatives, such as the disarmament of Somali civilians. American policy toward Somalia and the agenda of the U.S. Institute of Peace within it therefore await fuller analysis.

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LIDWIEN KAPTEIJNS

## IDENTITY AND HISTORY

*Being and Becoming Oromo: Historical and Anthropological Enquiries.* Edited by P. T. W. BAXTER, J. HULTIN and A. TRIULZI. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996. Pp. 310. £18.95, paperback (ISBN 91-7106-379-x).

A great distance separates Oromo from 'Galla', and the road between has been hard. The book begins with a young urban refugee's memories of state persecution in the 1980s and ends with a poetic appeal for unity written by an Oromo Liberation Front fighter in 1994, shortly before he shot himself to avoid capture by government forces. The first is narrated in Amharic, the language of subordination, the second was composed in Boran, the new language of liberation.

Oromo-speakers now consider themselves a nation with a common identity and history but without a place of their own. Here, a group of engaged scholars – both Oromo and Western – reflect in print on their journey and its goal and on their current predicaments. The medium is important, for the book gives us the opportunity to read ethnicity, political and otherwise, in the making. Like others before them, Oromo have taken to print to argue out their differences and similarities, but the contributions here include both programmatic statements and critical commentary. The mix makes *Being and Becoming Oromo* a polemical document as well as a scholarly collection.

Understandably, it is the Oromo contributors who make the statements and the foreigners who provide much of the commentary. The former see themselves in the classic role of nationalist intellectuals, putting up the social and cultural scaffolding of the nation and arguing it into existence. They are concerned to assert the essential unity of all Oromo and tend to assume that all those born Oromo are

Oromo, a simple and all-embracing definition which is perhaps as much a reaction against the earlier experience of marginalization and 'Amhara-isation' as it is a political strategy. In so far as the concept of Oromo ethnicity itself is addressed, it is treated in a rather essentialist fashion – the 'being' of Oromo – though both Dahl and Bulcha also stress aspects of 'becoming'. Several contributors examine concepts like 'the Peace of the Boran' and institutions like *gada*, and seek to reshape them into usable, modern and pan-Oromo ideas. There are also short accounts of the recent development of an Oromo political identity. Together, these chapters imply a search for commonality and continuity, exemplified in Baxter's comparative study of marriage and affinity or Gufu Oba's discussion of resource allocation and sharing in Gabbra, rather than a determination to confront fragmentation and ambiguity.

The commentators, however, are more critical of the construct of 'Oromo-ness' and raise some awkward questions about both being and becoming Oromo. Hultin's study of the 'Great Narrative of Ethiopia', a political morality tale and the main historical instrument through which Oromo were made into 'the Galla', warns that merely reversing the flow will reproduce all the flaws of the original. Arnesen's account of the settlement of northern Shoa by Macha and Tulama groups reminds us of the sheer complexity of historical movements and relations, a theme echoed by other chapters on shifts and adaptations along negotiable boundaries. Blackhurst and Triulzi look at 'outsiders' (within *gada*) and at the position of those assimilated or adopted into Oromo communities (*gabaro*) respectively. Are such people somehow less Oromo than others? These chapters are more in the mainstream of studies of historical ethnicity, but they are not at odds with the overt message of the book; rather they add depth and complexity.

Inevitably, *Being and Becoming Oromo* leaves gaps and questions. Much of the ethnographic material comes from the southernmost Oromo areas in Kenya which have been more open to research than the heartlands to the north. But does this focus also suggest that the new Oromo identity is to be built on a 'traditional' Boran foundation?

Constructing ethnicity is in part an exercise in drawing lines, but we are told little of what lies on the other side. The Ethiopian state is curiously absent except as an oppressive force and a political space; and non-Oromo neighbours are equally shadowy. Few of the chapters situate the Oromo in a wider context. Again, there is little on the historical construction of communities; it is perhaps unfortunate that Schlee's work could not be included since his focus on the pathways, real and imagined, between clans and communities, would have added another perspective.

Finally, Dahl tells us that the 'little boxes' approach to ethnicity is outdated. So it may be, but identities must still be created and asserted. There is a tension running through the book around the political project of forming a defensible polity encompassing the many out of a cultural community imagined by the few. If this collection is less than a full survey of Oromo, it may be because it attempts to grapple with ethnicity as lived rather than as theorized.

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RICHARD WALLER

## SWAHILI-SPEAKING WOMEN IN COURT

*Pronouncing and Persevering: Gender and the Discourses of Disputing in an African Islamic Court.* By SUSAN F. HIRSCH. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998. Pp. ix + 360. \$48 (ISBN 0-226-34463-0); \$19, paperback (ISBN 0-226-34464-9).

Susan F. Hirsch's book, written from the vantage point of linguistic anthropology and comparative legal discourse, is one of the most thought provoking contributions to the literature on law in Africa I have encountered recently. While Hirsch is clearly well versed in Africanist work, her inspiration tends to come from comparative studies in legal discourse, particularly studies that are alert to the gendered nature of the processes at play in the courtroom.

