commercial history Dr. Nicolls appears to have left few conventional stones unturned. Her present study will therefore remain as the standard description of these aspects of coastal history for some time to come. But the virtues of academic thoroughness are more than a little offset by a historical perspective that is narrow and unimaginative. For the historian not familiar with the Swahili Coast the missing chapter on Swahili society is mourned. Even upon a complete reading of this book one has no clear idea of the human dimensions of the trading towns under consideration. It may be that diplomatic and economic histories of unfamiliar societies inevitably fall flat when they fail to consider the people with whose fate they are ostensibly concerned.

A further general failing of this work would appear to be the author’s disinclination to consider events in the Indian Ocean in a wider perspective. The reader searches in vain for comments, however brief, relating the British position in India to their reluctance to take on responsibilities on the East African littoral and to their attempts to abolish the slave trade. As British imperialism was and is a global affair, local policies cannot be comprehended in isolation. So while the present work is commendable for its meticulousness a real appreciation of the Swahili Coast in the nineteenth century awaits the author with a wider view of British imperialism in that era.

Loyola College
Montreal, Canada

MICHAEL MASON


In different ways this undertaking by Longmans both compliments and challenges the regional surveys of African history which have hitherto been the preserve of Oxford University Press. One assumes that O.U.P. has not capitulated to the invader and that a kind of bibliographic “Scramble” may be seen soon witnessed. In any event, Longmans must be praised for being first off the mark in the field of West Africa with a work which is bound to be of enduring value. Professors Ajayi and Crowder owe their greatest success to having secured contributions from a number of scholars who individually have won themselves reputations of the most impressive eminence. A majority of these are from Nigerian universities; Mabogunje, Shaw, Alagoa, Adeleye and Ajayi himself from Ibadan, Crowder and Smith from Ahmadu Bello and Akinjogbin and Horton from Ife. While Hunwick is now at Legon his longest association has also been with Ibadan.

Given the preponderance of scholars from Nigeria it is not surprising that there is a bias of interest in the Central Sudan and the Bights hinterland. There is a further bias against the forest areas especially those in Francophone areas. While Suret-Canal discusses the whole of Senegal-Guinea states, occupying a much smaller area are surveyed in great depth and with great thoroughness by E. J. Elagoa. As a result of this distortion one might come away from a reading of this volume with the feeling that the hinterland areas of modern-day Liberia and Ivory Coast were deserted between the Neolithic and Colonial periods.

While the bulk of the contributions are original a few are certainly \textit{deja vu}.

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Curtin's comments on the Atlantic Slave Trade, Alagoa's on the Delta States and Akinjobin's on Oyo and Dahomey are all encapsulations of larger works. But these aside, it is the originality of the work, rare for such surveys, that is its most striking value. For a start, Thurstan Shaw presents a comprehensive discussion of West African prehistory while Robin Horton discusses stateless societies and the problems which they create for historians. It should be noted here that apart from Horton's references there is nothing on the Igbo peoples of Nigeria, not even a summary of what has thus far been speculated on their history, even though they are one of the most numerous and fascinating groups in the whole of West Africa.

It is the Sudanic areas which receive the most thorough treatment. Smith's article on the early states of the savanna will have no doubt the same repercussions on future considerations of this area as his seminal paper on Islamic revolutions of a decade ago did on discussions on the nineteenth century history of the Sudan. It must be seen as unfortunate that Smith was not encouraged to take his study right up to the nineteenth century for there is no other writer on the broad trends of Northern Nigerian history who can marshal such a breadth of learning and who, as well, has the capacity to write the history of society that is at once bold and convincing. John Hunwick, one of the masters of the early medieval period in the Sudan puts that area into the wider context of the Islamic world while John Willis, in a rare appearance as a scholar rather than an academic entrepreneur, does a convincing job in laying to rest the fiction that the fall of Songhai had the same effect on civilization in the Western Sudan as the fall of Rome did on Western Europe.

To the social historian this book, in common with most works on African history, may come as a disappointment. A majority of the contributors seem obsessively concerned with the minutiae of dates, events and even numbers. There is, as might be expected from Arabic scholars, a loving observation of the niceties of Arabic orthography as well as a compulsive concern with the development of Islamic institutions. To the non-Arabist this may seem as an unsatisfactory substitute for more general investigation and speculation on the subject of social developments which were either non-Islamic or had a small Islamic content. Hunwick, for example, refers to slaves being used as the labour force upon which the prosperity of Kano was built (p. 216). He seems entirely indifferent to the social concomitants of the introduction of slave labour in the city. It is in the same vein that the advent in Kano of various bodies of foreign Muslims is noted; there is for the most part little analysis of the change in social and economic relations which their coming would have signified.

A critical blindness in the use of conventional sources mars the work of several contributors. Adeleye, for instance, puts enormous strain on the value of the "Kano Chronicle" as a source without indicating that he has given any second thoughts to its reliability. When he writes that Amina of Zaria "emerges as a historical personage" (p. 490) he does so without suggesting that he has given any heed to the vast literature on mythical stereotypes in the histories of pre-literate societies. Yet as far as can be seen there is nothing but the most equivocal evidence to justify discussing Amina as a historical figure. In many ways African history has not liberated itself from its own past; the ghosts and mythical giants of the first histories still wander in and out of ostensibly serious modern histories.