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James Currey
is an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9
Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF (GB)
www.jamescurrey.com

and of

Boydell & Brewer Inc.
668 Mt Hope Avenue
Rochester, NY 14620-2731 (US)
www.boydellandbrewer.com

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First published 2013

1 2 3 4 5 15 14 13

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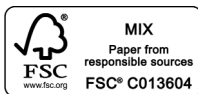
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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record is available on request from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-84701-063-6

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Papers used by Boydell & Brewer are natural, recycled products made from wood grown in sustainable forests



Typeset in 11/12 Bembo
by Avocet Typeset, Chilton, Aylesbury, Bucks
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

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Preface

Under the title of *Approaching African History*, this book aims to describe the gradual approach to the idea of Africa as a continent with a geography, a society and above all a history, and conversely to describe the ways in which that history has been approached since the establishment of the subject as an academic discipline since the end of the Second World War. The idea has developed over the centuries since the Romans first used the name of Africa for their provinces in what is now Tunisia, growing under that name to embrace a larger and larger area of the land mass and its inhabitants, until today the name stands for the continent as a whole. This history of the name points in turn to the evolution of its significance as it extended southwards from the northern margin of the continent, developing with the growing knowledge of its size and shape, and growing acquaintance with the peoples to the south, on the part of the societies of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In the process, those peoples have themselves adopted the idea of Africa as an identity for themselves, however they may have adapted it for their present purposes. The growth of this knowledge and this acquaintance, and the formulation of this idea in all its various forms, have together left a trail of written evidence for the historian to follow. But not until the second half of the last century did this lead to the concept of a specifically African history as an essential component of the idea itself. Having once been accepted, on the other hand, African history is now an idea whose time has come.

That said, the ways in which that history has been approached have been both problematic and controversial. The problem has been to discover what did happen in the past; the controversy has been over its understanding. In practice they are inseparable, since no discovery is free from its interpretation. The distinction is nevertheless important, since in Africa it is particularly the case that the evidence for what happened in the past has been hard to come by. Down to the end of the nineteenth century the written record has been patchy, thin, or non-existent, necessitating the search for other

sources of information among the remains of the past. What happened in history, to quote the title of a famous work by Gordon Childe, has been in consequence more than usually difficult to establish. That it has proved at all possible has required a major effort of understanding as well as determination to convince a sceptical world that in the absence of written records anything at all could be known, or indeed that anything at all happened. This fundamental argument over the very existence of African history is now part of the subject's history; meanwhile the vindication of that history as a subject of study has created a field not simply for continuous discovery, but for the inevitable controversy over its understanding. Thereby it has not only added a further dimension to the concept of Africa. It has created for itself yet another history, that of its own development as a subject. On the principle that the history of the subject is in fact the subject, any description of that development is tantamount to a history of Africa as it has come to be conceived and written since the end of the Second World War.

To run, then, what amounts to three horses at once, this book provides a narrative outline of African history over the past ten thousand years, as it has been established over the past sixty years, to describe on the one hand the growth of the concept of Africa, and on the other to show the ways in which the narrative itself has been constructed and its content understood. The task is complicated by the nature of the sources, ranging beyond the written to the archaeological, linguistic and ethnographical, and still further afield to the natural sciences of natural history, all of which have been required to reveal what happened over the five thousand years before the appearance of writing in Ancient Egypt, and over much, indeed over all of the continent thereafter down to the end of the nineteenth century. The reconciliation of these very different records is a fundamental problem, which I have attempted to solve by taking their evidence separately before providing a unified account. Thus the narrative is organised firstly by archaeology, which takes priority as the necessary source for the first five thousand years of the period, and thereafter as an indispensable source throughout most of the second. This is followed by ethnography, including oral tradition, which despite its general limitation to the last five or six hundred years, is indispensable for the understanding of the societies involved. In third place is writing, taking the story back to Ancient Egypt and forward to Rome before continuing down to the present day to cover a larger and larger area of the continent before embracing the whole over the last hundred and fifty years. The scheme is at the expense of a strict chronology, but in proceeding from the material evidence of archaeology to the internal evidence of ethnography to the external evidence supplied by so much of the written record, it is one that corresponds to a distinction between internal output and external input which has been a fundamental feature of what has happened over the past five thousand or so years as a result of the relative isolation imposed upon the continent by the formation of the Sahara – two separate histories not fully intertwined before the nineteenth/twentieth centuries. Meanwhile it is through the external witness of the written record that the emergence of the concept of Africa can be traced to its conclusion in

modern historical scholarship. In that scholarship, the strands of evidence have been woven together to take the formulation of the idea of the continent to a new level of sophistication. But as the literature of that scholarship has grown since the middle of the last century, it has itself become a primary source for the development of the concept as well as a secondary source for the past which it attempts to describe. The relationship is all the more close since in the years of its existence, the scholarship in question has been obliged to come to terms with a past in the making, the ongoing present of which it forms a part and to which it makes its own contribution. The discussion thus concludes with an indication of the relationship between them in the contentious field of contemporary history, and of the way in which the scholarship has proliferated to investigate new topics in anticipation of the future.

Passing the literature in review in this way has, I hope, the advantage of a readable text unencumbered with the page references which would normally be required, leaving to the Bibliography the list of authors and works discussed in the course of the narrative. I am well aware that this particular work is itself only the latest contribution to the ongoing approach to African history which it endeavours to outline, outdated almost as soon as it appears in a literature which continues to expand in the manner of the African population, whose exponential growth underlies the entire story. Emerging as it does out of everything that has gone before, inevitably it takes a stance which may be summed up in the title of a review article by Roland Oliver of a work which confined itself to Africa south of the Sahara. 'Why Africa is one' may stand for the approach to African history which he developed at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, an approach which is a continuation of the ongoing unification of the continent on the ground and in the mind, one which for better or worse has integrated Africa into our global world. Surely in this case it is for the better.

Dedication



To Roland Oliver

PART I

The Problem of African History





1

The Problem of Definition

From a camel to a weasel to a whale: Polonius, following Hamlet's description of a cloud which by its nature was changing all the time, might well have been the historian of Africa, attempting first to outline then to understand what has happened on the continent. The continent itself is huge, as large as the more habitable areas of Europe and Asia put together, its satisfying shape is reminiscent of its greatest mammal, the elephant. At the same time its history is immensely long, from the evolution of humanity to the present day. As Roland Oliver used to say to his students: 'The advantage of African history is that you can begin at the beginning.' On the other hand, its study as an academic discipline, a subject in its own right, is little over sixty years old, coming into existence after the Second World War with Roland Oliver and John Fage at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London; Robert Cornevin in France; and Jan Vansina and his colleagues in North America. Since those pioneering days, the subject has grown enormously, but the question still needs to be asked: is it indeed a subject, and why should it be studied?

The question is first and foremost one of unity. Africa, as we now see from the map, is a separate land mass. But unlike for example China, Africa as a whole has had no conscious unity, no awareness on the part of its peoples of belonging together as the inhabitants of a separate part of the world, nor any obvious political unity, before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Does African history, therefore, exist as a whole or simply as a bundle of local histories, ancient and modern, with little in common apart from their location in the same quarter of the globe? In the case of Europe over the past fifteen hundred years, the separate histories of the separate states form part of a wider European history with a variety of common denominators, not least conscious participation in a self-consciously European civilisation. In the absence of such participation, how far does this hold true for Africa? Do African histories, when put together, make good histories of Africa; and if so, to borrow a chapter heading from Graham Connah's *African Civilizations*, what are the common denominators?

Any answer must begin with geography, in the manner of the *Annales* school of history in France, famously exemplified in the work of Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*. From the shape and the situation, the climate and the relief of the continent, two constants are outstanding. In shape, Africa is highly compact: a solid L, turned upside down on maps that habitually place north at the top and south at the bottom; there is no branching, as in Europe and in Asia, and few offshore islands; Madagascar, almost big enough to be a continent in its own right, is the exception that proves the rule, in a highly problematic historical relationship to the mainland. In situation, this compact land mass forms an even bigger island lying across the Equator between the Atlantic Ocean to the West and the Indian Ocean to the East, and almost completely separated from the land mass of Eurasia to the north and north-east by the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. On the other hand, it clearly belongs with Europe and Asia to the greater land mass of the world's eastern hemisphere, in which the Mediterranean and the Red Sea are internal waterways that cut their way through from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. To the north and north-east, therefore, Africa has close neighbours. The outer edge of the land mass, however, the coasts to the west and south, looked out on nothing until the Portuguese and Spaniards discovered the sea routes to the Indies and the Americas five hundred years ago.

The second constant is internal. Long before the Portuguese and the Spaniards had situated Africa in a wider world, the position of the continent across the Equator, stretching as far to the south as to the north, had determined its climate. That climate is tropical: that is, it belongs for the most part to the region between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, imaginary lines drawn on the surface of the globe to the north and south of the Equator, which mark the effect of the earth's inclination towards the sun. They mark, in other words, the limits at which the sun stands overhead before 'turning' back to the north in the middle of winter and back again to the south in the middle of summer in the northern hemisphere. The climate therefore follows the same pattern to the north and south of the Equator, moving northwards and southwards from rain forest on the Equator itself through savannah or tropical grassland to desert on both of the two Tropics. Beyond this desert, in North Africa and at the Cape, the northern and southern extremities of the continent enjoy the Mediterranean climate of southern Europe: cool wet winters and hot dry summers. A simple pattern is thus formed, of parallel bands of climate moving in the same order northwards and southwards away from the Equator. They provide Africa with its own distinctive ecology, the conditions for human life.

This simple pattern is modified in two ways, first of all by the L-shape of the continent. The desert to the north of the Equator stretches across the very widest part of Africa. This is the Sahara, an Arabic word meaning deserts, in the plural: seas of sand, plains of rock, bare hills and rugged mountains. The whole is the size of Australia: a continent, almost, in its own right, but almost uninhabitable. In second place, however, is the relief, that is, the height of the continent above sea level. Africa is a huge tableland, heavily eroded, but



1. Geography of Africa: Relief, Climate, Vegetation

consistently higher to the east and south than it is to the north and west. Down the long eastern side of the continent, therefore, from the latitude of the southern Sahara, across the Equator and down to Table Mountain at the Cape of Good Hope, a succession of uplands cuts across the bands of climate: desert; savannah; rain forest; savannah; and desert, down to the Mediterranean climate at the southern tip. As a result of the altitude, not only is highland Ethiopia raised above the level of the Sahara into seasonal rainfall; the belt of rainforest at the Equator is crossed in East Africa by savannah, tropical grassland which links the belts of savannah to the north and south to form a huge horseshoe around the rainforest in the Congo basin. Further to the south, this grassland then extends across the southern band of desert, confining this to the Kalahari in Namibia to the south-west. The result is a continent linked from north to south by grassland which ranges from woodland to scrub: denser and wetter towards the rainforest, thinner and drier as it shades into desert.

From these two geographical constants: the one external, the position of Africa in relation to the rest of the world; the other internal, its climate and relief, two conclusions can be drawn for the history of Africa. The first is that the range of climate, from extremely wet to extremely dry, has, despite its variety, created a tropical environment for the development of human society in Africa with common economic, social, political and cultural features. The second is that the Sahara, which forms such an important part of this environment, has nevertheless acted as a barrier to communication between Africa's geographical neighbours and the savannahs to the south. So much is this so, that one solution to the problem of African history has been to limit the subject to the continent south of the Sahara, discussing its unity in terms of sub-Saharan or Black Africa; well represented in the literature, it is a solution that rests on the assumption of a fundamental difference between society north and south of the desert, the product of separate development in separate circumstances. That is not the approach of this book, which takes the Sahara into account as a unifying factor distinguishing the history of Africa to the north as well as the south. It is nevertheless reflected in the structure of the discussion. Whatever the substantial differences between north and south that may be attributed to the isolation of the one from the other, the fact of separation has had one major consequence in the paucity or absence of written sources for much of the continent before the end of the nineteenth century. This has not only created a fundamental problem for the historian of Africa in search of information, but means that Part II of the book, 'The Making of African Society', which relies for the most part on non-written sources, is thereby largely concerned with Africa to the south of the Sahara, and indeed with Africa south of the Sahara down to the nineteenth century. Its purpose is nevertheless to show how the whole of the continent, despite its regional variety, may be regarded as a historical unit, in principle from the origins of man, but in practice for the last ten thousand years, from the end of the last Ice Age in the northern hemisphere, and the beginnings of agriculture and pastoralism in Africa itself. Part III, 'Africa in the World', and Part IV, 'The Unification of Africa', then deal with

the history of African relations with other continents and other societies over the past five thousand years, from the time when the Sahara became the desert it is today. Because of the Sahara, it is a history of growing contact, from a corner to a half of the continent, and from a half to the whole.

These two stories are evidently one and the same: two aspects of a single course of events divided for the sake of clarity. Behind the division, however, stands an important truth. When the two stories come together, as they clearly do in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they do so not only on the ground but in the mind. Their combination is the latest stage of a process of imagination: the changing awareness of Africa over the centuries, and the changing idea of what Africa might be. That awareness and that idea are an integral part of the history with which this book is concerned down to the present day, and certainly down to the growth of historical scholarship. Here therefore in Part I, 'The Problem of African History', the discussion will introduce the difficulties faced by that scholarship in establishing an account of what happened in African history. In the final section, 'The Arrival of African History', it will look at the progress of its approach over the past sixty years of academic study, to set that study in the perspective of the history itself.



2

Solving the Problem

The Search for Information

The problem of the sources for African history is integral to the problem of African history itself. The problem arose when Africa and the world finally coincided with the imposition of European rule upon the whole of the continent at the end of the nineteenth, beginning of the twentieth century. For the first time, the continent was consciously united; but its unity in the eye of the beholder, whether European or African, was based upon ignorance of the African past. It was commonly assumed that because for the most part it had no written records other than those of the outside world, Africa itself had no history apart from one of contact with that world. The proposition was yet another proof of European superiority, in historical knowledge as in everything else. It nevertheless went to the heart of the question of history itself. Since the past itself is irrecoverable, by definition gone forever, history can only be our present knowledge of what happened in it, derived from what has physically survived to the present day. In accordance with the traditional view of history, the survivals in question were taken to be written records, without which no such knowledge was possible. The refutation of this thesis in the case of Africa was the beginning of African history. It required, however, two intellectual revolutions. The first was the demonstration that knowledge of the past did not depend exclusively upon writing, but could be obtained from records of a different kind. Second was the demonstration that this applied as much to Africa as to anywhere else.

The demonstration that knowledge of the past could be obtained from records other than writing predated the imposition of colonial rule upon Africa. After centuries of antiquarian interest in objects surviving from the past, it began much earlier in the nineteenth century with the birth of archaeology, the scientific study of the material remains of the past. Its first task, to demonstrate the antiquity of those remains, was accomplished by stratigraphy, the study of layers, on the principle that what is underneath must be earlier than what is on top. Out of that study came the realisation that the tale of human activity was far longer than the written record,

preceding it everywhere by thousands of years. From that came the idea of prehistory. *The Idea of Prehistory* is the title given by Glyn Daniel to a brilliant little history of this intellectual revolution, which effectively disposed of the idea that knowledge of the past depends upon written sources. Both the title and the book are nevertheless apologetic. The very word prehistory, 'before history', coined to establish the independence of archaeology and its findings from the written record, is an acknowledgement of the priority of history as traditionally conceived, the story of the past derived from the writings of the past. It was an act of defiance by the archaeologist Gordon Childe to claim the name of history for a book based for the most part on the archaeological record of the Middle East and Europe under the title, *What Happened in History*. The second revolution which began within the next few years after the publication of Childe's work in 1942 was the application of the same idea to Africa in a determined effort to demonstrate that Africa did indeed have a history which could be reconstructed not only from such writing as there was, or even from archaeology alone, but from what turned out to be all manner of evidence from all manner of sources. Not only writing, not only material remains were called upon, but language, customs, and oral tradition; plants, animals, and human beings themselves; not to speak of geology with its record of climate change. A quarter of a century after its inception, the programme was summed up in 1970 by J. Desmond Clark, one of its principal pioneers, in *The Prehistory of Africa*, a work in the series *Ancient Peoples and Places* edited by Glyn Daniel himself. Its execution in Africa has made its own radical contribution to the study of history, not least through its search for information.

The evidence began to accumulate from the beginning of the colonial period, as colonial governments took scientific stock of the lands and peoples they ruled, and contributions multiplied from the many individuals fascinated by the difference of Africa from Europe. South of the Sahara, indigenous written records came to light from the Islamic societies of West and East Africa; archaeology achieved spectacular success with the discovery of the earliest prehuman remains in eastern and southern Africa. The many languages of Africa were learnt, and social anthropologists moved in on the multitude of beliefs, customs and traditions of the different peoples they encountered. Plants and animals were scientifically investigated in the interests of agricultural development; geology was studied in the interest of mining. It was not, however, until the 1930s, and more especially the 1940s and 50s, towards the end of the colonial period after the Second World War, that all this information began to be considered from a historical point of view as so many survivals from the past which could be used as evidence for the past. When that happened, the historical revolution was under way, confronted by the task of evaluation.

Regarded from the point of view of history, all these different kinds of information have yielded different kinds of evidence with different bearings on the past. Writing, the traditional source, is the most personal, giving information about who people were, what they said and did, and what they thought – political history in the Aristotelean sense of active participation in

the affairs of the community. But while it first appeared in Egypt about 5000 years ago, writing spread only gradually southwards and westwards, and did not cover the whole of the continent before the end of the nineteenth century. And its appearance in Egypt, long ago as that may be, leaves out the previous millennia. Archaeology, on the other hand, covers the whole of the continent the whole of the time, from the origins of humanity, and certainly for the last 10,000 years. But apart from the fact that archaeologists have so far only scratched the surface of this enormous continent in selected spots, the information to be gathered from the material remains of human settlement about how people lived is impersonal. While it is likely to turn up written records to add to the canon in centres of literacy such as Ancient Egypt and Ethiopia, and a pictorial record in the form of sculpture and painting, its main contribution is to the economic rather than the political history of the continent. To meet the requirement of political history in societies untouched by writing, historians have had recourse to oral tradition, narratives of the past transmitted from generation to generation until reduced to writing in the so-called ethnographic present, the moment, for the most part in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, at which they were transcribed and fixed for future reference. But although in principle these narratives cover the whole of the continent, a feature of literate as well as illiterate societies, their time depth is shallow, usually no more than two hundred years, after which they shade off into myth and legend. And since they are dependent for their existence upon their narrators, their value as a record of the past may be less than their value as evidence of the lines along which these narrators think about themselves and the community to which they belong. This value as evidence of the mind of the narrator takes these traditions into the realm of the ethnographer, the social anthropologist who sets out to describe the ways in which present-day communities behave and think. Descriptions of this sort, which once again may be obtained for the whole of the continent, offer the possibility of social history, on the grounds that behaviour in the present reflects behaviour in the past. The problem is to decide how far such behaviour may be regarded as a survival from the past, and if so, how far back it goes.

Among these four kinds of evidence, archaeology with its material remains is the exception, in that it does not depend upon the knowledge and use of language. Language, for the historian, is much more than a key to what is being said by its speakers today, even to what they were saying in writing up to 5000 years ago. Languages in use today are constantly changing, but along with the memories and behaviour of their speakers can be treated in the same way as survivals from the past. African languages fall into five indigenous groups, with the recent addition of the Indo-European languages of Europe, notably English and French. Their distribution is itself significant – we have only to think of the worldwide distribution of English, French, Spanish and Portuguese as the result of the emigration of their speakers from Europe. At the same time their vocabularies may be mined for words that indicate the lifestyle and experience of previous speakers in the recent and more distant past – words for plants and animals, and for manufactures old

and new. This linguistic evidence is parallel to the physical evidence, uncovered by archaeology, for the presence of such things in human settlement. For the interpretation of that evidence, archaeology is crucially dependent upon the whole range of natural sciences: biology, physics and chemistry, whose findings may provide quite separate kinds of historical information. Botany and zoology, the scientific study of plants and animals, wild and domestic, can indicate both their origin and their evolution. Palaeontology, the study of previous forms of life, goes hand in hand with archaeology in studying the evolution of humanity from the fossil record. When palaeontology turns into physical anthropology, the study of the present human species, bones unearthed by archaeology reveal the lifestyle and medical history of the individual concerned. In providing evidence for the history of the species on the continent, however, bones are now less important than the blood and genes of the living. When they have been thoroughly studied, genes in particular will provide a major new source of historical information.

The list of the sciences capable of providing the historian with evidence for the African past is very long, and certainly includes geology with its record of climatic change. But while the identification of all these various forms of evidence has laid the foundations of the intellectual revolution, the demonstration that Africa did indeed have a history which could be approached, with or without any written record, much of the work is still in its infancy. Archaeology in particular, the basis of the idea of prehistory, is very thin on the vast ground of this enormous continent. Moreover, the list itself, from writing down to rocks, creates its own obstacle. Each source, each science, illuminates only one aspect of the African past; not all of the subject, and not all of the time. For a view of the whole it is necessary to place all these separate columns of different kinds of information side by side, and combine them at any one time, in any one place. But each requires its own expertise; no one scholar is master of all. The history of African history is a history of attempts, by one scholar after another, to effect a synthesis.



3

Solving the Problem

The Writing of African History

If Africa be the elephant, then the different students of the African past, each with his or her own specialism, are the blind men who each have hold of a different part of the beast – trunk, tusk, ear, belly, leg and tail – and have in consequence quite different tales to tell. Proverbially, in the country of the blind, the one-eyed man is king; but who might this be in the case of Africa? Which of these various students has the eye to see the whole, however imperfectly? Imperfection begins with historical knowledge itself, which is derived from surviving records, never directly from the past. It is, moreover, built into the process of derivation. In principle, this should lead to a steady accumulation of knowledge, which has certainly been the case in Africa. That knowledge, however, is governed by the ways in which we make sense of the information. These ways, as we can clearly see from the example of Africa, are continually changing. For the moment, and no doubt for the future, they include not only the idea of prehistory, but the idea of African history itself. Beyond that, however, they are as various as the blind men with their different approaches to the subject. Only the rules of evidence, the master idea which provides the common ground of modern scholarship, can decide between them, or bring them together in a vision of the whole. In applying those rules to African history, the would-be kings, those who have claimed the eye, have started from different positions, proceeded by trial and error, and reached only provisional conclusions.

The first vision for our purpose was put forward in 1930 by a social anthropologist, C. G. Seligman, whose book, *The Races of Africa*, classified the peoples of Africa by culture, that is, by ways of life and thought. His evidence was ethnographic, that is, descriptions of African societies in the early twentieth century. As the title reveals, however, he went on to equate culture with race, stepping from social into physical anthropology in search of an explanation for the cultural differences he perceived. Outwardly, race was a matter of skin colour, black and white; but inwardly it was a question of hereditary abilities and aptitudes which produced the behaviour described by the

ethnographer. From this equation of culture and race came Seligman's view of African history. The original inhabitants of the continent were the black peoples, at a very low level of achievement; but beginning perhaps with the Ancient Egyptians, Africa had been colonised by whites from the north-east. These had intermarried with the black population, so that to the south of the Sahara, at least, they were no longer white-skinned. But their aptitudes explained the appearance of civilisation on the continent, that is, the development of arts and crafts, cities and states, in all kinds of hybrid forms.

This is the notorious Hamitic hypothesis, of which the best that can be said is that it was indeed a theory of African history, of the history of the continent as a whole. It has been not only rejected, but turned on its head by black African writers, in particular by another social anthropologist and ethnographer, Sheikh Anta Diop. In *The African Origins of Civilisation*, and other works from 1954 onwards, he argued that it was black Africans who had not only civilised themselves but the world through their creation of Ancient Egypt. From 1987, this thesis has gained its own notoriety with the publication of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*, designed to show that Greek civilisation, the foundation of Western European civilisation, had originated with black Egyptians, not white Nordics. Like Seligman's, however, this is a view of African history which depends upon the equation of culture with race; and for that reason cannot stand. Physical anthropology itself has nothing to say about mental ability in relation to the various cultural achievements of *homo sapiens sapiens*, 'wise, wise man', beyond the fact that they all proceed from the same brain. Archaeology meanwhile, in the words of Glyn Daniel, is firmly committed to the principle that 'language, race and culture are independent variables.' In the first place, there is no way of telling from the material remains of a people's culture what language they spoke or who they may have been. Even if these may be inferred from skeletal remains or traces of writing, it is perfectly clear from the modern world that the use of English, for example, and the employment of modern technology, bear little or no relationship to the genetic origin and physical character of the speakers and users. In the absence of any necessary connection between these three elements, in the past as well as the present, what can be said of the Ancient Egyptians is not that they were black or white, but that, whatever their colour, whichever human population they belonged to, they were an African people in an African environment, making the most of the opportunities of the Nile valley and delta.

This is the principle upon which modern archaeology builds in its attempt to explain the material remains of the past, and gain some idea of the societies which created them. Since archaeology is the one approach to the African past that covers the whole of the continent the whole of the time, it might appear that this is the key to African history as a whole; and that as a result, the archaeologist has the best claim to be the historian of Africa, not least because it is his study of stratigraphy, coupled with radio-carbon dating, that has yielded the firm chronology required for the reconstruction of the past. From there to drawing upon the many other kinds of evidence to arrive at a picture of the whole is another matter. For the interpretation of their

data, archaeologists certainly rely upon an impressive range of sources, looking especially to the natural sciences – physical anthropology, zoology, botany, geology, not to speak of physics and chemistry, which have yielded the radio-carbon dates required to convert the relative chronology of stratigraphy into an absolute chronology of events across the continent as a whole. They have employed modern ethnographic data for comparative purposes, and where written records are available, they have used them as a guide. But they have been reluctant to go further, and venture into the traditional realm of the historian whose main concern is with the written sources. In practice, with the notable exception of Ancient Egypt, archaeology in Africa has so far perpetuated the original distinction between history and prehistory by concentrating on the more distant past for which written records are not available. The result can be seen in David Phillipson's *African Archaeology*, a continent-wide account of the evolution of society in Africa from archaeological data. But it comes to a halt about a thousand years ago, with the briefest of summaries of events thereafter. Graham Connah's *African Civilizations* is an ambitious attempt to arrive at a comprehensive explanation for the growth of African society, using written records, where available, to supplement the archaeological evidence. But his studies of individual societies do not pretend to be a history of the whole; northern Africa is excluded; and once again he stops short of the modern period.

Language, race and culture may be independent variables, but it is of course possible for them to coincide, in the sense that a particular people may speak a particular language while leading a particular way of life. On this basis, the way is open to the linguists, the experts in the third element of the trio, to bring their knowledge of African languages to bear on the historical relationship between the three. In *The Civilizations of Africa*, Christopher Ehret uses his expertise as a linguist to argue that the close connection that evidently exists between language and culture in the modern world can be traced far back in the past. His argument is that while archaeology cannot infer language from the material remains of culture, it is possible to infer culture from language. To be precise, it is possible to regard modern languages as survivals from the past, and thus as evidence for the lifestyle of previous speakers. And if both lifestyle and language can be known, then the identity of the people themselves can be established: not their physical identity in the form of their race, a concept which Ehret quite rightly dismisses as without foundation in the genetic mixture of humanity, but their identity as a community. Beginning with the division of African languages into families, therefore, he goes on to examine their vocabularies for clues to the material culture and mental outlook of their speakers in the past. This archaeology of language takes him back many thousands of years, and provides the starting-point for a comprehensive history of Africa, drawing upon all other kinds of evidence, down to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Ehret thus takes the story on beyond Phillipson and Connah, but still not down to the present day. For the history of the whole of the continent, the whole of the time, only the historians remain; that is, the specialists in the original kind of history, the study of the past from the written records of the

past, despite the fact that such records have only covered the whole of Africa for less than two hundred years. Working from these records, African historians have naturally tended to concentrate on the more recent past, beginning where Ehret leaves off. And insofar as they have set themselves to write the history of Africa as a whole, they have looked back from the end of the story rather than beginning, like the archaeologists, at the beginning. The further back they have looked, moreover, the more they have become dependent for their data on the others in the field, the archaeologists and the linguists in particular. Since the development of the subject after the Second World War, it is nevertheless the historians who have claimed the eye, so to speak, to accomplish the intellectual revolution required to extend the notion of history to the whole of the African past.

Among the pioneers of the revolution, the name of Roland Oliver is outstanding. Starting his career with work on the missionary records of East Africa, he set out to establish the study of African history as a whole, on the continent as well as in the United Kingdom. The result was seen in the publication, in 1962, of *A Short History of Africa*, written in collaboration with his colleague John Fage. Giving the first, chronological account of the whole of African history, drawing on all available material from all sources, it was a manifesto of the revolution. Its brevity was the key to its clarity: after forty or so years, and various reprints and new editions, it is still the easiest history to read. It shows its age most notably in the diffusionist explanation offered for the spread of so-called divine kingship into sub-Saharan Africa from Egypt to create what he called the Sudanic civilisation: an attenuated version of the Hamitic hypothesis, relying like Seligman upon ethnography, but stripped of his racialism. Nevertheless, it set the pattern for the future, not only through its incorporation of the idea of prehistory into a programme for the history of the continent from the evolution of humanity onwards. Through its arrangement of the narrative, it raised the problem faced by all subsequent historians: how to organise the data for such an enormous subject into a coherent whole. The solution it proposed has underlain all subsequent thinking on the subject. The *Short History* is first evolutionist, describing the development of ways of life on the continent; then diffusionist, describing the spread from the north of Egyptian, Roman and Islamic influence over the period from 5000 BCE to 1000 CE. For the period from 1000 to 1800 CE it is regional, giving separate accounts of the north, east, south and west; and finally, from 1800 CE onwards, it is continent-wide again, describing the unification of the continent under colonial rule, followed by independence. The solution was explicitly justified at about the same time by Ivan Hrbek in 'Towards a periodisation of African history', an article which looked for the common features in the African past, and concluded that the history of the continent began as a single story which later divided, on the one hand into regional histories, and on the other into the histories of contact and non-contact zones, in touch or out of touch with the rest of the world, before progressive reunification began in the sixteenth century CE.

In Fage's own *History of Africa*, the scheme of the *Short History* was simplified by the subordination of the regions to themes, in three main stages:

internal development; the spread of Islam; and European influence. But it was overloaded in the two great triumphs of African historiography, the publication in the 1970s and 80s of *The Cambridge History of Africa* and the UNESCO *General History of Africa*. These multi-volume works were a tribute to the energy and enterprise of the first generation of African historians, on the continent, in Europe and in North America, in pressing their new subject upon the attention of the international community. They were, on the other hand, collective enterprises, written by a range of largely regional specialists, with fragmentation as the result. Regionalism took over after the first volumes, generalisation returned only at the end, so that African history as a whole became the sum of its parts, of what happened on the continent in different places at different times. It might appear that African history had fallen victim to its own precocious success in selling itself to the world.

There has in consequence been all the more reason to seek a balance between periods, regions and themes, lest the historians continue to swell the ranks of the blind. Oliver himself, once again in collaboration with an archaeologist and a historian, has produced what amounts to a three-volume periodisation of the last 2,500 years, divided between an Iron Age, a Middle Age and a Modern Age, each with its characteristics. Most recently, in *The African Experience*, he has turned to a thematic treatment in which successive innovations are identified and discussed in order of their appearance as major themes and topics. Such themes and problems have been put back into a regional framework by Curtin, Feierman, Thompson and Vansina in their collaborative *African History*, while Elizabeth Isichei has discussed them by way of introduction to the regional histories in *A History of African Societies to 1870*. The most radical solution of all is that of John Iliffe in his *Africans: The History of a Continent*, who has subordinated periods, regions and themes to the one key theme of colonisation: the efforts of natives and immigrants to make a living in 'an especially hostile region of the world'. He returns, in other words, to the geographical setting to produce a 'natural history of man in Africa', a demographic history of the slow growth of population over the millennia. He is, in Isaiah Berlin's estimation, a hedgehog who knows one great thing, as distinct from the fox who knows many different things. In the approach to African history, the problem is to combine them in the ongoing search for information and for understanding. How this combination has been achieved is the essence of the subject.

PART II

The Making of African Society



THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIMENSION



4

From Hunting & Gathering to Herding & Farming

I

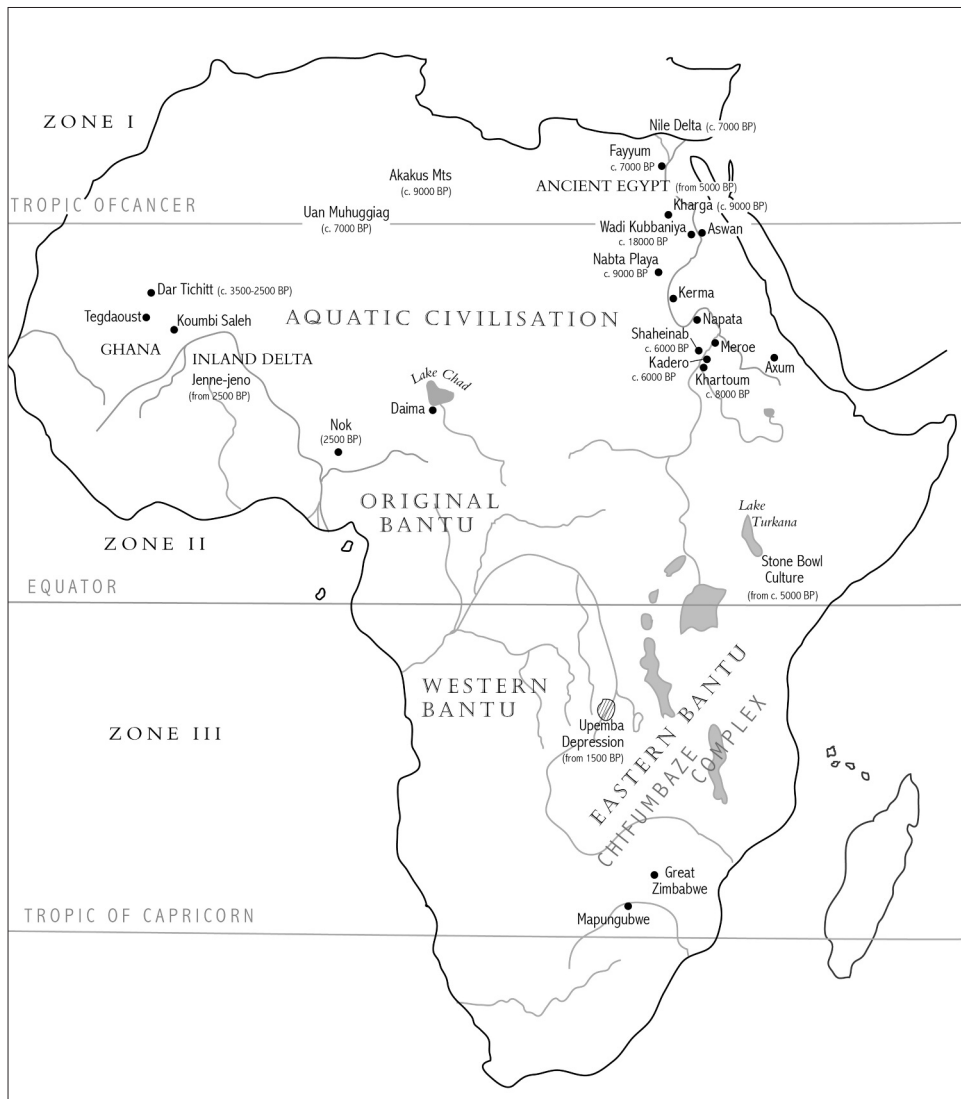
To turn from the problem of African history to what can now be said about events over the past ten thousand years, is to turn in the first place to Phillipson's archaeology for information and to Iliffe's geography for the beginning of understanding. Throughout the length of human history, which goes back much further into the past, the position, shape and relief of the continent have not significantly changed. The same, however, cannot be said of its climate, which has fluctuated over what, geologically speaking, are astonishingly short periods of time: as little as five thousand years, or from one millennium to another. The date of around 10,000 BP – Before the Present – is the date of just such a climatic event: the ending of the last Ice Age in the northern hemisphere. It marked the end of the Pleistocene – the Most Recent period in the history of the earth, and the beginning of the Holocene – the Wholly Recent period, the period in which we now live. During the last Ice Age, at the end of the Pleistocene, the climate of Africa north of the Equator, and especially in the Saharan region, was even harsher and drier than it is today: we can call it the Pleistocene Dry. But with the rapid melting of the glaciers, the climate of the Mediterranean spread southwards and that of the Equatorial regions northwards, to begin a period of some five thousand years in which the desert turned into savannah and the old savannah into swamp. This phase, the Holocene Wet, was succeeded some five thousand years ago by a much drier period, the Holocene Dry, in which the desert reappeared, and the climate became much as it is today. Over these three climatic periods, from dry to wet to dry, we can trace in the stratigraphic sequence of the archaeological record, the evolution of three ways of life: hunting and gathering; the cultivation of crops; and the herding of animals.

It is a story, in Iliffe's terms, of colonisation: of the gradual occupation of the continent and the exploitation of its environment by the human animal, which turned from monkey into man on the highlands of East Africa

between 5 million and 1.5 million years ago. Thereafter it developed from a creature that walked upright into one fully human, *homo sapiens sapiens* or wise, wise man, with our brains, faces, tongues, hands and legs; and colonisation by evolution turned into colonisation by hunting and gathering. Hunting of animals large and small includes fishing; while gathering is of everything edible: leaves, fruit, seeds and roots, not to speak of eggs, grubs and insects. In various forms, it is a way of life that has survived until today; although it is dangerous to think of the way of life of the Bushmen of the Kalahari, for example, as corresponding exactly with the past. Ethnography may be suggestive, but it is archaeology that provides the evidence for settlement, diet, toolmaking, and so on by the end of the Pleistocene Dry. By then, hunting and gathering was not only diverse, varying from region to region according to the environment, it was the basis for some settled as well as nomadic communities, with a wide range of skills. The evidence for those skills is primarily an array of well-chipped microliths, small sharp stones designed to be set in wood or bone to form tools and weapons for piercing and cutting; only in the rainforest did the older tradition survive of the large, heavy hand-axe, the pointed, pear-shaped stone for every purpose. In the course of the Holocene Wet and the Holocene Dry, the skills in question were extended to cover the domestication of animals that had previously been hunted, and the cultivation of plants that had previously been gathered. Colonisation of the continent by hunting and gathering became colonisation by food production; the hunters and gatherers became herdsmen and farmers, their lifestyles geared to the rearing of animals and the growing of crops.