Hirsch is less concerned to use the courts to gather evidence of household and community dynamics than to consider the shape of courtroom discourse itself. She argues that the courts and the Kadhis who officiate in them are contradictory participants in processes that simultaneously reassert and subvert dominant coastal ideology concerning appropriate gendered behaviour as enacted and indexed through speech. The Kadhi's courts of Kenya, located as they are at the confluence of coastal assertions of a distinctive Islamic identity and the secular state's impulse towards legal homogeneity, serve both as sites of resistance to the state and as sites of state intervention.

If carrying stories about domestic conflict outside the home violates the central Swahili value of *heshima* (respect, honour or modesty), then when women take their marital problems to the court they risk both their own and their family's standing in the broader community. Women are to remain silent and persevere in the face of a difficult home life. It is men, with their Islamic prerogative to pronounce a divorce, who seem at first to have the power of speech. In this context, by entertaining women's narratives of perseverance in the face of unpleasant domestic circumstances, Kadhis threaten local constructions of gender, authority and appropriate behaviour. Nevertheless, as Kadhis work to reconcile couples, they devalue the narratives of women with metalinguistic comments that suggest that 'words' and 'stories' are themselves the cause of ongoing marital troubles. Hirsch insists that while for individual women the largely favourable outcome of these court cases may be empowering, for women more broadly the effect is that the courts sustain and amplify an underlying ideology in which women are silenced as 'complainers' while masculine authority is reaffirmed through the male performance of legal debate. In her analysis, then, real Muslim women emerge as active agents in reshaping marriage and their own lives; simultaneously, the figure of the ideal Swahili woman is reproduced in discourse as appropriately silent and passive.

The heart of the book consists of Hirsch's close reading of a series of marital disputes aired in the court of Malindi. She shows how women use narrative to convey the repetitive qualities of an unpleasant and occasionally abusive home life and then goes on to examine the very different modes of speech employed by husbands and the Kadhi. She argues that the courts themselves are spaces in which gender is indexed through speech. Women do not themselves make statements of judgement about rights and duties; it is the men who engage in debate as equal interlocutors with claims to authority. The Kadhi occupies the shifting roles of witness to women's perseverance in the face of marital woe, potential ally to the husbands who share access to legal discourse, and counsellor who must prompt the disputants to move beyond words to resolution and often reconciliation.

Hirsch's focus on courtroom discourse inevitably leaves many interesting questions unanswered. One wonders whether and how women rehearse their

highly effective courtroom narratives in other contexts: if their silencing outside of the court is indeed so thorough, how is it that they are capable of producing such powerful narratives? The injunction to avoid carrying tales outside of the home is not nearly so potent among women and the lower classes as among relatively elite men; 'gossip' and other forms of *magana* (from playing popular music to wearing cloth with proverbs printed on them) undoubtedly provide contradictory leverage in domestic life that other researchers might explore more fully.

This book is rich in insights that should interest a broad audience including scholars of law, gender and Islam in Africa; those who study oral arts and their contexts; and those interested in developing more complex theories of agency and performance. The book would provide graduate students on the verge of orally based fieldwork with an interesting model of transcription, translation and interpretation to evaluate – the author has generously provided Swahili language texts of the key transcripts in the appendices. Hirsch observes that as a researcher she is implicated in local debates about the appropriateness of revealing domestic problems through speech; the book offers a useful example of the complex dilemmas and insights of reflexive research. Finally, despite the book's theoretical sophistication and a few minor reservations I have about its form (I wish the author had made greater concessions to the non-specialist in decisions about translation, for example), many portions of it are lively and would be engaging to undergraduates, particularly in courses with a gender focus.

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BARBARA M. COOPER

## SCHOOLING IN KENYA

*Le Désir d'École : Les Initiatives Africaines dans l'Éducation au Kenya* [The Desire for School: African Initiatives in Kenyan Education]. By HÉLÈNE CHARTON. Paris: Publications de l'Université de Paris 7 – Denis Diderot, n.d. Pp. 134. FFr. 70.00, paperback (ISBN 2-7442-0024-7).

The private sector's role in education has been a subject of much debate and analysis in the past two decades. Debates about school choice, school access, enrollment, and a quest for more and better schools have dominated this period. In post-independence Africa, for example, the dilemma has been a difficult one. Which policy to adopt: to Africanize colonial schools which were divided on racial and religious lines or expand access to school for all school-age children; to provide universal primary school or neglect secondary, tertiary and adult education; to expand government public schools or encourage private (including community schools – or what has come to be known as *Harambee* schools in Kenya); to continue to support education with 25 per cent of the national budget amid dwindling public resources or introduce cost-sharing measures? These dilemmas are further compounded by complex political, economic, and cultural factors. As many African governments succumb to the pressures of liberalizing their economies, multiparty politics and democratization of schools, the desire to expand schools to reach all children and the introduction of alternative forms of school that reflect local cultural realities have been left to escalate. Many citizens wonder: Expansion to what end? Are schools a myth or a genuine goal to pursue? Who can benefit from school expansion?

