

only because several of the Russian archives were closed, but also because many of the documents were considered sensitive. Even today the political climate in Russia may not have prepared readers for what they will find in these documents, the contents of which will challenge many set views on Russian–African relations during the last two centuries.

For example, one discovers that despite Russia's strong pro-Boer sentiment during the Anglo-Boer War, its government knew from the start that it was not going to intervene on the Boer side or even support their cause decisively. A memorandum by the Russian foreign minister, Count Lamsdorf, written at the very beginning of the war gives an amazingly exact forecast of the future development of events. South African historians may be aware of the fact that Boer nationalists originally supported the 1917 Russian revolution, but it comes as a complete surprise to discover that as late as 1925, only five years before he authored the first anti-communist law in Africa, Oswald Pirow undertook a secret mission to the Soviet Union in order to establish closer co-operation against Britain. The reader will be equally startled by the discovery that at the end of the Second World War the Soviet government attempted to 'adopt' one of the former Italian colonies; only when this attempt failed did it become an ardent supporter of Africa's struggle for independence.

Many of the documents provide arresting and amusing reading, such as the letter from Peter the Great to the 'King of Madagascar', and the correspondence of Soviet embassies in the first independent African countries. Some read like detective stories, such as the reports of Russian reconnaissance ships from southern Africa, diplomatic correspondence from late nineteenth-century Ethiopia, a diary written by an African traveller in early twentieth-century Russia, and various documents about the secret activities of the Communist International in South Africa.

Even where the detective element is absent, historians will find much new and exciting material in this collection. These include descriptions of South Africa and of Ethiopia; materials on the Anglo-Boer and Italo-Ethiopian wars, and on the work of the Russian Red Cross in Africa; documents on Soviet diplomatic relations with Ethiopia and South Africa during the Second World War and on relations between the first African independent states and the Soviet Union; sources on the principles and practice of Russian and Soviet policy in Africa; and new data on African students in Russia and in the Soviet Union.

Unfortunately, the majority of Africanists and, indeed, general readers will have no access to this publication. An English translation would constitute an invaluable contribution to African studies.

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### SHORTER NOTICES

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*Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghreb*. By MICHAEL BRETT. Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999. Pp. x + 300. £57.50 (ISBN 0-86078-772-9).

KEY WORDS: Northern, Islam.

L'ouvrage reproduit quinze articles dont quatorze déjà publiés et un inédit. L'ensemble se concentre sur l'histoire des idées et l'histoire tout court des dynasties et des sociétés maghrébines entre les huitième et neuvième siècles et les

douzième et treizième siècles, voire jusqu'au seizième siècle ('Morocco and the Ottomans'). La division du livre en trois parties rend bien compte des thèmes et des problématiques abordés: 1. Islam et Etat; 2. Les Banu Hilal; 3. Les cités. Cette division ne présume en rien de l'importance particulière accordée aux manifestations de l'islam dans ses rapports avec les idéologies, le pouvoir politique, la justice, le commerce, les taxes, l'identité des groupes sociaux ou la sainteté.

Il ne s'agit donc pas d'un ouvrage écrit d'un seul jet, de manière linéaire mais d'une construction *a posteriori* dont les parties s'articulent soigneusement, à la manière d'un puzzle et à travers ce damier très serré, l'on dénote chez l'auteur une volonté d'aborder l'histoire d'un fait ou d'une région de la façon la plus complète possible, faisant la part belle au religieux, au politique, à l'économique et au social, voire au militaire.

Le meilleur exemple en est peut-être donné par la quinzième et dernière étude qui porte sur l'histoire locale de Biskra. Elle nous ramène d'abord au titre d'ensemble de l'ouvrage qui se réfère révérencieusement au *Kitâb al-'ibar* d'Ibn Khaldûn, 'starting point for the reconsideration of that history today'. Si les quatorze autres articles renvoient ou utilisent Ibn Khaldûn, celui-ci s'en inspire de façon systématique et approfondie. Il nous donne une analyse fort riche de tous les problèmes de société qui ressortent des différents passages du texte des *'ibar* qui concernent l'histoire de la région de Biskra ou du Zab: rapports entre pouvoir local et central; entre pouvoir sédentaire-urbain et tribal-nomade; entre mouvement social et religion; entre hiérarchie sociale et revenus économiques. L'auteur n'est pas seulement un remarquable arabisant et scrutateur attentif de textes mais surtout un chercheur à l'affût de tous les indices, directs ou indirects, symboliques ou réels, clairs ou cachés, qui peuvent renseigner sur l'état de la société et des pouvoirs dans un endroit donné à un moment donné.