II

The archaeological evidence for the development of these three ways of life over these three periods is most recently covered by Phillipson in his *African Archaeology*, and in more detail by Thurstan Shaw and his fellow editors of *The Archaeology of Africa*. It can most conveniently be traced by dividing the continent into three zones. The first is from the Mediterranean to the Tropic of Cancer; the second is from the Tropic of Cancer to the Equator; and the third from the Equator to the Cape. The Tropic of Cancer, running through the heart of the Sahara and across the Nile to the south of Aswan in southern Egypt, is a critical boundary on which the transition to farming first appears in the archaeological record. At Wadi Kubbania on the Tropic to the east of the Nile, a riverside population at the height of the Pleistocene Dry collected, ground and cooked the tubers of wild grasses: behaving, in fact, like a farming community, except that the grasses were not yet cultivated to yield a larger grain and bigger harvest. Around the turn of the Pleistocene Dry into the Holocene Wet, the grains of such wild grasses were themselves being harvested in the Nile valley north and south of Aswan. Then about 9000 BP, a thousand years into the Holocene Wet, a population at the same latitude to the west of the Nile was cultivating both grains and dates at Nabta Playa,



2. Africa: the Archaeological Dimension

Dates BP = Before Present

with pottery for cooking purposes. Two thousand years later, about 7000 BP, a farming population established itself down river, at the base of the Nile Delta and in the adjoining oasis of the Fayyum in Zone I. Over the next two thousand years, down to the end of the Holocene Wet, the Nile Valley itself from Aswan to the Delta began to be cultivated. By 5000 BP, in the Valley and the Delta of the Nile, Ancient Egypt had come into existence, with an agricultural population that had swelled from communities of a few hundred to over a million.

To the west of the Nile in Zone I, the story in the Holocene Wet is concerned with herding rather than farming. About 9000 BP, cattle too were kept at Nabta Playa, and sheep and goats in the oases of Kharga, further to the north. From about 7000 BP onwards, the keeping of sheep and goats spread westwards along the Mediterranean coast as far as Morocco. Inland, the grasslands of what is now the desert were home to the big game of Africa: to elephants, rhinoceros, giraffe and buffalo, which were certainly hunted, and graphically represented in rock carvings and paintings. But around 9000 BP, wild sheep were penned in the Akakus highlands of southern Libya, and by 7000 BP, cattle had been domesticated in the same uplands at Uan Muhuggiag. From archaeology we know that sheep and goats were kept and wild plant foods gathered, ground and cooked; but right across the central Sahara, along the line of the Tropic, the emphasis in the rock art is clearly upon cattle and their keepers, typically shown with round heads. By the end of the Holocene Wet, pastoral populations had firmly established the keeping of sheep and the herding of cattle on the continent.

In Zone II, from the Tropic of Cancer to the Equator, the story is different. At Khartoum far to the south on the Nile, the Holocene Wet saw a hunting and gathering population settle down, not to farming but to fishing the wetlands that now extended across the continent from the Atlantic to the upper Nile, reaching up to the Tropic in the Sahara and down to Lake Turkana in northern Kenya. Not only was Lake Turkana itself much larger, but so was Lake Chad, covering an area comparable to the Great Lakes of North America. To the north of the rainforest and as far east as the highlands of Ethiopia and Kenya, these wetlands were home to the so-called 'aquatic civilisation' typified by the settlement at Khartoum. Its way of life covered the whole of the zone, marked by the same kind of 'wavy-line' pottery and the same fishing equipment. The lifestyle was well developed in settled communities with cooking pots and a thorough familiarity with food plants as well as the art of fishing. Nevertheless, there was no food production, either by cultivation or herding. Nor was there any to the south along the inland margins of the rain forest and along the West African coast, although the appearance of pottery coupled with stone axe heads or hoes suggests that the forest yam was being collected and cooked. To the east, in the highlands of Ethiopia, the archaeological evidence points to hunting and gathering like that still further south, in Zone III, from the Equator to the Cape. There, the Holocene Wet was not so pronounced, and to the east and south of the rain forest the hunting continued to be principally of animals, big and small, by a more nomadic population.

III

After the desiccation of the Pleistocene Dry, Africa in the Holocene Wet was scarcely the 'especially hostile region of the world' described by Iliffe, despite climatic fluctuations that brought intermittent returns to drier conditions; but after some five thousand years, hostility came back with the Holocene Dry. The Sahara reverted to sand and stone, while the wetlands dried away southwards into steppe and savannah. In Zone I, therefore, from the Mediterranean to the Tropic of Cancer, only the waters of the Nile ensured the survival of Egypt as a vast oasis in the desert. Winter rainfall permitted the appearance of cereal agriculture along the Mediterranean coast and in the Atlas Mountains. In the desert itself, however, cattle gave way to sheep and goats; mobility was restricted; and the sparse population became concentrated in what remained of the old river valleys, where water just beneath the surface enabled the people to turn to cultivation. The change was still more remarkable in Zone II, from the Tropic of Cancer to the Equator, where for the first time herding and farming took the place of hunting, fishing and gathering. The old 'aquatic civilisation' disappeared, first of all on the Nile in the last millennium of the Holocene Wet, then further to the west in the first two millennia of the Holocene Dry. The change was first visible at Esh-Shaheinab on the Nile to the north of Khartoum, where fisher-gatherers began to keep cattle and goats around 6000 BP. At the same time and in the same locality, cattle-keeping on a much larger scale at Kadero was accompanied by the gathering of grains, some of which may have been cultivated. In the following thousand years the valley to the north in the direction of Egypt was occupied by the so-called A-Group, a population cultivating cereals as well as keeping cattle, sheep and goats.

Over to the west, the demise of the 'aquatic civilisation' was later. Cattle-keeping was established somewhat to the north of the Niger bend by the end of the Holocene Wet, and on the bend itself after 4000 BP, about a thousand years into the Holocene Dry. Still further to the west, at Dar Tichitt in southern Mauritania, a fishing-gathering population turned to herding and farming around 3500 BP, surviving in its villages for a thousand years before the site was abandoned to the desert about 2500 BP. Between the Niger and the Nile, in the region of Lake Chad, the transition was later still as the lake shrank to its present size; the plain it left behind turned to desert in the north, while to the south it was not colonised by herders and farmers until about 3000 BP. By then, however, the cultivation of yams and oil palms in and around the West African rain forest may have been well established. Over in the highlands of Ethiopia, cereal cultivation in conjunction with the keeping of cattle had taken hold in the north and east, while in the wetter south-west the food crop was probably the ensete or 'false banana', a similarly large plant with edible stem and shoots. Around Lake Turkana, fishing and gathering had given way to hunting and the keeping of sheep and goats. And on the Equator, to the east of Lake Victoria, a cattle-keeping population belonging

to the so-called Stone Bowl culture was coming into existence. Otherwise, in Zone III, from the Equator to the Cape, the hunting and gathering lifestyle was unchanged.

IV

The problem has been to explain this progressive change to food production. The idea that it depended upon the introduction into Africa of food crops and animals has been shown to be wrong. While such modern staples of agriculture and pastoralism on the continent as sheep and goats, humped cattle, bananas, coco yam, maize and cassava have indeed been introduced at different times from Asia and the Americas, cattle as such, barley and possibly wheat, tropical grains such as sorghum, millet, African rice and teff, together with the African yam and the ensete, are indigenous, and quite sufficient for their domestication on the continent to bring about the change from hunting and gathering to herding and farming. That does not quite dispose of the problem of introduction, since sheep and goats, of indubitably southwestern Asiatic origin, appeared at Kharga in Egypt at the very beginning of herding and farming around 9000 BP. Cattle too were probably brought in at a very early date to add to the indigenous stock, perhaps by the farmers of Palestinian origin who introduced wheat and barley into the Fayyum and the southern Delta of the Nile about 7000 BP. Nor does it answer the question of the diffusion of domestication on the continent, its spread from place to place as opposed to its independent invention in the various regions. For diffusion, the argument has always been the fact that the domestication of both plants and animals took place much later in Zone II than in Zone I, and later still in Zone III. Domestic animals, moreover, have certainly spread from the north to the south of the Sahara, since they all derive from wild progenitors in the Sahara itself or in Asia. Against diffusion is the fact that the original tropical plants are indigenous, and must have been domesticated in their various homelands.

The evidence from Nabta Playa is crucial in this connection, since the population not only cultivated barley and possibly wheat, but gathered possibly wild sorghum; for good measure, it also cultivated dates, and kept cattle. The range is significant, for barley is a grain from the lands of winter rainfall to the north, while sorghum is a grain from the lands of summer rainfall to the south and the date palm is a plant of the Saharan latitudes. Not only, therefore, does the early date of Nabta Playa, around 9000 BP, point to an independent African invention of both cattle-breeding and agriculture; the presence of sorghum suggests that from this site on the borderline between Zones I and II, domestication could just as easily have spread south as north and west. Confirmation that it did so is provided by Kadero around 6000 BP, where the herding of cattle, sheep and goats, together with the collection and possible cultivation of sorghum and millet, took the place of the 'aquatic civilisation' at Khartoum some one to two thousand years earlier. The fact that it took so long to do so, however, or for its independent

invention to occur elsewhere in Zone II, raises the question of why domestication took place at all.

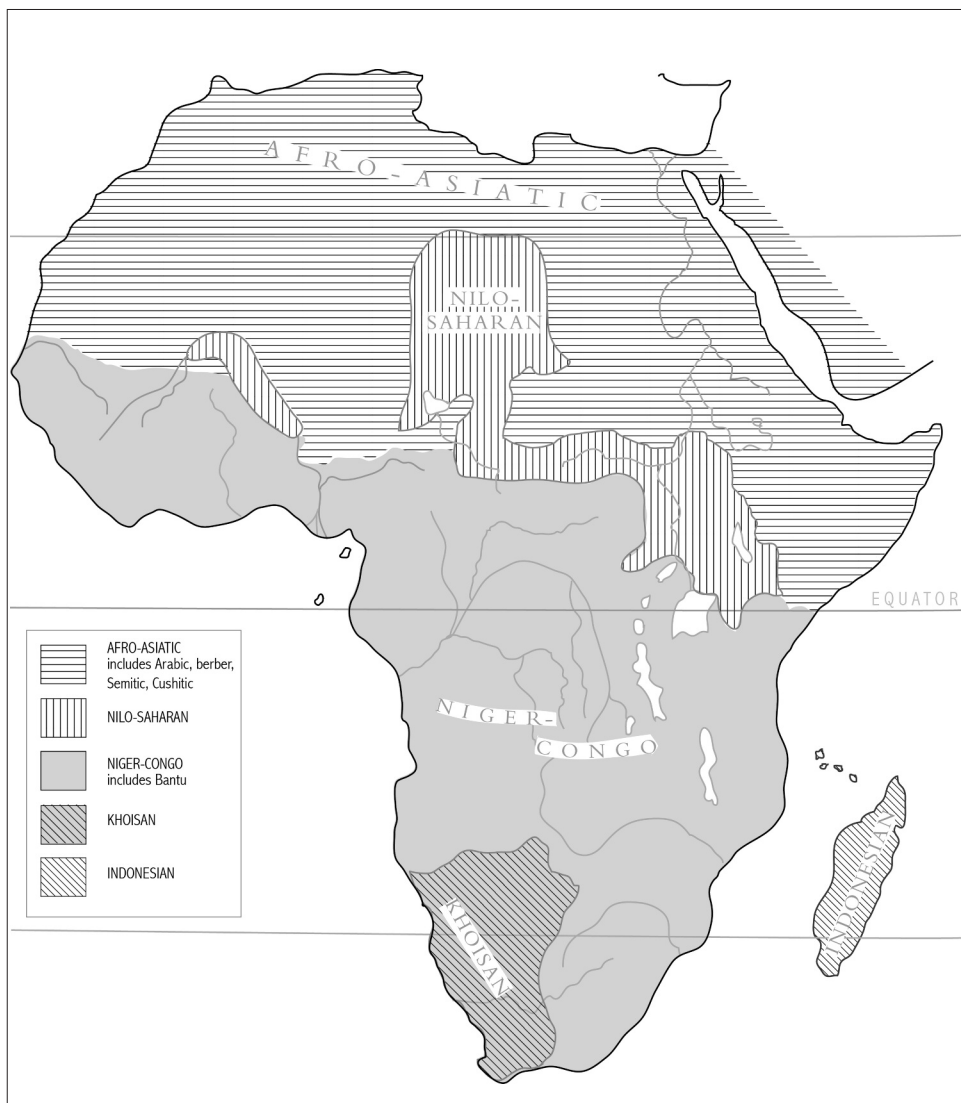
The answer, for the moment, rests with the carrot and the stick. The carrot would have been the prospect of a larger and more regular supply of food. The stick would have been the smallness and the irregularity of the food supply in the wild. That was a question of the environment, which depended in the first place upon the climate. At Wadi Kubbaniya at the height of the Pleistocene Dry, it may have been the intense aridity that forced the population to make the most of what little there was to gather. This necessity should have disappeared in the Holocene Wet, but may have returned at intervals of comparative aridity in the Sahara to bring about the decisive move into food production with the domestication of plants and animals in Zone I. The move once made, it was certainly completed with the onset of the Holocene Dry. While cattle keepers were driven southwards out of the desert, the desiccation of the southern Sahara and the savannah in Zone II put an end to the fishing and gathering of the 'aquatic civilisation', and compelled the population to find an alternative. The need to do so would have been related to the size of the population. To judge from the number of sites, population was undoubtedly on the increase in the Holocene, so that even on the forest margins, where the climate may not have greatly changed, hunting and gathering alone may have become insufficient to support the community. Whether introduced by immigrants or arising naturally out of the familiarity of the population with the flora and fauna of the locality, food production was the result: the response to the twin challenges of population and environment. The response varied almost *ad infinitum* from people to people and place to place, but the conclusion was broadly the same: a gradual shift, over thousands of years, out of hunting and gathering into herding and farming.

While food production offered the carrot of a larger and more regular supply of food, however, it carried its own stick. A population that undertook to feed itself in this way had the ability to make fresh use of the land to support a growing number of people. Sooner or later, however, as it increased in size, it would face the same environmental constraints, either sporadic, in the form of bad weather, bad harvests, or more persistent, in the form of long-term deterioration of the environment. An extreme example is the fate of Dar Tichitt, an agricultural settlement abandoned to the desert after a thousand years. Dar Tichitt is a stark reminder of the hostility of Africa to human settlement in the Holocene Dry, of the fact seized upon by Iliffe and more specifically by Hopkins in his *Economic History of West Africa*, that despite the colonisation of the continent by growing numbers of herders and farmers, the overall population remained thin down to the very recent past, with a ceiling upon growth even in so favoured a spot as the Nile valley in Egypt. To climate may be added generally thin, poor, unproductive soils and disease, notably malaria and sleeping sickness. Both are caused by parasites transmitted by insects (the mosquito and the tsetse fly) from person to person, and both, therefore, encouraged by numbers: the more people, the more infection; the more infection, the fewer people.

V

Both Iliffe and Hopkins are historians whose reflections on the historic constraints upon population growth and economic development in Africa are based upon modern observation and records of African society rather than the evidence of archaeology. A different reading of the past from the present is that of Christopher Ehret in *The Civilizations of Africa*, who approaches the question of African origins in the food-producing revolution not through archaeology but linguistics, the study of modern African languages. His aim is to reconstruct the vocabulary of their original speakers, and hence to discover from the words they used what those speakers knew, what they thought, and how they behaved as they changed from hunters and gatherers into herders and farmers. Such an approach is hugely promising. Starting from speech, the most fundamental feature of any human society, which has been transmitted without interruption from generation to generation from the beginning of humanity, it not only works with an important survival from the past, but has the advantage over archaeology in that it addresses the question of what the people said rather than simply what they did. On the other hand, it suffers by comparison, in that while the material remains of the past are direct, contemporary evidence of their makers, the words they used survive only at very considerable remove in the languages of today. The use of modern language as evidence of the past requires at least three steps before it becomes possible: a classification of the languages concerned into families with many branches; a reconstruction of their original vocabularies by the identification of words common to the most branches; and finally a firm measure of the length of time over which the branching has occurred. All are problematic, with a long way still to go. Ehret's book is only the latest and most ambitious attempt to build a historical edifice from what Oliver in *The African Experience* has called 'the bricks of Babel'.

The indigenous language families of Africa are four: Afro-Asiatic; Nilo-Saharan; Niger-Congo; and Khoisan. Khoisan is the odd one out: a group of languages in Zone III, from the Equator to the Cape, whose only common feature is a series of 'clicks' made with the tongue. The others are families like the languages of Europe and elsewhere, related by grammar and vocabulary, their geographical names giving an idea of their geographical location. Afro-Asiatic is a family common to north and north-east Africa and south-west Asia; it includes most of the Sahara; much of the savannah in the Central and Nilotic Sudan; and the Horn of Africa: that is, Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia, with an extension into Kenya. Niger-Congo stretches to the south of the Sahara from the Atlantic across the basins of the Niger and the Congo, with a huge extension into eastern and southern Africa. Nilo-Saharan is a family in between these dominant groups, stretching out of the central Sahara south-eastwards across the savannah to the Upper Nile, with isolated pockets on the Niger Bend and the Nile to the south of Aswan. It is this



3. The Language Map of Africa

(Excludes indigenised European languages, notably Afrikaans and English in South Africa, and Portuguese, and the distribution of European languages as official or second languages in former colonial territories)

distribution that Ehret, Oliver and others have sought to explain as the result of the colonisation of the continent by herders and farmers in the Holocene Wet and the Holocene Dry.

The assumption from which the arguments starts is that these are the original language families of Africa in the Pleistocene Dry, at least two of which are still to be found in their original homelands: Afro-Asiatic in northern Ethiopia and the eastern Sudan, between the Nile and the Red Sea; Niger-Congo around the Upper Niger. As a result of the expansion of Niger-Congo south of the Equator, the Khoisan languages today are largely confined to South Africa; they may have begun life in Kenya and Tanzania. Nilo-Saharan has been extensively overrun from the north by Afro-Asiatic, which has taken over most of its proposed homeland on the Middle Nile around Khartoum. The second assumption is that this expansion and contraction is the consequence of the move out of hunting and gathering into herding and farming. This seems clear in the case of Khoisan, which has remained associated with hunting and gathering to the south of the Equator, while the language of the herders and farmers who form the bulk of the population is predominantly Niger-Congo. The case of Nilo-Saharan is more complicated, since its speakers have long been herders and farmers like their Afro-Asiatic neighbours. The presence of Afro-Asiatic across the whole of Zone I, and at the eastern end of Zone II in the highlands and deserts of the Red Sea coast and the Horn, may be explained in the first place by the establishment and spread of agriculture and pastoralism, from the Holocene Wet into the Holocene Dry. By the same token, Nilo-Saharan may be thought of as the speech of the fishers and gatherers of the 'aquatic civilisation' of the southern Sahara and the savannah belt over the same length of time in Zone II, at least as far as the Niger bend where it has survived to this day as the language of a riverine population. Nevertheless, as the comparable survival of the Nilo-Saharan language of Nubia on the Nile to the south of Aswan seems to show, the most northerly members of the language family occupied the drier savannah on the northern boundary of the Zone where they too were associated with the beginnings of herding and farming on the continent. This is confirmed by Ehret's identification of words for cattle and grain in the Nilo-Saharan languages as part of the original vocabulary of the family. Nilo-Saharans, in other words, may have been the people of Nabta Playa and Uan Muhuggiag.

The subsequent history of the relationship between the two families would then correspond to the progress of the Holocene Dry in Zone II. The Nilo-Saharans of the 'aquatic civilisation' would have adopted the lifestyle of their linguistic cousins to the north as these moved southwards out of the desert with their herds and their cultivation of sorghum to colonise the drying savannah where the fisher-gatherers had been at home. Behind these cattle-keepers and farmers, however, came the Afro-Asiatics of the northern Sahara, with their sheep, goats, and donkeys, which had been tamed in Egypt in the early stages of domestication. Their languages took over the south-western quarter of the Sahara, from north of Lake Chad to the Atlantic and also established themselves on the savannah between Lake

Chad and the Niger, in what is now northern Nigeria. Nilo-Saharan then survived only on the Niger bend, in isolation from the main bloc in the south-eastern Sahara and the savannah to the east of Lake Chad as far as the Nile.

To the far west and the south of the Nilo-Saharans and Afro-Asiatics, on the southern savannah and in the forest from the valley of the Senegal as far as the Upper Nile, the land belonged to the speakers of Niger-Congo as they in turn settled into herding and farming, with grain on the savannah and yam and oil palm in the forest. But with this colonisation of the whole region to the south of the desert by food producers came an extraordinary number of individual languages, so much so that the savannah between the rainforest and the desert has been called by David Dalby, the compiler of a language map of Africa and the adjacent islands, 'the fragmentation belt' in his edited volume *Language and History in Africa*. Niger-Congo in particular is a family with many subdivisions which are likely to have established themselves in a hunter-gatherer population well before the beginning of the Holocene. But the breakdown of these subdivisions into so many language communities, of which the majority are very small, is perhaps to be explained as a consequence of cultivation, by the isolation of many small groups of people as they settled into a particular niche in this vast land. The multiplication of languages in a growing population may be an important indicator of the way in which food production divided so many of its practitioners into separate communities even as it united them in a common way of life. It would certainly help to explain the huge diversity of the population of Zone II that underlay the subsequent growth of a more complex society, above the basic unit of food production.

VI

A quite different consequence of this language development is that by about 3000 BP, right across the continent, we can begin to see who the people were rather than simply what they did. We can, in consequence, begin to name them in ways that bear some relation to what they called themselves, or were called by others. The labelling of populations by otherwise unheard-of sites: Nabta Playa, Dar Tichitt; by their place in the stratigraphical sequence: A-Group; or by their artefacts: Stone Bowl, is overlaid in the first place by the names we have given to the kind of language they spoke, and in second place by the names of individual languages. Between the geographical names of the main language families and the ethnic names given to the myriad individual languages of today, are the names given to groups of these languages within a particular family. In this broad spectrum are names which bear some relation to the languages and their speakers in the past; more and more as time goes by. Afro-Asiatic, for example, is simply a geographical term for one of the main language families; but among these families, the term Khoisan is derived from the names of modern speakers and gives a less abstract sense of identity in the past. Within Afro-Asiatic, geog-

raphy provides Chadic as one of the six main branches of the family, named after from its location around Lake Chad. The Semitic branch, on the other hand, which is located in Ethiopia and south-west Asia, is called after the Biblical legend of Shem and his descendants and takes its name, therefore, from the ancient Semitic language and literature of Hebrew. The branches found only in Africa used to be called Hamitic, from the same Biblical story, but this term has now been dropped because of its racist connotations and more particularly because it has no basis in the languages concerned. Instead we have Omotic and Cushitic for the branches in the Horn of Africa, the first derived from the river Omo in south-western Ethiopia, but the second from Kush, the Ancient Egyptian name for the land and people of the Middle Nile to the south of Aswan. It is a misnomer, since the original Kushites appear to have spoken a Nilo-Saharan language from which the name of Kush may well derive. It nevertheless demonstrates the influence of Ancient Egypt and its language, then and now. Ancient Egyptian is the third of the African branches of Afro-Asiatic, one which takes its name from Egypt, the Greek form of an Ancient Egyptian word. From Ancient Egyptian likewise comes the name 'Libyan' given to the peoples of the northern Sahara by the Greeks and the Romans. These Libyans were the speakers of the fourth African branch of Afro-Asiatic, which today is called Berber, from the name subsequently given them by the Arabs. In the course of the Holocene Dry, Berber-speakers came to occupy the whole of the northern and western Sahara as well as North Africa, confining the languages of the fifth, the Chadic branch, to the far south.

Of the Nilo-Saharan languages, only Nubian has a similarly historic pedigree. The name of a language spoken on the Nile to the south of Aswan, it has been left in isolation by the arrival of the Semitic language of Arabic over the past thousand years. But the name itself is ancient, going back to Roman and probably to Ancient Egyptian times as a name for the land and its people in the days when Nilo-Saharan was the language of the region as a whole. The name of Songhay for the Nilo-Saharan language spoken on the Niger bend goes back in the sources to the empire of Songhay in the sixteenth century CE. The antiquity of the language, however, is attested both by its isolation from the rest of the family following the intrusion of the Chadic languages into the savannahs of northern Nigeria, and by survivals of its vocabulary in these members of the Afro-Asiatic family. The vast Niger-Congo family is largely lacking such middle ground between the geographical and the modern for the names of its members. In Bantu, the name of the group of languages which over the last 2500 years have spread throughout Zone III, from the Equator to the Cape, Niger-Congo has nevertheless provided the outstanding example of a name for its speakers taken from the language itself: *ba* = 'people', *ntu* = 'man'.

As a name for its speakers at the outset of their history, Bantu deserves, and will receive, a chapter to itself. It will do so precisely because it illustrates, almost to perfection, the way in which language can not only illuminate the past, but enable the historian to use a vocabulary of proper names for its peoples. That is a huge advance, bringing them into the way in which we, as

human beings, think of and talk about each other, even if it risks confusing language with people, and people with culture. Language, race and culture, it must be repeated, are independent variables; and names are no more than a shorthand for an infinite variety of combinations. Eternal vigilance is called for in their use. But that is the price to be paid by the historian, and especially by the historian of Africa, for the use of language itself, English, French, Arabic or any other.



5

From Herding & Farming to Cities & States

I

Writing in North Africa and Egypt at the end of the fourteenth century CE, Ibn Khaldun stands out as a mediaeval historian with a modern approach to his subject. The subject is the history of the world under the title of the *Kitab al- Ibar*, the Book of Instruction in the deeds of those peoples who have risen to power. The approach is explained in the *Muqaddima*, the introduction to his great work. The work itself is written in the encyclopaedic tradition of Islamic learning to which Ibn Khaldun belonged, covering religion, philosophy and science, language and literature, history and geography. But in the *Muqaddima* he placed himself outside that tradition in an attempt to understand the course of human history in terms of the laws governing the evolution of human society. He did so as a participant observer of the society to which he belonged six hundred years ago in the Sahara and North Africa. His laws were derived not so much from his reading as from his experience as a secretary of state who took part in the story he has to tell. Like the story itself, which began as a history of the Berbers and Arabs of North Africa and only later became a history of the world at large, these laws refer in the first place to society in Africa, whose evolution from herding and farming to cities and states they are designed to explain.

The starting-point of Ibn Khaldun's analysis is the difference he perceived between the countryside and the town. At one extreme are farmers and herdsmen who produce just enough food to feed themselves; at the other are workmen, craftsmen, merchants, professionals and servants of the state who produce all manner of goods and services. These townsmen, however, have evolved out of countrymen through the division of labour. People must cooperate to make any kind of living at all; and once farming involves specialists such as smiths and carpenters for tools and equipment, production increases to the point at which a surplus becomes available to support more people with more occupations; and so, theoretically, *ad infinitum*. As with Iliffe and Hopkins, the key element here is population and its growth. The

problem remains the limitation of agricultural and pastoral production in Africa by the harsh climates and poor soils of the Holocene Dry. The question is how, despite these factors, evolution along the lines proposed by Ibn Khaldun did in fact take place.

As far as the writing of African history is concerned, Ibn Khaldun is an ethnographer, whose work is of particular value as that of an African writing long before the ethnographic present, that is, the period of the last hundred years when modern social anthropology collected its data. Its time depth, moreover, is extended by historical reference to events over the previous seven hundred years, from the time of the Arab conquest and the rise of Islam. But although this explanation out of the African past provides an insight into the evolution of cities and states on the African continent, it is archaeology rather than ethnography that is required to take the story back to the beginning in the realms of Phillipson's *African Archaeology*. The change in the economic basis of African society with the shift out of hunting and gathering into herding and farming began in the Holocene Wet and continued far into the Holocene Dry. But even as it developed in the northern half of the continent, it was overtaken by the change from subsistence to surplus, out of which appeared the first complex societies. 'Complex society' is a neutral but correspondingly unspecific term for the wide variety of what Ibn Khaldun thought of as cities and states, societies in which both town and countryside are inter-related and interdependent. In the title of his *African Civilizations*, the archaeologist Graham Connah elects to use the more familiar term of civilisations, loaded as it is with a whole range of connotations derived from its origin in the Greek and Roman definition of a city. He does so no doubt partly for the sake of an arresting title, but more specifically because it is the material remains of what look like cities which provide him with the bulk of his evidence for the complex societies whose development he sets out to explain. Adopting for this purpose the vaguest possible definition of what a city might be, his answer to the problem of the appearance of his chosen civilisations, as the environment of the Holocene Wet deteriorated into that of the Holocene Dry, is 'the productive land hypothesis'. This is the proposition that settlement in pockets of more fertile land has led at various times and in various places to population growth and the increasing complexity of society up to the limit of what the land would support. Well before that point was reached, it would have been necessary for some kind of government, some sort of state, to control the allocation of resources until the time came when control was insufficient, the land was overused, and the society, or civilisation, collapsed. The result is not to contradict Iliffe and Hopkins, so much as to fit the fact of Connah's cities and states into their picture of a hostile region of the world in which the potential for growth remained circumscribed.

II

The most conspicuous as well as the earliest example of the kind of ecological niche proposed by Connah is the valley of the Nile, as the great river cuts

its way down to the Mediterranean from the Equatorial highlands of East Africa, across the climatic belts of savannah and desert from Zone II to Zone I – a geological phenomenon of outstanding importance in African history. To the north of Khartoum, where the Blue Nile flows in from the highlands of Ethiopia, the stream descends over six cataracts through a winding canyon almost two thousand kilometres long to Cairo, where it branches out across the delta to the sea. It was in the region of the last cataract at Aswan, where the High Dam now stands on the border between Zones I and II, that the first farmers made their appearance in the Holocene Wet on the savannah to either side of the river. Towards the end of the Holocene Wet, it was in the valley itself to the north of Aswan in Zone I that the first move into surplus most obviously took place on the floodplain of the river about six thousand years ago. Shaped like a tadpole, its broad head in the delta to the north and its long, thin, tapering tail between the walls of the canyon to the south, this floodplain turned into a vast oasis in the desert as the savannah dried up but the water continued to flow from the rainlands to the south. What was originally swamp was steadily reclaimed for cultivation that relied on the late summer flood to soak the ground for planting. So successful was this reclamation that the millennium from about 6000 to 5000BP saw the growth of villages into cities that were the capitals of city-states, until around 5000BP the valley and the delta, from Aswan to the sea, were politically united under the Pharaohs in the state of Ancient Egypt. Their kingdom lasted throughout the first half of the Holocene Dry, as long, in fact, as the time from its eventual conquest and absorption into larger empires round about 2500BP until the present day. It exhibited the kind of growth described by Ibn Khaldun from a rich agricultural base into a diversified economy complete with industry, trade and services, a high level of craftsmanship and skills involving literacy and numeracy, and a population running into millions rather than thousands or mere hundreds. At the same time it produced the cities admired by Ibn Khaldun as the climax of social evolution, and valued by Connah for the evidence of their material remains. Moreover, it was strictly regulated by the state, which Ibn Khaldun thought necessary for such evolution to take place, and Connah sees as essential for the management of resources in the course of economic growth.

Largely unknown to Ibn Khaldun, Ancient Egypt is nevertheless excluded from consideration by Connah, who leaves its vast wealth of archaeological material to the specialists who have made Egyptology into a separate subject. Instead, he turns from Zone I to Zones II and III, beginning with Nubia on the Nile to the south of Aswan, where the river runs for about 1400 kilometres in a huge double bend across the desert. Apart from the Dongola reach around the western curve of the bend, however, the valley is even narrower than in Egypt, while the savannah has retreated southwards in the course of the Holocene Dry to the latitude of Khartoum. As an ecological niche, therefore, the valley remained undeveloped from the appearance of the first herders and farmers at Shaheinab and Kadero before 6000BP until the time of Pharaonic Egypt after 5000BP. Then, as the Egyptians moved south of Aswan to establish themselves on the second cataract at the southern end

of modern Lake Nasser, the Dongola reach, where the floodplain is widest, saw the growth of Kerma, an indigenous city and state in cultural and commercial contact with Egypt to the north. Kerma, where the river flows northwards out of the great bend in the direction of Aswan, was conquered and annexed by the Egyptians about 3500BP under the name of Kush, but recovered its independence several hundred years later to emerge after 3000BP as the kingdom of Napata. Highly Egyptianised, to the extent that for almost a hundred years around 2700BP its kings conquered and ruled Egypt itself, Napata centred on a cluster of city and temple sites across the bend in the river from Kerma, at the upper end of the Dongola reach. But from around 2500BP onwards, when the kingdom of the Pharaohs came to an end in Egypt, the capital was transferred southwards to Meroe on the river to the north of Khartoum. There in the savannah, far to the south of Aswan, the kingdom flourished for the next eight hundred years in relative isolation from Egypt under the Persians, Greeks and Romans, until in the fourth century CE, about 1700BP, its territories were overrun by the kings of Axum in the highlands of Ethiopia to the east.

III

Since pastoralism figured prominently along with the cultivation of the floodplain in the economy of Kerma, Kush and Napata, the move to Meroe may have been dictated by the progressive desiccation of the region, driving the cattle further and further to the south in the search for pasture. It ensured, however, that the civilisation of the Middle Nile survived the end of Ancient Egypt into the second half of the Holocene Dry, when it was joined not only by Axum, but by those other tropical African societies which are the subject of Connah's book. Their development, first in Zone II and then in Zone III, is not simply to be explained by the productive land hypothesis, the growth of population in some favourable environment, as Connah recognises in his discussion of the range of factors suggested by his archaeological material, from buildings to objects. Starting from its agricultural and pastoral base, the evolution of Kerma through Kush and Napata to Meroe clearly depended to a large extent upon foreign trade, foreign culture, foreign settlement and foreign conquest. The rise of Axum was similarly related to previous settlement on the coast of Eritrea by immigrants from across the Red Sea in the Yemen, and the subsequent development of long-distance trade through the Red Sea from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. Yet another example is that of the Garamantes of the Fezzan in the Libyan Sahara to the north of the Tropic in Zone I, where the irrigation of a line of oases some two hundred kilometres long supported both a city and a state from about 2500 to 1500BP. Here the input from abroad, most probably from Egypt, was the underground tunnels that tapped the springs at the base of the cliffs on the edge of the valley, greatly enlarging the carrying capacity of the land. The problem in all such cases is to decide on the nature of the contribution from outside.

Today, in their attempt to understand the processes at work in the societies they study, archaeologists like Connah agree with social anthropologists in making the people themselves responsible for the way they live, whether in the past or in the present. So do the economists, for whom choice in the matter of making a living is fundamental. Choice, therefore, is the underlying principle of Hopkins' *Economic History of West Africa*, where it is employed to refute the argument that African and European attitudes to wealth are fundamentally different. Contending that Africans have always been as rational in these matters as Europeans are supposed to be, choosing the most profitable course of action, Hopkins justifies the general absence of the kind of growth envisaged by Ibn Khaldun on the grounds that in tropical Africa, it would have been unrewarding to produce food for a non-existent market. The kind of tools which might have served the purpose, for example the heavy plough and the wheel, were thus never invented, and had they been imported from abroad, would not have been used. But as he observes, by the time of Ibn Khaldun there was, nevertheless, a considerable amount of long-distance trade in both commodities and manufactures, produced and marketed in the same rational pursuit of gain. While much of this trade took place within Hopkins' chosen region, a great deal was carried on across the Sahara to the north. Its profitability largely depended upon what he calls 'social islands of purchasing power', the cities and the rulers of the states that had arisen in close association with the commercial economy. Among the items imported for their benefit were cowrie shells from the Indian Ocean, which were expensive, given the cost of transport, highly valued, and used as currency. At the other extreme from Hopkins' example of the plough and the wheel, the cowrie is an instance of the way in which an imported item could serve a local purpose which might be quite different from its use elsewhere. In both cases, acceptance or rejection depends upon the choice of the people themselves, in accordance with their own criteria of value and use. The principle, which evidently affects the nature of trade, has become axiomatic, a basic tenet of current thinking with which Ibn Khaldun would probably have agreed.

Its importance is apparent in the case of the Garamantes of the Fezzan. Two thousand years before Ibn Khaldun, they adopted the *qanat* or *foggara*, the underground irrigation tunnel that Insoll thinks was introduced via Egypt from its homeland in Iran, and made it the key to the successful colonisation of their valley in the desert, between sand to the north and stone to the south. This is a straightforward example of the transfer of technology, the adoption and use of a device for its original purpose by another society. Much less clear is the spread of ironworking to the south of the Sahara, following the widespread use of iron in Egypt and North Africa from about 2800BP onwards. From about 2500BP, ironworking became characteristic not only of Meroe but of all the other civilisations that appeared at this time in what has been called the Iron Age of tropical Africa. Its derivation from Egypt and North Africa is uncertain: independent invention in both east and west Africa is a possibility. Still more important is the question of its usefulness in the development of these societies to the south of the

Sahara. Egypt, after all, had managed very well without iron for the past three thousand years. The obvious use of iron for more efficient tools and weapons may have been limited by its initial scarcity, when it may have been valued, to judge from modern ethnographic data, more for the mysterious alchemy that transformed stone into metal by fire. The transformation is part of the problem of origin, for the smelting of iron requires a very high heat, and it has seemed unlikely that it could have been invented without previous experience at lower temperatures with copper and bronze. Ironworking at Meroe was presumably introduced from Egypt, but although it was practised there on a considerable scale, the role of Meroe as 'the Birmingham of ancient Africa', as it was called at the time of its first excavation before the First World War, has not been archaeologically demonstrated, nor have alternative routes across the Sahara to the west. What matters is that the appearance and spread of ironworking not only at Meroe, but right across the continent in Zones II and III within the space of a few hundred years, was marked by such local diversity that even if the requisite knowledge came by different routes from different sources within and without, it was rapidly taken up and assimilated by each community into its way of life. However iron was used, however it was valued, ironworking was a major craft that took its place in the growing complexity of Connah's African civilisations in accordance with Ibn Khaldun's model of development, in which the economic activity generated by demand is independent of the utility of what is supplied.