Hélène Charton captures these paradoxes and issues in her book, in which she explores how the desire for school is historically situated. Charton sets out to document and analyze two popular movements in Kenya from 1945 to 1978 whereby African communities struggled to expand their access to school. Her

primary aim is to show the connections between various historical and cultural phenomena that could explain what she calls ‘[le] divorce entre une société et sa tête’ (the divorce between a society and its [soul] head) (p. 9).

A central theme that runs throughout the book is the author’s attempt to characterize and explain the desire to attend school, which she argues is inextricably linked to the historical context of Kenya. As a settlement colony, Kenya had a large population of European and Indian immigrants who controlled educational resources as well as land rights. Charton demonstrates in several charts, tables and statistics from census data that in terms of enrolments, teacher qualification, access to school facilities and government support, there was an abysmal gap between the education of Africans and that of their Indian and white counterparts. In addition, European settlement also entailed appropriation of lands at the expense of local owners. The legal institution that processed land litigations employed both language and procedures that put the African plaintiffs in an unfair and weak position. Furthermore, with the British policy of indirect rule, most educational initiatives were left in the hands of missionaries whose goal was to evangelize and to train a limited number of intermediaries for local administration. School was thus a vehicle for values alien to African practices and beliefs. School also created a new intermediary class of African collaborators who connived with the Europeans to garner and protect their rights and privileges, including land.

This book also explores the development of the Kenyan independent school movement as illustrative of the communities’ demand for education. The author, however, does not give a full account of this case study but merely presents the relevant sources and provides a cursory analysis of the phenomenon.

Nevertheless, this historical approach to the role of education within the independence movement is relevant to African educational planners today. By underscoring the socio-cultural roots of independence movements the book highlights the reasons why the rulers of the newly independent nations also fell short of meeting their people’s education needs. Secondly, there is a warning to planners as Charton rightly put it, ‘l’école a pu être considérée comme un moyen plutôt qu’une fin. L’éducation est alors recherchée non pas pour ce qu’elle est mais pour ce qu’elle projette’ (school has been considered as a means rather than an end. Education is sought not for what it is, but for what it projects [p. 111]). Anything that looked like a modern school would do, with little regards to equity and quality.

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LADISLAUS M. SEMALI

## SCHOOLING IN UGANDA

*History and Development of Education in Uganda.* By J. C. SSEKAMWA. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 1997. Pp. 240. \$18.00/£9.95, paperback (ISBN 9 970020 59 5).

The first president of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere wrote in 1968 that ‘there is nothing in our existing educational system which suggests to the pupil that he [she] can learn important things about farming from his [her] elders. The result is that he [she] absorbs beliefs about witchcraft before he [she] goes to school, but does not learn the properties of local grasses; he [she] absorbs the taboos from his family but does not learn the methods of making nutritious traditional foods. And from school he [she] acquires knowledge unrelated to agricultural life. He [she] gets the worst of both systems!’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J. K. Nyerere, ‘Education for self-reliance’, in *Freedom and Socialism/Uhuru na Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (New York, 1968), 78–290.



The dilemmas voiced by Nyerere's lament are echoed in the book here under review in which the author raises the question, 'Why was Basic Education for National Development (BEND) ineffective in Uganda's education system during the colonial days?' Why did it also fail to take root during the heavily internationally funded and publicized Namutamba Project? (p. 230). These questions are not particular to Uganda. In fact, Nyerere's radical suggestions about practical education and a move away from what Ssekamwa refers to as 'the fever for academic education' (p. 231) resound in the canons of Basic Education for National Development.

Ssekamwa's book, which outlines Uganda's educational development from pre-colonial days to the time of the colonial establishment of western education in 1877, is divided into fifteen chapters. It includes chapters about indigenous education, western education, the role of church and state in education, agricultural education, technical education, private schools, language of instruction, basic education and more. One theme that cuts across these chapters is the goal of localizing education in Uganda. According to Ssekamwa, since the 1925 Phelps-Stokes Commission report on African education, the goals of localizing education, teaching practical skills, Africanizing the curriculum, using local languages for instruction and adapting education to suit the local environment have until today eluded politicians and policymakers. The achievement of this goal has been marred by colonial dependence, teachers' attitudes, half-hearted policy-makers and a fever for literary education divorced from the local context (p. 212).

