

limited by its restriction to 'elitist' arguments and concerns about their 'essentialism' rather than any ethnography of local religious experience.

Fiona Bowie is represented in two 'reflexive' essays. The first, on change in a town that was also the site of a notorious German colonial death, is co-authored with a Cameroonian scholar, Michael Mbapndah Ndobegang, and might be better classified under 'transformation/history', although the introduction by Bowie raises interesting questions about various issues of 'encounter'. Bowie's solo chapter on 'multi-sited ethnography' addresses an entirely different set of issues: first, it deals with her own dual role as an 'outsider' researcher and an 'insider' member of the Focolarini religious movement that has many followers among the people of her field site, Fontem; second, it turns out that Fontem people are now scattered about not only Cameroon but also Europe and North America, so that they have to be seen in the same peripatetic terms as the anthropologist herself.

Bowie's contributions epitomize the strengths and weaknesses of this volume. The questions that they raise and the historico-cultural frame of reference are both interesting and shared with other authors here but very little is resolved on even a tentative basis. Perhaps just posing the questions and undertaking the research is a sufficient tribute to the lasting influence of both Shirley and Edwin Ardener.

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## A RICH WINDOW INTO SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EAST CENTRAL AFRICA

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*Treatise on the Rivers of Cuama (Tratado dos Rios de Cuama)* by António da Conceição. Edited and translated by MALYN NEWITT. Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2009. Pp. xxxix + 95. £25, hardback (ISBN 978-0-19-726407-2).

KEY WORDS: Central Africa, precolonial, sources.

This edited reproduction of António da Conceição's *Treatise on the Rivers of Cuama* is the latest in the British Academy's New Series of Fontes Historiae Africanae, critical editions of sources of African History. It has a beautiful historical map of the region on the book jacket; a useful map of the seventeenth-century Portuguese Zambezi markets; Newitt's fine introduction (28 pages); the original Portuguese-language text, translation, and footnotes (84 pages); a helpful glossary; a bibliography; and an index. Its publication makes at least three important contributions.

First, in preparing this reproduction, Malyn Newitt compared manuscript and published versions of the *Treatise*, including both manuscript and published forms held at the Biblioteca Pública da Évora and a revised manuscript version held at the Biblioteca da Ajuda. The Ajuda manuscript is the core of this translation, but Newitt has reconciled it with clearly marked additions from both of the Évora versions and included sections reconstructed from the Évora manuscript that were excluded in the published version. This puts into print all of the known pieces of the puzzle, and Newitt expertly guides readers through them. That alone is a fine contribution.

Second, Newitt's English-language translation flows nicely, capturing the nuances and humor of the original. Readers get off to a delightful start in the second paragraph:

The River Zambezi is one of the largest that I have seen. It has very healthy fresh water and, although it has many crocodiles and hippopotamuses, they do no harm to the navigation but only check the excessive confidence of those who think to swim in it (p. 5).

Given that the original manuscript was broadly abbreviated, any translation must have been a challenge. Portuguese-speaking students of the region and period will certainly welcome a complete print version of the original in Portuguese, but Newitt's English translation makes the work exponentially more accessible, since English is increasingly an important second language for scholars worldwide.

Finally, the *Treatise*, along with Newitt's introduction and annotations provides a rich window into seventeenth-century East Central Africa. Few scholars are better placed than Malyn Newitt to discuss the *Treatise's* context and highlight its significance. He tells us what we need to know about the authorship and process of producing the *Treatise*, but, more importantly, he frames its insight into the practices of the Portuguese who lived in the area, what they thought they were doing, and what they thought the rest of the people of the region were doing. The *Treatise* supports Newitt's judgment of the author as an astute observer and that the Portuguese had a 'mature understanding of the cultural realities' (p. xviii) of the peoples of the Zambezi valley in the seventeenth century.

As one would expect, the *Treatise* provides a lens into the landscapes and markets of the region, at times contrasting great abundance with grinding poverty. The affairs, tensions, and jealousies of Portuguese and regional African rulers take center stage. Military supplies, strength, or brave fighting are valued for their ability to paralyze an enemy with fear or to intimidate potential enemies to the point that they will not risk an attack. Occasionally, a well-placed Portuguese widow comes into the narrative, but we get a surprise glimpse into the role that African women played in Changamira's defeat of Portuguese forces at the battle of Maungue in June 1684 (pp. 62–3). Changamira's forces were apparently severely weakened when he ordered the women, who, the author notes, 'were accustomed to accompanying the Cafres', to cut and gather wood to set fires all around the Portuguese forces. In the middle of the night, his forces lit the fires, terrifying the Portuguese into scattering (p. 63). It would be good to know more about the apparently usual roles of women who accompanied African militaries.

The *Treatise* reminds us of the tendency, then as now, to tell people up the chain of command what they want to hear, and to leave out what they probably do not want to hear. Thus, despite the complete absence of silver deposits in the region, if kings lusted after silver, kings were reassured that the imagined pots at the end of the region's ever-elusive rainbows held silver (pp. xxv–xxx). Also, the author's droll observation that 'we have been in such a state that our armies have been more under the orders of the Cafres than the Cafres under ours' (p. 85), was among the paragraphs deleted from the Évora version before it went up the chain.

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