IV

The spread of ironworking may have been comparatively rapid, but it was patchy and uneven. About 2500BP, ironworking appeared over three thousand kilometres away from Meroe on the Nile, to the north of the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers in Nigeria. Knives, arrowheads, spearheads and bangles were produced together with terracotta figures that demonstrate a skilled and diversified society flourishing for some seven or eight hundred years at the same time as Meroe. But the sites have been disturbed, and little more can be said about this so-called Nok culture, named after the place where it first came to light. Eight hundred kilometres to the north-east of Nok, the situation is different. Here, the floodplain of the Chari and its tributaries flowing northwards across the savannah into Lake Chad was much broader than that of the Middle Nile, productive land on which fishing was joined by farming from about 3000BP onwards, and village settlements built up in mounds on the flat terrain. About 2200BP ironworking appeared on the mound of Mdaga, where hoes make clear its practical purpose. But iron, followed by ironworking, does not appear in the nearby mound of Daima for the next five hundred years. The discrepancy may suggest two different communities in the same locality, and calls to mind the diversity of peoples attested by the multiplicity of languages in Dalby's 'fragmentation belt' (1970). The blacksmith who came with ironworking, for example, is likely to have belonged to a specialist kindred living alongside but

apart from his clients. But however the mound peoples were distinguished from each other, they cannot have been indifferent to their neighbours. There are over eight hundred such mounds in the region, some larger, some smaller, forming a regional society. None are big enough to be called a city, but they may well have clustered around the ones that grew in relative size and importance. Some form of government is implied, foreshadowing the little states with their walled capitals that had emerged by 500BP.

Unlike Nubia, whose civilisation grew over the millennia in association with that of Egypt, the growth of settlement on the rivers to the south of Lake Chad was not only much later, but apart from the introduction of iron-working, not obviously influenced by external contacts. It is discussed at length by Connah, who excavated the Daima mound, in his *Three Thousand Years in Africa: man and his environment in the Lake Chad region of Nigeria*, but only in passing in his *African Civilizations*. As an example of his 'productive land hypothesis', it cannot compare with the settlement on the Niger to the west. Here, in the third great river system of Zone II, there are in effect two rivers that cross the savannah, the one flowing northwards out of the forest into the desert and the other southwards out of the desert to the sea, joined into a single stream by a channel across the desert which in winter is frequently dry. In summer it carries the overflow from the immense floodplain of the northward-flowing stream, the so-called Inland Delta of a river that but for a hydrological accident would have ended in a second Lake Chad. Not only does the Inland Delta resemble the floodplain of the Chari geographically; it resembles it archaeologically in that it is covered with mound settlements going back to about 2500BP. The difference is that at least two of these settlements grew into recognisable cities of a kind to provide Connah with the evidence he requires for a complex society. Dia on the western edge of the Delta is one, but the most important in our present state of knowledge is Jenne-jeno, or 'old Jenne', close to the modern city at the head of the Delta in the south. Jenne-jeno is the focal point of Roderick McIntosh's *The Peoples of the Middle Niger: the Island of Gold*, an account of the region by its excavator, whose work with Susan McIntosh at the site and in its neighbourhood is fundamental to Connah's own description of the West African savannah as 'an optimal zone' for the growth of civilisation.

That is not to say that there are no disagreements. McIntosh envisages the settlement of the floodplain, which stretches for some 300 kilometres to the north of Jenne-jeno, by refugees from the southern Sahara, notably Dar Tichitt, as the site was abandoned to the desert round about 2500BP. Its colonisation was all the more intensive during a period of sustained drought from about 2300 to 1700BP, when the savannah likewise became inhospitable, but African rice was brought under cultivation in the Inland Delta as a major new source of food. The ending of the drought ushered in a further period of six to seven hundred years when the climate noticeably improved, and the Inland Delta flourished at the centre of a wider area of settlement, extending out into the savannah to east and west, and back up into the fringes of the desert to the north. Dar Tichitt was not reoccupied, but Tegdaoust at almost the same latitude became a cultivated oasis with

water drawn from wells, while at the northern limit of the savannah the important settlement of Koumbi Saleh grew up. Jenne-jeno itself developed as a town at the centre of a cluster of smaller settlements, with a total population somewhere between ten and thirty thousand. An Iron Age site from its inception, it reached out into the savannah for its iron ore and fuel, and into the desert for copper. Trade with the desert almost certainly included salt, long before its first mention as an essential item in the Arabic sources. And by the same token, it probably included gold from the headwaters of the Senegal and Niger to the south-west. We are looking at a vast regional cycle of trade from the forest to the south to the desert in the north.

An economy on this scale is explicable in terms of Connah's 'productive land hypothesis' as the result of settlement and agricultural surplus. Disagreement arises over the nature of the society and its government. The McIntoshes, surveying the district of Jenne-jeno, found small agricultural settlements followed by medium-sized settlements specialising in iron-working, weaving and pottery, centred on the city of Jenne-jeno itself: a pattern that cannot have been peculiar to this location, but in various forms covered the entire Delta. They did not, however, find palaces or grand tombs in the vicinity as evidence of the kind of social inequality and state power proposed by Connah as a consequence of population growth. Instead, they envisage a community structure of specialist producers, differentiated in all kinds of ways by occupation, origin, descent, residence, dialect and language, but cooperating in a civil society in which all played their part. However this worked in practice, Jenne-jeno was not the capital of an authoritarian state, despite its size.

Connah finds improbable this absence from Jenne-jeno of a state characterised by inequality and by government with the power to enforce its demands, although at present the only archaeological evidence for some overall authority is the city wall, built after some hundreds of years around 1200BP, as a defence against invaders, or possibly floods. But he is surely right to suspect their existence in such a complex society centred on such a heavily built-up area, that both Connah and McIntosh agree to call a city rather than a town. If so, however, the polity was very different from that for which the evidence is clearer. From about the time of the building of the city walls of Jenne-jeno, there appeared a series of monumental tombs on the savannah that fringes the Delta two hundred or more kilometres downstream from the city. These are earthen tumuli, in which persons of high standing were buried with an assortment of grave goods, including weapons, and in some cases with many other persons, apparently human sacrifices. They indicate both inequality and power in a society ruled by chiefs whose tombs match the description of the burial of the ruler of Ghana in an Arabic source from the eleventh century CE, about 950BP. The existence of Ghana as a kingdom or empire is attested in these same Arabic sources from the ninth century CE onwards, from about 1150BP, but while there is said to have been a royal capital, it has never been located on the ground. Wherever it may have been, Ghana under its powerful, wealthy and prestigious monarch appears to have been an empire of the savannah rather than the floodplain,

though one which may well have extended its control over the settlements of the Inland Delta.

Mention of Ghana in the Arabic sources introduces a continental, indeed an intercontinental dimension into the story. But even in the West African context, the archaeological evidence of the great tombs suggests a regional complexity far exceeding that of Jenne-jeno alone, a complexity whose salient feature from this point of view is the distinction between the city and the empire. Ibn Khaldun would not have been surprised, even though his knowledge of Ghana was restricted to his predecessors' accounts. Although he regarded the state as necessary to ensure and promote the orderly growth of the city, he never envisaged more than a limited degree of self-government by the citizens, or the rise of a citizen to more than local despotism. His rulers and their followers were all warriors from the countryside, with the strength to conquer and rule a much wider empire. While the rulers he served in North Africa lived in the city, the cities they inhabited were those they had founded or had taken over from their predecessors. The *Muqaddima* turns out to be a long examination of the uneasy relationship between empire and city, state and society, power and prosperity. It is a problem pointedly raised by the archaeology of the Inland Delta.



6

The Peopling of the South

I

Language, race and culture, in the sense of what we make and do and think, may be independent variables, but equally, they may overlap, if never fully coincide. To turn from the evolution of cities and states in Zone II to the appearance and spread of herding and farming in Zone III, in Africa south of the Equator, is to see the way in which archaeology and linguistics combine to demonstrate a progressive repopulation of the continent from the Equator down to the Cape, by farmers speaking the same basic language: Bantu, after its word for 'person'. The difference from the development of food production in Africa to the north of the Equator is startling. As the Holocene Wet turned into the Holocene Dry, and herdsmen and farmers moved into and out of the expanding Sahara, the great language families of the continent gained and lost ground. But within those families, languages that were already different from each other became still more numerous and diverse, so that with the exception of the Afro-Asiatic language of Berber in the Sahara, even those spoken over a wider area remained localised. The linguistic variety reflects the combination of independent invention and local experimentation with migration and settlement that was instrumental in the changeover of the original population from hunting and gathering to herding and farming over a period of some six thousand years, from about 9000 to 3000BP. To the south of the Equator, linguistic homogeneity is evidence of a much more rapid spread of people with a farming way of life at the expense of the languages, societies and culture of the indigenous hunter-gatherers, taking place over a subsequent period of a thousand years from around 2500BP to 1500BP. In Iliffe's terms, this spread is the supreme example of the colonisation of the continent by its native food producers, not confined to a particular ecological niche, but covering almost the whole of the southern half of his 'especially hostile region of the world'.

The reasons are geographical as well as historical. The highlands that run down the eastern side of Africa from Ethiopia to the Cape cut across the

climatic belts of rainforest on the Equator and desert on the Tropic of Capricorn to create a vast area of savannah, ranging from woodland to grassland, from wetter to drier, but open to the advance of peoples from the north. There on the Equator, the rainforest represented a barrier through which they might filter, but the highlands around Lake Victoria were a rendezvous where they might gather before moving south. Who they were is a matter for linguistics; what they did and when they did it is for archaeology to confirm. Putting the two kinds of evidence together to produce a satisfactory account of the event has been one of the great success stories of the attempt to solve the problem of African history.

That is not to say that there have been no difficulties, or that no difficulties remain. The initial perception that most of the languages spoken by most of the people to the south of the Equator in Zone III resemble the Romance languages of southern Europe, which have developed out of Latin over the past fifteen hundred years, was followed by an intensive study of their relationship to each other and to their equivalent of Latin, a proto- or original language that has mutated into its successors, and long since disappeared. With the general acceptance of Greenberg's classification in his *Languages of Africa*, the conclusions of Malcolm Guthrie's monumental *Comparative Bantu* were modified. The languages which he described in such detail were not only established as a branch of the Niger-Congo family, but the original Bantu language from which they sprang was located in modern Cameroon to the north-west of the rainforest. Today, however, this homeland is to the north-west of the Bantu language area, which covers the forest itself and the savannahs to the east and south. Within this area the languages are now divided into a western and an eastern branch, albeit with considerable overlap. The problem for the historian is to account for their appearance so far from their point of origin by the movement of Bantu-speakers through or round the rainforest.

While some of those speakers evidently went through the forest, others may have gone round the northern and eastern edge. The suggestion of Ehret in his *Civilizations of Africa* and *An African Classical Age*, that having passed through the forest they came to the highlands of East Africa along its southern edge, is seriously weakened by the lack of references noted by Vansina in his review article, 'Linguistic evidence and historical reconstruction'. It nevertheless seems clear that having climbed up onto those highlands from the lowlands of the Congo basin, they encountered on the uplands a farming and herding population of Nilo-Saharans, beyond which was a pastoral population of Afro-Asiatics, both at the southern limit of their language areas. Not only, then, would the immigrant Bantu have picked up from the Nilo-Saharans the cultivation of grains and the keeping of cattle, sheep and goats to add to the yams that were the staple of their forest agriculture, but also the use of iron. On the strength of these assets, they would have thrived on the clearance and cultivation of a particularly fertile region of woodland until they became the dominant population to the west of Lake Victoria. Along with the relatives they had left behind along the southern edge of the rainforest, they were then in a position to move south. Their

particular form of Bantu gave rise to the eastern Bantu languages spoken right down the eastern side of the continent, in the highlands and along the coast of the Indian Ocean as far as Natal. But as their speakers turned westwards into the Congo basin, their languages mingled with the western Bantu languages of the rainforest, whose speakers had previously spread southwards onto the savannahs that stretch from the Atlantic across to Lake Tanganyika as far as the deserts of the Kalahari.

II

This account is based on linguistic evidence, upon the relationship of the Bantu languages to each other and upon their vocabularies, which show for example that their words for grain and domestic animals are of Nilo-Saharan and hence East African origin. It cannot at present be confirmed by archaeological evidence before the establishment of the Bantu on the East African highlands, since material remains in the forest and its southern margin are not only slight but largely undiscovered. Thereafter, however, the findings of archaeology corroborate those of linguistics for a relatively rapid expansion of the eastern Bantu languages to the greater part of Zone III, including the vast central area to the south of the rainforest in which they encountered the western Bantu languages from the forest to the north. Archaeology supplies the evidence of a common material culture over the whole of this area, called by Phillipson in his *African Archaeology* the Chifumbaze complex, after a type-site in Mozambique where its characteristic pottery was first found. That pottery originated in the highlands between the forest and Lake Victoria, spread southwards down the eastern side of the continent, and westwards to the Atlantic in the region where eastern has flowed into western Bantu. The appearance and spread of the complex is dated to between 2500 and 1500BP, the most rapid expansion taking place to the south of Lake Tanganyika between 1900 and 1700BP. At its point of origin in the north, and throughout its area of dispersal, the Chifumbaze complex represented a sharp break with previous cultures. Its peoples were iron-using to the extent that stone tools were rare; they lived in villages and practised a mixed farming economy that varied according to the environment. On the plausible assumption that they were the speakers of the eastern Bantu languages, their southward spread completed a major repopulation of Africa to the south of the Equator by farmers from the north who took the place of the previous hunter-gatherers as the principal occupants of the land. Like the so-called pygmies of the rainforest, many of these survived, but did so on the margin of the new agricultural society, whose languages, with few exceptions, they came to speak. Only on the border of the desert to the south-west did the Khoi turn from hunting and gathering to the herding of cattle, and become sufficiently numerous to hold their own.

Over a period of a thousand years, therefore, material culture to the south of the Equator came together with language. To what extent, therefore, can regard its practitioners as a single people that we can call 'the Bantu'? Starting

from the identification of an ancestral community in the far north-west of the Bantu language area, we are certainly looking at successive build-ups of Bantu-speaking populations in successive areas within and beyond the rain-forest, on the strength of their knowledge of agriculture: knowledge that enabled their numbers to increase and eventually spill out onto adjoining lands and into different environments. Part of this increase will have resulted from the assimilation of non-Bantu speaking peoples, such as the Nilo-Saharans of the East African highlands from whom the Bantu acquired the knowledge of grains and cattle, not to speak of ironworking, and hunter-gatherers whose lands were overrun by the farmers moving south. But the preponderance of the Bantu languages suggests that at every stage it was their original speakers whose multiplication was the most important factor. Such growth overcame the constraints of the African environment without confinement to a particular ecological niche; on the contrary, the favourable conditions of the East African highlands contributed to the emigration that populated the continent south of the Equator with its first farmers. By descent as well as language and culture, those farmers belonged to the same people.

If true, that is important for our understanding of what happened. But our understanding will be very different from that of the people themselves. While their vocabulary may be reconstructed, and insight gained into their way of thought, their account of themselves is lost. Over such a long time and such great distances, their sense of their own identity will have divided and divided again into a multitude of different stories told by different communities in different places, in which memories of a previous existence were eclipsed or transformed. Those stories may well lie behind the legends of origin embedded in the oral traditions that have been recorded over the past hundred years, but at some considerable remove. The division and multiplication of the Bantu languages is the principal sign of the process at work. But it is signalled in the archaeological record by the different material cultures that developed out of the Chifumbaze complex in what may be thought of as the Later as distinct from the Early Iron Age in southern Africa. Over the five hundred years from 1500 to 1000BP, iron and copper working developed around the headwaters of the Congo in a culture that was beginning to count its wealth in metal ornaments and objects. During the same period in the highlands to the south-east, cattle became the principal form of enrichment. The material remains of these different societies are sufficient for Connah to extend his consideration of the growth of complex societies out of Zone II into Zone III.

III

The Upemba Depression on the upper Lualaba (in effect, the upper Congo) lies towards the east of the savannah to the south of the rainforest, in that central region where the western and eastern branches of Bantu have combined. Like the Inland Delta of the Niger, it consists of a long floodplain,

down which runs a chain of lakes. And like the Inland Delta, it is good, productive land, as good for fishing as for farming, with chickens and goats for livestock. Population density is correspondingly high, in contrast to the surrounding savannah. Its settlement has been traced back by archaeology for at least fifteen hundred years, going back to the late Chifumbaze period. Unlike the Inland Delta, however, there is no Jenne-jeno; no ancient cities have been identified. But again like the Inland Delta, a series of burial sites have been found on its margins, with graves rich in iron- and copper-work. These date from about 1500BP to about 200BP, dividing around 600BP into an earlier and a later sequence. Known as Kisalian, the earlier sequence was characterised by the extensive use of iron for a whole range of tools, weapons, and items both ceremonial and decorative, and the growing use of copper for ornament; it was at its richest from about 1000 to 600BP. Thereafter a fresh tradition, the Kabambian, introduced the manufacture of copper crosses, which appear to have served as currency, certainly as a form of wealth. Such a plentiful supply of copper, from the modern Copperbelt about 200 kilometres to the south, is a clear indicator of trade over a wide area, in which the Depression played a central role, perhaps exporting fish together with the metalwork of its craftsmen. For Connah this is evidence of a stratified society, not only occupationally divided, but ranked in order of prestige, wealth and power in accordance with his productive land hypothesis. He is thinking in fact of a state, although there is no other evidence for a state before the Kabambian period. Without a clearer picture of the nature of settlement in and around the Depression, moreover, it is difficult to see what kind of a state there may have been, what kind of rulers may have been buried with their iron axes, iron anvils and iron gongs as symbols of their authority. The archaeological evidence may be suggestive, but is by no means conclusive.

It remains tantalising when Connah turns to the ruins of Great Zimbabwe that have given their name to the modern state. These stand in complete contrast to the floodplains of the Nile, Lake Chad, the Inland Delta and the Upemba Depression, in the highlands on the eastern side of the continent, on the plateau between the Zambezi to the north and the Limpopo to the south, the two great rivers cutting down to the Indian Ocean from west to east. From about 1000BP the plateau was colonised by a cattle-keeping population that lived in round huts with conical roofs supported on a central pole, either inside or outside enclosures formed by dry stone walls. These enclosures, to an original number of at least two hundred, are called *zimbabwe-s*, a name in the modern Shona language variously understood as 'stone house', 'venerated house', or 'court' (of some chief). The majority are on the south-eastern side of the plateau, with a few down in the lowlands of Mozambique, and belong to a period of some three or four hundred years that ended around 550BP. It was about that time that the grandest of them all was effectively abandoned, leaving only its impressive ruins to take the name of Great Zimbabwe, and become the symbol of the modern state. The continuity of the pottery tradition, for example, at later sites elsewhere on the plateau certainly suggests that the *zimbabwe* people were the Shona, the people of the region today. But Shona traditions do not extend so far back

in time, and any conclusions to be drawn from them are inferential. The material remains examined by the archaeologist are almost the sole source of information. Nevertheless they are sufficient to provide Connah with his best example of 'the productive land hypothesis' while pointing elsewhere to the reason for Great Zimbabwe's pre-eminence.

As an ecological niche for human settlement, the Zimbabwean plateau is a promontory protruding from the dry lands of the Kalahari to the west between the valleys of the Zambezi and Limpopo as far as the lowlands of Mozambique to the east. At around 1000 metres or more, it is high enough to be free of the tsetse fly that infests this surrounding region on three sides, and thus of the sleeping sickness that prevents the keeping of cattle, quite apart from its danger to human health. In places it is fairly fertile, and thus good for farming as well. The picture of settlement that emerges from archaeology is of a cattle-keeping and beef-eating aristocracy in the *zimbabwe-s*, and a larger farming population outside. Besides pottery, spinning and weaving, there is in addition the evidence for a mining and metal-working industry, producing iron, copper, tin to turn the copper into bronze, and gold, that came into existence before the *zimbabwe-s* but expanded as they multiplied. As in the case of Jenne-jeno and the Upemba Depression, the quantities produced seem to indicate the existence of an extensive regional trade. Some of this trade is likely to have crossed the Zambezi to the north-west, in pursuit of salt, to link up with the trading area of the Upemba Depression. Ivory and soapstone were both carved. Gold in particular was a sign of the wealth of the cattle-keepers in a situation unlike the Inland Niger Delta, where the gold of the Upper Niger and Senegal; the city of Jenne-jeno; and the empire of Ghana were widely separated. At Mapungubwe in the Limpopo valley to the south of the plateau, a hilltop was walled and occupied by persons of wealth and probably power, to judge from their burials, from about 900 to 750BP. Its abandonment coincided with the rise of Great Zimbabwe on the plateau, where for about two hundred years the hilltop was fortified, while in the shallow valley below a series of *zimbabwe-s* culminated in a massive construction with walls up to ten metres high. Outside these stone enclosures was a very large area of huts, making for a total population of perhaps 18,000. Great Zimbabwe was, in fact, a city that looks like the capital of a major polity. On that assumption, it is possible to consider the many other *zimbabwe-s* of the plateau, not only as satellites in the manner of the settlements surrounding Jenne-Jeno, where they are ranked below the metropolis in order of size, but as the seats of an aristocracy subordinated to some central power.

The rise of such a polity to control the limited resources of the plateau would nicely illustrate Connah's productive land hypothesis; the abandonment of Great Zimbabwe might seem to confirm it. In the end, he suggests, the land was overcropped, overgrazed and overhunted by a population that had flourished only too well in the favourable conditions of the highlands, destroying the economic basis of its success together with the wealth of its rulers and the power of their state. The problem is that Great Zimbabwe prospered to the extent it did from a trade in gold and possibly ivory with

the Indian Ocean, the most striking evidence for which is the Chinese porcelain found at the site. To use the terms employed by archaeologists for the kinds of state they have detected in the archaeological record, Great Zimbabwe may have arisen not as a central but as a marginal state. Its outstanding greatness, in fact, may not have been due to its basis in the economy and society of the plateau, but to its exploitation of a foreign source of income, to its wealth in beads, porcelain and other prestigious commodities derived from the export of gold. In that case, its abandonment may have followed from the loss of that income as the patterns of world trade altered.

IV

In principle, the archaeological distinction between a central and a marginal state is useful for an understanding of the archaeological record. A central state, the product of a society's political evolution, should be visible on the ground through some central settlement: Connah has a good example in the city and kingdom of Benin in southern Nigeria. Its wealth should come from taxation in some shape or form. A marginal state, on the other hand, the product of political opportunism, might be visible in the foreign objects that constituted its wealth; beyond that, its income should be derived from tribute. In practice, however, as in the case of Great Zimbabwe, the two elements may well coexist, and conclusions as to their relative importance be hard to draw. Archaeology by itself can go no further into the nature of the state, or into the spiritual beliefs represented by the objects in the Upemba graves and the monoliths with carved birds at Great Zimbabwe, important as they may have been to government. To understand the possibilities, it is necessary to turn to a quite different source of information, namely ethnography and the oral tradition that it incorporates, and confront a different set of problems.

PART II

The Making of African Society



THE ETHNOGRAPHIC DIMENSION



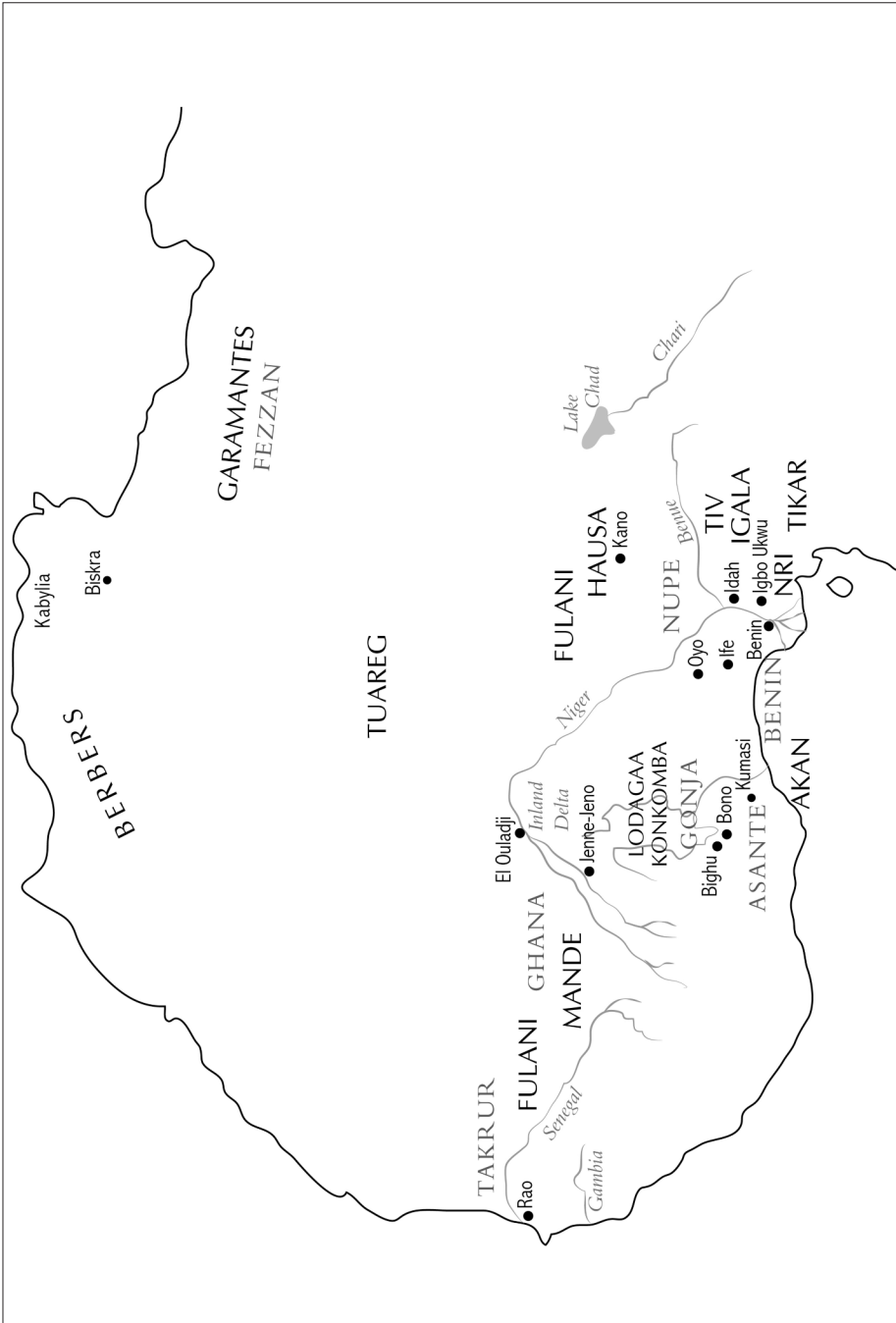
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Men & Women

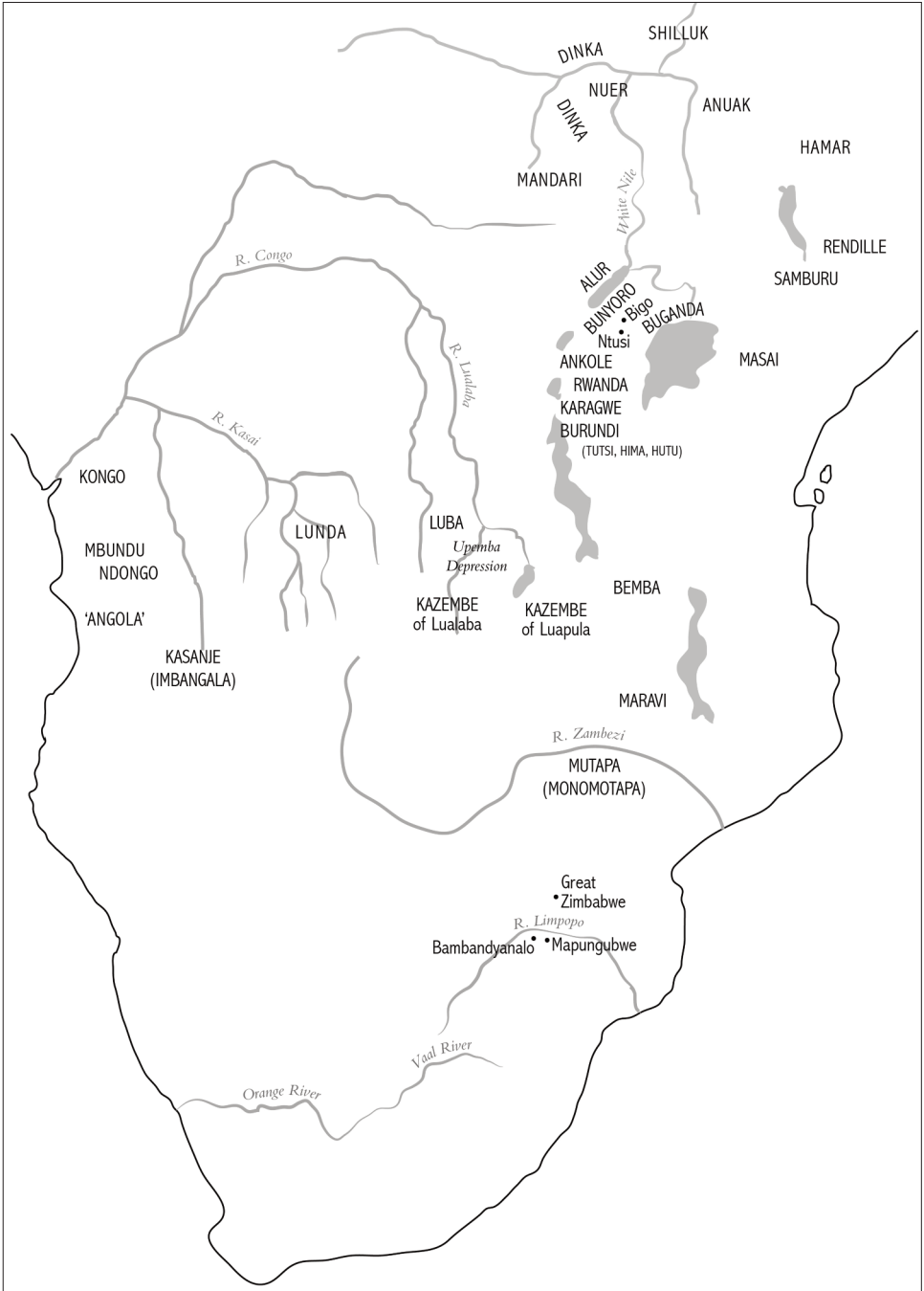
I

The archaeological dimension of African history may cover the whole of the continent the whole of the time, providing the hard evidence which is otherwise wholly or largely lacking for Iliffe's colonisation of his especially hostile region of the world. Its great problem, however, is to argue from material effects to mental causes; although the physical remains may demonstrate what was done, and when and how, the evidence they provide for the reasons why is necessarily indirect and ultimately inconclusive. While those reasons may plausibly be inferred from the remains of herding and farming, for example, the inferences themselves are heavily dependent upon the reasoning of the archaeologist rather than that of the people themselves. Connah's productive land hypothesis, with its English vocabulary of cities and states derived from a European heritage, is a case in point. Meanwhile the principle upon which he, along with Renfrew and modern archaeologists in general, bases his evaluation of evidently foreign elements in the local archaeological record, that their reception has to be understood in terms of their usefulness for local purposes, is an admission of the extra dimension which is required for a full understanding of the processes at work. In Africa that dimension has been sought in ethnography, in the description of African societies in the so-called ethnographic present, that is, the time at which such descriptions appear in the written record, for the most part in the course of the twentieth century.

The principle, that 'the present is the key to the past', is simple enough. But while Charles Lyell's dictum works well enough for the science of geology which he helped to found, for the purpose of human history it comes with its own set of problems. In the first place, prior to the twentieth century, the written records which might support such an approach are patchy and for the most part slight; they only grow in depth and coverage with the documentation generated by European government and economy, and (which is very often the same thing) the descriptions produced by Euro-



4. The Ethnographic Dimension: Peoples and Empires of the West



5. The Ethnographic Dimension: Peoples and Empires of the South

pean followed by African ethnographers of the societies they observed. In principle it is indeed possible to regard the ways of life recorded in this way over the past century or so in the same way as language: survivals from the past that constitute evidence of the past, especially since the language spoken is part and parcel of those ways. But for ways of life in general there is no such thing as glottochronology, that is, the way in which linguists can not only see how language has changed, but offer an estimate of the length of time over which the change has occurred. Archaeologists and historians who turn to ethnographic data for their understanding of the physical record of the past must proceed yet again by inference. Their problem is well illustrated in the first volume of the UNESCO *General History of Africa*, where the account of hunting and gathering prior to the appearance of herding and farming was a description of the way of life of the modern hunters and gatherers of the Kalahari: an unqualified use of the present for which the author was reprimanded by the editors. More ambitious was the attempt in Oliver and Fage's *Short History* to describe a Sudanic civilisation derived from Ancient Egypt on the basis of similarities in the rituals of kingship to the south of the Sahara, a hypothesis generally dismissed as taking no account of time, space and local circumstance. For the historian, the challenge is to sort out what is new from what is old in the descriptions they have to work with. Insofar as they have relied upon the descriptions of the social anthropologists, they have had to contend with the findings of a discipline which, like archaeology, is not their own, and whose approach has followed its own logic in wrestling with the problem of understanding the people in question without losing the necessary degree of objectivity in describing and analysing their beliefs and practices. Insofar as they have collected their own ethnographic data for their own purposes, the problem of finding the past in the present has generated its own set of difficulties.

Not the least of these is the problem of selection. Where the archaeologist can only work on what he has found of what has remained, the data of ethnography are limitless. Not only do they comprise the entire way of life of the people under study, but also what they have to say about themselves and about their past, in oral testimony and in oral tradition which is liable to change from generation to generation. In the description of his methodology in his *Kings and Kinsmen*, Joseph Miller has justified his selection of such evidence and the conclusions to be drawn from it for the political history of northern Angola in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At the same time he draws attention to its limitations for such a purpose. While oral tradition and custom may include a folk memory of indefinite age, for the most part it will not go back more than a few hundred years, and even so, has a quite different sense of time from the sequence of years in which it is reckoned by the historian; the attempt to use it for the purpose of dating was described as the quest for a chimera by David Henige in *The Chronology of Oral Tradition*. Thus Miller admits his dependence on the corroboration of his findings from early written European sources, which extend the ethnographic present back into the past with which he is concerned. Such limitations have not deterred Jan Vansina, one of the founders of African history

as an academic subject, from a sustained attempt in *Paths in the Rainforest* to recover the undocumented history of the equatorial forest from ethnographic data supported by linguistics and archaeology. But the implications for the writing of African history as a whole are important.

While it is usually possible to distinguish the older from the newer in the ethnographic record, there is nothing like the stratigraphic sequence of one thing on top of another which enables archaeologists to set their findings in chronological order, and in principle to establish an absolute chronology of dates, whether BP, BCE or CE, for each region and for the continent as a whole. And since the ethnographic record is, by contrast, not only peculiar to each people or group of peoples, but of relatively shallow time depth, it becomes difficult if not impossible to use on its own for the purpose of a narrative history, whether of the region or the continent. Where Phillipson, in his *African Archaeology*, can write what is in effect a history of Africa down to the end of the first millennium CE, and a history of sub-Saharan Africa well into the second, the history to be written from ethnography not only begins where he ends, but is a history of a different kind. It is a social and cultural history of the last centuries before the colonial occupation of the continent forced the workings of African society into a different mould. In choosing its examples from different times and places, such a history is only broadly chronological. On the other hand it offers an understanding of society which may answer the historical as well as archaeological question why. For John Iliffe, indeed, ethnography supplies an understanding of the history of the continent as a whole in the form of a history of population, by illustrating the concern of Africans themselves with reproduction for the sake of survival. For the approach to African history, that raises the basic question of men and women.

II

‘When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?’ John Ball’s question, put to the peasants in revolt against their landlords in 1381 CE, went to the heart of the grievances of the peasantry against the nobility of fourteenth-century England. Taking the first man and woman to stand for men and women in general, and employing the past tense for the history of their relationship, it put its Biblical finger on the question of society and its evolution, not very far, indeed, from the sociological finger placed upon it by Ball’s exact contemporary Ibn Khaldun. The important difference between them is Ball’s reference to the sexes. ‘Men’ and ‘women’, the English terms for the two sexes of mankind, are defined in relation to each other. As fathers and mothers, they are defined in relation to their offspring, as sons and daughters in relation to their parents. Beyond these terms, English has a relatively limited vocabulary of ‘grands’ and ‘great grands’, brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces and cousins to place them in their other relationships as members of the same family. Terms such as ‘breadwinner’, ‘homemaker’ and ‘housewife’ meanwhile refer to an economic relationship of no less impor-

tance. Whereas 'wife' simply means 'woman', her husband was originally 'the housekeeper'. And as Ball may dimly have been aware, the familiar terms of 'lord' and 'lady' for the nobility whose privileges he denounced began life in Anglo-Saxon England with the meaning of 'ploughman' and 'breadmaker'. In that early agricultural society, in which the family was the unit of production, the economic relationship was as intimate as the physical.