Ssekamwa's volume is one among many books on Uganda which chart this complex history. However, Ssekamwa handles this task differently. Starting by defining indigenous education, Ssekamwa does not assume that the history of Uganda began with the arrival of visitors from Europe, and he treats education as a continuous process which was interrupted by missionaries who introduced school along Western lines in 1877 (p. 1). By including in this continuum a detailed explanation of indigenous education, Ssekamwa fills a gap and crosses borders into a terrain many authors have not ventured to traverse. By systematically weaving into the text notions of indigenous education, the reader is alerted to the nexus between power and knowledge and thus to appreciate better the complex human relations involved in negotiating and putting in place an education system which today is neither truly African, nor truly European. This unstable blend is a result of complex political, religious and economic realities that have faced Uganda over the years since 1877 and have continued through the post-Idi Amin years of terror until now. To understand the dynamic interplay in African education between foreign and indigenous forces in different periods of time is particularly relevant today, especially with the recent movement to involve local communities in education and in the running of schools.

The strength of this book is found in the author's attention to detail, the thick descriptions of teachers and their labour unions, school organization and teaching (p. 5), indigenous education through songs, legends, proverbs and information about the environment of schooling (pp. 9–11), details of which add to the richness of the history of education in Uganda. The book is a significant addition to the literature of the contemporary history of Uganda. However, it falls short of the sort of critical analysis that would help history teachers, politicians or policy-makers go beyond the historical dates and events in this dense and turbulent history. Nor, it must be said, does the book contain any references or bibliography, a shortcoming which seriously detracts from its usefulness.

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LADISLAUS M. SEMALI

## SHORTER NOTICES

*Routes to Slavery: Direction, Ethnicity and Mortality in the Transatlantic Slave Trade*. Edited by DAVID ELTIS and DAVID RICHARDSON. London: Frank Cass, 1997. Pp. 248. £29.50 (ISBN 0-7146-4807-8); £15, paperback (ISBN 0-7146-4360-2).

Four of the seven contributions to this little volume are by co-authors of the W. E. B. DuBois Institute dataset, combining available voyage-based data on the Atlantic slave trade. The introductory chapter by Eltis and Richardson provides an overview of research on the Atlantic slave trade, highlighting those issues on which the expanded dataset will be most relevant.

A second chapter, also by Eltis and Richardson, focuses on new evidence of long-term trends in the Atlantic slave trade of West Africa, particularly the Gold Coast, Bight of Benin and Bight of Biafra. Breakdowns by port and by time period show the fine structure of the trade. Nevertheless, as the authors acknowledge, the data almost certainly under-represent voyages from the Bight of Benin to Bahia. For this reason, the volume and the composition of the slave trade from this region are incompletely presented.

Of greater use is the chapter by Herbert Klein and Stanley Engerman on long-term trends in the transatlantic mortality of captives. The comparison of mortality for two periods (before 1700 and 1751–1800) shows a substantial decline in the amount of time spent at sea, and an even greater decline in the average mortality per voyage. (The graphs displaying this information, however are labelled in a confusing fashion.) In addition to the secular decline in mortality, the data show that individual voyages continued to experience great variation in their rates of mortality.

Stephen Behrendt's study of crew mortality shows a similar long-term trend, but other patterns as well: mortality for crews of English slavers was consistently higher than for French slavers, and seasoned crew members had, as would be expected, consistently lower mortality rates than crew members on their first voyage. In this analysis, Behrendt has sought to calculate crew mortality per unit of time, rather than per voyage.

Douglas Chambers's contribution is an interpretation of the Igbo diaspora, focusing especially on the settlement of Igbo captives in British America. By focusing on distinctive elements of Igbo culture, he lays the groundwork for more systematic efforts to identify survivals of the Igbo tradition in the Americas.

In the concluding chapter, Philip D. Morgan offers a general assessment of the cultural implications of the Atlantic slave trade. In his attempt to take account of the many dimensions of data available in the new dataset, Morgan puts more effort into emphasizing caution and nuance than into offering bold generalizations. For instance, he urges caution in linking ethnic groups, as labelled within Africa, to the ethnic labels applied to slaves in the Americas. His concluding emphasis is on 'heterogeneity, on fluid boundaries, on precarious and permeable zones of interaction'.

This modest collection serves as a teaser for the wave of analysis and publication that will inevitably follow upon the publication of the DuBois dataset (and on other datasets in preparation) that herald the era of the microcomputer in the social history of African slavery.

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PATRICK MANNING

*Missionary Encounters: Sources and Issues*. Edited by ROBERT A. BICKERS and ROSEMARY SETON. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996. Pp. vi + 255. £37.50/\$68.50 (ISBN 0-7007-0369-1); £14.99/\$29.95, paperback (ISBN 0-7007-0370-5).

