

REVIEWS OF BOOKS

EMMANUEL KWAKU AKYEAMPONG, *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: an Eco-social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana, c. 1850 to Recent Times*. Oxford: James Currey; Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2002, 256 pp., US\$44.95, 0 8214 1408 9 hard covers, US\$22.95, 0 82141409 7 paperback.

In *Between the Sea and the Lagoon* the author presents an overview of recent ecological and social change in a remote and neglected region of West Africa. This is an exceedingly original sweep of socio-economic history, with an environmental focus, rich in empirical data. It is packaged as seven substantive chapters (each readable as an independent case study), interwoven by three common thematic threads: the relationship between culture and nature and the search for a mode of production; the cultural construction of the environment and its relation to the social reproduction of the community; and the history and legacy of colonial government environmental policy.

But Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong's book is difficult to appraise, on two fronts. On the one hand, the author's conceptual apparatus is like no other: he is clearly taking environmental history in an entirely new direction, along the way breathing new life into Marxist analysis of the colonial condition, but pinpointing the exact departure is no easy task. On the other hand, the very site of this study, the Anlo-Ewe community of south-eastern Ghana, is such a hotbed of new and exciting research that isolating an empirical contribution in this study surely requires first a summary of developments in the sub-field. Coupled with these caveats is the fact that the monograph is far removed from his first work, thematically and geographically (1996), and some explanation is in order.

The author explains in his introduction that he was drawn to the history of Anlo and its environment partly by a childhood fascination with stories of regional erosion that surfaced in the Ghanaian media. This, combined with his appreciation of the role of the forests and forest economy of Asante, gave birth to a unique blend of social and environmental history that emphasises 'the dynamic and symbiotic relationship between people and their environment'. Akyeampong's 'eco-social history' thus investigates African landscapes and livelihoods, interrogating the discrete spaces of economy and life style, accumulation and social differentiation, marriage, family, 'knowledge, belief and power, modernity and social change, and the sustainability of "development"', resulting in a distinct conceptual shift away from African environmental historiography in the mode of Harms, Giblin and Brooks or even Schoenbrun's recent pre-colonial history of the environment of the Great Lakes region.

Although the work is a major departure from earlier environmental histories, largely because of its emphasis on hydrology and its subsequent de-emphasis of such vagaries as 'ecological imperialism' and 'custodianship' with respect to his geographical focus, Akyeampong is but one of several scholars injecting new interest into Ewe-Adja studies. Meyer, Greene and Geurts have published important works reconceptualising Anlo and neighbouring communities' ideas of religious personhood, spirituality and sensory perception respectively, while Nugent has examined the Eweland border zone on the Ghana-Togo frontier. Under-utilised in this work, however, is Amate's recent history of Ada, which is directly relevant, as it posits a socio-economic history of the Volta River urban conglomeration immediately opposite Akyeampong's Keta and Greene's

Anloga. Collectively this scholarship heralds a complete overhaul of Ewe–Adja historiography and ethnography.

In chapter 1 Akyeamong considers the significance of migration narratives, Anlo topography and pre-colonial settlement in and around Keta. Chapter 2 begins in the mid-nineteenth century with British abolition policy, formal colonial rule and the growth of contraband and smuggling. Chapter 3 explores the diversity of commerce and prosperity in the increasingly urbanised Keta. Chapter 4 investigates the ecology of the region and the implications and social interpretation of sea erosion along the Anlo littoral. Fishing, urban and rural space, land reclamation and other activities, such as illicit liquor production, form the basis of chapter 5. The construction of harbours and dams and various attempts to control regional hydrology comprise chapter 6. The final thematic chapter and the conclusion summarise the implications of erosion, and the environment more generally, in postcolonial and contemporary debates on politics and citizenship among the fiercely pro-Rawlings Anlo–Ewe. It is a thoroughly engaging work and its sophisticated methodology will prove indispensable to environmental historians and anthropologists.

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J. D. Y. PEEL, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*. Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press, 2001, 431 pp., £35.50, ISBN 0 253 33794 1.

The ‘religious encounter’ of the title is that between Christianity, as propagated in Yorubaland (south-western Nigeria) by foreign missionary societies from the 1840s onwards and the religious traditions they encountered locally, which included Islam (introduced into the region a couple of centuries earlier than Christianity) as well as indigenous Yoruba cults. More specifically, the focus of John Peel’s book is on one particular missionary body, the Anglican Church Missionary Society; only passing attention is paid here to its Methodist, Baptist and Roman Catholic rivals, or to the ‘African Churches’ formed by secession from the missions from the 1880s onwards. In terms of its documentary basis, the study rests principally upon a meticulous reading of the voluminous records of the CMS ‘Yoruba Mission’, and more especially the journals of its local agents; although these are interpreted in the light of twentieth-century anthropological studies of Yoruba religion (including Yoruba Christianity), not least Peel’s own earlier work. The CMS mission in Yorubaland was unusual in the large number (over 50 per cent) of its agents who were themselves Yoruba, including some who were converted locally, but mostly ‘repatriates’, deriving from the community of former slaves (liberated from illegal slave ships by the Royal Navy) and their descendants in the British colony of Freetown, Sierra Leone. Such people, from their linguistic competence and their presumed anterior familiarity with indigenous culture, were evidently ideally placed to serve as intermediaries in the interaction between Christianity and the Yoruba, explaining each to the other, and in the process to some degree transforming both.

The chronological scope of the study is specified as constituting ‘the first sixty or seventy years’ of Christian–Yoruba engagement (p. 1). Elsewhere a more precise terminal date of 1912 is invoked, but not explained, beyond that it was that of the death of the Rev. Daniel Olubi, one of the most eminent of the Yoruba mission clergy. Granted that he was distinguished mainly by being the first to be ‘home-grown’ rather than a repatriate from Sierra Leone, it is not obvious why his passing should be regarded as marking ‘the end of an era’