Such relationships have received a great deal of attention in Africa from social anthropologists, sociologists and economists as well as from historians. The study of kinship is almost a subject in its own right. Its economic significance goes back in the first place to the rationality of food production as a way of life, and secondly to Hopkins and the rationality of African ways of meeting its demands. It is well put by Iliffe in his other work, *The African Poor*, where the criterion of poverty is deprivation of the prerequisites of wealth: physical fitness; family; and land. Physical fitness may go without saying, but family is crucial. Land might be plentiful, as for the expansion of the Bantu, but people were a problem. There had to be enough for a viable colony, past, present and future; the problem was how to amass? It was a matter of reproduction, physical for social, for the creation and perpetuation of a community. The solution at its simplest is seen in David Cohen's *Womunafu's Bunafu* where it transpired that a whole village in Uganda traced its descent from one man, a founding father in the nineteenth century with many wives and still more children. But that depended on patriarchy, patriliney and polygyny: the rule of the father; descent in the male line; and the taking of many wives. This is not to speak of patrilocality, where the wife goes to live with the husband's family, and an evident imbalance between the sexes that could only be sustained in the context of a wider society. It was certainly not the only solution. Many African societies, from West Africa through the equatorial forest and out on to the savannahs to the south, have been matrilineal, tracing their descent in the female line, as well as matrilocal, the man going to live with the woman in the wife's family. This is a much looser arrangement that allows for a balanced exchange of men and women and the maintenance of some equivalence in their numbers. But the variation across the whole range of African communities is very wide, and difficult to correlate precisely with the need for people.

Social anthropologists have become distrustful of functionalism, the idea that every practice has a specific role to play in societies that resemble clockwork, in which each part functions as a component of the whole. It is not only difficult to define the society, but difficult to define the role of any particular custom, and especially difficult to explain how such a society might change: how, in any given case, it must have changed in order to come into existence. Historians are now much happier with the view that social identities and customs are the framework within which both societies and individuals lead their lives in the manner of Hopkins' economic man, by choice, however limited that may be. The evolution of the approach is well illustrated in the case of Morocco in Gellner and Micaud, *Arabs and Berbers*, where adaptability and change take over the argument from more static descriptions. Marriage customs are no exception. Vansina is of the opinion

that in the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, matriliney gave way to patriliney in the rainforest because patrilineal societies were better organised for warfare at a time when warfare was on the increase. Matriliney itself is regarded by Wyatt MacGaffey in an article in the *Journal of African History*, 'Changing representations in Central African history', as a social practice for practical social purposes. The basic considerations, however, have been less political than economic. The acquisition through marriage of a man or a woman, typically in exchange for some payment, meant the acquisition by a family of their fertility and their labour. The consequences for society are the stuff of African history, in other words the stuff of historiography. This has been caught up in two major debates: on the one hand women's history, and on the other slavery.

III

Division of labour between the sexes there certainly was. Ball's archetypal Adam and Eve are matched in the Berber society of North Africa, where the men plough and the women weave in a way of life so deeply entrenched in belief and practice that its origins must lie far back in time. With exemplary caution, therefore, the archaeologist Elizabeth Fentress in her joint work with Michael Brett, *The Berbers*, has discussed the structure of Berber society in the recent past in conjunction with her interpretation of the material remains of the Roman period almost two thousand years ago. Further south, in West Africa, the picture changes. Weaving may be done by men; potting, which in North Africa is divided between men and women, may be done by one or the other. More important is agriculture, which in Africa to the south of the Sahara has been largely women's work. This is strikingly illustrated by the Hamar, a people of southern Ethiopia who herd cattle as well as farm the land. While the men take the cattle away from the village for months at a time, living on milk and blood drawn from the necks of their animals, the women and children cultivate the fields, eating what they grow. Such a clear separation recalls the fact that in hunting and gathering societies, it is typically the men that hunt and the women who gather, with the implication that herding and farming developed from their particular skills. In most farming societies there has been an element of collaboration, the men clearing the fields, for example, and in all of them an element of cooperation between families when labour has had to be found for some major task: taking turns to herd the village cattle, for example; digging ditches and building dams for irrigation; and hut-building. Nevertheless, the occupational divide between men and women has generally been clear, and may have provided a measure of independence for the women concerned. Whereas in Berber North Africa, in 'The Kabyle house' described by Bourdieu, the household is the domain of the woman who controls what the man brings home, elsewhere on the continent the women who are the producers may take on other responsibilities besides the bringing up of their children. They will typically be the ones to go out and sell what they have

grown or reared, cooked or uncooked, in the local market. Where society has become increasingly complex, for example in Hopkins' West Africa, the growth in the market economy has enabled the more enterprising among them to grow rich, sometimes very rich, as traders in Dakar, Accra, Lagos, and surprisingly in Hausaland, where upper-class women are secluded by Islamic custom. Eve, on this reckoning, has become the gentlewoman, playing a historical role in the evolution of society rather than a functional role in its reproduction.

Examples like these illustrate the importance of women's history for the history of Africa; women's history, that is, defined as the contribution that women have made to its outcome, from the origins of herding and farming down to today. Its importance is recognised by Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch in her *African Women. A Modern History*, and emerges from the contributions to Hay and Stichter, *African Women South of the Sahara*, to the extent of providing Collins with a separate category of *Problems in African History: the precolonial centuries*. These, however, emphasise a darker side to the division of labour that is summed up in the title of Robertson and Klein's *Women and Slavery in Africa*: many women doing women's work have been slaves. Slavery is an elastic description, easily extended to the endless routine of housework, fieldwork, and childbearing in families where the woman was a dependent without choice in the matter. The objection, if objection there be, is that among the Berbers of North Africa and elsewhere, age counted as well as sex, and the senior woman was the boss of her juniors, in charge of her domain. But slavery might well be the appropriate term in the case of women taken from their families by capture, purchase or exchange, and obliged to join another as a servant instead of a relative. Slaves like these were valued in the same way as other women, for their fertility and their labour, leading lives that may have been little different. Their presence, however, calls for explanation. The first might be the need to increase and reproduce the family and the community of which it was part, but the second relates to Ball's bitter question. Slaves, like men and women, are defined by their relationship to someone else, in their case to a master or mistress in a society that may be as far removed from equality as Ball's gentleman from his Adam and Eve. The nature of such inequality in the recent past has been a matter for ethnography, but its previous existence poses a historical problem, peculiarly acute in the controversial circumstances of the Atlantic slave trade.

IV

The argument is well represented in Collins, *Problems in African History. The Precolonial Centuries*, where the view of Miers and Kopytoff in the introduction to their *Slavery in Africa* is contrasted with that of Lovejoy in his *Transformations in Slavery*. Where Miers and Kopytoff rely on ethnography to locate slaves and slavery in the context of customary African society, Lovejoy turns to the written record to suggest that customary slavery was transformed over the centuries, over a wider and wider area, into a much more pronounced

feature of state and society by the supply of slaves for export to the Middle East and the Americas. A view of slavery as the product of the crucial need for people in Iliffe's Africa is set against the more familiar view of slavery as a means to the wealth, power and prestige of the slaveowner and slave trader in the kind of complex society envisaged by Connah, where the division of labour is matched by the division between rich and poor, strong and weak. The range of relevant examples is very wide, from the slavery of women in peasant families in West and Central Africa described by Coquery-Vidrovitch, to the slaves of the nomadic Berber Tuareg in the Sahara referred to by Iliffe in *The African Poor*, to the plantation and palace slavery of Hausaland described by Beverley Mack in Savage, *The Human Commodity*. The first, for Lovejoy, is a marginal aspect of what he calls the family mode of production, the last an example of a slave mode of production, in which slave labour has become an essential feature of the economy. Hopkins sees no difference in principle, since both depend upon an appropriate economic choice in response to need and opportunity. But Miers and Kopytoff strongly disagree on the grounds that slavery in Africa was always more than economic, and that the marginal character of slaves in family units of production does not mean that they were not both numerous and important.

Part of the problem for all these authors is the problem of definition, not merely of slavery in relation to mastery, but slavery in relation to freedom, the most problematic category of all. The terms themselves are European, and cannot easily be made to fit the wide variety of African practice and terminology in the wide variety of African society and language. A specifically African definition would begin with a distinction between insiders and outsiders, coming down on the one hand to a distinction between kinsfolk and non-kinsfolk, and on the other to a distinction between kinsfolk or people with entitlement to the land, and others who have been admitted into their community. Freedom is hardly the word to describe the complicated obligations of such people to each other, which accompany the rights which members enjoy to a share in their common livelihood. Unfreedom, however, might usefully describe the situations of those admitted into or recruited by these people as inferiors obliged to be their servants. To what extent such situations amounted to slavery as understood in European terminology is another matter. It is Lovejoy's argument that the violence by which Africans were rounded up for export across the Sahara and the Atlantic did indeed turn them into slaves in both the European and the Islamic sense, not only in the Americas but throughout Africa itself, where they were recruited into the societies of their captors. In such a transformation of customary forms of servitude into slavery as such, the element of voluntary slavery may have been as rare as Lovejoy says. It was, on the other hand, an extreme form of something very different, namely the entry of the African poor, without either family or land to ensure their survival, into the service of those who had both, but still needed dependents. That in turn was symptomatic of something still wider, namely migration on the part of people who may have been driven from their homeland by poverty and war, but who may equally well have been attracted by the possibility of a better life on terms that left them rela-

tively free. The point is well made by Humphrey Fisher in the first chapter of his *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa*. There, under the heading of 'Population mobility', he puts his subject into perspective by pointing to other ways of mobilising labour than enslavement. He quotes to that effect the *Kano Chronicle's* eulogy of a ruler of this northern Nigerian city back in the fifteenth century: 'Many men came and settled in Kano-land in his reign.' He is surely right to conclude that, as an answer to the scarcity of people, enslavement and immigration, compulsion and attraction, were the opposite extremes of a wide range of choices made by men as well as masters.

V

Between these two extremes, at the centre of the range, lay the relationship between the client, the one who 'hears and obeys', and the patron, the 'father' by whom he is adopted. However one-sided, the relationship is contractual, since the client offers, and the patron retains, his service in return for a reward. Historically it has varied enormously. Many clients were freed slaves who remained under an obligation to their former masters; others were simply poor men, perhaps refugees, who commended themselves to the wealthy and powerful. Some may have been attracted by the offer of land, like the servile cultivators brought into the oases of the Ahaggar mountains in the Algerian Sahara by the nomadic Tuareg in the middle of the nineteenth century. But all such forms are included by Jacques Maquet under the heading of 'dependence relations' in his *Power and Society in Africa*. As an illustration he turns to Rwanda, where on the highlands between Lake Victoria and the Equatorial forest, in the homeland of the Eastern Bantu 2500 years ago, he discusses the kind of patron-client relationship between herders and farmers that may have prevailed on the Zimbabwean plateau in the days of Great Zimbabwe. It is a discussion that illustrates the dangers as well as the difficulties of ethnography as a source of historical information.

Maquet gives a straightforward account of the way in which the cattle-owning patron would give, or lend, his beasts to the client farmer in return for his work and his produce, including calves of the cows he had borrowed. The difficulty is that he was attempting to describe, on the basis of his field-work in the 1950s, the situation at the beginning of the twentieth century, before the German and subsequently Belgian government of this old kingdom was firmly in place. The uncertainty is apparent from Iliffe's discussion, in *The African Poor*, of the findings of other ethnographic historians going over the same ground in Rwanda and its neighbour Burundi in the second half of the century. Iliffe himself concludes that in addition to the landed peasants described by Maquet, there may have been others who were given land to cultivate in return for their labour services, and yet more who were simply servants: all clients of the kings and their ruling aristocracy. Patronage, in this context, was the means of rearranging an existing population into groups of dependents who provided the equivalent of Ball's gentlemen with the followers they needed to secure their position. The

greatest difficulty, and the source of greatest danger, has been to establish who these equivalents actually were.

For Maquet, at work in the last years of a colonial government that had discriminated between native rulers called Tutsi and subjects called Hutu, there was no doubt that the cattle-owning patrons had been the Tutsi and the farming clients the Hutu. Moreover, like the colonial authorities, he considered the difference between them to be not simply economic, social and political but racial: the tall Tutsis had originally come from Ethiopia to impose their domination upon the shorter, indigenous Hutu. Although Tutsis spoke the same Bantu language as their inferiors, they had maintained their separate identity as a closed caste from whom the rulers of the kingdom, and subsequently the chiefs appointed by the Belgian administration were drawn. Maquet, in fact, like the colonial authorities, was following Seligman in subscribing to the Hamitic myth of a superior race of Caucasian immigrants into Negro Africa, with pernicious consequences. The discrimination practised and the antagonisms fostered by colonial government in the first half of the twentieth century culminated at the end of the century in the horrific massacre of the Tutsi by the Hutu, from which the region has not yet recovered. A distinction that for Maquet was a matter of sociological fact has in consequence been subjected to an anxious re-examination that has sought to trace the history of these identities, and in the process to show how they have changed.

The finding of Jean-Pierre Chretien in *The Great Lakes of Africa. Two Thousand Years of History*, is that the Tutsi may or may not have been immigrants at some point in the distant past, but more importantly, that they evolved as a cattle-keeping people within the population as a whole, playing their part in the economy of the whole. In that capacity, they were a people within a people, speaking the same language as their neighbours, and joining with them on equal terms as members of the various clans to which everyone belonged. This relationship, however, was overlaid from the seventeenth century onwards by the formation of the kingdoms of Rwanda and Burundi by the Tutsi and their counterparts the Hima. While the majority of Tutsi remained herdsmen, a royal Tutsi aristocracy came into existence, and the names Tutsi and Hutu took on new meanings as rulers and patrons, subjects and clients. Both as subjects and as clients, the Hutu had considerable freedom of manoeuvre between chiefs and patrons, who needed to attract rather than repel their followers. But this fluid practice was terminated by the colonial administration, which turned chiefs against subjects and subjects against chiefs; and with it went the fluidity of the terminology, to be replaced by the threefold definition of Tutsi and Hutu as herdsmen and farmers, rulers and subjects, and most of all as 'white' and 'black', a superior and an inferior race. Entrenched in administrative practice by the colonial regime, it was a definition accepted by the people themselves in the struggle for power that has gripped both Rwanda and Burundi since independence. Maquet's history may have been wrong, but his treatment of the subject as an aspect of power in general has been vindicated only too well. The question of who was then the gentleman proves to be inseparable from that of government.



8

From Kinship to Kingship

I

'Of all the questions that have preoccupied historians of [West] Africa, perhaps the most vexing has been that of the origins of states. Are states indigenous developments, or the result of external influences?' Thus Robin Horton, discussing the subject of stateless societies in the first volume of Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa*. It has certainly been a major concern of the archaeologists, who in answer to Horton's question have distinguished between central and marginal states. Connah's 'productive land hypothesis' associates the appearance of states with the development of complex societies, to which they are both central and indigenous. But McIntosh in *The Peoples of the Middle Niger* sees no such connection at Jenne-jeno, while the association of Great Zimbabwe with the export of gold suggests that its greatness may have been marginal rather than central to the society of the plateau. Their problem is a good example of the limitations of archaeology which historians have endeavoured to overcome by recourse to ethnography, by arguing from the present to the past, on the strength of behaviour observed in the last hundred years. While the evidence of such behaviour for ways of life in the past is equally problematic, it is at least political, and to the point. Horton's discussion of 'Stateless societies in the history of West Africa' thus begins where Connah ends, with the question of government in its widest and narrowest sense. All societies have government in the form of rules to be followed, but not all have rulers to make and enforce them. That has certainly been the case in Africa, where down to the twentieth century societies without rulers existed alongside those that had, and continued to function even when incorporated into wider empires. It is Horton's contention that the rules came before the rulers, and that the origins of African states must be sought in the mechanisms of these so-called 'stateless societies'.

Such societies must first be identified. Like its relative the linguistic map, the ethnographic map of Africa is covered with a bewildering variety of

names; but as in the case of the Tutsi and the Hutu, their meaning varies from place to place and time to time. In *Nomads in Alliance*, Paul Spencer discusses the case of the Rendille and Samburu of Kenya, the former camel herdsman of the desert lowlands, the latter cattle-keepers of the highland savannah. They speak different languages, and seem in every way distinct. But in times of drought, when life in the desert is hard, Rendille will move up on to the savannah to become Samburu, economically, socially and linguistically; or else form an intermediate people, the Ariaal or Masagera. It is an example, as Spencer says, of symbiosis, of the way in which two peoples may live together, and of growth, of the way in which populations can expand, or come into existence under some convenient name. Such behaviour, dictated by the need for people to form a viable community, exemplifies the rules that make such formations possible – the rules of government.

II

In Womunafu's Bunafu, the rules of government began as the rules of the family, extending over time to a widening circle of kinsfolk. For Ibn Khaldun, writing in *The Muqaddimah* about what he called the 'bedouin civilisation' of the Berbers and Arabs in North Africa and the Sahara, the rules that defined a community and governed its behaviour were likewise those of kinship, the tie of blood that created a sense of solidarity between people who considered themselves to be related to each other, and named themselves accordingly. The rules in their case were described by Evans-Pritchard, who coined the term 'segmentary societies' for a whole range of such peoples, from Ibn Khaldun's Berbers and Arabs in North Africa, to Horton's Tiv and Fulani in West Africa. His own Nuer on the White Nile in the southern Sudan are usefully described in his contribution to the book which he edited together with Meyer Fortes, *African Political Systems*. The rules in question allowed for an endless process of fission and fusion: the splitting-up of overlarge groups of kinsfolk into new groups with new names, and their combination with others on the pretext of descent from some common ancestor. At the same time they were rules of conflict, summed up in the Arab saying: 'Myself against my brothers; my brothers and myself against our cousins; our cousins, my brothers and myself against the world'. Solidarity, in other words, cut both ways, uniting close relatives against more distant relatives in the event of a quarrel, even while it united them all against a common foe. On the principle of a life for a life, a quarrel that led to bloodshed threatened to involve the whole community in a self-destructive feud as kinsfolk were drawn in on one side or the other. Behaviour of this kind, observed in the ethnographic present, is the starting-point of the structural analysis of societies without rulers with which Horton begins his discussion.

Cooperation and conflict, two sides of the same coin in segmentary as in all societies, are both diminished in the case of the agricultural Tiv and the pastoral Fulani in Nigeria and the West African savannah by the thinness of

the population, which keeps kinsfolk away from each other in isolated farmsteads and scattered pastures. Regulation of a different kind enters the equation where the population remains dispersed, but where immigration has brought two peoples on to the same land. Going further than the Rendille and Samburu, but not so far as the Tutsi and the Hutu, societies such as the Konkomba and Lodagaa on the savannahs of northern Ghana and Burkina Faso are made up in this way of 'natives' and 'newcomers' who complement each other as more or less equal halves of a joint population defined by its occupation of a common territory. From the 'natives' may come an 'owner of the land', from the 'newcomers' an 'owner of the people', elders who represent the community as a whole, and take some responsibility for its conduct. Problems arise where the population is concentrated in villages inhabited by close neighbours who may or may not be related to each other. In societies such as these, in the forests of Liberia for example, and in eastern Nigeria, the need for cooperation and the risk of conflict are correspondingly heightened, and government becomes more complex. The number of elders may increase, each representing a particular section of the community while holding some title under the head of the oldest lineage. And if that be insufficient to keep the peace, age sets and associations may come into play, countering loyalty to one's family with loyalty to one's peers and fellow members.

In this third kind of stateless society, the rules of behaviour have taken institutional form, not only in West Africa. Age sets, which are created through rites of initiation, and bind a community together at every stage of life, are widespread among nomads and farmers in East as well as West Africa. They give rise to what Lucy Mair, in *Primitive Government*, calls 'diffused government', in which authority is doubly shared between the members of the set and between the sets themselves, each of which, from the younger to the older, has its part to play in the affairs of the people. As these sets define themselves, so they define the nation, to which they may admit new members as recruits at the appropriate level. Similarly widespread is the hereditary authority of individuals placed in some special relationship to the land and its inhabitants, whose sanction may be required for collective action. Power enters the equation in the form of public opinion, which enforces collective judgements and collective decisions. Among the Berber villagers of North Africa, the customary behaviour of a segmentary society is controlled in the public interest by a council of elders, the heads of the various families, whose unanimity determines the attitude and actions of the community. In west Africa, Horton describes the so-called 'secret societies', whose masked initiates assume the impersonal identity of a leopard, for example, with the power to punish, even to kill, their own relatives for overstepping the bounds. In ways like these, communities could be constituted as self-governing republics, without being subject to rulers. The problem is to explain why, in that case, government by rulers should have come into existence at all. As Horton points out, many of the features of his stateless societies have survived in the constitutions of West African states; there seems, however, to be no necessity for their passage from the one to the other form

of government. He suggests that some external stimulus such as war or foreign trade may have acted as a catalyst, bringing heads of lineages, age sets and secret societies under the control of a monarch. However, foreign trade in particular takes the argument back to the marginal states of the archaeologists, and leaves their central states unaccounted for. For ethnography to find an explanation, it must observe the transformation in progress.

III

The opportunity to do so is now past, and was foreclosed almost from the start by the imposition of colonial government on the societies in question. In *Primitive Government* (in the sense of elementary rather than crude), Lucy Mair could find only one example in East Africa. But in the context of her discussion of 'The expansion of government', the example in question is significant of the ways in which Horton's stateless societies might develop in accordance with their own rules. Their development is undeniable: the societies in question must have come into existence through a process of change that can never have ceased. What is required is demonstration of the kind that Mair has been able to find in the ethnography of the southern Sudan and East Africa. Her 'expansion of government' turns on the growth of inequality out of equality, as men of authority rose to power within the stateless system through the accumulation of prestige and wealth. Their authority arose in the first place partly out of the need for arbitration to keep the peace, giving rise among the Nuer of the southern Sudan to the 'leopardskin chief' who served as a mediator in disputes. Deference was likewise paid by the Nuer to the 'bull' whose word was heard and whose example followed on the strength of his personality and wealth in cattle. Among the societies selected by Mair, the elders in general were held in respect, especially those who claimed descent from the first settlers, in the manner of Horton's 'owners of the land'. Authority in such cases then ran in lineages, which among the Anuak to the east of the Nuer supplied the village headmen whose role it was to hold court for the settlement of quarrels; among the Mandari to the south, the heads of such lineages had become chiefs. The reason in their case was the immigration of refugees in search of land or simply protection, who had become the clients of these owners of the land, and provided them with people who owed them obedience. Among the Getutu of Kenya, a similar influx had enriched the clan of the founder in both men and women. Not only had the clan grown in numbers, but the elders of the clan to whom people appealed for the settlement of disputes had acquired the followers needed to enforce their judgements against offenders.

Among the Anuak government was a question of internal politics. Headmen drawn from the lineage of the founder came and went in each village on the strength of their popularity, which depended to a large extent on the entertainment they were able to offer in ruinously expensive feasts. This process of selection and deselection was common to the Anuak as a whole; but among the eastern Anuak it was overlaid by a second competi-

tion for the right to hold the national emblems of a spear and a necklace. The right belonged to the members of a national as distinct from a local clan, individuals whose personal claims were fought out between villages for the privilege of hosting the holder, the 'king'. The king had neither duties nor power, only the honour due to himself and the village in which he lived; but for that reason his position was so coveted that the eligible claimants multiplied, establishing themselves in each village, where they rivalled the headman in popularity. These noblemen attracted the followings they required to enable them to mount a challenge for the emblems, and meanwhile to hold court on the strength of their prestige and the wealth they acquired in part from gifts. Meanwhile the royal clan of the Alur on the border between Uganda and the former Belgian Congo had spread out by invitation to neighbouring stateless societies anxious on the one hand for the prestige of a prince, and on the other for a ruler to settle their disputes. Unlike the nobles of the eastern Anuak, these princes had power, demonstrating how a state system, for want of a better word, might spread along with the growth of an aristocracy.

IV

How the chiefs of the Alur had gained power in the first place is nevertheless unknown, so that the upshot in the case of the eastern Anuak is all the more instructive. Out of the competition for the spear and the necklace, there emerged at the end of the nineteenth century three eligible noblemen who armed their followers with guns, and whether or nor they held the emblems, exacted tribute from their clients and villagers in the form of ivory and other trophies of the hunt. Against a background of followers gathered in and chiefs going out, this one example of original state formation may have been, as Mair says, a historical accident, the product of foreign guns and foreign demand for ivory. But if these Anuak chieftaincies were to that extent marginal, they arose out of the politics of their society, like the spreading of the Alur chieftaincies, not as the result of war or conquest. Fighting may have been endemic in the societies Mair discusses, but was typically ended by negotiation. It is equally significant that those societies that were in fact organised for war, that is the cattle nomads of East Africa, and in particular the Maasai, were never conquerors or state builders, only cattle raiders. Six hundred years ago, in the *Muqaddima*, Ibn Khaldun was of the same opinion. Nomads of the Sahara, whose solidarity was necessary to their survival, and whose fighting spirit was correspondingly strong, were only capable of destruction of the cultivated lands they overran. The fact that some had indeed become great conquerors and empire-builders was again the result of historical accident: specifically, the intervention of Islam and its call to arms. In the body of his *Kitab al-'Ibar*, however, Ibn Khaldun provides a more organic example of state formation at Biskra, an oasis city in eastern Algeria on the border between the low-lying desert to the south and the highlands to the north. His account has the inestimable value, in this ethnographic

context, of being not only old, but provided by an African observer on the basis of information he himself collected. Like Mair's discussion, it centres on the politics of the society in question; but unlike her examples, it also centres on a city, bringing the story back towards the concerns of Connah.

As discussed by Brett in the final article of his collection *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, the story began in the eleventh century CE, when Biskra was a walled city surrounded by villages in the great palm grove of the oasis, inhabited by a population going back to Roman times. It was a city of Ifriqiya, a province of the former Arab empire comprising eastern Algeria, Tunisia and Tripolitania, that had become independent under successive Islamic dynasties ruling from Qayrawan to the south of Tunis. But instead of a governor appointed by the sultan, it was ruled by a *shura*, a council of shaykhs or elders of the community. Inequality was present in the superiority of the city to the villages, and in the superiority of two families within the city, the Banu Rumman and the Banu Sindi. These contended for the *mashyakha*, the headship of the council: Mair's expansion of government was well under way. Towards the end of the eleventh century, at a time when Ifriqiya was overrun by the warrior nomads of the Banu Hilal, and central government was at a discount, the Banu Sindi ousted the Banu Rumman. The Banu Sindi then enjoyed the *mashyakha* down to the middle of the twelfth, when the Banu Rumman gained the patronage of the Almohads, the new rulers of Ifriqiya. A hundred years later, however, the Banu Rumman were confronted by fresh rivals in the shape of the Banu Muzni, a new element in the population formed from immigrant Arab nomads who had been forced out of the desert to settle as cultivators in the oasis. There they had grown rich on the irrigated land to the point at which they were able to move into the city, and join the *shura*. Fighting then broke out with the Banu Rumman, and the issue was only resolved at the end of the thirteenth century, when the Banu Muzni finally triumphed with the aid of the Hafsid dynasty at Tunis. In the course of the conflict, the *shura* had disappeared, and the Banu Muzni emerged as a dynasty, installed in a castle, and ruling from Biskra over the whole of the surrounding region down to the time of Ibn Khaldun in the second half of the fourteenth century.

V

For an archaeologist like Connah, the castle in the city in the oasis would be *prima facie* evidence that a state had come into existence to control the resources of a fertile enclave in a barren land; Ibn Khaldun's narrative shows how it did so. On the southern edge of the desert, there are no such accounts to explain the appearance of the kingdoms recorded for the most part at second hand by Ibn Khaldun and his predecessors from the ninth century CE onwards. That is especially so in the case of the Inland Delta, where the inferences of archaeology and ethnography differ, and Connah's productive land hypothesis is challenged by McIntosh in *The Peoples of the*

Middle Niger. The self-regulating society which he envisages on the floodplain in the absence of any kind of palatial structure at Jenne-jeno is postulated on the heterogeneous character of the population today. In describing the much more modest settlement mounds on the floodplain to the south of Lake Chad in *Three Thousand Years in Africa*, Connah himself does not go so far as to suggest that they indicate the emergence of a state or state system. In the case of the Inland Delta, on the other hand, his doubts about McIntosh's conclusions may be justified. Over the hundreds of years that saw the formation of a complex society, and the growth of Jenne-jeno into a walled city by the end of the first millennium CE, there must in fact have been changes, not only in the constitution of the society but in its form of government. The form that emerged was clearly sufficient to organise the building of the walls by what we might call a republic, if not a monarchy. Regarding the possibilities, the history of Biskra is suggestive, and might not be inappropriate.

In contrast to Jenne-jeno, the burial mounds on the northern flanks of the Delta offer clear archaeological evidence of disparities in prestige and wealth, which when coupled with the evidence for human sacrifice seem to indicate power. But once again, McIntosh is reluctant to make the association with the empire of Ghana, or think in terms of states at all. The tumuli in question are variously associated with habitation mounds and megaliths. The collective labour involved may have been mobilised for a collective, communal purpose by interrelated communities sharing the same beliefs and practices and governing themselves in the manner of Horton's villagers. Further clusters of such monuments are to be found between the Senegal and Gambia rivers across the savannah to the west. On the savannah itself, McIntosh once again invokes ethnography in support of his argument against state formation in the first millennium CE. The ethnography in question centres on the *kafu* or Mande township, which is taken by Oliver as the starting-point of his own discussion of state formation in *The African Experience*, under the heading of 'The cities of the plain'. In the nineteenth century the *kafu*, in the centre of its farmland, was a community of Horton's third type under a headman called a *mansa*, who settled disputes between families and supervised the agricultural year. The *kafu*, however, was only one of many, all of which were surrounded by a wall against their neighbours' aggression. The *mansa* was thus a leader in war as well as peace, who might acquire power as well as authority from captives recruited into his household as henchmen. Out of such a leader might well come a ruler who bent the existing institutions of government into those of a state, and turned the *kafu* into a building-block of empire. However, such a history at some time in the more distant past cannot be assumed. In his discussion of that past, McIntosh may be right to argue against the application of an evolutionary model of state formation corresponding to the growth of population, economy and society; to argue, in other words, against Connah's 'productive land hypothesis'.

VI

For the time before the ethnographic present, Horton's vexed question thus remains open, ethnographically as well as archaeologically. What emerges from the literature, however, is that in this form the question is oversimplified. The contrast which it posits between state and stateless is, like the contrast between slavery and freedom, inconceivable except in terms of the spectrum of government described by Mair. The gradations in authority, power, prestige and wealth, in land and goods and people, between individuals and groups of one kind and another, mean that the passage across the spectrum from one extreme to the other moves through such a wide variety of intermediate forms and combinations that it becomes hard to say where statelessness ends and states begin. The difficulty is discussed at length by Miller in relation to the subject of the early Mbundu states in his *Kings and Kinsmen*. It is treated more generally by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard in their *African Political Systems*, where as in the title, the term 'political systems' is preferred to describe the range of government of African 'political societies'. In so far as they use the term 'state', it is to refer to any number of political organisations involving the use of physical force by their directors – a definition almost as wide as 'political systems' and 'complex societies'. It is certainly not a term which can be used unthinkingly.

Whether or not their definition of a state is accepted, the problem for the historian is to explain the evolution of such organisations in the past without corroboration of the kind found by Miller in the Portuguese record of Angola, and in the case of McIntosh's Middle Niger, in the admittedly second-hand accounts of Ibn Khaldun and his predecessors. As records of an ethnographic past, those accounts do indeed serve as a measure of control for both the archaeological and the modern ethnographical evidence. It is inconceivable that the growing wealth of the mound burials of the Niger and the Senegal from the seventh to the eleventh century CE was not closely related to the growth of Ghana and Takrur, the kingdoms or empires named in the written sources from the tenth century onwards. The description of the burial of the kings of Ghana by the Arab geographer al-Bakri in the eleventh century so closely resembles the great tomb at El-Ouladji at the north-west extremity of the Delta that the relationship is certain, even if its two occupants, buried with ornaments, weapons, food, drink, and sacrificial victims, cannot be positively identified. Whoever they may have been they were, as Connah observes of the wearer of the great gold disk buried at Rao near the mouth of the Senegal, no ordinary persons, economically, socially or politically, even if we do not know quite how or why they achieved such preeminence, or quite how to decide upon a label for their power, wealth and prestige. But what they undoubtedly were, from the point of view of al-Bakri and those fellow Muslims to whom we owe the first mention of Ghana and Takrur, is pagan, honoured in death according to beliefs that varied with the variety of burial, but were all in opposition to those of Islam. The details

of those beliefs may be unknown, despite McIntosh's review of the myths and legends of oral tradition which tell of a great snake. Their importance is nevertheless clear from the tombs themselves. They are an aspect of the making of African society that cannot be ignored, not least for what Connah calls 'the assumption of spiritual attributes' by its various rulers. In considering the nature of African political systems, the assumption of those attributes adds another dimension to the narrow concern of Fortes and Evans-Pritchard with the use of physical force. An understanding of 'the mind of Africa' is indispensable for the history of its body.



9

The Mind of Africa

I

“Sir, good morning.” The quotation is from Kwame Anthony Appiah’s discussion of ‘Old Gods and new’ in his *In My Father’s House*, but the title is taken from W. E. Abraham’s *The Mind of Africa*. Abraham’s work, published in 1962, was written in the optimism of African independence to announce the contribution that African ways of thought could make to the future of the continent and the world. Thirty years later, in 1992, Appiah’s work returned to the same subject in the light of the disappointment with the way in which the political kingdom coveted by Kwame Nkrumah has failed throughout the continent to live up to expectations. Like Nkrumah, the first president of the first state south of the Sahara to win its independence from colonial rule, the two authors are Ghanaian, but unlike Nkrumah they are both Akan, from the major language family of the country. Appiah is specifically Asante, a member of the dynasty of its major kingdom. Like Ibn Khaldun, therefore, they are inside observers of the society to which they belong, using their intimate knowledge of its beliefs and behaviour to establish what Abraham calls the paradigm of African society in general, and to explain its workings to the world. Both, therefore, are apologists in the sense of advocates of their subject in the face of the long-standing dismissal of the continent by Europeans as congenitally backward. Just as Hopkins mounted a vigorous defence of African rationality in economic matters, so Appiah confronts the argument that African thought is unscientific: that believing as it does in the supernatural, it is incapable of offering rational explanations of what happens in the world. The first charge relates to religion, the second to its role in society and government.

II

“Sir, good morning.” The person addressed so respectfully but familiarly is a spirit, a spirit of nature and a spirit of place, specifically the Tano River in

modern Ghana, where it is one of many inhabiting and controlling the physical universe of West Africa. Alongside them are the spirits of the ancestors, overseeing the moral universe of the living. Over them both reigns some supreme deity, while underneath they shade into the magical properties of animals, vegetables and minerals. Appiah dislikes the word religion, with its sense of commitment to a body of doctrine and a set of rules, for this omnipresence of the invisible in the visible world. In *West African Religion*, Parrinder proposes the name of polytheism, the recognition of a variety of supernatural beings. Elsewhere in Africa such beings may be fewer. In *The Civilizations of Africa*, Ehret identifies polytheism with the Niger-Congo language area, attributing to the Nilo-Saharanans the sense of a less diversified, more general divinity, and to the early Afroasiatics particular gods for particular peoples. Everywhere, however, the spirit world is at hand, to be drawn into the affairs of humanity through rites that bring it to bear upon human needs. Such rites are of the essence of the beliefs described by Appiah, and crucial for his understanding of their rationale. For the historian, their importance as evidence is greatly enhanced by their reliance upon physical tokens for their performance.

These are the artefacts or natural objects at the centre of each performance, through which the immaterial world of spirit may be drawn into the human world, for good or ill. As embodiments of the supernatural, such tokens are of every kind, from necklaces, spears and drums to carvings of human beings and animals, as well as rocks, trees and streams. Representations of animals are conspicuous, since each animal represents its own spirit and its quality – the buffalo ferocity, the elephant strength, the spider cunning – which can in turn be represented by its image. Modelled, sculpted or painted, such representations of representations go back at least as far as Ancient Egypt, to the scarab, for example, and the hawk. The scarab, the beetle that rolls a globular pellet of dung in which to lay its eggs, was identified with the cosmic force that propelled the ball of the sun across the sky, while the towering hawk became the god of the rising sun. Out of the multitude of such identifications came a pictorial language seen at its most elaborate in the tombs of the Pharaohs in the Valley of the Kings at Luxor, where it is employed in strip cartoons that depict the passage of the dead king into the afterlife. These renderings are artistic enactments of the passage, a perpetual performance designed to ensure the immortality of the monarch. Elsewhere in Africa, such works of art for such ritual purposes survive not only in the world's museums, whose collections are superbly represented in Phillips' magisterial catalogue to the exhibition at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1995–6: *Africa. The Art of a Continent*. Human statues and animal masks, very different in appearance from the ancient Egyptian images, are still produced and still employed for the purposes discussed by Appiah. Described by Frank Willett in his *African Art*, they are discussed in the present context by R.I.J. Hackett, *Art and Religion in Africa*.

Since the objects in question are for the most part in wood and other perishable materials, what survives from the centuries before the great age of collecting in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is limited

to terracotta statuettes from as far back as Nok, where they are contemporary with the artistic production of Meroe in the tradition of Ancient Egypt some 2500 years ago. Over the past millennium, such terracottas from across the continent have been accompanied by a certain amount of stone and ivory carving, and by metalwork in iron, copper, brass and bronze, most notably at Ife and Benin in western Nigeria. In the kingdom of Benin, the casting of figures in brass has been continuous from the fifteenth century to the ethnographic present, artistic evidence of the antiquity of a living tradition. Elsewhere, the significance of such works is conjectural; but over five hundred years ago, the Portuguese were in no doubt about what they called fetishes, lit. 'factitious', 'things made (by hand)' that they took for objects of worship and witchcraft. These fetishes were evidently the things found today, ranging from statues and masks to compositions of wood, iron and other materials, with a wide variety of charms and amulets. Among the Akan, for example, a ball of black burnt stuff might house the spirit, while charms might be made of anything. Both 'fetish' and 'fetishism' have entered the languages of Europe with various usages and meanings, none of which will serve for African belief and practice. 'Fetishism' is certainly inappropriate, if only because it dwells on the token rather than the act, the ritual in which it is employed. The act, which brings the supernatural into play in the natural world, is an act of government; and those who perform it lay claim to both authority and power as mediators between the human and the divine.