This collection of essays is described by the editors as a 'commemorative volume' from the Workshop on Missionary Archives, held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, in July 1992. Of the eleven essays, seven are revisions of papers presented at that workshop; among the remaining four, which were added to bring a degree of geographic and thematic balance to the collection, the paper by Justin Willis is reprinted from *Past and Present* 140 (1993). At the end of the volume is printed an up-dated 'Archival sources in Britain for the study of mission history', by Rosemary Seton, which first appeared in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18 (1994). The editors' objective is to demonstrate, through these essays, that information found in these archives can be used to open a diversity of research respecting societies that sponsored missionary ventures, missionaries themselves, communities of converts, regional politics and retrospective histories in areas being evangelized, indigenous clergy, and many other aspects of religious and local history. African historians who thus far have missed these archives will find in this slim volume an assortment of innovative approaches, themes and aspects of historical study. The message is clearly stated: Eugene Stock and others have written 'useful reference books' but those volumes 'represent an obsolete view of what mission history is'.

All of the essays focus, in one way or another, on the peculiar characteristics and uses of missionary societies' archival collections (mostly British, and all Protestant) and ways that history and other disciplines can apply these under-used, largely incomplete, often disorganized, and occasionally scattered materials. All the essays should be classified as 'mission history' or missiology pieces, fixing on aspects of the missionary experience. Three essays (Dick Kooiman, Rosemary Fitzgerald, Geoffrey Oddie) focus on India and one (Robert Bickers) on China during the revolutionary 1928–31 period. The remaining seven essays touch on aspects of African history, but only as they related to mission history. Steven Maughan's essay, for example, describes the development of financial support networks within the London-based Church Missionary Society during the nineteenth century. Three of the essays (Rosemary Seton, Deborah Gaitskell, Rosemary Fitzgerald) detail the recruitment and experiences of women missionaries, whether as teachers, doctors/medical workers, or wives. J. D. Y. Peel reminds anthropologists of the richness of the archives and demonstrates, using descriptions of Yoruba religious practices from the nineteenth century, how missionary writings can improve understanding of the present and the past.

Unfortunately, this volume suffers from many of the problems characteristic of conference or workshop proceedings. The quality of papers is mixed, with some reflecting oral presentations by their authors and an inability to transform these easily into written form. Some papers are well written and thoroughly documented, but do not address fully the objectives of the volume or the workshop. Rosemary Fitzgerald, for example, wrote a very interesting and useful article on women medical missionaries in India, but a majority of her citations came from published materials; she excused this fault by noting that many reports and journals have been published already, missing the point made by others that published material is generally edited material and that often the most interesting parts have been deleted from original documents for some reason. Another deficiency, also characteristic of many such volumes, is the lack of an index and a bibliography.

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BRUCE MOUSER

*Djibouti 1888–1967: Héritage ou Frustration?* By COLETTE DUBOIS. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan 1997. Pp. 431. FFr 230 (ISBN 2-7384-5860-2).

This is an economic history of the city of Djibouti based largely on colonial archival records kept both in France and the Republic of Djibouti. It consists of two parts, one dealing with Djibouti's Golden Age (1888–1942), the other with the city's economic decline (1943–1967).

Part One opens with the French role in the scramble for Ethiopia and the southern Red Sea, the French take-over of Obokh and the establishment of Djibouti as a new port after 1888. It then chronicles Djibouti's economic growth as a deep-water port, as the terminal of the Addis Ababa railway line, as the site of an important salt industry, and as a magnet for French, other Mediterranean, Arab and Indian merchants. While the illegal slave and arms trade dragged on, bona fide financial and commercial establishments such as the Banque de l'Indochine and several maritime companies moved to Djibouti in the early twentieth century. The two European World Wars had a great impact on Djibouti, which was devastated by the Allied blockade (1940–2) which ensued when its colonial administration chose the side of Vichy France. Two imbalances and obstacles to social and political stability became obvious in this period: the concentration of all economic activity in Djibouti and the creation of an economic vacuum around it, and the administrative neglect of the local population of Afars and 'Isa Somalis in favour of migrants from the wider region.

Part Two, which covers the history after World War II, chronicles economic decline and traces the trends and conjunctures responsible for this, including growing economic competition from alternative Red Sea outlets for the Ethiopian trade. It examines developments leading to Djibouti's new status as a free port, and traces to this period the overwhelming in-migration of rural, nomadic people. By 1967, 60 per cent of the colony's population lived in the city of Djibouti! It is at this point also that the serious and chronic unemployment which still plagues the republic today made its appearance, together with social activism for workers' rights and political activism for national independence. The author does not continue the history of Djibouti up to the date of its independence, but suggests that France's eventual decolonization was facilitated by the flight of metropolitan private capital in the period after World War II.

The strengths and weakness of this study are those of the colonial archival sources on which it is based. Although the author occasionally draws on interviews with descendants of the initial commercial pioneers, this is almost exclusively a survey history of colonial trends and events, not a social or political history of Djibouti's people. What this study sets out to do, it does extremely well, and it is therefore an important contribution to the history of a vastly understudied country.

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LIDWIEN KAPTEIJNS

*Legacy of Bitterness: Ethiopia and Fascist Italy, 1935–1941.* By ALBERTO SBACCHI. Lawrenceville, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1997. Pp. 434. £16.99, paperback (ISBN 0-9322415-74-1).

