

HISTORY OF EAST AFRICA. Ed. ROLAND OLIVER and GERVAASE MATHEW. Vol.1. xiv, 500 pp., 16 maps, 2 tables. Oxford University Press, 1963. U.K. Price 63s.

The appearance of the first of three volumes of the *Oxford History of East Africa* is a major event in African historiography. From man's earliest appearance in the East African fossil record we are carried up to the time of the imposition of colonial rule at the end of the nineteenth century. There are twelve chapters in which eleven authors contribute what is often the fruit of original research rather than an epitome of existing knowledge. The work is thus not, strictly speaking, a standard text-book so much as a point of departure for future scholars. It is, avowedly, the first attempt to treat East African history from the point of view of the indigenous inhabitants and not from that of the aliens who came to explore, proselytize, trade or administer in the region. Thus the volume devotes only about a dozen lines to Nile exploration, and the word "discover" is cautiously placed in inverted commas. (p.338). There are only two references to the work of the Royal Geographical Society — one of which is incorrect. (p.367). Nevertheless the names of Burton, Speke, Livingstone and other explorers recur quite frequently because great reliance has to be placed on their accounts for material about the East Africans. This is not to say that the volume is simply a re-hash of evidence that has been used before. Much additional material which only a few years ago would probably have been regarded as "non-historical", has been used to very great effect to amplify the scanty traditional types of evidence. The results of the work of biological scientists, archaeologists, anthropologists and linguists have been knitted into several chapters besides those dealing with the early periods which might be conventionally regarded as their proper place.

It is inevitable, perhaps, that much of the resultant narrative should be rather flat. Even where it has been possible to draw on oral traditions, it is difficult to get beyond the cultural patterns, the tribal migrations and the cautious scholarly guesses to the lives of the ordinary people. In the vast majority of cases, this will never be possible and it is difficult to envisage, for example, the form in which this new approach to East African history can be made stimulating to the imagination of school-children. The important point, however, is that this approach to African history had to be made and once the attention of historians is firmly focussed on East Africans, some extremely interesting results will emerge in the study of the history of the colonial period. In any case, this volume does, as the editors claim, give us some idea of where the people of East Africa stood when the colonial period began.

It is impossible in a short review to do justice to every chapter of the *Oxford History*; each deserves a review to itself. It may be noted, however, that some of the disadvantages of a co-operative venture are apparent. There are overlaps and often marked inconsistencies between the contributions of the different authors.

The
Bak
had
a m
The
whi
nort
one
reas
migl
disc
exar
of L
the
and

Colo
This
as a
in th
sche
chaj
firm
by C
suc
reas

atte
tatic
avoi
drav
One
cont
incu
side

has
of d
clos
a m
earl
Low
exte
thar
(p.2

The first chapter in the volume provides a succinct account by Professor S.J.K. Baker of East Africa's geographical environment. It is unfortunate that this essay had to be written in a vacuum as it were. A geographer's insight would have formed a most useful commentary on the historical chapters after they had been written. There is, for example, the fundamental change in space relationships in East Africa which occurred at about the end of the eighteenth century when a period in which north-south cultural and population movements had been dominant was replaced by one in which westward-moving influences from the coast became dominant. Again, the reasons for the ascendancy of Buganda in the north-west part of the region (p.180) might with profit have been discussed in detail by a geographer. However, the discerning reader will find many leads in Professor Baker's chapter. The fact, for example, that morphological developments have provided a 'corridor' on either side of Lake Victoria (p. 8) is obviously of great importance for human developments in the region. A full-scale historical geography of East Africa would be most revealing and useful.

The second chapter, an excellent survey of Stone Age East Africa by Sonia Cole, is followed by G.W.B. Huntingford's chapter on the peopling of the region. This should disabuse anyone still inclined to rely on Seligman's *Races of Africa* as an adequate account of the ethnic composition of the population. The remarks in this chapter on "Azanian Culture" (p.71 ff) will be questioned by many other scholars as indeed they seem to be by another contributor (p.100). Gervase Mathew's chapter on the coast until 1498 is an excellent summary which sets this area quite firmly, as it should be set, in its Indian Ocean context. The succeeding chapter by G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville, on the coast up to 1840, does not seem to be equally successful and there are a number of questionable statements, as for example the reasons given for the cessation of French trade with Kilwa in 1812. (p.156).

Perhaps one of the most interesting chapters in this volume is Roland Oliver's attempt to describe developments in the interior between 1500 and 1840. The temptation to overlook parts of East Africa other than the north-western area has been avoided and, in general, this chapter shows how an historian can weld information drawn from a variety of (historically) unorthodox sources into a coherent narrative. One of the most interesting conclusions which now seems confirmed is that the conformation of the "Bantu line" east of Lake Victoria represents not a Nilo-Hamitic incursion into the Bantu World but a "Bantu tide which has lapped around both sides of the Nile-Hamitic bulge" (p.199).

For the period 1840-1884, the idea of treating coast and interior separately has been maintained and J.M. Gray contributes the chapter on the coast. In view of the fact that by the mid-nineteenth century the two areas were becoming very closely linked both culturally and economically, the separation appears to be more a matter of convenience than a reflection of historical reality as it was for the earlier periods. With this reservation, the chapters by Miss Alison Smith and A.D. Low on the interior from 1840-84 are extremely good. One wonders whether the extent of African inter-tribal trade was not, in fact, greater in the eighteenth century than even Miss Smith allows in her mainly "static and self sufficient" Bantu World. (p.264).