III

Rituals may be simple or complex, from libations that bring the ancestors into the family circle to annual festivals that ensure the health of the community, and for many other purposes. Most obviously, these are the welfare of the individual at each stage of life, from birth through puberty and marriage to death. The antelope dance of the Mande in present-day Mali, in which the dancer is invisible in a cape of straw with the *Chi-wara*, the carving of an antelope, mounted on his head, is to procure fertility and avoid desolation through the invocation of the antelope spirit. The Ogboni rituals of the Yoruba people of Oyo in western Nigeria employ a male and a female figure joined by a chain to find those responsible for evil with the aid of the spirits of the ancestors and the earth. Evil in the form of malady is typically attributed to witchcraft, to be countered by more potent interventions. Sacrifice is common, with blood smeared on masks and other ceremonial objects, like the great drum of Rwanda. Those who perform such rites of invocation, propitiation or exorcism may need no qualification, whether pouring a libation or conducting a long induction into the spirit world, as with the priests of the Akan. With special knowledge goes a special quality, charisma in its literal sense of 'the gift of God', that confers upon its possessor a status in society and a role in government. Called *baraka* in the case of the marabouts or Muslim holy men of North and West Africa, it gives them authority to keep the peace in a tribal society in the manner of the leopardskin chief

among the Nuer, who achieves the ritual reconciliation of enemies. Among the Alur described by Mair in her *Primitive Government* the word is *ker*; but this is a quality of success that is essential to the power as well as the authority of a chief. Such power is itself supernatural, hedged with a variety of rituals that may include human sacrifice, and frequently with taboos on what the monarch may not do; it is dangerous.

It may certainly be represented in art. Just as the falcon, the cobra and the lion stood for the potency of the Ancient Egyptian Pharaoh, so the buffalo drinking horn of a chief of the Tikar of Bamoun in Cameroun is covered with engravings of his attributes: the buffalo for ferocity, the elephant for strength, the spider for cunning, and many more. As Mair observes of the rituals of kingship, these emphasise the fearsomeness of power rather than the generosity and justice to be expected of those that wield it. Justice in the sense of punishment, however, is very much part of the fear, a feature of government that is common to the stateless society as well as the state. At Oyo in western Nigeria, the Alafin, the ruler, represents the sky above; the Oyo Mesi, a council of seven officers of state, represents the people; while the Ogboni secret society represents the earth beneath in its search for malefactors. The society, as Horton notes, has become the agent of a monarchy that has taken over the government of the community at some stage in the past. How it came to do so is explained by superhuman intervention. Oyo is one of a series of Yoruba monarchies that trace their origin to Ife. Ife in turn is said to have been founded by Ododuwa, who is on the one hand the supreme god of the Yoruba, and on the other the first king. Such stories of origin are common across the continent, and in the chapter entitled 'Myth and history' come under Benjamin Ray's heading of religion in his *African Religions: symbol, ritual and community*. For Fortes and Evans-Pritchard in their introduction to *African Political Systems*, their importance is sociological: they contribute to 'the mystical values associated with political office'. For the historian they belong to the category of oral tradition, moving effortlessly out of myth and legend into the memory of recent events. However they are regarded, they offer an insider's view of the society, its culture and its history to be interpreted by outside observers like Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, and to be matched by historians against other records of the past.

Interpretation is a problem that is clearly stated by the two anthropologists, who distinguish sharply between their own understanding and that of the Africans whose societies they have studied. Stories that account for the origin of a people are regarded as myths in the sense of justifications for its way of life: charters, as they have been called, for its government. Together with the rituals by which its conduct is regulated, they form a bundle of symbolic representations of a social system that they endow with 'mystical values' on the strength of belief in their truth and efficacy. That in themselves they are without scientific or precise historical foundation is irrelevant: their importance lies not in what they claim to be but in their function as 'the ideological superstructure of political organisation'. Such a distinction between belief and reality is necessarily foreign to the believers themselves, who are unable to subject their behaviour to such rational analysis. It is

against this patronising view of the mind of Africa that Appiah defends its way of thought as no less scientific than modern European experiments with theories. It is certainly the case that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's view of religion as society in disguise is now old-fashioned, a theory whose time has gone. What matters for the historian is the historical truth of these combinations of myth and ritual, words and deeds: their value as evidence of a past which by now includes the ethnographic present, the time at which they were recorded. While Elizabeth Isichei brings out their importance in her account of each people in *A History of African Societies to 1870*, the problem they present is circular: to understand the part they have played in the history of the society, while deriving that history from their version of events. It is a problem well illustrated in the case of the forest kingdoms of West Africa that arose around the time of Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe in the first half of the second millennium CE, to be encountered by the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, and to go on flourishing until the European conquest at the end of the nineteenth.

IV

The rich tombs of the Senegal and the Inland Delta of the Upper Niger find their contemporary equivalents in the forest just to the east of the Lower Niger at Igbo-Ukwu, in a cluster of pit graves dating from the ninth century CE. In the most important, the dead man was crowned and enthroned together with items in copper and bronze, terracottas, elephant tusks and beads from across the Sahara, and accompanied by the bodies of sacrificial victims. The bronzes in this and other graves are beautifully worked castings of vessels and creatures: flies and beetles, snails and heads, of people, leopards, elephants, rams, monkeys and pythons. The circumstances are obscure: archaeologically, there is a gap of a thousand years from the time of Nok on the Benue to the north of the forest, and a further thousand before the ethnographic present. The Igbo, the people of the region, remained without rulers down to the twentieth century, and it is unlikely that they ever had one. On the other hand they did possess an authoritative priesthood latterly associated with the Aro Chukwu oracle, but previously with Nri a few miles from the site. At Nri the tradition survives of a priest-king whose ritual authority stemmed from the creation of the world and the cultivation of the yam, and whose representatives travelled the region, keeping the peace and purifying the people from offence against the sacred earth. In her *History*, Isichei thinks that the sway of the Eze Nri was at its height between 1100 and 1400 CE, and was certainly attested at Igbo-Ukwu; Connah is not so sure. What is clear is that by the ninth century the rainforest of the region had been extensively colonised, and the yam and the oil palm sustained a well-developed population of villagers and craftsmen, much of whose wealth was devoted to the cultivation of a spirit world.

Across the Niger among the Yoruba, archaeology and tradition are more securely connected through the remains of towns. Ife, where the world was

created, the Yoruba originated, and Ododuwa founded the first dynasty, was a well-built city by the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, after some five hundred years of growth. Surrounded by concentric walls, the city had developed around the royal palace. Terracotta statues of kings and queens, together with lifelike brass and copper castings of figures, heads and face masks, apparently represented a cult of royal ancestors. The difficulty noted by Isichei in her *History* is that although the rulers of subsequent states in the region, most notably Oyo and Benin, claimed their descent from Ife, in subsequent centuries the city was politically unimportant, and is unlikely ever to have been the capital of an original Yoruba empire. Like the furnishings of the graves at Igbo-Ukwu, the evident wealth and prestige of the royal family may have demonstrated its religious authority rather than its power. The latter, on the other hand, was certainly wielded by the dynasties that subsequently flourished in the region from at least the fifteenth century onwards. As at Oyo in the savannah to the north-east of Ife, it was exercised through the holders of different offices with different duties, and employed in the endless wars recounted by tradition. As at Ife, archaeology provides evidence of urban settlement going back to the period in question; but the extent to which the myths, the legends and apparently factual narratives can be persuaded to yield a political history of the states themselves is hard to say. The reconstruction of their history by Ade Obayemi in his chapter on 'The Yoruba and Edo-speaking peoples before 1600' in the first volume of Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa*, comes to the general conclusion that they formed out of coalitions of village communities or mini-states whose elders became the hereditary officers and councillors of the kingdoms. Of the kings themselves, some may indeed have come from Ife on the strength of its prestige, in the manner of the chiefs of the Alur cited by Mair in her *Primitive Government*. Of the non-Yoruba states across the Niger to the north and east, Nupe claimed its dynasty from Idah, the capital of Igala. But wherever they came from and however they actually came to power, what these legends of origin make clear is that the rulers were associated from the beginning with the supernatural, an association that set them apart even as it united them with the people they ruled.

V

At Benin, the best-known of these southern Nigerian monarchies, this ambiguity was embedded in the structure of the kingdom. Its claim to fame comes from the wealth of the so-called Benin bronzes dating from at least the fifteenth century, well illustrated and described in Phillips, *Africa. The Art of a Continent*. But the evidence these provide for its history and culture is backed by a wide range of sources, from archaeology through oral tradition and written references down to the ethnographic record of the monarchy under the British in the twentieth century. An Edo rather than a Yoruba state, it lay to the west of the Niger but well to the south-east of Ife in the direction of the coast, where it was flourishing at the time of the arrival of the

Portuguese in the fifteenth century. The legend of its foundation by Oranmiyan, son of Ododuwa, the stranger who came from Ife at the invitation of the elders, only to return after fathering a native prince, must therefore refer to a still earlier century. It is the starting-point of Bradbury's reconstruction of the precolonial state in Forde and Kaberry's *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*, in which this foreign element in the origin of the dynasty explains the formal opposition between the Oba, the king, and the elders and town chiefs who represent the Edo, the people. Expressed in ceremonial and in ritual, this opposition was fundamental to the constitution of a state in which the ruler exercised power through a miscellany of nobles, office-holders and servants. The elders, the Uzama, were a hereditary aristocracy, the town chiefs were commoners appointed by the king. The Oba meanwhile was served by the palace chiefs, members of the royal household. In the villages, where age sets were the rule, the senior elder was the headman, but over most of the country he was subordinate to hereditary chiefs claiming descent from the royal family or some appointment by the Oba. The government was thus divided from top to bottom along the lines of Horton's distinction between the Owners of the People and the Owners of the Earth.

This complementary relationship was sanctified by religion, in which the Oba took pride of place as the King of the Dry Land in association with the god Olokun, the King of the Waters. Dressed in coral beads, he was identified with the leopard and the python, the creatures of the land, and with the mudfish and the crocodile, the creatures of the water, all represented in brass, ivory and wood. Symbolised in this way, his was a sacred person, created and maintained to the accompaniment of human sacrifice by the rituals that installed him on the frontier between his people, their ancestors and the spirit world. In that position, he nevertheless depended upon the participation of the dignitaries of the kingdom in the ceremonies that began with his enthronement and continued throughout the year. As evidence for the origin of the kingdom in the story of Oranmiyan and his son, this duality may be compared with the archaeological record described by Connah. The old city of Benin was fortified by a vast earth wall and ditch that may date from the fifteenth century. But this towered over a series of more or less contiguous walled enclosures covering a much larger area, which in turn were only a fraction of a very much bigger series of such earthworks some thousands of kilometres in total length. These may represent the progressive colonisation of the forest by people from the savannah to the north from the end of the first millennium CE, in the course of which the land was divided up. Around Benin itself, they may represent the growth of a coalition of chiefdoms out of which came the kingdom as a solution to the warfare of such close neighbours. Such a history is implicit in the story of Oranmiyan, invited by the elders to put an end to their anarchy. It is accepted by Obayemi in the first volume of Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa*, who sees in the modern Uzama the original elders or chiefs who were defeated but not removed by the son of Oranmiyan, the founder of the city and the state. The rise of his dynasty to power may have been completed with the building of the massive

walls; its subsequent history saw the rise of the palace as the arm of central government. Its sanctity, however, remains unexplained. 'Oba' is a Yoruba title, as it were from Ife; but 'the King of the Dry Land' has more in common with Eri in the creation legend of the Igbo than he has with Odojuwa, while Olokun, 'the King of the Waters', is different from both. If the kingdom was in fact created by Eweka, the native prince who waged a war to end all wars on the strength of his prestige as the son of a foreigner, it may be that he and his successors brought with them to the throne the authority of their precursors in a previously stateless society, as keepers of the supernatural harmony of the forest world.

VI

In the forest five hundred miles, eight hundred kilometres to the west of Benin lies Kumasi, the capital of the kingdom of Asante. Central to the arguments of both Abraham and Appiah, Asante has the advantage over Benin from the historian's point of view in that it is a more recent foundation, and one whose history is much better known from contemporary records. The point is well made in Forde and Kaberry's *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century* by Ivor Wilks, who also recounts its previous history in Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa*. Its formation at the end of the seventeenth century was the climax of some three hundred years in the region of modern Ghana, the former Gold Coast, during which cities and states grew up on the savannah to the north as well as in the forest to the south. On the savannah, the archaeological sites of Bighu and Bono point to gold mining and gold trading with the Inland Delta of the Niger a further five hundred miles, eight hundred kilometres away to the north-west. From that direction, in the sixteenth century, what Jack Goody in Forde and Kaberry calls 'the over-kingdom of Gonja' was founded by immigrant conquerors, who ruled a confederation of small chiefdoms in collaboration with the indigenous Masters of the Earth. With the arrival of the Portuguese on the coast, however, gold found a second outlet through the forest to the south, where in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries increasingly large and warlike states came into conflict with each other. Of these states, the last and greatest was Asante, which in the course of the eighteenth century eliminated its rivals, defeated its neighbours to the north, and came to rule an empire dominating the territory of the modern state of Ghana.

The rise of all these states is associated by Wilks with the production and export of gold, followed by the export of slaves. They might as a result be considered marginal to the society of the region, except that their appearance accompanied a probable growth in population following the introduction of cassava and maize from the Americas, and a consequent expansion of cultivation. It was certainly the outcome of a lively history of migration, invasion, settlement and resettlement. Among the Akan peoples of the forest and the coast, moreover, such states grew out of the native chieftaincies encountered by the Portuguese in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Then

as now, these chieftaincies were identified with stools that ranged from personal seats to those on which no-one ever sat, but served instead as the shrines of the ancestors in the lineages of this matrilineal society. The stools of the lineages from which the chiefs were chosen were the stools of the chieftaincy rather than the chief, so much so that 'the stool', like 'the throne', became the common word for the office. The character of the stool as the dwelling of the spirit of the people, together with the ritual nature of 'the stool', have remained after the political role of the chiefs has disappeared or been transformed under the modern state; but before the creation of that state by the British, the chieftaincies were the building-blocks of empire, and the chiefs the ruling class. In the Asante kingdom they were integrated into a centralised political system.

The Asante came from around the sacred Lake Bosumtwé to the south of Kumasi, which they founded after driving the previous occupants from the site. As the seat of the Asantehene, the king, it was the capital of the seven chiefdoms that formed the heart of their new domain. The nucleus was established at the end of the seventeenth century by Osei Tutu and its expansion undertaken in the first half of the eighteenth by Opoku Ware. By the beginning of the nineteenth century this had given rise to the complicated structure described by Wilks in his *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*, whereby the peoples incorporated into the kingdom kept their stools and their chiefs alongside the officers of an ever more centralised government. These were the occupants of stools created as posts in the army or administration rather than headships of communities. Apart from the military, they formed a financial service responsible for revenue; a political service whose central figure was the okyeame or 'linguist', the official spokesman; and a provincial administration of resident commissioners in the various chiefdoms of the empire. Through their stools, those chiefdoms and their peoples were meanwhile assimilated in varying degrees into an Asante nation whose spirit was enshrined in the Golden Stool that Okomfo (the Priest) Anokye had brought down from the sky upon the knees of Osei Tutu. Thus invested, the Asantehene was yet another sacred monarch at the head of a pyramid of such chiefs, all ritually installed as the representatives of the people to the spirits and the spirits to the people.

In that capacity, the Asantehene officiated at a round of ceremonies, in particular the Adaye and Odwera festivals, the first every twenty-one days, the second annually. These are described by Busia in Daryll Forde, *African Worlds*, and at greater length by Rattray in *Ashanti* and in his *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, the masterpiece of early ethnography which has placed the Akan of Ghana at the centre of the whole subject. Both were devoted to the ancestors, but the Odwera was also a harvest festival, the so-called Yam Custom. Common throughout West Africa, in Asante it was a rite of national purification at the turn of the agricultural year, sealed in human blood. Lasting up to two weeks, in ceremonies involving the whole of the state apparatus, it provides Tom McCaskie in his *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante* with the ethnographic evidence for an understanding of the kingdom as something much more than the pyramid of chiefs and functionaries described by Wilks.

Observed by British visitors in the nineteenth century, its pageantry was regularly deployed on occasions such as the reception of the British envoy Bowdich in 1817 and the victory parade of 1869, when the whole constitution of the Asante state was on magnificent display. Descriptions of the events are quoted in Freda Wolfson's *Pageant of Ghana*. Enacting the power and authority of the Asantehene in a way which involved the entire population, the Odwera festival was, as McCaskie says, a political performance of the highest order, one which served to maintain and perpetuate the unity of prince and people against the constant threat of disintegration into the constituent chieftaincies or stools of the kingdom. Promulgating in this fashion a version of the old French maxim of the state as a community under one king, one law and one faith, a dominion created by confederation and conquest had become for this purpose what Clifford Geertz, in *Islam Observed*, has called a theatre state, one which governs as much by dramatic ceremony as by force.

For McCaskie, the dramatic ceremony of this particular state served to represent the identity of the state with the ruler, the possessor of the Golden Stool. He criticises Wilks, and by extension those such as Fortes and Evans-Pritchard who have failed to recognise the political importance of this belief and practice in binding together the various peoples and chieftaincies annexed in the course of the eighteenth century. They have on the one hand adopted too narrow a definition of the state as a mechanism for law and order, and on the other have endeavoured to assimilate such kingdoms as Asante to European models of government and politics – bureaucracies without pen and paper, as Oliver and Fage called them in the *Short History*. But while McCaskie resists the introduction of these European models of statehood, it might well seem to the historian that the importance of this theatrical aspect of the Asante kingdom lies in its contribution to the construction of what might indeed be called a nation state, in the sense of a government with a high degree of organisation ruling over a people with whom it was identified, and who identified themselves with it. When he notes the failure of the myth of Asante kingship to prevent the struggle for power which broke out towards the end of the nineteenth century, the current difficulties of the nation states of Spain and Great Britain in preserving their ideological and physical unity may come to mind. As far as Africa is concerned, McCaskie is equally reluctant to think in Abraham's terms of Asante as a paradigm of the precolonial state in Africa. Going well beyond Abraham's description of the Akan theory of government in *The Mind of Africa*, his account of the Asante state nevertheless offers an instance of the working of Abraham's 'mind of Africa' in the making and unmaking of a major African kingdom, which may stand for the processes at work in the formation of many another African political system.



10

The Empires of the South

I

McCaskie's reading of Asante history comes as near as the historian may hope to get to the rather dangerous dictum of Collingwood in *The Idea of History*, that the historian who studies a civilisation other than his own can apprehend the mental life of that civilisation only by re-enacting its experience for himself. It is certainly far away from the approach of Eva Meyerowitz in *The Akan of Ghana*, who used the same ethnographic evidence to trace the Akan, and thus the Asante, to an origin ultimately in Ancient Egypt. But the kind of experience he describes was variously repeated, not only in the forest kingdoms of West Africa: off to the east and away to the south, in the Bantu world across the Equator, the period from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century was likewise one of state formation, or at least, was characterised by the proliferation of rulers and overlords of various descriptions. Empire is rejected by David Beach in *The Shona and their Neighbours* as a general term for these political systems, on the grounds that it conjures up a vision of imperial Rome; but if as he says, 'empire' is taken to mean some form of government of different peoples by some common power and authority, it may describe a wide variety of dominions, from Asante down to the nominal recognition of Ife as the source of royal authority. The common factor upon which MacGaffey, like McCaskie, insists in his *Kongo Political Culture* and again in his article 'Changing representations in Central African history', is the identity of belief and government in the person of the ruler. So widespread was this proliferation, however, that the general question of the origin and character of states in Africa becomes a historical question of their appearance at this particular time. For Oliver and Atmore, the changes to the political map of the continent in Ajayi and Crowder's *Historical Atlas of Africa* went so far as to determine the choice of the period for a study in the history of the continent as a whole: *The African Middle Ages, 1400–1800*. The reasons in each case may have been local, but taken together contributed to the growth of an overall complexity that

neither Iliffe's general nor Connah's selective approach can adequately explain. In the second edition of Oliver and Atmore's *Medieval Africa 1250–1800*, they have extended the period backwards by a hundred and fifty years in order to insist upon the indigenous origins of the societies and states that came to light from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century in what is indeed a middle age, between an ancient African world for which archaeology is the principal source of information and a modern period in which the continent has been engulfed by European documentation. From that documentation comes the evidence of ethnography and oral tradition for the intervening centuries, supplemented by the written records of the period, the sources on which Miller relies in his *Kings and Kinsmen*. In *Medieval Africa*, these sources are used to describe a stage in the evolution of the continent characterised by 'the enlargement of political scale'.

In the Bantu world, what is important about this enlargement of political scale is the growing visibility of the factors at work as the sources grow in number and in kind. Over the vast range of territory from the rainforest and highlands on the Equator, across the savannahs to the borders of the desert in the south, the unity brought about by the southward spread of agricultural settlement in the course of the first millennium CE underlay the proliferation of more complex societies in the Later Iron Age in the first half of the second. The original distinction between the eastern and western Bantu languages and cultures, and their intermingling as those of the east moved westwards towards the Atlantic, was perpetuated by the spread of cattle-keeping from East Africa to Natal, and across the highlands from Zambia to Angola. From East Africa to Natal there were clear social and political consequences that emerge around the fifteenth century from the anonymity of the archaeological evidence into the different light of oral tradition and contemporary observation. Cattle at Great Zimbabwe supported a nameless aristocracy, but subsequently were central to the formation of identifiable states in the Interlacustrine region of East Africa. Over in the Upemba Depression, on the other hand, the wealth of an agricultural and fishing economy, reckoned in copper, led up to the appearance of rulers whose prestige was associated with the hunting of big game. Still further west, the region of Angola and the lower Congo has been called the land of the blacksmith kings encountered by the Portuguese on their arrival in the fifteenth century. To the south-east, the cattle-owning successors to the rulers of Great Zimbabwe continued to exploit the gold that had paid for the Chinese porcelain at the old capital. Right across the board, however, run Horton's distinction between owners of the earth and owners of the people, and Mair's contrast between rulers who draw in their subjects and those who go out to find them. So too do the contributions of myth and ritual to the constitution of empire.

II

In the far north-east of the Bantu world, the kingdom of Buganda around the north-west corner of Lake Victoria most closely resembled the West

African kingdoms of Benin and Asante: Benin in the manner of its origins, and Asante in its character as a centralised kingdom created by the incorporation of the conquered into the original population. It is, moreover, equally well known, since it was incorporated in its turn into the British empire in Uganda, where its traditions were recorded by its ministers, and its constitution examined by social anthropologists. And as with Meyerowitz in Asante, the observation of its rituals in Tor Irstam's *The King of Ganda* provided the evidence for the vision of the Sudanic civilisation to the south of the Sahara in Oliver and Fage's *Short History*. Its origins in a group of matrilineal clans are probably ancient, but like Asante it first made its mark in the seventeenth century, and built its empire in the eighteenth by land and in the nineteenth by sea, when its fleet dominated the great lake. Described at some length by Mair in her *Primitive Government*, its government and administration were far from primitive, even by her own definition of limitations of scale, competence and technology. Under a chief minister, the *katikiro*, chiefs appointed to each district supervised the grades of lesser chiefs who collected the taxes and called up the people for military service, the maintenance of roads and the upkeep of the palace city of the Kabaka, the king. At every level they held court, right up through the *katikiro* to the Kabaka himself. An absolute monarch, he was quick to punish the slightest lapse in his service, while as a sacred monarch, he represented the people to the gods of myth and legend. At the base of the mythology was Kintu, the superman from the sky who had taught the people the arts and crafts, and established the first dynasty. But the gods that were worshipped came from the Chwezi, a race that had once lived on earth as rulers of the legendary kingdom of Kitara. From an illicit union between a descendant of Kintu and a princess of Kitara had sprung Kimera, the founder of the existing dynasty. In this way, Buganda shared in the beliefs of the much wider state system that stretched around Lake Victoria to the north, west and south.

In all other ways it was exceptional, both in the homogeneity of its large agricultural population and in the system of government that enabled it to succeed Bunyoro, its neighbour to the north-west, as the most powerful state in the so-called Interlacustrine region. Bunyoro, together with Nkore, Rwanda and Burundi, headed the galaxy of small to medium-sized states running down the western side of Lake Victoria, in which government was associated with pastoralism. First seen in the archaeological context of the Zimbabwean plateau, in the ethnographic context of East Africa this association has generated more than academic debate. Put down to the immigration of cattle-herders from the north, it fed the Hamitic hypothesis of racial inequality, with disastrous consequences in Rwanda and Burundi long after its rejection by the real outsiders who first propounded it. The nature of the connection between immigrants, cattle-keeping and state formation is far from agreed, but it is now accepted that, like language, race and culture in general, the three elements must be kept separate before being taken together. To the east of Lake Victoria, in Kenya, stateless societies of Bantu farmers have remained apart from equally stateless Nilotes, herdsmen at the southern limit of the Nilo-Saharan language area. To the west of the lake, on

the other hand, where the population is predominantly Bantu-speaking, herdsmen have enjoyed prestige, wealth and power as patrons and rulers of a farming community in states such as Rwanda. The difficulty of explanation is a nice example of the difficulty of combining the different sources for African history, in this case archaeology, language and oral tradition, with the evidence of ethnography.

It was in the Interlacustrine region that the eastern Bantu languages and cultures first took shape with the incorporation of a previous Nilo-Saharan speaking, cattle-keeping, ironworking population into a more numerous group of settlers from the west. There is, therefore, no need to think of cattle as a relatively recent introduction, or of contact with Nilo-Saharan speakers as anything new. Novelty, however, appears in the archaeological record from the tenth–eleventh century onwards with the appearance of a different style of pottery, which has suggested an immigration of Nilo-Saharans from the north–east onto the grasslands of the region, and the beginning of pastoralism as a separate way of life. By the fourteenth century, the earthwork of Bigo close to a large settlement at Ntusi on the grasslands of western Uganda was the largest of a number of such sites in the area. It was an extensive enclosure for cattle, but possibly for fields, surrounding a palatial residence. Described by Connah in *African Civilizations*, Bigo and its like have been interpreted as fortifications associated with states that preceded the abandonment of Bigo and the appearance of Bunyoro in the same region in the sixteenth century. This major change on the ground corresponds to a major change in the sources, from archaeology to oral tradition. The kinglist of Bunyoro is one of the many such traditional lists of rulers that document the appearance of the Interlacustrine kingdoms of the precolonial period. Tabulated by Chrétien in *The Great Lakes of Africa*, they go back to heroic founders at some time in the sixteenth century. They fall in consequence into groups, of which the largest are represented by Bunyoro on the one hand and Nkore on the other. These trace the origin of their dynasties to the figures of Rukidi and Ruhinda, who together with Kimera in the kinglist of Buganda are related to the previous dynasty of the Chwezi, the rulers of the lost empire of Kitara. Rukidi, however, the Man from the North, is a foreigner from what is now the land of the Lwo in northern Uganda. The Lwo are Nilotes like the cattle-herding Nuer and Dinka of the southern Sudan, where they are represented for example by the Anuak. Within the Nilo-Saharan family of languages, those of the Lwo are closely related, suggesting a relatively recent expansion southwards into their present territory. Their encounter with the Bantu to the north of Lake Victoria may well be the event represented by the figure of Rukidi, the legendary architect of the sixteenth-century revolution in the Interlacustrine world.

What kind of a revolution that may have been depends upon the reading of the traditions. For Oliver and Atmore, the Chwezi were the rulers of Bigo, Kitara their kingdom, and the Lwo warlike invaders who took their place as the Bito dynasty of Bunyoro, driving their predecessors southwards to form the Hinda dynasties of Nkore, Karagwe and their fellows. Between the two editions of their *African History*, Curtin, Feierman, Thompson and Vansina

move to the opposite extreme, that the Chwezi were spirits whose cult has survived to this day. No mention is made of an intrusion by the Lwo, while the previous reference to the Lwo origins of Bunyoro has been dropped. In her *History of African Societies*, Isichei repeats Wrigley's suggestion that Lwo immigration into the Bantu world occurred at an earlier date, contributing to the subsequent development of monarchy out of a long tradition of sacred kingship in the region. Chrétien distinguishes the emergence of kingship from the formation of monarchical states, which only becomes clear by the eighteenth century. From Nkore (Ankole) southwards, this is plausibly ascribed to the employment of pastoralists as kings' men able to turn royal authority into regal power. Bunyoro, however, remains unaccounted for except as a state founded by invaders who attacked their neighbours over the previous two hundred years. The problem remains, in that the Lwo have long disappeared into the Bantu population, while Bunyoro itself was the least pastoralist of the pastoralist kingdoms, insofar as apart from the dynasty, it lacked a pastoralist upper class. Perhaps all that can be said, with Mair, is that against a background of rising population, progressive land clearance, and increasing herds of cattle, dominions came into existence by a concentration of followers at the bidding of some owner of the earth or the people, and proliferated on the strength of the legendary prestige of their dynasties. The arrival of 'Rukidi' may or may not have accelerated the process.

III

The Alur, from whom Mair takes the notion of proliferation by the 'planting out' of princes from a royal family, were Lwo to the north of the Interlacustrine kingdoms. To the south-west of those kingdoms, on the savannahs around the headwaters of the Congo, the emigration of such princes, real or imaginary, underlay a still larger cluster of polities that by the nineteenth century stretched for over a thousand miles, well over fifteen hundred kilometres, from northern Angola across the southern provinces of what is now the Democratic Republic of the Congo, through northern Zambia to Lake Malawi. At the centre of this great arc lay the Upemba Depression on the upper Lualaba, where the settlement that began in the fifth century CE had developed by the eleventh century into the wealthy society typified by its grave goods: iron axes, anvils and bells together with copper ornaments and a wide range of weapons and utensils. Like that of its contemporary on the Zimbabwean plateau, this so-called Kisialian society is anonymous and its political structure unclear. But from around the time that Great Zimbabwe was abandoned in the fifteenth century, the Kisialian tradition in the Upemba Depression developed into the so-called Kabambian, distinguished by the copper crosses that may have been used as currency. Lasting down to the seventeenth century, and ultimately into the nineteenth, the Kabambian in its heyday was contemporary with Ntusi and Bigo, presenting the same problem of relationship to the states whose traditions were recorded in the twentieth century. The difference is that the evidence comes from tombs

rather than settlements. The resemblance to the situation in the Inland Delta of the Niger is all the more remarkable, since as in the case of the western Sudan, the states of the Upemba region seem to have developed away from the floodplain of the Depression.

The reconstruction of their history from their traditions of origin and growth began with Jan Vansina. One of the first generation of modern African historians, he was a pioneer of its methodology with his *Oral Tradition* followed by *Oral Tradition as History*, accompanied by his essay on 'The use of ethnographic data as sources for history' in Ranger's *Emerging Themes of African History*. The outcome was his *Kingdoms of the Savanna*, a comprehensive survey of the history of the lands from Angola to northern Zambia in the period of Oliver and Atmore's African Middle Ages. Here he conceded that dating on the basis of kinglists was insecure, but considered that it was possible to regard the legendary founders of such kingdoms as historical figures, and their doings as actual events. As in the case of the Interlacustrine kingdoms, such positivism has been challenged by those who have treated the stories as myth. These have indeed the same structure as those of the Interlacustrine region, and of Benin: an original king; a newcomer; and a son who founds the existing dynasty. The legend of the Luba on the western borders of the Depression is nevertheless the starting-point of all the others, and the essence of a belief in Luba ancestry stretching across the savannahs to east and west. An original conqueror, Nkongolo, married his two daughters to a huntsman from the east, Ilunga Mbili, who then departed, but left a son, Kalala (the Warrior) Ilunga, who overthrew Nkongolo to take his kingdom for himself. From that kingdom Chibinda (the Hunter) Ilunga, one of Kalala's sons, went out to the west to marry the queen of the Lunda and become the founder of their empire on the upper Kasai and Lualaba. Thus expelled from their inheritance, the queen's brothers moved away still further westwards and southwards into the highlands of Angola to create their own kingdoms. Far away to the east, beyond the lands of the Luba on the Lualaba, other emigrants would have established an array of Luba-Lunda chieftaincies on the plateau of northern Zambia, most notably those of the Bemba. Not quite so far in the same direction, the Lunda empire itself proceeded to establish the Kazembe kingdom in the valley of the Luapula. At the extremity of this range, the Phiri princes of the Maravi kingdoms around Lake Malawi claimed a Luba origin.

The principles and practices involved in this proliferation of states are to be found in the ethnography of those that survived down to the twentieth century. The Luba notion of *bulopwe* or princely blood as the necessary qualification for kingship underlay both the legends and the reality of state formation. From the Luba likewise came the title of Mwaant Yaav, Lord of the Vipers, to designate the Lunda monarch, the Mwata Yamvo, according to the rules of what Vansina has called positional succession and perpetual kinship, whereby each ruler succeeded to the title as the son of his predecessor. All rulers stood between their people and the spirit world, most notably in the case of the Luba, whose king was himself a spirit, and the Maravi, whose name means (sacred) fire. Between the people and the king

stood a titled nobility: on the one hand the heads of the royal family, male and female, and the officers of the household; on the other the heads of lineages and communities. Implicit in the constitution of central government, this distinction between owners of the people and owners of the land became explicit in the provinces of the widespread Lunda empire, where villages were governed by hereditary headmen, *tubungu*-s, under the authority of *chilolo*-s, tax collectors appointed by the king. While the villages lived by agriculture, taxes and tribute transported to the capital not only fed its inhabitants, but supplied a trade in manufactures; in commodities such as salt, copper and ivory; and in slaves, that by the nineteenth century reached across the region. The result was then seen by the Portuguese, who visited the capital of the Kazembe, the ruler of the eastern Lunda state, around 1810 and 1830, and described not only its affluence but its pageantry.

The problem is that the states whose constitution was recorded in this fashion dated from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, much later than the archaeological record and the time to which the legends of origin apparently refer. The difficulty of reconciling all three sources in a history of their origins and growth is apparent in the literature. In *A History of African Societies to 1870*, Isichei discusses the legends without the archaeology, and separately from the states. In the second edition of Curtin, Feierman, Thompson and Vansina's *African History*, Vansina himself ignores the legends, relying on the archaeology before turning to the later period. In *Medieval Africa*, Oliver and Atmore treat the archaeology of the Upemba Depression as the prelude to a history of state formation from the fourteenth century onwards, in which small chieftaincies grew into larger and larger ones over a wider and wider area, first among the Luba and then the Lunda, as armed bands of hunters pushed further and further afield. The key to this account is Joseph Miller's reading of the legends of the Lunda and their western neighbours in his *Kings and Kinsmen*. These are taken to represent the westward displacement of one set of chiefs and their titles by others from the east, occurring gradually over some hundreds of years, and equally gradually accompanied by the formation of ever more recognisable states. Beginning among the Lunda with the arrival of the Luba leader Chibinda Ilunga, the process culminated in the seventeenth century in the formation of the Lunda empire. In the eighteenth century offshoots of this empire appeared to the north, north-west and south, and away to the east in the kingdom of the Kazembe. Again these offshoots were the work of small military expeditions in search of ivory and slaves, whose forces stayed to rule over the peoples whose territories they invaded.

The event personified as the arrival of Chibinda Ilunga cannot have been later than the beginning of the seventeenth century, when the brothers whom he is said to have displaced were encountered by the Portuguese on the Atlantic coast in the form of the marauding Imbangala, and his Luba antecedents that much older. As Isichei points out in her *History of African Societies*, the story of Nkongolo, Ilunga Mbili and Kalala Ilunga is ancient, perhaps derived from the Early Iron Age encounter between the Eastern and the Western Bantu as the culture of the Chifumbaze complex spread

westwards towards the Atlantic. Its adoption as the foundation myth of a royal Luba race must be later; but when, where and why is the question. The archaeological evidence of a wealthy and complex society of the Later Iron Age in the Upemba Depression contrasts with the appearance of the later Luba states on the savannah to the north and west, and specifically with the growth of the principal Luba kingdom in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries after the end of the main phase of the Kabambian in the seventeenth. The prestige of Luba royalty, going back beyond the emigration of Chibinda Ilunga to Kabambian times in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, must nevertheless be related to that of the occupants of the tombs on the margins of the Depression, ritually interred with the tokens of their eminence in iron, copper and sacrificial human remains over a period of hundreds of years. Their wealth is certainly witness to the place of the Depression at the centre of an economic cycle comparable to that of the Inland Delta of the Niger, one that drew in iron and salt from the north and copper from the south, and involved the movement of people and ideas across the entire region. Whatever its origin in the rivalries of petty chiefs, the extension across the savannah of the line of Kalala Ilunga, in the flesh or in the mind, was an aspect of this long-standing development of exchange and communication over a far wider area than the ecological niche of the Upemba Depression, good ethnographic evidence of the integration of its peoples into a wider international community.