Several 'legacies of bitterness' have been left by Fascist Italy in Ethiopia: from the extensive use of poison gas to the blind use of violence against the civilian population. The legacy of the Ethiopian war has also inhibited objective assessments among Italian historians. Alberto Sbacchi is one of the few scholars who has consistently attempted to analyze the short-lived Italian rule over Ethiopia, mainly through archival, particularly Italian, sources. This volume is a collection of ten

articles published in the late 1970s (only one, on Marcus Garvey and Ethiopia, is dated 1988) in which the author deals with different aspects of the Ethiopian question: from war atrocities to the treatment of the Ethiopian aristocracy, from Italian demographic policies to the 'price of empire'.

Yet the book is not just a remake. The author has successfully managed to tie together the ten essays by expanding and updating the original texts with fresh material and 'with the latest available literature', and by adding a useful introduction and conclusion in which he reiterates the main lines of his interpretation. The volume is further enriched by a chronology of the main events detailed in the book, and by a very extensive index of both names and content. Thus the volume is a useful addition to the present debate on Italian colonialism in Eastern Africa and to its scant literature. The author is right in pointing out (p. xvi) that Ethiopia under Italian rule continues to be 'a neglected topic of discussion', and that an objective assessment of Italian colonialism is still hampered by internal polemics among scholars and by nationalist prejudices: 'Africa is not a popular subject among Italian historians and remains a topic to be forgotten'. This rather peremptory statement may surprise the readers of this journal, and indeed is perhaps too sweeping. Yet it reflects the national trauma which afflicted the historiographical debate on the colonial question in post-Fascist Italy.

The book itself is concerned with more bitter legacies. It deals with four main issues: the varied reactions of public opinion in Italy, America and Africa to the Italo-Ethiopian war of 1935–6; the 'price' of the Italian Empire in terms not only of human lives but of enduring hatred and sense of defeat inflicted by the war to both Ethiopians and Italians; Ethiopian reactions to Italian rule; and the recognition of Italian East Africa by the great powers. Sbacchi is at his best when he deals with Italian sources which he knows thoroughly and handles with consummate ability: his assessment of the initial negative reaction of Italian public opinion to the war is still refreshing, as is his detailed analysis of the use of poison gas and other atrocities committed during the war. In so doing, the author clearly sides with those few Italian historians who have successfully contrasted official statements to the contrary (see in particular Angelo Del Boca's recent collection *I gas di Mussolini*, Rome, 1997).

Sbacchi is less persuasive, perhaps, when he attempts to estimate (through 'historical inference') the cost of empire merely in terms of Italian lives (the author dismisses the official numbers given by both Italian and Ethiopian authorities), or when he writes of Ethiopian opposition to Italian rule or about the ambiguous role the Ethiopian nobility played *vis-à-vis* the Italian authorities. Here in particular, difficulty of access to the Ethiopian sources – which are scattered, difficult to decode by an external eye, and no less ideological than the Italian ones – impairs Sbacchi's analysis. He admits that much 'remains to be examined'. Yet, his two broad statements to the effect that the main legacies of bitterness following the brief Italian occupation were the war atrocities and the erratic and cruel crushing of Ethiopian opposition are still sound, as is his statement that Ethiopian resistance prevented the effective exploitation of occupied Ethiopia by the Italian authorities and 'prepared the way' for the liberation of the country during the Second World War (p. 325).

To be fair to Sbacchi's work, one must also register the hesitancy of Ethiopian scholars to come fully to terms with a period of recent history which has been locally appropriated so far by patriot associations and official nationalist discourse, thus obscuring some of the complexities of Ethiopia's own legacy of bitterness. Despite Bahru Zewde's more objective assessment of the Italian period (see his recent *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, London, 1991) which Sbacchi sees as 'a departure from the traditional anti-Italian posture' (p. xvi), Ethiopia under Italian

rule still awaits a lot more, and more critical, research. Sbacchi's volume has the merit of keeping alive a debate which is far from finished.

*Istituto Universitario Orientale*

ALESSANDRO TRIULZI

*Decolonization*. By RAYMOND F. BETTS. London and New York: Routledge, 1998. Pp. 112. £8.99, paperback (ISBN 0-415-15236-4).

This slim volume on a large subject forms part of a still more ambitious series on 'The Making of the Contemporary World'. Betts' aim in the early chapters appears to be to give students some of the flavour of the vanished cultures of colonialism, which he approaches through the metaphors of 'landscape' and of 'stage performance'. His spatial and temporal limits are wide and indeterminate. Betts implies that the performance concluded in 1963 with Kenyan independence (the problems of southern Africa are barely discussed) but he has earlier begun by evoking Patten's departure from Hong Kong, the colony selected for illustration on the cover.