C'est ainsi, pour prendre un autre exemple, qu'il fait faire un bond considérable à la compréhension du fameux épisode dit de l'invasion des Banu Hilal au onzième siècle – un de ses trois thèmes d'approche – en mettant en perspective des textes de nature et de portée très différents qui lui permettent de dégager une explication nouvelle et convaincante, en montrant comment la dynastie fatimide au Caire a tiré profit religieusement et politiquement d'un conflit armé qui a opposé, en dehors d'elle, des tribus et un pouvoir local en Ifrîqiya.

Sans pouvoir entrer plus dans le détail, il est très clair que cet ouvrage apporte des éclairages et des points de vue nouveaux et intellectuellement stimulants ('either explicitly or implicitly revisionist', se définit-il dans l'introduction) sur une large période de l'Afrique du Nord que l'auteur se refuse visiblement – et il le démontre – à considérer comme celle de 'siècles obscurs'. L'apport, entre autre, sur les doctrines ismailiennes des Fatimides mais aussi les comparaisons avec les dogmes almoravides ou almohades, ou bien les analyses socio-religieuses et politiques sur le statut des Berbères, ou encore les jugements de juristes maghrébins sur le Bibâd as-Sûdân contribuent à éclairer un paysage que le sunnisme triomphant a par la suite relégué dans l'ombre. De ce point de vue, Ibn Khaldûn, quoique *faqîh* malikite, reste le dernier grand auteur de la frontière.

Sauf exception, tous les articles comportent une bibliographie et des notes de bas de page. L'index concerne surtout mais pas entièrement les noms propres. Il n'y a pas de pagination suivie de l'ouvrage mais des paginations partielles d'articles qui reproduisent les publications d'origine.

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*Historical Dictionary of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire)*. Revised edition of *Historical Dictionary of Zaire* (1988). By F. SCOTT BOBB. (African Historical Dictionaries, 76). Lanham MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 1999. Pp. xxxviii + 598. £67.50 (ISBN 0-8108-3571-1).

KEY WORDS: Democratic Republic of Congo (Zaire), general.

This volume takes its place in a well-known series primarily aimed at a public of reference librarians, personnel employed by humanitarian agencies and journalists, rather than university students or scholars. The author himself has served a correspondent of VOA. As a son of missionaries, he has had first-hand experience of the Congo. The task faced by authors of such mini-encyclopedias, usually published under one signature only, is daunting. Bobb did not make his work easier by compiling a larger than average number of entries, ranging from 'birth control' to biographical sketches, from ethnic groups to short monographs on trade, education etc. Following the general pattern of the series, a 130-page bibliography and tables are appended to the dictionary.

The author treads on safer ground when he presents factual, contemporary data on persons, political movements, the miscellanea of daily life or the basics of the political economy of the Congo. He has included information on the regional and international context within which the Congo has fared.

Yet it is a misnomer to speak of a *Historical Dictionary*, as its representation of the past often falls short of expected standards of accuracy. Contrary to what the reader is led to believe here, there are no oral traditions to substantiate the entry of Bantu people into Kasai by 1500 A.D., Nyamwezi did not migrate into the Congo in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries and the Ngombe are not a Mongo subgroup. Likewise, in the early 1700s, Beatrice Kimpa Vita was not burned at the stake by Portuguese officials, and in 1921 Simon Kimbangu did not found a church, a task later fulfilled by his son. Belgium is not bordered on the north-east by the Atlantic Ocean, the country was not neutral during the Second World War, and there were no Nazi troops in Ethiopia in those years. Enough of this excursion into desolate counterfactual landscapes. Cross-references to other volumes of this series might sometimes have saved the day. For example, the Angolan volume by Susan Broadhead correctly states that Beatrice was sent to her death by a coalition of Kongo noble houses.

In a series of mixed quality, Bobb's book will serve as a useful companion for quick reference to the Congo of recent years. The extensive historical ambitions of this volume raise questions, however, and one cannot help feeling that it might have been wiser to keep it to a less ambitious format. To stay in the region, the tight Congo-Brazzaville volume by Thompson and Adloff might have shown the way.

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*Historical Dictionary of South Africa. Second edition*. By CHRISTOPHER SAUNDERS and NICHOLAS SOUTHEY. (African Historical Dictionaries, 78). Lanham, MD and London: Scarecrow Press, 2000. Pp. xxxiv + 375. £76.50; \$85 (ISBN 0-8108-3646-7).

KEY WORDS: South Africa, dictionaries.