By the eighteenth century, the states of the Luba-Lunda formation were active participants in a commerce that spanned the savannah from north to south, and stretched across the continent from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. The tribute levied by the kings of the Luba as well as those of the Lunda made their courts the focal points of a redistributive economy that put into circulation the products of the savannah, of which they were both suppliers and chief customers. While the Lunda dispatched expeditions to procure ivory and slaves, the Luba patronised the trading ventures organised by bands of enterprising commoners. In pointing to the strong connection between the growth of such long-distance trade and that of the various polities, Oliver and Atmore nevertheless resist the suggestion of cause and effect put forward by Horton in his 'Stateless societies', and adopted by the theorists of the marginal state. The relationship between state formation and long-distance trade was not only reciprocal, and mutually reinforcing, but is likely to have originated with the growth of Connah's complex societies in places like the Upemba Depression. That is not, on the other hand, to subscribe to his hypothesis of productive land, in which state formation was required to control its exploitation. The trigger for the appearance of rulers wielding power as well as authority may have been control over a different element in the complexity: the making and manufacture of iron into tokens, tools and weapons. In legend, iron ensured the victory of Kalala Ilunga. In reality, it figured prominently in the graves of the Depression in the form of axes and bells, and in one case in the form of an anvil. In both, the mystery of its creation was married to the success of its owners. And as a means of destruction, iron held the key to power.

IV

It certainly did so for the Imbangala. Expelled from their Lunda homeland by the legendary Chibinda Ilunga, they constituted themselves into a wandering warband living off the land before they settled down to establish the state of Kasanje at the westernmost extremity of the Luba-Lunda nexus. They were, however, the exception. Beyond them, in the lands of the Mbundu they had invaded and terrorised, states were formed not by conquest, but by an association between ironworking and kingship so close that in this so-called Land of the Blacksmith Kings *musuri* or smith was a royal title, while Angola took its name from Ngola, a title of kingship derived from the *ngola* or iron token of the smiths. The northern lands of the Mbundu, stretching up to the mouth of the Congo, had meanwhile been colonised by ironworkers from across the river, who established the kingdom of Kongo encountered by the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century. Its previous history, together with that of the Mbundu to the south, depends like the history of the Luba-Lunda states to the east upon oral tradition and ethnography. The great difference is that there is no major archaeological site to relate to the legends of origin; instead, from the end of the fifteenth century onwards, there is a written record of contemporary events as well as traditions from long before the ethnographic present. Both Vansina and Miller are on that much firmer ground for their discussions of state formation, which in the case of the kingdom of Kongo can be securely dated to the beginning of the fifteenth century at the latest. It arose from an immigration that assimilated the native Mbundu under their *kitome*-s or priests of the earth to a Kongolese population under the Manikongo, a ruler of the people. To the south, the Mbundu themselves made the change from the authority of the wooden *lunga* to that of the iron *ngola*.

The change in their case was as much social as political. Lineages centred upon a *lunga* lived in its locality, in contrast to those whose portable iron *ngola* left them free to migrate. As the one gave way to the other, the territorial authority of the keepers of the *lunga*-s was superseded by the overlordship of keepers of *ngola*-s. These were originally the smiths, whose mastery of metallurgy gave them an entry into both trade and warfare, and the means to turn the prestige of their occupation into power. By the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese encountered the Ngola a kiluanje, the ruler of the kingdom of Ndongo, his power had replaced that of the shadowy domains of the *lunga*-s, and created a centralised authority with titled office holders and armies. On the other hand, the more northerly Kongo kingdom ruled by the Manikongo was created by invasion and conquest spreading out from the initial settlement south of the Congo in the manner of the Lunda empire. Unlike that empire, however, it was consolidated by the settlement of the expeditionary forces in new villages that effectively repopulated the country, a process that was more or less complete by the time of the Portuguese arrival. The headship of villages was hereditary,

but the districts and provinces into which they were grouped were ruled by governors appointed by the king, all with the title of *mani*; many of them were members of the numerous royal family from which the Manikongo himself was chosen. Similar titleholders performed an array of duties at court, which were paid out of the annual tribute of the provinces. By appointment, often on the basis of descent, they formed a political as well as an administrative class engaged in the competition for the throne in this elective monarchy.

V

What is novel about this kingdom is that from the time of the Portuguese arrival at the end of the fifteenth century, and their conversion of the kings to Christianity, the names and the actions of these individuals are known from the contemporary written record. The appearance of that record transports the history of the kingdom into quite a different historiographical realm from that of its neighbours, at a time when the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade introduced a major new factor into the equation. Thus alongside her description of its constitution, beliefs and rituals in *The Kingdom of Congo*, Anne Hilton is able to write the kind of political history that in Asante, for instance, is not really possible before the nineteenth century. On the far side of the continent, the Portuguese settlement at the mouth of the Zambezi was too distant from the realm of the ruler they called the Monomotapa on the Zimbabwean plateau to penetrate the kingdom and provide the same kind of personal information. Nevertheless it is the Portuguese written record that joins with the oral tradition of the Shona people to end the anonymity of the rulers of Great Zimbabwe with a reference to their successors, the Mwenemutapa-s, on the northern edge of the plateau. Given the Portuguese report of a city of stone called Zimbabwe, a southern outpost of the kingdom they encountered, the passage from the archaeological record to that of the ethnographic present seems less problematic than in the case of the Interlacustrine region or the Upemba Depression. Here as in the kingdom of Kongo, however, the appearance of written records announces a major change not only in the kind of information available but in the circumstances of Africa south of the Equator. From the end of the fifteenth century onwards, the development of society in this southern half of the continent cannot be separated from the place of Africa in the world. Indeed it is only for the sake of clarity that these two aspects of African history can be considered apart, since despite the relative isolation imposed upon Tropical Africa by the formation of the Sahara over the past five thousand years, the continent has never enjoyed the complete independence imposed upon the Americas by the Atlantic and the Pacific in the days before Columbus. Oliver and Atmore's definition of a Middle Age of African history not only concerns the making of African society. The questions it raises place the period in comparative perspective.

The extension of state formation across the length and breath of the

continent from the thirteenth century onwards, which forms the climax of indigenous growth before its transformation by external conquest, was late even by comparison with mediaeval Europe, whose modern states began to take shape in the tenth century. For Iliffe, who treats this climax under the heading of colonising society prior to the nineteenth century, it was the fruit of a slow but successful build-up of population over a period of a thousand years, in an especially hostile region of the world that lacked the advantages of the more favourable climates and soils enjoyed by the more precocious societies of Asia and Europe. Such late development may nevertheless be something of an illusion. The problem is with the sources, with the glimpses of much earlier development at Igbo Ukwu, in the Upemba Depression and at Mapungubwe, for example, that are so difficult to match with the suggestions of ancestral states and empires in subsequent oral tradition. But that in itself is significant of an absence of writing, indigenous or otherwise, in what Hrbek called the non-contact zones of Africa. Part of the whole problem of African history from the point of view of knowledge, this absence is equally important from the point of view of understanding. While it distinguishes the states of the African Middle Ages from their contemporaries elsewhere, the contrast is by no means negative. The African counterpart to the literate states of Asia and Europe was what Oliver and Fage once called in their *Short History* bureaucracies without pen and ink: the elaborate structures of Asante, Buganda, Benin and Kongo, of the Interlacustrine kingdoms and the states of the Luba-Lunda formation, that combined their peoples politically and administratively in peculiarly African fashion. At the same time the spread of written records on the continent, from the appearance of Egyptian hieroglyphs five thousand years ago down to the present day, represents more than the welcome addition of a further source to the variety of historical evidence. It documents the development of Africa's relations with the rest of the world in the course of the Holocene Dry. The written dimension of African history is the key to their understanding.

PART III

Africa in the World



THE WRITTEN DIMENSION



11

Ancient, Mediaeval & Modern

I

For the historian, to turn at last from the evidence of archaeology, linguistics and ethnography to the written record is to find himself or herself on the familiar ground of history as traditionally conceived and principally practised wherever that record is sufficiently full. Its advantages are considerable. By comparison with archaeology, the written record supplies the names of people and places, and an account of their actions. By comparison with ethnography, it supplies the kind of linear chronology on which events can be plotted and their sequence established, not to speak of the evidence required by McCaskie on the Asante and Miller on the Mbundu to make full use of the ethnographic record for historical purposes. On the other hand it comes with its own set of problems. Where a bus ticket, for example, is unambiguous evidence of a journey having taken place, as well as bearing witness to the underlying technologies of literacy and numeracy, printing and mechanised transport, as well as the practices of government and administration, any account of that journey requires the reader to understand what the writer intended to say, and what in addition he may be saying about himself and his world. But since the reader himself will come with his or her own outlook, formed by education and experience and informed by personal intentions and purposes, likes and dislikes, the scope for understanding or misunderstanding is potentially very wide, leaving the subject wide open to disagreement and controversy. That is all too true in the case of Africa, where so much of the record has been written by outsiders, and controversy over its meaning is exacerbated by indignation at the events it records, notably the slave trade and the colonial occupation of the continent. What is incontrovertible is that whatever the written record may be saying about particular times and places, its extension over the past five thousand years from the north-east corner to the continent as a whole has documented the spread into Africa of external influences. At the same time, moreover, it has recorded the development over the same period of the

concept of Africa as a continent with a history of its own. With the establishment of that history as a subject of study after the Second World War came the problem of its conceptualisation: the problem of the elephant.

When a degree in African history was first introduced into the history syllabus of the University of London, it was obliged to conform to the standard division of that syllabus into Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern History. African history was accordingly deemed to be an aspect of Mediaeval History, that conventionally began in 395 with the death of the Roman emperor Theodosius and the break-up of the Roman empire at the end of the Ancient World. This classification was for the sake of administrative convenience rather than out of any conviction on the part of its teachers that the new subject was either chronologically or typologically mediaeval. The problem for African historians was nevertheless to break out of this particular straitjacket by placing the history of the continent upon a quite different footing. The challenge was not simply the difficulty of finding the evidence, but the task of showing how and why the history itself was distinct and distinctive. Oliver and Fage's *Short History*, written by the originators of the London degree, was a first and astonishingly successful attempt to do so. But Hrbek's essay, 'Towards a periodisation of African history', which began by dismissing the relevance of the division of history into Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern as a scheme that was only applicable to Europe, was hard put to offer an African alternative. The essay's failure to find much common ground before the nineteenth century lay at least in part with its division of the continent into zones of contact and non-contact with the outside world. For the understanding of that contact, and the evaluation of its contribution to the history of Africa, the conventional periodisation of history is not only relevant but essential.

II

It is a mistake to regard the sequence of Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern history as exclusively European. Certainly it was devised for a specifically European purpose, one that began in the fifteenth century with the study of the language and literature of the Roman empire, and ended with the consideration of the intervening centuries as a mediaeval period, literally a middle age between the ancient and the modern world of western Europe. The ancient world to which these Europeans looked back as the source of their civilisation was that of Greece and Rome; but behind it lay the world of the Bible, the source of their religion, with its tales of things much older and more remote: Assyria and Persia; Ur and Babylon; and especially Egypt. Not until the arrival of archaeology in the Middle East in the nineteenth century did these come properly into focus; but since then the subject of Ancient History has stretched back to the beginning of the kingdom of the Pharaohs some five thousand years ago: as long before the Greeks and the Romans came on the scene as the time from the building of the Parthenon at Athens to the present day. The unification that then took place some two

thousand years ago, of all the lands around the Mediterranean in the Roman empire, was the culmination of a history that not only embraced Africa to the north of the Sahara, but actually began in the Nile Valley. Ancient Egypt was as much a part of that history as it was of the history of Africa, and continued to be so after its conquest and colonisation by the Greeks and then the Romans. At the mouth of the Nile and at the head of the Red Sea, Egypt commanded the trade routes up the river and out into the Indian Ocean that led to the inclusion of Nubia and Ethiopia in what Mortimer Wheeler called *Rome beyond the Imperial Frontier*, and ended with the conversion of their kingdoms to Christianity.

That conversion was in the period of Late Antiquity, around the time of the break-up of the Roman empire and the beginning of the Middle Ages. This is the period from the fifth to the fifteenth century CE that was indeed defined by western Europeans as an episode in western European history, and continues to be treated as such in the literature. But as the volumes of *The Cambridge Medieval History* and more especially those of its successor, *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, make clear, western Europe in this period cannot be seen in isolation from the fate of the Ancient World as a whole: from the survival at Constantinople of the Roman empire in the Balkans and Asia Minor, and especially from the occupation of the whole of the Middle East and North Africa by the Arabs and Islam. For this huge region, the period from the seventh century onwards was what Lombard called the Golden Age of Islam, when both West and East Africa were drawn into this intercontinental civilisation, and Hrbek's contact zone was extended to half the continent. The period as a whole, however, came to an end around 1500 CE with the circumnavigation of the globe and the rise of a comprehensive world civilisation centred upon 'the West'. The narrow definition of Modern History as the affairs of Western Europe in the aftermath of the Renaissance and Reformation, upon which the original *Cambridge Modern History* was constructed around the beginning of the twentieth century, has progressively given way to its definition as the history of the world over the past five hundred years. The salient feature of that history so far as Africa is concerned is the arrival of Europeans on the continent, first as merchants on the coasts and then as conquerors of the interior. That arrival turned the whole vast land mass into a zone of contact with the outside world, with which it is now comprehensively included in a truly global society.

III

It will be apparent that the conventional division of history into three major periods corresponds to important stages in the history of Africa over the past five thousand years of the Holocene Dry, from the time when the formation of the Sahara created a formidable barrier to intercourse between the north and the south. The stages themselves are visually represented in Ajayi and Crowder's great *Historical Atlas of Africa*. But as the names on the maps make clear, they are doubly important for the development of the written record

that begins in Ancient Egypt and spreads progressively across the continent with the growth of contact with the outside world. It may be the case that the idea of prehistory, of knowledge of the human past from sources other than writing, is crucial to the idea of African history, to the idea that such a thing could exist because it could be known. But it is equally the case that the existence of written references adds an increasingly important dimension to that knowledge, qualitatively different from anything except oral tradition. As in oral tradition, writing of whatever age uses the words that bring the peoples of the past out of anonymity into individuality; it becomes possible to know who was who and what they did. But as historical evidence it has the advantage over oral tradition, which is a record of what people remember of the past, in recording events at the time when they occurred, as much as five thousand years ago. And in those many cases where ancient chronicles are to a large extent oral tradition reduced to writing, they still have the advantage of antiquity, of preserving a memory that would otherwise be lost. The spread of writing across the continent is a vital element in our knowledge of the African past.

The record begins with the hieroglyphic or 'sacred carving' writing of Ancient Egypt, which appeared at the time of the unification of the country by the first Pharaohs about 5000 BP. It looks like picture writing, but is largely alphabetic, capable of representing everything that might be said; and over the centuries it gave rise to a cursive script, called hieratic or 'priestly', for the sake of speed. From this a further script, called demotic or 'popular', was derived. Because of the dry climate of Egypt, an enormous quantity of this writing has been preserved, not only cut into stone but in wall paintings, on wood and on papyrus paper. The reference is mainly to the Egyptians themselves, but extends to their neighbours: to the Asiatics across the Isthmus of Suez; to the Libyans of the desert to the west; to the land of Punt in what is probably now Eritrea at the far end of the Red Sea; and especially to the Nubians on the Nile to the south of Aswan, to whom the Egyptians exported their armies, their government, their religion and their script. The literate civilisation to which this gave rise in the Nilotic Sudan survived the end of Ancient Egypt by almost a thousand years, with its own Meroitic script for its own language. Over the same period, from about 500 BCE to 500 CE, the alphabet of the Yemen in South Arabia crossed the Red Sea to evolve into the script of the kingdom of Axum in the highlands of Ethiopia, where it has survived to the present day. That of Meroe, on the other hand, died out in the fourth century CE, at about the time that the hieroglyphs were finally abandoned in Egypt. Their decipherment in the nineteenth century from the trilingual inscription in Greek, demotic and hieroglyphic on the Rosetta Stone gave the vast written record of Ancient Egypt to the modern world and hence to history; but although the script of Meroe can be read, the language cannot be understood, so that the record is effectively blank.

The Rosetta Stone tells the story. From the time in the fourth century BCE when Alexander the Great conquered the world from Egypt to northern India, Greek became the dominant language of the eastern

Mediterranean, driving down the native language of Egypt and eventually driving out its scripts. This substitution of literacy in Greek for the traditional literacy of Ancient Egypt was all the more important for Africa since Alexandria, the city founded by Alexander on the coast of Egypt, became a major centre of Greek literature. Reaching back to Herodotus in the fifth century BCE and forward to the sixth century CE, that literature embraced far more of the continent than the valley of the Nile. Its coverage extended westwards across the Sahara to the Atlantic, and southwards to Ethiopia and the coast of East Africa, as trade developed between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, and North Africa was colonised first by the Phoenicians and then by the Romans. Little survives of the writing of the Phoenicians at Carthage, the city they founded near modern Tunis; like Ancient Egyptian it was overtaken in this case by Latin, which the Romans introduced alongside Greek as the language of their empire and its literature. Latin, followed by Greek, forms the major written record of the history of North Africa in Antiquity, including the obscure and scrappy references to the Sahara and what lay beyond. But like that of Ancient Egypt, the survival of this whole body of texts was imperilled by political disaster: the conquest of the bulk of the empire by the Germans and the Arabs that put an end to the Ancient World. That it did survive as a source for the historian of today is largely because Latin and Greek had become the principal languages of the Christian Church, which carried the tradition of literacy into the European Middle Ages. In Africa the Church brought Greek into the Nilotic Sudan with the conversion of Nubia to Christianity in the sixth century CE. In the wake of the Arab conquest of Egypt and North Africa in the seventh century, however, Latin and Greek on the continent suffered the fate of the previous languages they had replaced, overtaken by Arabic and its very different script.

The Arabic writings of the Middle Ages are the voluminous product of the civilisation of Islam, which from the eighth century onwards stretched across the Sahara from the Mediterranean to embrace the whole of the Sudan and the coast of East Africa. In comparison with the previous writings of Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome, therefore, the Arabic sources embrace a far wider region of the continent, while covering it in the same three basic ways. As documents, they record the activities of those who used the written word in their daily lives, the members of the literate societies of Egypt and North Africa. As narratives, they relate the histories of those societies from the rise of Islam onwards. But as documents, narratives and descriptions of the world at large, they also make mention of the peoples with whom these societies were in contact or of whom they had heard. It is in this way, thanks to the widening horizon of the Islamic world with the growth of commerce in the Indian Ocean and the establishment of a regular trans-Saharan trade, that from the tenth century onwards we have a written record of the city states on the east coast of Africa, and of the African kingdoms of the Western and Central Sudan: the empires of Ghana, Mali, and Kanim-Borno that otherwise would have been as legendary as those of the Chwezi or Nkongolo. And it is thanks to the inclusion of such states in the Islamic world that from the sixteenth century onwards, when the Interla-

custrine kingdoms and the empires of the Luba and the Lunda emerged out of myth and legend into oral tradition, these Sudanese and East African societies produced their own written records: documents and narratives not only in Arabic but in languages such as Swahili and Hausa written in the Arabic script. By then, following the spread of Islam to Nubia in the fourteenth century, Greek had died out with the Christian Church in the Nilotic Sudan. But Ge'ez, the written language of Ethiopia, had survived to complete the tally of indigenous literacy on the continent.

It is partly for this reason that Oliver and Atmore entitled their original account of the centuries from 1400–1800, *The African Middle Ages*. But across the globe the conventional period of the Middle Ages, in which Islam had established itself from the Atlantic in the west to the Pacific in the east as a worldwide civilisation, had come to an end around 1500 with the opening by the Portuguese and the Spaniards of the sea routes round Africa to the Indies and across the Atlantic to the Americas. The consequent arrival of Europeans on the coast of sub-Saharan Africa, from Senegal round to Mombasa and the entrance to the Red Sea, extended their acquaintance with the continent far beyond North Africa and Egypt, so that from the end of the fifteenth century the writings of the Islamic world on the continent were joined by those in the languages of Europe. Narratives of the European experience included descriptions of peoples encountered at first and second hand; at the same time the commercial records of the Atlantic slave trade provide the first statistics from a written source in sub-Saharan Africa. Such information was for the most part confined to the coast throughout this early modern period. From the end of the eighteenth century, however, a determined attempt by Europeans to explore the interior of the continent led to its detailed description, while from the end of the nineteenth century the European conquest and partition of virtually the whole of Africa meant that every aspect of its life was reduced to writing. This systematic introduction of literacy in European languages into the government and society of Africa meant that from the historian's point of view the written record, five thousand years after the appearance of the hieroglyphs, finally covered the entire continent.

IV

In the course of this long history, the written record reveals as much about Africa in the mind as it does about Africa on the ground. Texts invariably say as much about the writer as the subject: not necessarily about the writer as an individual, who in this day and age may well be a machine, but certainly about the writer as a representative of a society and its outlook. It is through such products of their time and place that the evolution of the idea of Africa may be traced over the past five thousand years, from Ancient Egypt down to the present day. While this idea has depended at every stage upon the extent of geographical knowledge of the continent, it has been governed from the beginning by an idea of the world as a whole; by an association

between the land and its inhabitants; and by a contrast between the native and the foreign. In a world which had arisen from the waters, as in so many creation myths of Africa and elsewhere, the Ancient Egyptians inhabited the black land of the Nile in the midst of the red land of the desert to east and west, watered by the great river that flowed out of the south. Africa as they knew it thus consisted of a centre and a periphery, while its peoples were divided between the Egyptians themselves and those beyond the pale. The distinction is clear in their painting of themselves as reddish-brown, in contrast to the Lebu or Libyans of the desert to the west with their long hair, beards and tattoos, and the black Nubians to the south. Bearded Asiatics from Syria completed this tour of the horizon of a world that may have grown wider and wider across the centuries but never reached as far as the sources of the Nile. For the Ancient Egyptians, moreover, that world was essentially flat, encircled by the sun from dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn. It was for the Greeks to take a radically different view.

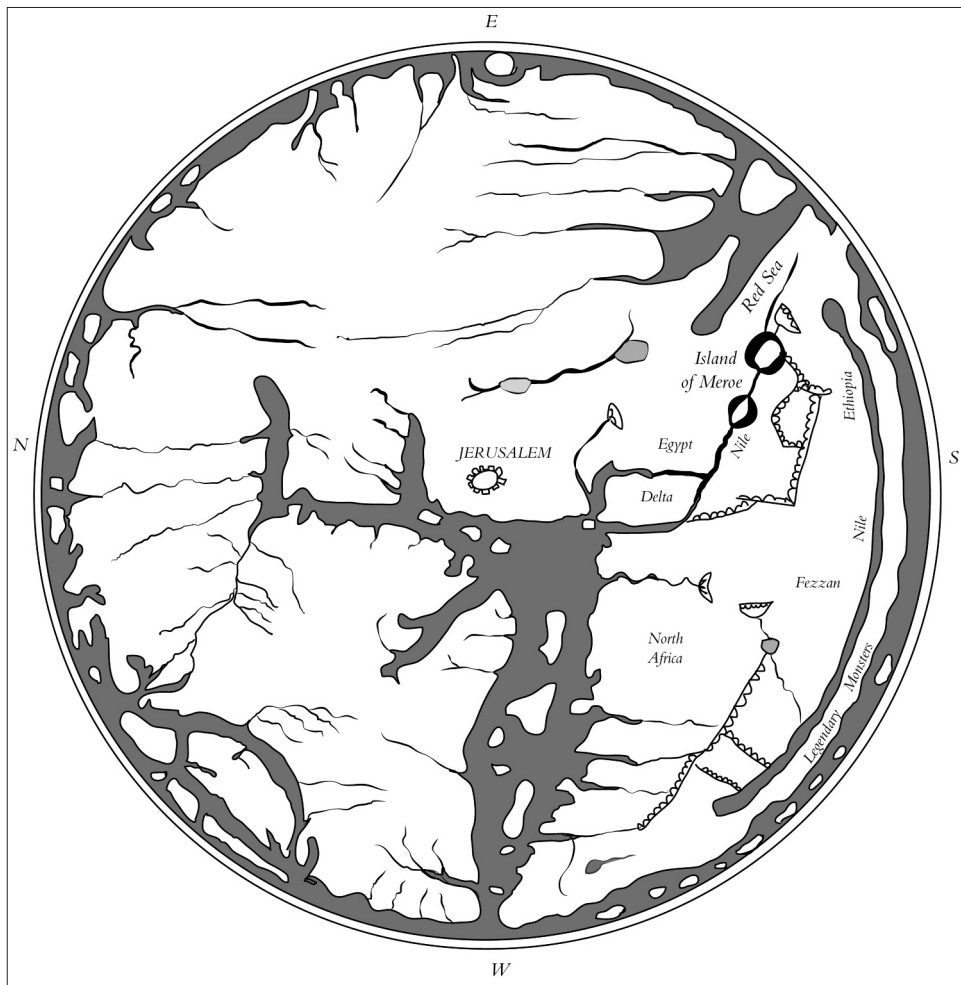
The transition began with the Greek Herodotus in the fifth century BCE, who took from the Egyptians their knowledge of the Nile, and added to it the knowledge of the northern Sahara acquired by the Greek settlers in Cyrenaica. He knew of North Africa, the region of Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia from the Phoenician settlements along the coast from Tripoli to the Atlantic, but only in the most general terms. Five hundred years later, after the occupation of Egypt by the Greeks and North Africa by the Romans, the geographers Strabo in Egypt and Pliny in Italy were much better informed about all these countries, while voyages into the Indian Ocean had extended their knowledge down the Red Sea to the east coast of Africa. Beyond Nubia and the Sahara lay the land of the Ethiopians, the blacks with 'burnt faces'; but the interior of the continent was effectively unknown. A great river was said to run from west to east to join the Nile; beyond it lay a land of monsters and marvels. Despite its limitations, however, this widening of the African horizon represented a change of perspective linked to a completely different view of the world. The black land of Egypt was no longer at the centre of the universe. The Nile was taken for a boundary between east and west, while at the same time it became central to a land mass placed in relation to Europe and Asia on the surface of a globe whose size was calculated with a fair degree of accuracy by observation of the length of the shadow cast by the midday sun at various points from south to north. For this land mass, the Latin name of Africa began its long career by extension from the region of Carthage to the whole. Its shape was another matter. With its southern boundary presumed to be on the Equator, the continent was thought to stretch from west to east rather than from north to south. In so doing, Africa formed the southern coast of the Indian Ocean as well as the Mediterranean, creating two landlocked seas across the globe. In this position, the continent was placed in the first of series of climatic bands that encircled the earth from the extreme heat of the south to the extreme cold of the north.

This description of Africa and the world was summed up in the *Geography* of the Greek astronomer and cosmographer Ptolemy, writing at Alexandria in Egypt in the second century CE. In the Middle Ages the work itself was

unknown in Western Europe, but the Greek and Roman conception of the world was represented in the so-called T-O maps. These flattened the globe into a circle around the land mass of Europe, Asia and Africa; in the most famous example, the Mappamundi or Map of the World in Hereford cathedral, Africa curves like a fat banana for about a third of the way around the circumference. Similar maps, more diagram than realistic representation, were made in the Muslim world. Islam, however, not only knew of the *Geography* in Arabic translation. As a civilisation that stretched across the three continents from west to east, its geographical knowledge was much wider than that of the Greeks and Romans, and far beyond that of the Christian West. Its voluminous geographical literature gave detailed descriptions of the lands with which it was familiar, often according to the climatic band in which they were situated. The accompanying maps were not scientifically drawn, but the world as represented by the geographer Idrisi in the twelfth century was at least more recognisable than its image in the early fourteenth century Mappamundi. The difference as far as Africa was concerned was striking. Where the Mappamundi continued to people the interior of the continent with monsters, geographers like Idrisi could describe not only the Sahara but what they called the Land of the Blacks in the savannahs to the south, together with Nubia, Ethiopia, and the East African coast. But the source of the Nile remained obscure, despite the rumour of a great lake out of which it flowed, while the tale of a great river flowing into it from the west continued to flourish, despite the incorporation of the Senegal, the Niger bend, and Lake Chad into the known world. As to the shape of the continent, Ptolemy still ruled. It was left to the Portuguese in the fifteenth century to discover it in the course of the voyages that introduced the modern world.

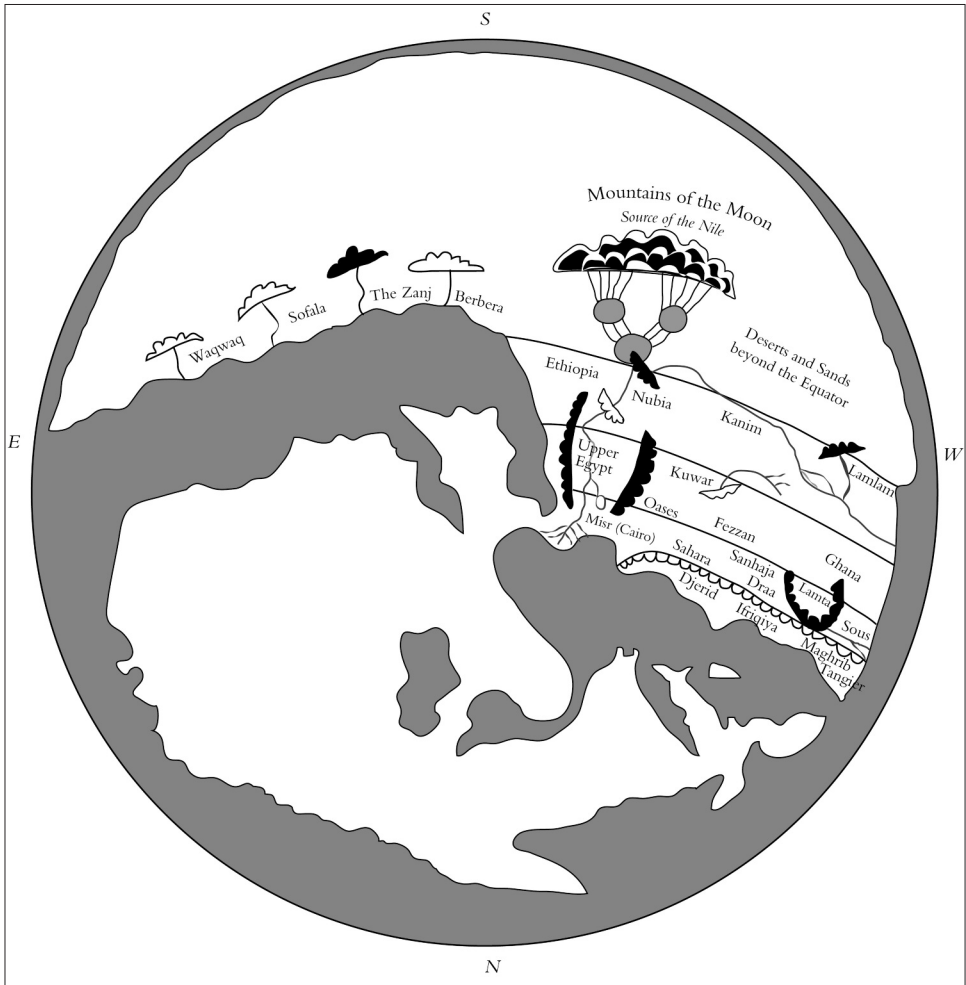
V

Between 1450 and 1500 the map of Africa was dramatically altered in a way that is graphically illustrated by Francesc Relaño, *The Shaping of Africa*. Not only did the Portuguese discover the southern rather than the supposed eastern extension of the continent, setting it, as it were, upright on its north-south axis. Their observations established its outline, size and position on the globe with a fair degree of accuracy, thanks to the measurement of distance and direction, latitude and longitude that transformed the art of mapmaking in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But although the continent now took final shape under the name of Africa, the European cartographers had no such firsthand knowledge of the interior. For its geography they relied ironically upon Ptolemy, whose *Geography* had finally arrived in Western Europe in the fifteenth century, and upon the geographical literature of Islam, first made available in the early sixteenth-century work of Leo Africanus. Not until the nineteenth century did they find out what was really there, by which time a different kind of image had taken shape in Europe. The impression of a land of hostile Muslims and a source of black slaves, that prevailed down to the end of the eighteenth century, turned in the colonial period



6. Africa in the World Map in Hereford Cathedral, c.1300 CE

The map is a schematic rendering of the Greek and Roman concept of the world in Christian Antiquity, 4th-6th Century CE., with Jerusalem at the centre. The place names are those of the Bible and Classical Latin authors, notably Pliny, pictures of whose legendary monsters fill the African section.



7. The World Map of al-Idrisi, 12th Century CE

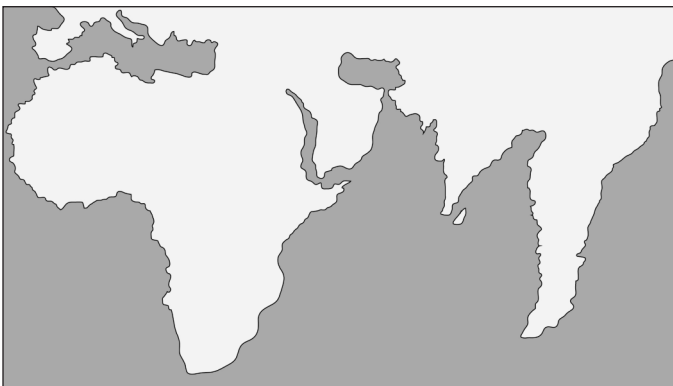
This map is based on the *Geography* of the Greek Cosmographer Ptolemy at Alexandria in the 2nd Century CE. The names of African places and peoples are those of the mediaeval Arab geographers, and reflect the increase in their knowledge of the continent.



World Map to illustrate Ptolemy's *Geographia*, 1478



World Map, Henricus Martellus, *Insularium*, c. 1490



World Map, *Cantino's Planisphere*, 1502

8. The Cartographic Revolution, 1478-1502 CE

The three maps show the immediate transformation of the concept of the continent effected by the Portuguese discovery of the sea route to India, 1488 – 1496.

into a notion of racial inferiority. In the twentieth century this concept spilled over into the approach to African history, where it met with fierce opposition. The controversy thus engendered has not yet worked itself out. Ancient Egypt is a case in point.



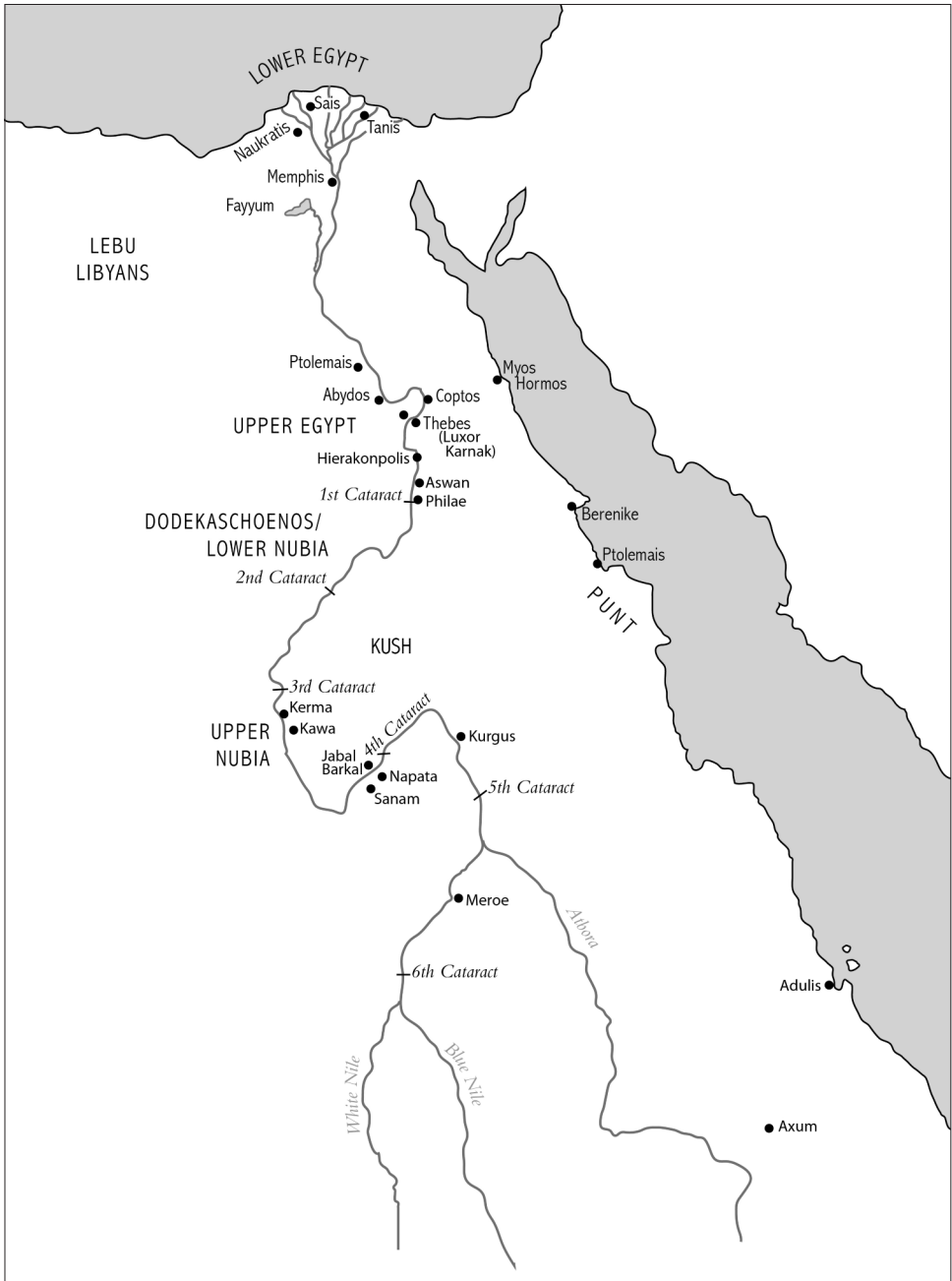
12

Ancient Egypt & Nubia

I

Below the Fourth Cataract, in the middle of the great S-bend of the Nile between Khartoum and Aswan, where the river flows south-westwards before turning back towards the north, the isolated crag of Jebel Barkal stands by the west bank. Flat-topped and sheer-sided, it is distinguished by a pillar of rock standing clear of the cliff face, which seemed to the Ancient Egyptians and the Nubians they conquered to be the cobra on the brow of the Pharaoh. The mountain was thus sacred, the home of the god Amon and the focal point of Napata, the region that has given its name to the kingdom of the Nubian Pharaohs who ruled Egypt itself for almost a hundred years. Today it poses the question of the role of Ancient Egypt in the history of Africa, the subject of a controversy at the heart of African historiography.