Betts is a fluent writer with an eye for significance in randomly observed details. He throws some features of the landscape into relief, notably ecological impacts of empire, tensions between city and countryside and effects of the changing balance between naval and air power. He seems most comfortable when extending his landscape into such territories as post-colonial migrations and post-colonial discourse.

His book cannot, however, be commended to students of African history, not least because of its careless errors, some rather serious. Lenin's *Imperialism* first appeared in 1916, not 1920; but the USSR (that early, flawed, attempt to decolonize) dates from 1924, not 1917 (p. 13). Lugard's 'dual mandate' was not economic and cultural (p. 12), and he was not married to Margery Perham (p. 16). Lumumba did not write an autobiography, nor did Senghor attend the Brussels conference of 1927 (pp. 40-1). It is dangerous to depict landscapes without accurate surveys of the land.

*Banchory*

JOHN D. HARGREAVES

*Jimmy La Guma: A Biography*. By ALEX LA GUMA. Cape Town: Friends of the South African Library, 1997. Pp. 87. ZAR 55 (ISBN 0-86968-121-4).

Alex La Guma wrote this affectionate sketch of his father in the early 1960s. Its belated publication tells us something of the so-called 'coloured' intelligentsia who played such an important role in the ideological constructions of the South African left. James La Guma was orphaned when very young. As a child he worked as a baker and then a boot-maker, labourer and 'cowboy' in South West Africa.

From an early age he agitated and organized among the working class, mainly in Cape Town. His passion for politics continued throughout his life; and except for an interlude during the Second World War he was a member of the Communist Party throughout its existence. He was an ardent advocate of an 'independent Native South African Republic'. He represented the Communist Party at the 1927 Brussels conference of colonial and oppressed peoples, and visited Germany and the Soviet Union. This last visit made an abiding impression on him.

This unpretentious little book helps us understand the importance of the Soviet Union in the ideological constructions of many black political groups, including the mainstream of the Congress movement. For James La Guma the Soviet Union was the metropole of colonial peoples. The Bolsheviks had done what they aspired to do – overthrow a repressive tyranny. His admiration is a little sugary:



The Russian people threw themselves selflessly into the task of building a new civilisation, working day in and night out with unrelenting enthusiasm... La Guma saw unshaven, dishevelled and weary workers and officials hard at their tasks... Often workers had to be ordered to take a test.

During the war he won many cases of beer betting white soldiers that the Soviet Union would not succumb, for 'he had seen a little of their determination... These people would never surrender to the old order of things'. James bequeathed his radicalism to Alex, journalist, agitator and organiser who was banned by the South African government and tried for treason in 1956.

Something of an oddity, this little book provides a lively footnote in the history of South Africa's left.

*University of the Witwatersrand*

ALF STADLER

*Historical Dictionary of Chad*. Third edition. By SAMUEL DECALO. (African Historical Dictionaries, no. 13.) London and Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1997. Pp. xlvii + 601. £85.50 (ISBN 0-8108-3253-4).

The word Chad is ambiguous. Originally, it means 'the lake'. At the outset of the colonial era, the name was extended to the territory under French rule; eventually, in 1960, it became the name of a state. Strictly speaking, the history of Chad begins in 1960, and it is obvious that the author of the dictionary had this in mind when he collected his material. And it is significant that, in his Introduction, he puts his brief survey of the ancient kingdoms under the heading 'historical background'. Nevertheless, ambiguity still pervades the dictionary, to the confusion of the reader. The author should have made the matter clearer.

The dictionary contains 427 pages. Most of the entries refer to persons prominent on the political or military stage and constitute the most interesting part of the book. Unfortunately, there are a few mistakes in the spelling of names – Vandome, Gourvenac, Kamougoue and Rabah instead of Vandame, Gourvenec, Kamougue and Rabiḥ (in Arabic, Raabiḥ, as attested in his letters). The other entries include names of places and regions, ethnic groups, political and military events, names of associations, unions and parties.

Most of the information provided is reliable, especially that related to political life and military campaigns, education, economics. But in other matters there are inaccuracies. Some statements are oddly irrelevant – the Zaghawa are described as 'a group of semi-nomadic Arab clans'; Mahamat Lol Choua, a Kanembu of some reputation, is said to be an Arab.

Despite its faults, the dictionary will contribute to a better understanding of the problems of Chad, but it should be read with a critical eye. The historian wishing to use this material is invited to further and closer investigation, for which purposes the bibliography will be helpful. It is extensive (149 pages), and has been conveniently divided into sections according to different topics, from archaeology to tourism. Of course, it is not exhaustive, and could not be. However, there is no excuse for missing four fundamental works – Louis Brenner's *The Shehus of Kukawa*, 1973; Dierk Lange's edition of the first part of Ibn Furtu's chronicle, 1987, Jonathan Owens' *A Grammar of Nigerian Arabic*, 1993, and, above all, Jean-Louis Schneider's *25,000 ans d'histoire du Tchad*, 1994.