This new edition of the *Historical Dictionary of South Africa*, compiled by Christopher Saunders of the University of Cape Town and Nicholas Southey of

the University of South Africa, is a revised and enlarged edition of the volume compiled by Saunders, published in 1983. The new *Dictionary* follows the series format with an introductory outline history, a chronology, maps but no illustrations, then articles in alphabetical order of varied lengths from a few lines to over three pages – the longest are on the ANC and on economic change – and finally a lengthy, classified but unannotated bibliography compiled by Mary-Lynn Suttie, a librarian at the University of South Africa. The *Dictionary*'s scope is immense, from prehistory to the present, and includes articles on countries, ethnic groups, persons, places, organizations, events, languages, religions, economics, art, literature, historiography and more. It is crammed with interesting facts and hypotheses, and is a useful companion to the study of South African history.

However, the *Dictionary* has flaws and limitations: some inherent to its dimensions and nature, but others avoidable. Christopher Saunders states in his preface that 'this book will inevitably be criticized both what is included and for what is left out'. Brevity means omission and, perhaps inevitably, some articles have insufficient data and may mislead readers outside South Africa and new to the subject. Post-apartheid South Africans understandably shy from ethnic classification yet, if regrettably, ethnic identity is crucial to South African history. Readers need to know if a person is African, Coloured, Boer, British, Jewish or whatever, and the *Dictionary* does not always state this. Some aspects of South African history are under-represented, including military and demographic history. Although Nicholas Southey is specially interested in 'the history of sexuality' there are no articles on birth control, prostitution or homosexuality. The first edition was criticized, in a review in this journal, for being focused on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The new edition, however, tends to present-mindedness and gives disproportionate coverage to the post-1948 period: for example, half the chronology is on the period since 1960. The articles on Steve Biko and Winnie Mandela are longer than those on Jan Smuts and Louis Botha. There are also some questionable interpretations, for instance on the role of gold in the origins of the Boer War. There are some odd omissions: for example, the article on the press omits *The Standard and Diggers News* which influenced, among others, J. A. Hobson. The *Dictionary* could be more 'user-friendly' too. A major fault is that the articles and the bibliography are entirely unconnected. The articles have no sources nor further reading, and no references to the bibliography.

The *Dictionary*'s limitations are far outweighed by its advantages, and it could be most useful for students of South African history, but few will ever own it as the price is such that only libraries and landlords can afford it. The first edition was £17.10; the 2000 edition is £76.50. Why it is so expensive is not apparent: other commercial publishers are able to sell comparable history books at under half that price. One hopes that the Scarecrow Press will change its pricing policy and that the *Historical Dictionary of South Africa* will then reach the wide readership it deserves.

Oxford

ROGER T. STEARN

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*Encyclopaedia of the Boer War, 1899–1902*. By MARTIN MARIX EVANS. Oxford and Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO Ltd., 2000. Pp. xxvi + 414. £44.95 (ISBN 1-85109-342-7); £14.99, paperback (ISBN 1-85109-332-X).

KEY WORDS: South Africa, military.

The Boer War or South African War of 1899–1902 was the biggest ever colonial African 'small war' of the late Victorian British empire and sealed its domination

of South Africa. This ugly and wasteful contest between British imperialism and Boer settler republicanism is of key historical significance, not merely because of its role in cementing the basis for a white supremacist South Africa, but because of its modernity. In its exploitation of the technological and bureaucratic advances of industrialization, the Anglo-Boer struggle acquired many of the characteristics of modern war or even 'total' war in its economic and social reach, in the range of its political and cultural consequences, and in its testing of the limits of Boer sacrifice to defend a way of life. The centenary of the conflict has produced a small crop of new narrative general histories and reprints of various classics of Anglo-Boer War literature. Martin Marix Evans has set about measuring knowledge of the war differently, and has succeeded in providing an exceptionally valuable and accurate compendium of information on just about every aspect of this important colonial conflict.

Abreast of the latest war historiography and written in a terse, fluent, style, the *Encyclopaedia of the Boer War* is no mean achievement. The author has surveyed so much of the terrain and rendered its features intelligible, that this thoroughly comprehensive *Encyclopaedia* looks set to remain a paradigm of accessible reference for a long time to come. Using an A to Z format, the volume provides a crisp and concise entry guide to the origins of Anglo-Boer hostilities, to campaigning strategy and field tactics, and to the shape of the war's main battles and siege actions. Along with detailed notes on armaments and leading military and political personalities, the chronology and unfolding shape of the various stages of the war are nicely plotted, showing how and why hostilities eventually ended in the way that they did. Mr Marix Evans misses little in his big range of individually-referenced entries, and readers will find detail on scarves and chocolate as well as on concentration camps, railway logistics and African and Indian war participation. The inclusion of rare photographs, vintage maps and reproductions of important primary documents make this the essential war reference guide. You even learn that Brigadier-General Herbert Plumer went on to become known as Old Plum.

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BILL NASSON