For Martin Bernal in *Black Athena*, the problem was with the white Europeans who refused to admit that the Ancient Egyptians were Black Africans whose civilisation had given rise to that of Ancient Greece: the Greek Herodotus in the fifth century BCE had said as much about the origin of Greek religion. But whatever its merits, insofar as the argument is racial, Bernal's thesis has been criticised as an inversion of the infamous Hamitic hypothesis of a superior white race in Africa to which the Egyptians themselves belonged. In opposition to the Hamitic hypothesis, the claim that the Ancient Egyptians were Black is not new; since the 1950s it has been vigorously argued by Cheikh Anta Diop in *The African Origin of Civilization: myth or reality*, a selection of his writings over the years. The claim is a focal point of what might be called the Black interpretation of history, as propounded for example by M. K. Asante in *Afrocentricity*, which turns on the genius of a Black African race. Diop's argument was elaborated in his 'Origins of the ancient Egyptians', the first chapter of Volume II of the *UNESCO General History of Africa*. But the objections were such that the editor felt obliged to annex the report of a symposium to discuss the peopling of Ancient Egypt. This came to no conclusion from the evidence of human remains, pictorial



9. Ancient and Classical Egypt and Nubia, c.3000 BCE to c.400 CE

representations and languages; and whatever might be meant by race was generally declared to be independent of the culture. Most recently, in *The First Ethiopians*, Van Wyk Smith has invoked the findings of geneticists to distinguish the Ancient Egyptians from the populations to the south, with whom they nevertheless shared the traits of 'the mind of Africa'. It was on such a basis, in the spirit of *The Idea of Prehistory*, that both the UNESCO *General History* and Volume I of *The Cambridge History of Africa* set out to place the findings of Egyptology, the specialised study of Ancient Egypt, in the context of African history as a whole.

II

'If a man cometh to seek thy counsel, let this drive thee to books for information.' This advice of a scribe to his son, quoted by Wallis Budge over a century ago in his comprehensive guidebook *The Nile*, is a tribute on the one hand to the Ancient Egyptians, whose invention of writing contributed to the growth of a highly complex society, in which an entirely new kind of record was created for the purpose of reference. On the other, its translation is a tribute to the modern scholarship that has deciphered that record and revealed its content. The information is certainly not lacking. Over the past two hundred years, the findings of Egyptology have rescued Ancient Egypt from legend by the examination and excavation of the impressive material remains preserved by the dryness of the climate in this vast oasis in the desert: buildings, artefacts, art, and writing, on papyrus, cloth, wood and stone. For their interpretation, the writing is crucial. Standing in the fifth century BCE at the interface between the Ancient Egyptian past and the Greek and Roman future of the Nile valley, Herodotus was well aware of its importance. 'The Egyptians who live in the cultivated parts of the country, by their practice of keeping records of the past, have made themselves much the best historians of any nation of which I have had experience.' That past was immensely long, as long from the first Pharaohs to Herodotus as from Herodotus to the present day; and what Herodotus gleaned from the priests to whom he talked was largely anecdote. But the record of which he spoke was real enough, and the kinglist written in Greek by the Egyptian scribe Manetho in the third century BCE has been adopted by modern historians to establish the outline of Egyptian history over these two and a half millennia, filled in from the contemporary documentation of the hieroglyphs and their associated scripts. That documentation completes the archaeological record with the names, ideas and purposes of its makers, to make possible a full understanding of their civilisation.

The frame is political: the unity of the Nile valley from Aswan to the sea under the rule of the Pharaohs. In Manetho's list, these are grouped into thirty dynasties, which are now gathered into three kingdoms, Old, c.3000 – 2160 BCE; Middle, c.2050 – c.1700 BCE; and New, c.1550 – c.1070 BCE: precise dates vary. These are separated by Intermediate Periods when unity was lost, and followed by a Late Period from c.750 BCE to 525 BCE when

it was finally restored before the conquest of the country by the Persians and eventually the Greeks. The original unification is another matter, since writing, and thus the record on which this chronology is based, only appeared with the creation of the Pharaonic state around 3000 BCE. The evidence for its accomplishment is thus predominantly archaeological, and the explanation in the realm of archaeological theory. If Ancient Egypt is the prime example of Connah's productive land hypothesis as far as its economy and society are concerned, politically it is not the case that the state came into existence in response to population pressure, to control the allocation of its resources. Over the two hundred years prior to unification the spread of so-called Naqadan pottery manufacture from the region of Luxor in Upper, or Southern, Egypt to the Delta in Lower, or Northern, Egypt, coincides with the distribution from the same region of ceramics and craftwork in copper, gold, precious stones, ivory and ebony as far away as Palestine and Nubia, and with the presence in its tombs and temples of imports from still further afield in Mesopotamia. The concentration of such treasures in these locations at Naqada, Hierakonpolis and Abydos points to the appearance of a marginal state, one that derived its wealth, prestige and power from the control of the luxuries of long-distance trade. The depiction of Narmer, the first Pharaoh of the First Dynasty, as a warrior slaying his foes, suggests that the country was then united by the conquest of Lower Egypt, creating the largest state of its time in the world.

The union of the Nile Valley with the Nile Delta was symbolised by the red and white crown of the new monarchs, and secured by the transfer of the capital to the strategic site of Memphis near modern Cairo, where the river divides and the delta begins. Its completion marked the beginning of an imperial tradition that culminated after fifteen hundred years in an empire that stretched from Nubia in the south to Syria in the north. In Egypt itself it coincided with the onset of the Holocene Dry, when the country became entirely dependent upon the river running through the desert. Control over the whole length of its floodplain was the beginning of the tradition of a central state, in which the land was the property of the ruler, who lived off the produce and the labour of the villagers who cultivated it. In return he was the demigod who ensured the fertility of the land watered by the annual flood of the Nile from the south, and lit by the daily rising of the sun in the east. Belief in the divinity of this natural cycle of death and rebirth was combined with the conviction that the god king must be immortal, to produce a religion of the temple and the tomb, the one to ensure the well-being of society, the other to secure the life of the individual after death. It found its expression in the monumental architecture of Egypt, from the Great Pyramid to the immense temple of Karnak; in the sculpture and the painting on those monuments; in the mummies and the coffins, from those of Tutankhamun to the thousands in museums around the world; and in the writing through which its beliefs and practices were spelled out. To all of these a huge proportion of the nation's wealth was devoted.

The land that generated the wealth was cultivated on a village basis by peasants who built the dykes required to control the annual flood. In the

absence of a monetary economy, however, it was parcelled out by the king in estates for the upkeep of the temples and the benefit of his ministers. These estates were the foundation of a household economy on a country-wide scale, summed up in the designation of the king as Pharaoh: Per Aa, 'Great House'. In palaces, temples and mansions the produce of the land was redistributed to the armies of servants, craftsmen and workmen who formed the non-agricultural population, and inhabited the cities that clustered around these great buildings. Surpluses were hoarded, or traded up and down the Nile and abroad. The essential figure was the scribe who kept the books and the records, and whose tradition of literacy maintained the continuity of memory, belief and practice that so impressed Herodotus, preserved in the texts that are the key to our own understanding. '*Never Had the Like Occurred*': *Egypt's view of its past*', is the arresting title chosen by John Tait to describe this self-consciousness in the volume for which he is responsible in the excellent series edited by Peter Ucko, *Encounters with Ancient Egypt*.

III

Stretched over a period of two and a half thousand years, however, the information we have about that past is not easy to translate into a history of change, as Barry Kemp in *The Cambridge History of Africa* and Ian Shaw in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* make clear. It is certainly a history of population growth. The regularity of the river and the orderliness of society meant that in spite of low Niles and consequent famines, and the long intermediate periods when central government broke down, the estimated population grew over the millennia from between one and two million to between three and four. That it grew no further, however, may have been the fault of that very scribal system of government, which created an administration quite unlike the forms described by Mair, whether in *Primitive Government* or *African Kingdoms*. What appears in the tomb paintings of the Old Kingdom as a familiar scene of produce offered to the great man, was already on its way to becoming a strict rendering of rents and taxes set down and accounted for in writing. As more and more of the floodplain was brought under cultivation by more and more people, this may not have been too oppressive; but in the manner of Connah's productive land hypothesis and in accordance with the law of diminishing returns, it may in the end, as it certainly did in subsequent centuries, have proved counter-productive. Meanwhile, however, the enlargement of the society was manifested in the growth of popular religion, with its festivals and pilgrimages centred upon the temples, great and small. At the political level divine justice, by which both heaven and earth were ruled, became the prime duty of the king, while at the personal level it became divine judgement, when the heart of the deceased was weighed in the presence of Osiris, the god of death and resurrection. But the increase in population aggravated the problem that the foundation of Memphis had not solved, the fact that the wealth of the country lay in the north where the floodplain was widest, but that power and pres-

tige remained with the south. The conflict surfaced in the First and Second Intermediate Periods, when the country was divided between north and south, only to be reunited on both occasions from the southern capital of Thebes by the Pharaohs of the Middle and New Kingdoms. The balance finally tilted at the end of the New Kingdom in the eleventh century BCE, when for three hundred years the country was politically fragmented, but when a dynasty of Libyan origin at Tanis in the eastern Delta became paramount. The country was then finally reunited by a dynasty based at Sais in the western Delta between 664 and 525 BCE.

This final reunification, however, had been prepared by the conquest of Egypt from the very far south by the Nubian kings of Kush, who ruled the whole country from 716 to 664 BCE as the Pharaohs of Manetho's XXV Dynasty. Following the reign of the Libyans in the Delta, the rule of the Nubians makes clear that by this time the Egyptians belonged not only to a national but to an international community that over the centuries had grown up around them. The role of Egypt in the evolution of that community is mapped by Manley in *The Penguin Historical Atlas of Ancient Egypt*. From the outset its development had been promoted by Egyptian demand for expensive raw materials: gold, ebony, ivory, perfume, cedar wood, turquoise, lapis lazuli and many more, that had encouraged the growth of trade. It had certainly been shaped by Egyptian imperialism from the time of the Middle Kingdom onwards, when the armies had followed the trade routes, first into Nubia and then into Syria. But from the Second Intermediate Period onwards, when the Hyksos of Palestine had occupied the Delta, the growth of the world about had menaced the country with invasion: by the Libyans of the western desert and the so-called Sea People towards the end of the New Kingdom, and the Libyans thereafter. Meanwhile from the time of the New Kingdom onwards it had led to the appearance of rivals: not the old city states of Syria and Mesopotamia, but the empire of the Hittites followed by that of the Assyrians and that of the Persians, whose invasions of Egypt in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE reduced the country to a mere province. So drastic an inversion of the imperial role was yet another consequence of the nature of the Egyptian state – a peasant population that produced the wealth of the country had ceased to provide the Pharaohs with their army, which came to be largely composed of Libyan and other foreign mercenaries, including Nubians. Long before its annexation by the Assyrians and Persians, Egypt had come to be ruled extensively by these militias. Its conquest by the Kushites was only one step further – the takeover of the Pharaonic state by the rulers of its former colony.

IV

To the south of Egypt the Nile winds northwards from the savannah to form an immense S-bend in the desert. Not only is the floodplain narrower than in Egypt; the course of the river is interrupted by six cataracts of which the First, from north to south, forms the natural frontier of Egypt at Aswan. The

beginnings of agriculture and pastoralism along this length of the Nile in the Holocene Wet were much modified in the Holocene Dry, when the formation of the desert enforced the concentration of population along the river. Between the First and the Second Cataract, a distance along the river of four hundred kilometres, a tiny agricultural population only gradually increased from around 3000 to 1500 BCE in the region called Lower Nubia. Over the same period, however, a much more complex society developed some three hundred kilometres still further to the south on the broader plain beyond the Third Cataract, in Upper Nubia. In this region, some thousands of years after the cattle-keepers of Kadero, cattle continued to be herded on land that cannot yet have been entirely desert. They were moreover highly valued, their horned skulls being set around the tumuli that housed the wealthy dead. Further north, where the desert was already established, the depiction of cattle in Lower Nubia is in contrast to the paucity of animal remains, and in the opinion of Adams represented a pastoral ideal rather than the agricultural reality of life on the river bank. Published in 1977, Adams' *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* remains the most comprehensive account of the history of the so-called Middle Nile, but subsequent archaeology has added considerably to his information, bringing the picture up-to-date in Connah's *African Civilizations*, and most recently in *Sudan: Ancient Treasures*, the catalogue of the exhibition at the British Museum in 2004, edited by Welsby and Anderson. What is clear is that despite a certain continuity of culture between Nubia and Upper Egypt in the Holocene Wet, the rise of the Pharaonic state and its civilisation in Egypt around the beginning of the Holocene Dry differentiated the Egyptians from their neighbours to the south, whom they treated as foreigners.

The written and pictorial record of the Old and Middle Kingdoms in Egypt documents a growing relationship with these neighbours: not only the Nubians on the Nile but the inhabitants of Punt, a region located by Kitchen in Shaw et al.'s *Archaeology of Africa* in the highlands and on the coast of northern Ethiopia and Eritrea to the east of the Nile bend. Relations by sea with Punt remained diplomatic and commercial, but the Pharaohs of the Middle Kingdom occupied Lower Nubia and fortified the frontier at the Second Cataract to control the passage to and from the kingdom of Kerma beyond the Third Cataract in Upper Nubia. When the Egyptians withdrew from Lower Nubia at the end of the Middle Kingdom, Kerma emerged as a powerful state that in the Second Intermediate Period may have ruled as far north as Aswan. At Kerma itself, Egyptians kept a palace record of trade with the north, while Egyptian technique is apparent in the two massive mud brick *deffufa*-s, the one a huge solid tower in the middle of the city which is now thought to be a temple, the other containing two narrow rooms painted in Egyptian style adjacent to the royal tombs. Despite the evidence that Kerma grew on the strength of its contacts with Egypt, however, the material remains reveal a society of local origin. Within the city walls the extensive palace possessed a large round audience hall. Outside, the dead were buried with leather clothes and furniture, accompanied by sacrificial animals, in tumuli to which the living brought food. Those of the kings

became larger and larger, and along with those of their nobles, contained a growing number of human sacrifices, eventually running into hundreds – a practice abandoned in Egypt after the end of the First Dynasty over a thousand years before.

Apart from the Egyptian community, Kerma was moreover an illiterate society whose personalities and politics are almost unknown, likewise the extent of its evident power to the east, west and south. To the north in the Second Intermediate Period its armies raided Upper Egypt, inviting its fate at the hands of the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom. These reoccupied Lower Nubia and the goldfields of the desert to the east, conquered Kerma, and annexed Upper Nubia to Egypt under the name of Kush. Their empire in the south lasted for some four hundred years, from the fifteenth to the eleventh century BCE, in the course of which the valley between the Second and Third Cataracts was colonised with new cities. The Kerma region was linked by a route across the southerly bend in the river to Jebel Barkal below the Fourth Cataract, while Kurgus on the northerly bend between the Fourth and the Fifth Cataracts looked eastwards to Punt. The Egyptian occupation was secured by temple building on a large scale, most conspicuously at Jebel Barkal, where the temple below the sacred rock replicated that of Amon, the god of the New Kingdom, at Karnak. Such building not only imposed on the Nubians the god of the Pharaohs, but centred their government on new temple cities and converted their lands into temple estates. A Nubian nobility adopted Egyptian ways, and where the kings of Kerma had been served by Egyptians officials in Lower Nubia, Egyptian Nubia was administered by Nubian scribes. But when the New Kingdom disintegrated in the eleventh century BCE, Lower Nubia was largely deserted, and Kush or Upper Nubia fell into the hands of Nubian chiefs who were buried in tumulus graves. These graves were nevertheless in the region of Napata, close to Jebel Barkal; and after three hundred years the chiefs themselves journeyed to Egypt to be recognised by the priests of Amon at Karnak. In the middle of the eighth century BCE the third such chief, Piye, went on to found the XXV Dynasty, ruling the whole of Egypt in the style of the Pharaohs.

V

In their determination to claim the inheritance of the Pharaohs, the Kushite kings of Napata appear in their monuments and inscriptions more Egyptian than the Egyptians. But at the same time they remained Nubian, in names like Taharqa; in their dress; and in their insignia, especially their crown, which was adorned with two cobras instead of one to symbolise the union of the two countries under their rule. Of the two, the first was Kush, where the dynasty was proud to have arisen. While the great temple at Jebel Barkal was reconstructed, and others built elsewhere, the great god Amon assumed a Kushitic form with the head of a ram. Other adaptations of the Egyptian style were equally significant. The tumuli were succeeded by pyramids for the

burial of the kings in their Napatan homeland, mummified in the Egyptian manner; but these were different in plan, form and construction from their Egyptian prototypes a thousand years earlier. Such features point not only to Kushitic patriotism, but to a society quite different from that of Ancient Egypt. Although human sacrifice had died out during the Egyptian occupation, to be replaced in the Napatan tombs by the Egyptian statuettes called *ushabti*-s, horses were now buried alongside the dead. Egyptian may have been a written language, and a language of trade, but was certainly not that of the people, who were now drawn from a much wider area than the New Kingdom had ruled. At Sanam across the river from Jebel Barkal, the temple was dedicated to Amon under the title of 'Bull of the Land of the Bow'. This was an old Egyptian name for the country, but from the seventh century BCE at the latest, it included the region to the south-east of Napata on the southern arm of the great S-bend in the river. With the people of that region the Egyptians of the New Kingdom had been intermittently at war, but its prominence after the expulsion of Taharqa by the Assyrians from Egypt in 664 BCE suggests that it may have been the original home of his dynasty.

The capital of this southern region was at Meroe between the Fifth and Sixth Cataracts. Some two hundred and fifty kilometres from Napata by a route across the desert, it lay on the edge of the savannah on land watered not only by the Nile, but by seasonal rainfall and seasonal streams in the valleys to the east of the river. From about the beginning of the sixth century BCE it became the capital of the kingdom, although its rulers continued to be consecrated and buried in the holy land of Napata until the end of the fourth. Taken from their pyramid tombs, first at Napata and then at Meroe, the names of its reigning queens as well as its kings are listed by Peter Shinnie in his *Meroe: a civilization of the Sudan*. Welsby in *The Kingdom of Kush: the Napatan and Meroitic Empires* proposes a change of dynasty around the time of the move, while in the third century BCE the report by the Greek writer Diodorus Siculus that the king Ergamenes (Ararakamani or Arqamani) had slaughtered the priests of Amon at Jebel Barkal suggests a more radical break with the past. It was certainly accompanied by further modifications of the Egyptian tradition. Amon was joined by new gods, such as the lion-headed Apedemek. Still in Egyptian poses with Egyptian insignia, figures became plumper, and their costume Nubian. Above all, the hieroglyphs were replaced by a new script for a new Meroitic language whose words can be read but not yet understood. This move towards cultural autonomy was a move into cultural isolation at a time in the last three hundred years BCE when Egypt itself had fallen under Greek rule, and its ancient religion and hieroglyphic script had lost their unique authority. Materially, however, Meroe flourished on trade with Egypt, which under its Greek rulers had not only returned to political independence but commercial prosperity. In spite of the distance, Meroe was strongly represented by settlements in Lower Nubia, where the valley between the First and the Second Cataract was repopulated in the last three hundred years BCE with the introduction of the *saqiya* or horizontal waterwheel for the purpose of irrigation. Trade from the far south entered this stretch of the valley not only along the river from Kawa in the region

of Kerma, but by a direct route across the desert from the top of the eastern bend in the river between the Fourth and Fifth Cataracts, before passing northwards into Egypt at Aswan. Here above the First Cataract was the temple to the Egyptian goddess Isis at Philae, whose estate stretched a hundred kilometres up the valley to the south, and formed a frontier zone between the two kingdoms. The goddess kept the peace, and presided over a mutually profitable exchange.

It is not clear if estate management as a form of government had survived the ending of Egyptian rule in Upper Nubia to become the economic foundation of the Kushitic kingdom at Napata and Meroe. Rainfall in the region of Meroe extended both the agricultural and the pastoral area, and with the aid of huge artificial reservoirs supported a cluster of royal and temple cities and sites away from the river as well as on its eastern bank. The architecture was impressive, and so was the craftsmanship, including the pottery. The numerous slag heaps at Meroe point to the manufacture of iron, which should have been an important industry, except that archaeologists think that it was slow to develop from the fifth century BCE onwards into the first centuries CE, with few iron objects found for the whole of this period. The same can be said of works of Greek art imported from the Mediterranean, but the presence of bronze, glass and pottery vessels from the north points to a trade in commodities as well as objects, including textiles and wine. Of these, wine may have been the drink of kings, but was part of a much wider consumption of millet and sorghum beer, signalled by the increasing number of jars buried with the dead. Such was the prominence of alcohol that David Edwards in *The Nubian Past: an archaeology of the Sudan*, has drawn on the kind of ethnographic evidence used by Lucy Mair in her *Primitive Government* to suggest that it played a central economic, social and political role in a society whose government was dependent upon hospitality to attract and reward loyalty and service. The Pharaonic appearance of Meroitic kingship may disguise a state very different in character from the Egyptian original.

If so, the end of Meroe becomes more explicable. The kingdom was at its height in the first century BCE and first century CE, when Egypt passed from an independent Greek kingdom to a province of the Roman empire, and a Nubian invasion of Upper Egypt was followed by a Roman expedition to Napata. But by the third century CE pyramid building was in decline, and in the fourth century ceased. This symbolic end to the kingdom of Kush coincides with an inscription that celebrates the invasion of the region of Meroe by the king of Axum in the highlands of Ethiopia to the east, and the appearance both here and in Lower Nubia of mound graves of heroic warriors accompanied by human as well as animal sacrifices. Such burials, of which the best known is that of Ballana to the north of the Second Cataract, have been taken to mark the conquest of the middle valley of the Nile by new peoples from the east or west. But in spite of their apparent novelty, it has become clear that they represent the growth of local chieftaincies within the Meroitic kingdom, who continued to use the Meroitic script, and whose rise to power prepared the way for the historical division of the Middle Nile into three Christian kingdoms from the sixth century CE onwards.

VI

This view of the Meroitic state as decentralised to the point at which the claim of its rulers to the inheritance of the Pharaohs ceased to justify their authority may answer the wider question symbolised by the sacred rock of Jebel Barkal: that of the role of Ancient Egypt in the history of Africa. Most recently debated in *Ancient Egypt in Africa*, the volume edited by O'Connor and Reid in the series *Encounters with Ancient Egypt*, the argument turns on the similarity between Ancient Egyptian practices and beliefs apparent in the archaeological and written record, and those of sub-Saharan societies observed in the ethnographic present, particularly those of kingship. The problem has not only been to verify the resemblance, but to make the connection over the thousands of kilometres and hundreds and thousands of years between the societies in question. Meroe has seemed to supply the answer to both. In the chapter entitled 'The Sudanic Civilization' in Oliver and Fage's *A Short History of Africa*, Roland Oliver argued that the Egyptian idea of the god king was perpetuated in Africa south of the Sahara through the kingdom of Meroe, which was ideally situated at the crossroads between the Nile to the north, the savannah stretching out to the west and the savannah cutting across the Equator to the south. Since these two great lengths of grassland to the south of the Sahara were natural highroads, they confirmed the reality of the resemblance by explaining how the principle of divine kingship could have spread throughout the continent to give rise to a truly African political system of similar states constructed on similar principles. But archaeology has found no material evidence for the spread of Meroitic culture beyond the Nilotic Sudan, while diffusionism is unfashionable, rendered suspect in the case of ancient Egypt by the racism of the Hamitic hypothesis: modern archaeology agrees with modern social anthropology in emphasising the individuality of each African society and state. Edwards' characterisation of the Meroitic state is very much in keeping with this approach, which would explain its Pharaonic imagery as a political device that ultimately failed to serve its imperial purpose. As far as the rest of Africa is concerned, the disappearance of this royal cult followed within a hundred years by that of its script and its language would suggest that beyond its territories its model served no purpose at all for the sparse populations of the surrounding areas.

If an Egyptian origin for the states of sub-Saharan Africa is to be excluded by the lack of evidence for a Meroitic influence upon the peoples to the south and west, the alternative is to explain the ethnographic similarities by a common origin in 'the mind of Africa'. In *Before Philosophy*, Henri Frankfort distinguished the god kings of Egypt from the priest kings of Mesopotamia, attributing the difference to their African character. In the middle of the twentieth century, this explanation was still in the realm of the Hamitic hypothesis. But race apart, it is now the most favoured, locating the Pharaohs along with so many other African monarchs in the ethno-

graphic present, on the frontier of a spirit world. It is certainly a satisfying hypothesis, elaborated at length by Van Wyk Smith in *The First Ethiopians*. From the historian's point of view, however, it is scarcely satisfactory to be returned to ethnography by the failure of literacy to document the sequel to Egyptian colonisation of the Middle Nile. Following the abandonment of hieroglyphic Egyptian, the incomprehensibility of the Meroitic texts and their eventual disappearance point to the abandonment of both language and script by a society to which they were no longer of use, and in which they were not immediately replaced. In their absence, there is no word of explanation.



13

The World of Greece & Rome

I

It was not only the writing of Meroe that had died out by the fourth century CE. That of Ancient Egypt itself fell into disuse at about the same time, after a life of some three and a half millennia. The reason for the demise of the hieroglyphs is apparent on the one hand in the Rosetta Stone, which enabled them to be deciphered in the nineteenth century, and on the other in Manetho's list of dynasties, which supplied a basic account of Ancient Egypt in the intervening fifteen hundred years. Inscribed at the beginning of the second century BCE to celebrate the accession of a Greek monarch to the throne of the Pharaohs, the Stone gives pride of place to the hieroglyphs at the top. But while this visibly elevated the foreign ruler to the height of Egyptian kingship, the descent through the Demotic script to the Greek at the bottom plays down the fact that Egypt was now a province of the Greek-speaking world to which its rulers primarily belonged. In that world, the hieroglyphs had no long-term future, and their record of the past was doomed. As Manetho's list of Egyptian dynasties, compiled in Greek in the century before the Rosetta Stone, clearly shows, the survival of the memory of Ancient Egypt depended upon the passage of its literature into the new language.

Greek was the language of the Hellenistic world created by Alexander the Great's conquest of the Persian empire between 334 and 323 BCE, and ruled by his successors for some two to three hundred years before they were eliminated from Iran and Iraq by the Parthians, and from Greece, Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt by the Romans. Greek was then joined by Latin as one of the two main languages of the Roman empire, which for about five hundred years, from c.50 BCE to c.450 CE, united the whole of the Mediterranean under Roman rule. The two very different regions of Egypt and North Africa were then brought into the single political system of a single, highly literate, and highly self-conscious civilisation, from whose terminology, theory and practice the word 'civilisation' itself derives. It does so because the



10. Africa in Antiquity, c.400 BCE to c.400 CE

use of that civilisation's languages, the reading of its literature and the employment of its concepts are central to the subsequent development of the arts and sciences in Europe. What this means for Africa is that the literature in question is not only informative but formative, to the extent of giving the continent its modern name. Not only is it the first written source for the history of that continent outside the Nile valley. Historically, it was the starting-point of the approach to African history from the time of the European Renaissance down to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, supplying the concepts employed to fit the newly-discovered continent and its inhabitants into the categories of European thought.

II

As a written source, the information supplied by this Classical literature has been greatly expanded by modern archaeology to bring out the contemporary meaning of this Graeco-Roman civilisation for the continent and its peoples. A complex society on an international scale, not only did it draw in the entire northern coast of Africa from the Atlantic to beyond the Delta of the Nile, and the Nile valley as far as Aswan on the Tropic of Cancer. Its influence was felt in the Fezzan in the Libyan Sahara, and as far as the coast of East Africa to the south of the Equator. In so many different countries, it worked to differential effect, not least in Egypt, where the passage of the Pharaonic state into the Roman empire is traced in *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*. Whatever the original debt of Greece to Egypt may have been, by the time of Herodotus in the fifth century BCE the obligation was the other way round. From 404 to 341 BCE, Athens and Sparta had assisted the Egyptians in regaining their independence from Persia under the last of the Pharaohs, and in 333 BCE it was Alexander the Great who finally drove the Persians out. But although Alexander was welcomed by the Egyptians, and their country once again became independent after his death in 323 BCE, the Ptolemaic dynasty founded by his general Ptolemy removed the capital from Memphis to the new city of Alexandria on the coast some way to the west of the Delta. Here it was 'at' rather than 'in' Egypt, a Greek city home to a Greek colony that enjoyed the privileges of Greek citizenship – Greek law, municipal self-government, and tax exemptions. Two other such colonies, Naukratis in the Delta and Ptolemais in the Valley to the south, headed the list of Greek townships at the centre of each of the country's thirty *nomes* or districts. But their inhabitants remained apart from the mass of Egyptians who lived mostly on the land, cultivating the floodplain as in Pharaonic times for the benefit of the central state, which was brought by its new masters to a new peak of efficiency. In that state the scribe was now Greek or in the service of the Greeks, controlled by a Greek head of finance who aimed to maximise both production and revenue by extending the area of cultivation while increasing the burden of tax. The operation was all the more thorough for the creation of a monetary system of exchange through the introduction of coinage, a Greek invention that incidentally provides the

historian with yet another contemporary written record, of ruler, place and date. Culturally as well as linguistically, the distinction between the colonisers and the colonised was marked by the contrast between the Greek philosophers in the Museum and Library at Alexandria and the Egyptian priests in the temples at Memphis and elsewhere. From the beginning, however, the Serapeum at Alexandria was a temple built to combine the Greek and Egyptian gods, in an attempt by the dynasty to identify itself with its new homeland. The attempt was actively pursued as the dynasty weakened from the end of the third century BCE onwards, with the construction of new temples to the Egyptian gods and traditional Pharaonic coronations designed to win the support of the Egyptian priesthood, as seen in the hieroglyphs of the Rosetta Stone. Over the same period the distinction between the two peoples began to break down through intermarriage, the adoption of Hellenism by Egyptians in the towns, and the recruitment into the army of Egyptians, who were eventually settled as veterans on the land along with their Greek comrades.

‘Egyptians who, when married to discharged soldiers, style themselves Romans are subject to the provision of violation of status.’ In *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, Naphtali Lewis quotes from a long list of such ordinances by which the distinction was revived and reinforced when Rome, having reduced the Ptolemies to dependence over the previous hundred and fifty years, finally annexed Egypt in 31 BCE. With the defeat and death of Antony and Cleopatra, the last of the Ptolemies, the country was then further reduced to a province by the victor, who became the first Roman emperor under the title of Augustus. As a province, however, Egypt was unique; the state which controlled its agriculture was appropriated by the Emperor, who converted the country into the vast estate of an absentee landlord. Required to supply the city of Rome with grain, it was tightly regulated by his prefects. Greeks were categorised, along with the large Jewish community, as distinct from the Egyptians below but equally from the Romans above – the provincial governor, the large legionary army and its veterans, and the few Alexandrians rewarded with Roman citizenship. The legal barriers between these categories of the population were maintained through the census, a comprehensive instrument through which a poll-tax was levied on nearly all adult males, and the peasants registered as cultivators of land whose yield was estimated by cadastral survey. Under such rigorous assessment, taxation was high, and made worse by abuse on the part of tax-farmers and collectors. Over the centuries a vicious circle developed as peasants fled, land went out of cultivation, and those who remained were held responsible for the shortfall in taxation. So too, from the second century CE onwards, were the tax-collectors and officials, members of the propertied classes who served for periods of one to three years as a *liturgy*, a duty they were obliged to perform. With their personal wealth at stake, such *liturgists* increasingly faced ruin. Their burden intensified in the third century, when the capital of each *nome* was converted into a municipality whose city council took over responsibility for its administration from its previous governor, with the obligation to nominate its functionaries and guarantee their performance. The state thus saved

itself their salaries, but by then impoverishment was such that Egypt had ceased to be a granary of Rome. The story is told by Robert Ritner in the first volume of *The Cambridge History of Egypt*; in *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, Lewis concurs, blaming the regime for loss of manpower, decline in revenues, and the brigandage to which the fugitives had been driven.

Lewis' *Life* is nevertheless more than a tale of the growing hardship brought about by Roman exploitation. With the transition of Egypt from state to province, the focus shifts from dynastic to social history, made possible by the recovery of vast quantities of writing on papyrus and potsherds, the contemporary record of the manifold activities of a society that flourished despite the flaw in its administration. Both the creation and survival of this record are peculiarly Egyptian, the product of Egyptian government, Egyptian papyrus, and the Egyptian climate, which has preserved it in immense, and personal, detail. A vast extension of the written dimension of history, the record is partly in Demotic, but for the most part in Greek. This continued to be the language of the state, within whose legal and administrative framework it had ceased to be a foreign tongue. The hieroglyphs survive for this period in temple inscriptions that celebrate the Roman Emperor, like the Greek monarch, as Pharaoh; but the temples had lost most of their lands, and by the end the hieroglyphs had died out with the priesthood. Greek had taken their place as a script and a language in which Egyptians were not only defined by the state, but in which they read and wrote, and in which, as Lewis notes by way of conclusion, they couched their hopes of deliverance from oppression.

III

It is ironic that the Roman municipality should have been introduced into Egypt when it was past its heyday as the centrepiece of Roman civilisation, the principal instrument of the civilising mission undertaken by Rome to introduce its subjects to a Roman way of life as loyal citizens of its empire. The creation of a *municipium* or municipality converted a provincial township into a self-governing city modelled upon the *civitas* or city-state of Rome, whose republican form of government survived the establishment of a monarchy by the first *imperator* or emperor, Augustus, 31 BCE to 14 CE to become the principal instrument of the administration. Its senate continued to legislate, its consuls went on to become provincial governors, while its citizenship was progressively extended to create a ruling class of *cives*, Roman citizens, who from end to end of the empire were recruited into its service. At the local level, the constitution of a *municipium* turned provincials, whether or not they were Roman citizens, into citizens of their own city, participating in its government, contributing to its construction, and thereby enjoying all the amenities of a civil, *civilised*, Roman way of life. The city itself was in principle foursquare, with two main streets that crossed in the middle, and a grid of side streets, all paved, dividing the housing into blocks. It had its forum or central piazza complete with basilica or town hall and

temples to the gods of Rome; its library, markets, shopping streets; its public baths, theatre, amphitheatre and triumphal arch, all monumentally built at the expense of its magistrates during their year of office. Nowhere have such cities survived better than in North Africa, where their impressive ruins stand for a feat of colonisation that transformed the society and economy.

‘The six hundred cities’ whose features are described by Susan Raven in her *Rome in Africa* were the culmination of a history quite different from that of Egypt in a very different geographical region, the broad and blunt peninsula formed to the north of the Sahara by the Atlas Mountains. Their ranges and high plains separate the desert from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, whose wet winters and dry summers form the most northerly as well as the narrowest of the climatic belts of the continent, matched only by its counterpart at the Cape. Extending from northern Morocco as far as the coast of Libya, this is a climate shared with southern Europe. But whereas in Europe it is backed by the natural forests of the temperate zone, cleared for increasingly dense human settlement, in Africa it is backed by the wastes of the desert to the south. In the first millennia of the Holocene Dry, the mountainous borderland between the sand and the sea in this northernmost promontory of the continent is archaeologically associated with the progress of agriculture and pastoralism in Zone I, more settled towards the north, more nomadic towards the south, except in the oases on the desert edge. Linguistically it is associated with the establishment of Afro-Asiatic in the form of Berber as the native language. ‘Berber’ has in consequence been taken as the name for its speakers, justifying the ethnographic approach of Brett and Fentress to the history of North Africa in *The Berbers*. At this distance in time, however, it can only be presumed that the societies in question were stateless in Horton’s sense. They become more perceptible with the appearance of a written record from the beginning of the first millennium BCE onwards, when the western Mediterranean was brought into the seafaring world of the Levant, and Phoenician merchants settled on the coast from Tripoli to northern Morocco. From the sixth century BCE their city of Carthage near Tunis, strategically situated to command the passage from the eastern into the western Mediterranean, rose to become the capital of these settlements and ruler of a maritime empire in North Africa, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica and Spain. The Carthaginians themselves have left for the most part only votive inscriptions; like the hieroglyphs, their Semitic language, script and literature eventually disappeared in favour of Latin and Greek. These are the languages in which their history came to be recorded and from which it is now written, as a glance at the sources cited in Warmington’s *Carthage* makes clear. Thus it moves out of legend as the Carthaginians came into conflict with the Greeks in Sicily and finally with the Romans, who defeated them by sea and land in the first two Punic or Phoenician wars, 264–241 BCE and 218–202 BCE, destroyed their city in the third, 150–146 BCE, and took their place in North Africa.

During this period, from the sixth to the second century BCE, as North Africa was progressively incorporated into the imperial realms of the Mediterranean, the influence of Carthage and its dependencies upon the

Berbers of the interior is recorded archaeologically as well as in writing. A city-state which, like Rome, turned from a monarchy into a republic with a consular form of government, Carthage annexed its hinterland in northern Tunisia and developed its agriculture, but never attempted further expansion inland with an army which largely consisted of Berber mercenaries. On the other hand, beginning with what Fentress in *The Berbers* calls the capillary contact of the Phoenician trading-posts on the coast with the peoples inland, the development of trade and alliances with these peoples contributed to, if it did not cause, the rise of Berber kingdoms, which then played a major part in the Punic wars. From these emerged two monarchies in alliance with Rome, Mauretania in northern Morocco and eastern Algeria, and Numidia in eastern Algeria and Tunisia. Their capitals at Volubilis near modern Fes in Morocco, and Cirta, now Constantine in Algeria, were well-built cities, as were their other towns. At Cirta the housing was of Carthaginian type, while the Numidian kings owned Carthaginian-style estates. The Numidian cities were governed in the manner of Carthage by magistrates who nevertheless had Berber titles and possibly Berber customs, while Berber made an increasing appearance alongside Punic in inscriptions in a Berber script. Despite such Berberisation, Punic retained its dominance as a sign that the kingdoms themselves were marginal rather than central to the essentially stateless societies of villagers and pastoralists under their control, while the Hellenistic style of their kings, most notably Masinissa of Numidia, identifies them with the Graeco-Roman world. Their incorporation into that world is evident in their insignia, their coinage and their monuments – three-storeyed tower tombs with Classical columns and statues capped with a pyramid, and two immense tumuli in dressed stone: the Medracen to the south of Cirta, and the so-called Tomb of the Christian Queen to the west of Algiers, that may have been modelled on the tomb of Alexander at Alexandria.