*Ndjamena*

J. C. ZELTNER

*Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*. By TOM KILLION. (African Historical Dictionaries, no. 75). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1998. Pp. xli + 535. £61.75 (ISBN 0-8108-3437-5).

This book is the most recent effort to compile a historiobiography of Eritrea. The first was an unpublished manuscript entitled *Bibliografie dei Capi Indigeni delle Colonia Eritrea* by Ferdinando Martini, the first civilian colonial governor, between 1897 and 1907. Martini's manuscript contained 491 entries of indigenous Eritreans and Tigrayans in Ethiopia. Forty years later, Giuseppe Puglisi, an Italian journalist published *Chi è? dell'Eritrea* (Asmara, 1952) which includes 2,500 biographical entries on Italian civilians, colonial army members and British nationals working for the British military administration, as well as some leading Eritrean figures of that day. More than a generation later, *The Historical Dictionary of Eritrea*, with 470 entries of persons, places, events and institutions, therefore responds to a timely demand. However, there are some critical errors in Killion's dictionary which affect its historical merit.

First, the dictionary excludes several key figures in Eritrea's history, such as the colonial governors Cerrina Ferroni, Astuto Riccardo, Daodiace Giuseppe, Barone Franchetti (the architect of the first colonial economic policy in Eritrea), and Bartolommei Gioli (an agro-economist who attempted the Italianization of Eritrean society). Likewise several prominent Eritrean nationalists are excluded, such as; Woldai Kahsay, Salih 'Tetew', Abraha Andeberhan, Ali Ibrihim and Ghbrehiwet 'Himberti' (who 'assassinated' General Teshome Irgetu in 1970, as a consequence of which martial law was introduced). These exclusions raise questions regarding the criteria used by Killion in selecting entries.

Second, some of the information is erroneous and superficial. The *Dictionary* states that Abedella Idris was a student in Al-Azhar University when, in fact, he was a student at Al-Azhar Secondary School in Cairo. Other misrepresentations include Ali Said Abdella, who is not a Saho, and did not attend Kekiya Secondary School. Ibrahim Afa was not killed in Barentu but in the Agamet Mountains in Sahel, Isaias Afwerki was not a Deputy Division Commander of Zone 5 in 1968; and in 1994, he was elected Chairman, and not Secretary-General, of the People's Front for Democracy and Justice. Furthermore, the information presented about Isaias Afwerki, Mesfin Hagos, Mohammed Ali Omaro, Ibrahim Afa, Ali Said Abdella, and Mahmud Ahmed Sherifo among others is superficial.

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YEMANE MESGHENNA

*Historical Dictionary of Zambia*. Second edition. By JOHN J. GROTPETER, BRIAN V. SIEGEL and JAMES R. PLETCHER. Lanham, MD and London: The Scarecrow Press, 1998. Pp. xxxv + 571. £85.50 (ISBN 0-8108-3345-X).

Over the past quarter-century the Scarecrow Press has published some 75 volumes of historical dictionaries on specific African countries. The books vary widely in coverage and quality. Several nations have received second- and even third-edition versions; such is the case with this revision of John Grotmeter's original *Zambian dictionary* of 1979. Brian Siegel and James Pletcher (anthropologist and political scientist respectively) have added considerable new material – the present edition being about 40 per cent longer than the first.

Added is the right word: the principal changes reflect the inclusion of material on the actual historical events of the last twenty years. This can be grasped in the book's introduction and its chronology, which precede the main dictionary. Both are virtually unchanged in the first several pages, then include additions concerning the last two decades which double or triple the original length. Though some

purists may complain that the volume becomes more a political than historical dictionary, I find the material on the recent past a welcome and convenient reference guide to a quite turbulent era. The period includes, of course, Zambia's virtual economic collapse under Kenneth Kaunda's one-party regime, and its perhaps abortive reconstitution in the 1990s.

The hundreds of dictionary entries range widely, from palaeontology and archaeology to contemporary popular music; it is a diverting book to browse through. The grammar has been standardized to some extent and the cross-referencing made more thorough. The work retains the emphases on the Bemba and Lozi peoples and states, presumably based on the early scholarly attention these received. It retains as well some of the omissions and minor irritants of the original: of fifteen missing persons mentioned by Andrew Roberts in his *Journal of African History* review of the first edition, only two are now found here. Anglo-American is still incorrectly hyphenated, the Rhodesia Railways still styled 'Rhodesian'.

There are, indeed, other errors. Such works provide an easy target for specialists. Yet we should perhaps be more grateful: compiling such a dictionary is bound to be a difficult and tedious task. Whatever its faults, its virtues make the *Historical Dictionary of Zambia* a valuable resource for students of the region. I note especially the bibliography, which runs to over 80 pages; it is clearly and helpfully organized, and includes not only entries from a very wide range of journals but theses and other works produced in Zambia itself.

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