GUIDES TO THE RECORDS OF EARLY WEST AFRICAN MISSIONS

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The systematic, academic study of history is barely two centuries old. Its progress has been marked by the discovery of new methods of investigation and of new fields to investigate, the two advances often linked, since many new fields were only recognized as worthy of exploitation when new methods made their exploitation profitable. In this perspective, the very recent development of interest in African history need not be regarded as sinister — either, on the one hand, for its lateness, or, on the other, for its present intensity — since African history has had to await the working of more obvious and more fundamental fields, where methods were invented and tested which are now being applied, with relative ease, to the study of the history of the remaining parts of the globe. As yet, however, African history is a raw field of study, a few vigorously-pursued excavations here and there contrasting with vast deserts of obscurity, where pioneers must resist the lure of mirages of speculation. The rawness of African historical studies is in no way more evident than in the lack of instrumenta studiorum shaped for the field. With very few significant exceptions, there are no bibliographical guides, no biographical dictionaries, no Monumenta or Fontes, no encyclopaedias, no local histories, no dictionaries of toponymy, no Fasti of clerics...

The series to which the volumes under review 1) belong aims to fill one of the gaps, by providing guides, to the manuscript material preserved in Western Europe which relates to the history of West Africa. The series has already had a warm reception from African historians, and the present two volumes are especially welcome to the African church historian.

What happens in a field of study where *instrumenta studiorum* are lacking or incomplete or, for one reason or another, inaccessible, can be shown by the Case of the Missing Mission. In 1710-11, twoFranciscans crossed the Sahara from Tripoli to the Central Sudan, with the intention of founding a mission in Bornu and the neighbouring lands: they reached Katsina where they died. In the standard literature of the present century (up to 1964) dealing with European contacts with the Central Sudan, no mention will be found of this Bornu mission, although it affords a striking example of European interest (and Christian initiative) in the 'discovery' of this region a century before the African Association was founded. Records relating to the Bornu mission survived in the Franciscan archives, and references to it were made in print in several nineteenth and twentieth century works by Franciscan historians, but these works were not seen by African historians, presumably because of lack of bibliographical media. Even when the references were brought together and listed with biographical detail in the *Bibliotheca Missionum* in 1952, they were not noted by African historians (for instance, to his shame, by the present writer who was a little later collecting material on the Bornu language) — perhaps (if the writer's experience is any guide) because the massive volumes of this expensive series were not easily available, and certainly because they were never given a searching review in print by an African historian. When finally in 1964 Mr Robin Hallet told us about the Bornu mission, his information came in fact not from the sources mentioned above, but from an independent, very slight reference (also previously overlooked, but more forgivably) in an English magazine of 1818. Yet another independent reference, in a German geographical journal of 1854 (provided to coincide with Barth's travels in the Central Sudan), has not to date been cited (to our knowledge) in any work on the exploration of the Sudan. African historians have surely much to learn from this deplorable lapse.

Working in Rome, Dr Richard Gray came upon the manuscript records of the Bornu mission, and in one of the works under review, he supplies references both to the manuscript sources and to the printed works. In a paper to appear shortly, Dr Gray not only describes this pioneer attempt at missionary work in the Central Sudan, but draws on material in the reports of the mission to discuss a wider issue — whether the neighbours of Bornu to the South, the Jukun, experienced in the later medieval period an attenuated Christian influence emana-