As clients of Rome these monarchs were, like the Ptolemies, to disappear in the middle of the first century BCE, when they were suppressed by Caesar, although the Mauretanian kingdom was revived by Augustus under a Roman nominee, and lasted until 40 CE. In their place, Rome divided North Africa into provinces, of which there were eventually four: Mauretania Tingitana in northern Morocco; Mauretania Caesariensis in western and central Algeria; Numidia in eastern Algeria, and Africa in eastern Algeria, Tunisia and Tripolitania. Africa, the home of the Afri, a name of unknown origin, was the territory of Carthage which Rome had annexed in 146 BCE, extended westwards from the lowlands of Tunisia on to the highlands of eastern Algeria. Its occupation by the Roman army, its colonisation by veteran legionaries, and the expropriation of its land was resisted by the tribal peoples of the old Numidian kingdom, who rose in revolt in 3–6 and 17–24 CE. The revolts extended westwards into Mauretania, and although they were savagely put down, were followed over the next three hundred years by lengthy uprisings that occurred at intervals of ten to twenty years from Mauretania to Tripolitania. Detailed by Marcel Benabou in *La résistance africaine à la romanisation*, they reveal the perpetual discontent of the stateless

tribal population of North Africa with Roman rule, Roman settlement, and Roman slave-raiding. The Roman response was to push southwards from an original chain of forts and settlements to create the *limes*, a semi-fortified border line that by the beginning of the third century CE divided the north and east from the south and west, the civilised from the uncivilised.

Within this Roman pale, essentially the long thin strip of winter rainfall inland from the Mediterranean, expanded beyond the Aures mountains in the east down to the edge of the desert, tribal hostility was offset by the progressive incorporation of Punic townships, Berber chieftains and Berber tribesmen into the urban and landowning society of the 'six hundred cities' founded or upgraded by Rome. The recruitment of tribal cavalry to support the Roman legion based in southern Numidia was a direct route to Roman citizenship and Roman property; tribal chiefs who emerged to deal with the Romans were similarly rewarded; and whole tribes came to be classed as the population of a municipality. Meanwhile the peasant farmer, a tenant or labourer on an estate, could, on the evidence of the tombstone of 'the harvester of Mactar', work his way up the ladder. The inscription is the personal statement of a peasant become a magistrate, quoted by Fentress in (Brett and Fentress) *The Berbers* in conclusion to her discussion of assimilation: '...born into a poor family...cultivated my field...harvested for others...led a gang of harvesters...; by working...content with little...owner of a villa and master of an estate...called to the senate of my city...became censor...my life has passed in honour.' Though his name is missing, he had certainly become a Roman citizen, since Mactar on the uplands of Tunisia had evolved from a Punic township with Punic magistrates into a fully-fledged Roman city well before the extension of Roman citizenship to almost the entire population of the empire at the beginning of the third century CE. Both the city and its censor, the magistrate in charge of the registers of persons and taxes, stand for the incorporation of North Africa into Roman civilisation. The difference from Egypt is clear. In North Africa it was possible to rise above one's station; in Egypt, by and large, it was not.

IV

Such an evolution was made possible by growing prosperity, to which the spectacular remains of cities such as Mactar bear witness. Where Egypt had been taken over and exploited by the Romans, North Africa was developed by them both economically and politically, to reach its peak in the third century CE as Egypt sank under the weight of taxation. For taxation to be effective in North Africa, there had to be the wealth created by the production of grain, wine and olive oil. In response to Roman demand, subsistence agriculture and pastoralism gave way to commercial farming, whose extension of the cultivated area reached southwards into regions that are now desert by means of irrigation and terracing. North Africa was thus incorporated not only into the civilisation but into the common market of the Roman empire, for which the Mediterranean supplied the means of bulk

transport for the export of its produce and the import of the vast quantities of marble for its monumental building. Carthage was reoccupied and rebuilt not only as the Roman capital but as a major port along with Alexandria. But although Alexandria served a similar purpose for Egypt, it had still greater importance as the channel of trade between the Roman Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean via the Nile and the Red Sea. In that trade, the demand of the Roman market was not for bulk commodities but for expensive luxuries worth the cost of transport: spices, perfumes, medicines, silks, pearls, ivory, and other rarities, in exchange for gold and Mediterranean manufactures, including glass, pottery and wine. Most of this trade was with western India, but some with the east coast of Africa, from Somalia to Zanzibar. It had been developed by the Ptolemies, who resumed the old Egyptian interest in the land of Punt when they established a second Ptolemais, a station on the Red Sea on the latitude of Napata to procure elephants for the army, followed by the ports of Myos Hormos and Berenice on the latitude of Aswan and Upper Egypt, to bring goods overland to Coptos on the Nile near Luxor, ancient Thebes. The flourishing economy of the Roman empire meant that the trade continued to expand, feeding the prosperity of Alexandria and offsetting the impoverishment of rural Egypt. Much more than that, it extended the influence of Rome far beyond the bounds of the empire.



14

Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers

I

The title is taken from Sir Mortimer Wheeler's *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, in which he described how 'the long, acquisitive arm of imperial Rome' reached out over thousands of kilometres, not only to affect the history of the lands it touched, but also to leave a record, archaeologically and in writing. As far as Africa is concerned, it is with the written record that the importance of its outreach begins, and indeed ends. While Christopher Ehret's *An African Classical Age. Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000B.C. to A.D. 400* is a reminder of how much of the continent was totally or effectively unknown to the Greeks and Romans, over the expanse of which they had some knowledge, their writings report on the passage from herding and farming to cities and states over a much wider area than those of the Ancient Egyptians. After Herodotus in the fifth century BCE, the core of the relevant literature is formed by the work of three geographers over a period of about a hundred years at the height of the Roman empire. The Greek writer Strabo, who settled in Alexandria and wrote at the beginning of the first century CE, is followed by the Latin author Pliny the Elder, a Roman who perished in the eruption of Vesuvius in 79 CE, and finally by the Greek Ptolemy, writing once again at Alexandria in the first half of the second century CE. Classified by M. Cary and E.H. Warmington in their conclusion to *The Ancient Explorers*, they represent two schools of geography, the human and the mathematical. On the one hand they tour the known world in a great circle around the Mediterranean, the sea in the middle of the land, listing the countries, places, peoples and curiosities with reference to historical events. On the other they plot their place on the surface of the globe. The effect is threefold. Along with Herodotus, these geographers are the first to survey the lands and peoples of Africa as we know it, both inside and outside the frontiers of the empire. In doing so they situate Africa firmly in the world as a whole, and at the same time begin to conceptualise its character and its history.

II

Meanwhile the geographers are a contemporary source of information on the lands beyond the imperial frontier, beginning with the valley of the Nile as far as Meroe. This is well within their compass, on the strength of the long-standing relationship with Egypt. In Roman times, this centred on control of the Dodekaschoenos, the valley for some hundred and fifty kilometres to the south of Aswan, where the Romans followed the Ptolemies in exercising a condominium with the Nubians. This began badly in 23 BCE, when the Nubians sacked Aswan, and the Romans retaliated by sacking Napata. If the episode was the result of a Roman attempt to treat the Nubian inhabitants of the Dodekaschoenos like the Egyptians, it was quickly over; the Dodekaschoenos was extensively Romanised, and in 61 CE a peaceful Roman expedition, described by Pliny, arrived at Meroe itself to give an accurate report of the country. Representatives of the Candace, as the Romans called the queens of Meroe, travelled the other way, for the Bible describes the conversion to Christianity of a eunuch of the queen on a visit to Jerusalem at about the time of Pliny's expedition. The isolation of the Roman mission shows that politically the kingdom was remote; but the reference in the Acts of the Apostles, however it is interpreted, points to a northward movement of people from the south, whether as worshippers of Isis at Aswan, as immigrants, slaves, or envoys. The reality is attested by the presence of Roman manufactures at Meroe, which point to an active commerce making such movement possible.

The route taken by this trade, however, was not necessarily up and down the Nile or by the desert road across the great bend. Much if not most came and went via the Red Sea, that other great way across the desert belt to sub-Saharan Africa, which had been developed by the Ptolemies when they built the ports of Myos Hormos, Berenice, and the outpost of Ptolemais. In his *Meroe*, Shinnie notes the suggestion of Indian influence in the representation of the lion god Apedemek with many heads and many arms in his temple at Naqa to the south of Meroe. Pliny noted a route from Napata to the Red Sea, on whose African coast to the south of Ptolemais he located Adulis, near Massawa in Eritrea, a large trading post for the procurement of ivory, rhinoceros horns, hippopotamus hides, tortoiseshell, monkeys and slaves. According to *The Periplus of the Erythraean Sea*, 'The voyage around the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean' written by an anonymous merchant towards the end of the first century CE, the ivory at least came from the Nile and its savannas by a route through the city of Axum in the Ethiopian highlands between the Nile and the Red Sea. In return a whole range of manufactures was imported, with gold and silver for the king of Axum, Zoscales, and supplies for the colony of foreigners, some of them probably from India: coins and objects from India, Rome and Meroe have been found at both sites. The development of this commerce dated most probably from the beginning of the century, when Roman trade with India greatly expanded as a result of

the discovery by the Greeks of the monsoon, the seasonal winds that enabled them to sail regularly and profitably from Berenice out of the Red Sea and across the ocean to India and back. The route, which Pliny implies was a recent innovation, was certainly instrumental in the growth of Ethiopia, where Connah locates the second of his African civilisations on the massive lava plateaux that rise above the low savanna to the west, and stand at the head of the high savanna to the south.

That civilisation falls into place in the archaeological record of Zone II, where it exemplifies the growth of cities and states out of herding and farming in what Connah describes as an attractive environment for human settlement. As Phillipson says in his own *African Archaeology* and in Shaw et al.'s, archaeology has so far found little to support the linguistic and biological evidence for the antiquity of the different crops and animals in the wide range of climates at the various heights of the mountain, although the fine grain *teff* at the high altitudes in the north and the huge vegetable *ensete* in the south are Ethiopian domesticates. Nor can it confirm the Ancient Egyptian record of the land of Punt. As in North Africa before the Phoenicians, an agricultural population was nevertheless in place about the time of the rise of Carthage, when the coast was settled from across the Red Sea by Sabaeans from the kingdom of Saba (Sheba) in the Yemen. Like the Phoenicians, these introduced a language, a script, and fine architecture in dressed stone, together with a religion of the moon-god, and most probably iron-working. Highlanders themselves, unlike the Carthaginians, coming from the chunk of the Ethiopian massif split off from Africa by the opening and filling of the Rift Valley by the Red Sea, they moved up from the coast onto the mountain, as it were into Numidia. There, in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, a Sabaeans-style state appeared in the fertile valley of Yeha, with the name, unvocalised in the inscription, of D'MT; kings with the Sabaeans titles of MKRB and MLK; and a royal city with palace and temple. Its relationship to the native population is obscure, and so is its fate; but three hundred years later, its political, cultural and technological innovations had contributed to the growth of Connah's Ethiopian civilisation after the fashion of the Numidian kingdom of Masinissa, and still more after that of Meroe. Axum was a city founded in the first century CE as the capital of a native state which like Meroe, had developed its own script for its own language of Ge'ez. Unlike those of Meroe, its inscriptions can not only be read but understood, since the alphabet developed from the Sabaeans script has continued in use for Ge'ez and its derivatives down to the present day. These complement the archaeological record summed up by Connah on the basis of findings described in Vol. II of the *UNESCO History of Africa*, by Munro-Hay in *An African Civilisation: the Aksumite Kingdom of Northern Ethiopia*, and by Phillipson in *Ancient Ethiopia. Aksum: its antecedents and successors*.

To judge from the literary record in Greek and Latin, extended in the second century CE by the work of the Greek geographer and astronomer Ptolemy at Alexandria, the kingdom of Axum was founded on a Red Sea trade at least partly supplied from Meroe by a route over the mountain. The

coincidence of the founding of the city with the expansion of the Indian trade of the Mediterranean would support such a view. If so, the archaeological record goes on to reveal a major growth of monumental building coupled with a major extension of Axumite settlement over the whole region from the third century CE onwards. The minting of a royal coinage from the second half of the third century CE onwards marked the entry of a Sabaean-style monarchy into the Graeco-Roman tradition, at the same time that an Axumite delegation found its way to the Emperor Aurelian in 274 CE. This was accompanied, however, by the erection at Axum of tall stone stelae carved like skyscrapers with up to ten storeys, and large, rectangular palace complexes, the most remarkable examples of an architecture found all the way down, through the urban sites of Matara and Kohaito, to the coast at Adulis. Such building, and such widespread settlement, argues for the development of an integrated society on a mixed agricultural base, with a range of skills and occupations, and varying degrees of wealth. It was, moreover, a military society under the war-god Mahrem and monarchs like Aphilas, whose Greek inscription records his conquests in the Yemen. Where Meroe had grown ever more remote from the outside world, by the fourth century CE its partner Axum had not only supplanted it as the regional power, but brought itself to international attention.

III

To the west of the Nile, there were no such natural ways as the river and the Red Sea from north to south across the desert. As the Sahara developed in the Holocene Dry, however, it had been occupied in Zone I to the north of the Tropic of Cancer by the movement of Berber-speakers from east to west. The argument advanced by Fentress in *The Berbers* is much the same as that for the spread of the Bantu: the relationship of Berber to Ancient Egyptian points to an origin for the language in the region of the Nile towards the end of the Holocene Wet, while the similarity of its various dialects suggests a comparatively rapid westward spread across North Africa as far as the Canaries with the onset of the Holocene Dry. As with the Bantu, what is suggested is a rolling frontier, as the build-up of population in each locality provoked onward migration to the next, accompanied by the assimilation of previous dwellers. Some indication of who these people were, and what gave them their demographic superiority, is graphically provided by the rock art of the mountain massifs of the central Sahara, well reproduced by Lhote in *The Search for the Tassili Frescoes*, and by Malika Hachid in *Les premiers Berbères*. Its sequence of representations of hunter-gatherers followed by cattle-keepers followed by herders of sheep illustrates the movement from hunting and gathering to herding and farming from the Holocene Wet to the Holocene Dry. At the same time its different styles represent a change in population from apparently black to apparently white, as the cattle-herders moved away southwards with the onset of desiccation. By the middle of the second millennium BCE, however, when this sheep-herding population

appears in the art and inscriptions of Ancient Egypt under the name of the Lebu or Libyans, more than nomadic pastoralism was in question. The Lebu were warriors who invaded Egypt towards the end of the New Kingdom. Enlisted into the Egyptian army, they settled in the Delta, and in the tenth century BCE produced the Pharaoh Sheshonq. By the time of Herodotus in the fifth century BCE, they were charioteers as well as infantry fighting in the Persian army. All this appears in the rock art, which depicts the same people as the Egyptian murals, with elements of Egyptian and also Greek costume and armour, together with Herodotus' chariots. The impression of socially superior warriors is reinforced by megalithic cairn tombs which were evidently restricted to a minority of the population, with the suggestion that previous peoples who had not moved away had been in some measure subjected.

By the time of Herodotus, these eastern Libyans stretched across the northern Sahara from the Nile as far as the great home of the rock art, the massif of the Tassili N'Ajjer in Algeria. Divided into different tribes with different names, they were distinguished from the western Libyans of the wooded hill country of North Africa by their way of life as nomads and inhabitants of the date palm oases. Herodotus' description agrees with the archaeological record, which suggests a growing concentration and settlement of these Saharans in the oases as desertification progressed over the previous thousand years, and nomadic pastoralism came to revolve around these centres of cultivation. About the time of Herodotus, that record then strikingly illustrates Connah's productive land hypothesis in the Libyan Fezzan, where the occupants of the cliff top fortress of Zinkekra descended to the unfortified settlements on the floor of the Wadi al-Ajal to complete the transition in the desert from herding and farming to city and state. Mediterranean cereals were cultivated together with dates, grapes and figs, irrigated by a growing network of *foggara*-s or underground irrigation canals bringing water from springs at the base of the cliffs out onto the valley bottom. By the Roman period their society had moved beyond subsistence to provide Connah with all his urban criteria of civilisation, including impressive dressed stone architecture, monumental tombs, and traces of industry: pottery; iron, copper and salt working; textiles; and carnelian beadwork. Their principal city of Garama was evidently the capital of a state which built forts in the Ghat valley some three or four hundred kilometres to the west. But if they were literate, they have left no inscriptions to suggest its constitution. There is only the single mention of a king by Pliny and one by Ptolemy. Such references to the Garamantes are sparse, making the interpretation of the archaeological evidence for their dealings with the Roman world all the more difficult.

The literary references are discussed by Bovill in *The Golden Trade of the Moors*, and by Charles Daniels in *The Garamantes of Southern Libya*; the archaeological evidence is summarised in David Mattingly et al., *The Libyan Desert. Natural Resources and Cultural Heritage*. The Iranian technique of the *foggara*-s on which the cultivation of the valley depended was probably introduced from Egypt following its occupation by the Persians in the fifth

century BCE. The construction and maintenance of these wide and long irrigation tunnels from the base of the cliff out on to the valley floor was hard and dangerous work which suggests the use of slaves in a well-developed society. But the monumental architecture of the city dates from the Roman period, after a century of hostility bracketed by two Roman military expeditions in c.20 BCE and 70 CE. Thereafter an abundance of Roman pottery, glass, lamps and wine jars accompanies the appearance of palatial residences and mausolea wholly or partly in dressed stone, arguing the presence of Roman builders as well as demonstrating Garamantian wealth and power. As at Adulis, a flourishing trade with the Mediterranean had evidently started up, probably with a colony of resident Roman merchants. Unlike Adulis, however, the question of what they had come for is not so clear in the absence of a supplier such as Meroe. A trans-Saharan trade of the kind that developed in the Mediaeval Islamic period has been held responsible for the wealth of Carthage and for that of Leptis Magna on the coast of Tripolitania., but cannot be proved. The Greeks and Romans were dimly aware of a land of the Ethiopians or Blacks beyond the desert, and of a river which Pliny called the Niger, 'the Black'; it may or may not have been the Niger. In the second century CE one Julius Maternus went south with the king of the Garamantes to an Ethiopian land called Agisymba, perhaps for the rhinoceros, or for the slaves whom the Garamantes were said to hunt, and whom they most probably employed. The recent excavation of Garamantian forts near Ghat at the foot of the mountain route to the Niger bend has prompted the suggestion that they were built to garrison a trade route to fetch gold from the western Sudan. But there is nothing in the literature to show that the Romans knew of any regular trade along these routes, still less travelled them; and archaeologically there have been no finds of Roman artefacts in the Sudan to demonstrate the existence of such commerce. The answer is probably that the Garamantes drew a miscellany of products from the south, of which ivory was the most important, for sale to the Romans in the north. Otherwise, 'the long, acquisitive arm of imperial Rome' failed to reach across the desert to the savanna.

IV

Out beyond the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean, Rome reached much further south down the east coast of Africa, crossing the Equator most probably as far as Cape Delgado on the border between Tanzania and Mozambique. As at Adulis, it did so for ivory and rhinoceros horn, but also for tortoiseshell and coconut oil, together with frankincense, cinnamon and slaves that it may have acquired en route around the Horn. As with Axum, this trade with East Africa developed in the first century CE following the establishment of the direct sea route to India, on terms which bring the whole of this commerce into focus. They are spelled out in the *Periplus*, a unique first-hand account of the involvement of Rome in the trade of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, from which it is clear that merchants from

Egypt had entered a different and even wider commercial world than that of the Mediterranean, one which stretched along the coasts of the Indian Ocean in a great arc from south-east Asia through India and Ceylon to Arabia and East Africa. Described for a later period by Kirti Chaudhuri in *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*, this world was evidently flourishing in Roman times, when the trade of Azania, the East African coast, was in the hands of Arab merchants from southern Arabia, and ships brought supplies of wheat, rice, clarified butter, sugar, sesame oil and cloth from India. The Arabs themselves imported ironware, weapons and tools together with glass and gifts of wheat and wine, enjoying some kind of monopoly by agreement with client chiefs at their ports of call. Of these the most notable was Rhapta, plausibly located by Sheriff in Vol. II of the *UNESCO General History* near the mouth of the Pangani river, flowing down from Kilimanjaro to the coast opposite Pemba and Zanzibar. Access up the valley across the dry coastal plain to the highlands would account not only for the ivory but also for Ptolemy's vague tale of snow-capped mountains, 'the mountains of the moon', and great lakes in the interior. Like that of Strabo and Pliny, his information was second-hand, but derived from the reports of Greeks who had sailed beyond Rhapta to the vicinity of Cape Delgado.

In support of this circumstantial story, however, to the south of Ras Hafun at the tip of the Horn there is no archaeological evidence to compare with that for Meroe, Axum and Garama, only the presence of a few Roman coins along the coast; nor has the site of Rhapta been found. There is only the distribution of Kwale pottery from the type site on the coast south of Mombasa, up through the hills on either side of the Pangani valley to Kilimanjaro and the Rift Valley, to identify the Africans involved. Apparently beginning around the time of the *Periplus*, its distribution is an aspect of Phillipson's Chifumbaze complex, the archaeological evidence for the development of the Bantu-speaking population of Africa south of the Equator in the Early Iron Age. In Phillipson's opinion, this population spread into the region from the south, perhaps displacing or assimilating a previous population related to the first food producers in East Africa, the Afro-Asiatic Cushitic cattle-keepers who occupied the eastern highlands of Kenya. But in spite of the evidence of the *Periplus* that the coastal trade with the Arabs was of long standing, no trace survives of such a population to explain its organisation and sources of supply. And if there is a missing link to landward, there is yet another to seaward. The presence of coconut oil in the *Periplus'* list of exports signals the introduction into tropical Africa of the food plants of south-east Asia, not only the coconut palm but the plantain, banana, Asian yams, taro and sugarcane, all planted rather than sown, and all major additions to the range of African agriculture in the forest regions. The date may be unknown, but is likely to have been around this time of the spread of agriculture in Africa south of the Equator, and the development of the East Africa trade of the Indian Ocean. The question is whether such plants were brought by the Indonesians themselves when they colonised Madagascar.

The evidence for that colonisation is primarily linguistic, and secondarily ethnographic: the language of Madagascar is Indonesian, justifying a

comparison between Madagascan and Indonesian beliefs and practices. The question is how and when the Indonesians arrived – directly from south-east Asia or via the East African coast; towards the beginning or the end of the first millennium CE. A direct route across the Indian Ocean is possible but unlikely; a more circuitous route via India, the east coast of Africa and the Comoro Islands is probable but problematic. As to when, there is so far no archaeological evidence of human settlement on the island before the eighth or ninth centuries CE. Neither is there any archaeological evidence to establish their presence on the East African coast, or any linguistic trace of their passing. On the other hand, the population of Madagascar is African as well as Indonesian in character, and the language has enough elements of Bantu to suggest an early admixture of language and people. In Vol. II of the *UNESCO General History*, Vérin is of the opinion that the admixture must have taken place in Madagascar at the time of the original settlement of the island by both peoples from the fifth century CE onwards. Ehret, however, is the latest of those who think that it happened some hundreds of years previously on the African coast, being linked not only to the arrival of the south-east Asian food crops, but to that of the chicken and the pig, the outrigger canoe and the xylophone, an instrument whose dispersal across the forest zone matches that of the crops and the chicken. Between these opposite interpretations of the linguistic and ethnographic evidence, there is only the written evidence of the *Periplus* to point to India as the intermediary between Indonesia and Africa, and to the development of trade in the western Indian Ocean as necessary for the major south-east Asian contribution to the development of Africa and its Madagascan outlier. For that trade, ships were evidently essential; and the *Periplus* again points to India when it derives the name of Rhapta from *rhapta ploiaría* or ‘boats sewn together with rope’, a type of construction that survives in southern India. What is clear is that, while the manner and the date may not be understood, the input of Asia into Africa in Ehret’s Classical Age was a major contribution to the peopling of the south, to the development of its population and its agriculture in the Early Iron Age.

V

If the Greek merchants of the Roman empire stimulated the development of trade in the western Indian Ocean, and the written legacy of their voyages is the sole witness to the exchange between the sea and the land down the east coast of Africa in the age of the Bantu expansion, their knowledge of the southerly trend of the coastline did not lead to a proper appreciation of the size and shape of the continent. Instead, the argument in the geographical literature is whether the coast turned west or continued east from Cape Mossilytes (Cape Guardafui) at the tip of the Horn. Discussed by Pliny, its turn to the west was derived from the accounts of Herodotus, Strabo and Pliny himself of partially or wholly successful attempts to sail around Africa. Affirmed by Ptolemy, its continuation to the east was dictated by cosmog-

raphy, his mathematical concept of the world as a whole.

Evaluated by Cary and Warmington in *The Ancient Explorers*, accounts of attempts to sail around Africa begin with Herodotus, who tells the one and only tale of a successful circumnavigation, made from east to west by Phoenicians sent from Egypt by the Pharaoh Necho II around 600 BCE. Stories of subsequent attempts to sail from west to east are tales of failure, but may be compared with the account of a successful expedition down the west coast of Africa by the Carthaginian Hanno about a hundred years later at the beginning of the fifth century BCE. Like the *Periplus*, the account stands outside the main body of the literature as an apparently first-hand narrative, though one which survives only in a tenth century CE copy of a Greek translation of an original inscription. Unlike the *Periplus*, it does not document a regular trade with West Africa to the south of the Sahara. Although placed by Harden, *The Phoenicians*, in the context of Carthaginian seafaring in the Atlantic, embracing the Canaries, Madeira and even the Azores, the report of Hanno's voyage serves to illustrate the contrast between the Atlantic coast of Africa and that of the Indian Ocean, isolated rather than in contact with the world at large. It is nevertheless circumstantial, listing islands, rivers, coasts and mountains, speaking of peoples who were either hostile or timid, and referring to what appear to be the bush fires of slash-and-burn agriculture. It has accordingly attracted a great deal of attention as a contemporary witness to the west coast of Africa at the very beginning of the Iron Age. By contrast, Herodotus' tale of the Phoenician circumnavigation is excessively brief, and while not impossible, as Cary and Warmington argue at some length, has generally been discounted. If indeed it did take place, nothing came of it. By the time of Pliny, who peopled the interior of the continent beyond the limits of Roman knowledge with half-human monsters – headless, dog-headed, one-eyed, goat-legged, strap-footed, a southern coast from Cape Guardafui to the Straits of Gibraltar was merely a matter of unconfirmed report. It was left to Ptolemy to place the continent firmly if erroneously on the map of the world.

The notion of the continent was obscured by nomenclature: Africa by extension from the Roman province in the north; Libya for the lands to the west of Egypt; Ethiopia, 'land of the burnt faces', for the country to the south; and Arabia in the east, which Strabo held to begin at the Nile rather than the Red Sea. Of these, however, only Africa corresponded to the awareness of a great land mass to set together with Europe and Asia on the surface of the globe, as a third part of the dry land in the midst of the sea. Physical thus triumphed over human geography in identifying and naming the continent, while still unaware of its size and shape. The notion of the earth as a sphere is ascribed to the Greek mathematician Pythagoras in the sixth century BCE; in the third century BCE the size of that sphere had been calculated more or less correctly by Eratosthenes at Alexandria, from the angle between a shadow cast at Aswan at midday in midsummer, when the sun was virtually overhead, and one cast at the same time at Alexandria some 800 kilometres to the north. Latitude could thus be reckoned fairly accurately; but establishing the shape, size, position and direction of lands and seas, rivers and

coasts was another matter. Eratosthenes' method was never systematically employed in a survey to fix the latitude of a large number of points; and no method at all was devised for the measurement of longitude. In the end, Ptolemy was forced to rely upon descriptions of countries and itineraries, with estimates of distances and directions, in his attempt to plot the earth's surface on a grid of lines of latitude and longitude. The result, as Cary and Warmington observe, was that 'the apparent exactitude' of 'this great standard work...based on the fullest collection of data and aimed at the highest level of precision', was 'wholly delusive'. As far as Africa was concerned, the coast from Cape Guardafui continued eastwards to meet up with south-east Asia, enclosing the Indian Ocean in the manner of the Mediterranean to form a second sea in the middle of the land, running in from the ocean that encircled the bloc of the continents. It was a conclusion which on the authority of Ptolemy survived for the next thirteen hundred years.

PART III

Africa in the World



THE SCRIPTURAL DIMENSION



15

Christianity in the World of Late Antiquity

I

'By this sign you will be victorious'

The sign was the Christian Cross, which gave victory, so he believed, to the Emperor Constantine in 312 CE, and began the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire. It was a conviction, in his case, halfway between the Classical notion of a father-god such as Jupiter, who presided over the natural order of the world and gave victory to his favourites, and the Biblical notion of a god with a message, who required a missionary to deliver it, a people to believe in it, and by extension, a statesman to institute it as the divine order of society. Under Constantine and his successors, it was the Biblical notion that prevailed. His victory over his rival for the throne began a new era in which belief in such a God and the truth of His scriptural commandments was established as the beginning and end of life and knowledge. As a principle of knowledge it imposed a new frame of reference on the wisdom of Greece and Rome to meet the new criteria of revelation. As a rule of life it became the prerequisite of government, with or without the state. For the latter it was a two-edged weapon. On the one hand it required obedience to the ruler on the authority of God; but on the other it measured his performance against the divine decree. In the first instance it was a formula for unanimity and submission, in the second a recipe for disagreement and opposition. This was immediately apparent in the situation created by the conversion of Constantine. Because self-governing Christian communities or churches had been in existence for almost three hundred years before the conversion, and had only recently been confronted with the demand of a pagan emperor for recognition of his divinity, the adoption of their faith as that of the empire did not necessarily lead to acceptance of imperial authority in matters of religion. Instead, the world of Late Antiquity, as the period of the Christian empire from the beginning of the fourth to the beginning of the seventh century CE is called,

was shot through with resistance to the attempt of the emperors to establish a single Church with a single doctrine for a single Christian community for the entire population of the empire. A dominant theme in the sources, nowhere was this more so than in North Africa and Egypt.

II

‘Sir, good morning!’ The notion of an intimate spirit world was familiar to the north as well as south of the Sahara. Closely associated with places and peoples, such familiarity had been personally, socially and politically important throughout Antiquity: personally, for health and prosperity; socially, for the coherence of the community, from the family up to the people; and politically, for the prestige of the people and the power of the state. As both places and peoples around the Mediterranean grew into an international community economically and politically united in the Roman empire, so the multitude of local divinities achieved a broad religious unity through their assimilation to the gods and goddesses of Greece and Rome. Through such syncretism Jupiter, the father of the Roman gods, became the supreme god of the empire, with whose worship the emperor was associated. Sacrifice was due to the emperor as a sign of loyalty, whatever other deities in the multifarious pantheon may have been worshipped. Such unification of belief and practice was reinforced rather than offset by the widespread popularity of non-Roman cults that spread across the empire from their countries of origin. The worship of Osiris, the Egyptian god of death and resurrection, and of Isis, the wife and mother whose devotion brought him back to life, was launched into the Graeco-Roman world under the Ptolemies. Persian in origin, the cult of the hero Mithras, slayer of the bull and champion of the unconquered sun, was adopted in the Roman army and eventually by the emperors themselves; it was a religion of initiates who met for ritual meals. These elements were similarly present in Christianity, the messianic offshoot of Judaism which had abandoned the expectation of a great earthly kingdom, and looked forward to life after death in the kingdom of heaven. What distinguished Christianity from the rest was the belief that it took from Judaism in a single God; the textual basis of that belief in a scriptural record of divine revelation; and its ecclesiastical, that is its congregational organisation into local churches, with priests and bishops, all belonging to the one international community. It was that belief and that organisation which, once adopted by Constantine, replaced the ceremonial and otherwise undemanding worship of Jupiter with the exclusive requirements of a single faith as the religion of state.

The development of Christianity into the one and only religion of the Roman empire is treated by Peter Brown in *The World of Late Antiquity. From Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*. While it had grown up in opposition to the cult of the Roman emperor, and formed in consequence an alternative society to that of the empire, Christianity was in fact well placed to take over the state and the organisation of its subjects at a time when the old repub-

lican model of government was giving way under pressure to maintain the revenues of the empire. By the fourth century CE the situation in Egypt, where the municipal system with its liturgies had been introduced to guarantee the yield of taxation, had become typical of the empire as a whole. By then, however, Christianity had not only adopted but transformed the model into an effective substitute for the former *civitas*. As the religion of an international community, the Ecclesia or Congregation whose membership was open to all who submitted to baptism at the hands of the priest, not only did it offer an equivalent to Roman citizenship. Like Roman citizenship, it required its members to participate in their government through the election of their local bishops, the English form of Latin *episcopi*, 'supervisors' who not only ordained the priests who administered the sacraments and led the prayers, but saw to the conduct and welfare of the flock. By the fourth century this episcopal organisation was not only widespread and well-developed, but offered an alternative to the decaying municipality as a structure for the community in this late Roman world. To the emperor, in consequence, it offered a popular form of government detached from the tax-collecting organisation which had reduced the municipality to an instrument of the fisc. By the same token, it offered him the kind of support that the municipal system could no longer provide. While churches built away from the centre of the Roman city took the place of the forum in the life of the town, the Christian Church became a mainstay of the dynasty founded by Constantine.

If the structure of the Church was ready to hand for the purpose of the state, its success in this role depended upon the extension of Christianity to the whole of the population. This, in Brown's opinion, was achieved not from above but from below, by the God-possessed, to quote the title of Jacques Lacarrière's study of the ascetics of Egypt and Syria. A product of the faith, these holy men were at the same time agents of its spread, but in a very different way from the priests and bishops of the organised Church. In their devotion to God and their battle with the Devil they withdrew from society instead of ministering to it, only to find their supernatural authority invoked for assistance in all kinds of trouble. In Egypt, their flight into the desert went under the same name, *anachoresis*, as the flight of the peasantry into vagabondage and banditry, giving them the name of anchorites. But in the desert, asceticism gave rise to yet another structure in the form of the monastery. In the fourth century, the colonies of Egyptian anchorites were formed by the Coptic saint Pachomius into monastic communities living according to the comprehensive rules he laid down. These communities, housed in their own compounds, were rapidly integrated into the episcopal structure of the Church in Egypt, which was centred on the old municipal districts under the supreme authority of the Patriarch of Alexandria, to such an extent that monks began to take it over as bishops themselves. Like the bishoprics, the monasteries became rich in the land they were given by the pious, and rose to social, economic, administrative and political importance in the government of the country. The pattern described by Roger Bagnall in *Egypt in Late Antiquity* was repeated right across the empire, where bishops

enjoyed not only the support of the state but the aid of the monks, whose monasteries provided them with the personnel they required to discharge their growing responsibilities in government.

Both the isolated ascetic and the monk in his monastery were initially men, and women, of the people, whose role in the conversion of the population to Christianity led Brown to conclude that 'paganism was brutally demolished from below.' With the freedom allowed them by the Christian empire, they were indeed involved in sporadic violence well into the fifth century; certainly in Egypt, where they roused the Coptic majority for the faith. The Coptic vernacular became a written language into which the Christian Scriptures were translated from the Greek, while the old Demotic script, associated with the worship of the old Egyptian gods, fell into disuse. Greek nevertheless remained the language of administration, and its literature and learning survived as the culture of an upper and middle class whose acceptance of Christianity was largely unproblematic. Bagnall's conclusion in *Egypt in Late Antiquity* was increasingly valid for the empire as a whole, including the Latin-speaking west, where at the end of the fourth century the scholarly Augustine finally accepted baptism, and returned to his native North Africa to become both a bishop and a theologian. It was as a theologian that he put his scholarship to work, and became involved in the doctrinal controversies that split the Church in defiance of the emperors' attempt to ensure that it was both catholic and orthodox, a single body with a common doctrine.

As bishop of Hippo, modern Annaba in Algeria, Augustine's immediate concern was with the Donatists, the followers of Donatus, who had broken away from the Church when his election as bishop of Carthage was rejected by Constantine. Their objection to the candidate he favoured was that he and his fellows had betrayed their faith in the face of persecution by the previous emperor Diocletian, and were thus unworthy of their office. Under the leadership of Donatus, they took over most of the North African bishoprics, and allied themselves with the Circumcellions, bands of zealots who in the name of God invaded the estates of the landowning aristocracy. Giving a voice to the lower orders of society in town and country, Donatism survived repression in the middle of the century, and went on to support the rebellion of the Berber chieftain Firmus in 373–5, and that of his brother Gildo in 397–8. The defeat of Gildo, however, opened the way to its final condemnation by Augustine as the spokesman of orthodoxy, and to the expulsion of its clergy from their bishoprics in 412, exactly a hundred years after its inception. Deprived of its base in the Church, Donatism was driven underground, while in the hands of its Catholic opponents, the Church itself entered upon a period of wealth and magnificence in alliance with the state.

The story is told by W. H. C. Frend in *The Donatist Church*, summarised along with his companion work *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement* in Vol. II of *The Cambridge History of Africa*. It hinges on the definition of Donatism as a heresy, a belief contrary to the orthodox doctrine of the Church laid down by agreement at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and confirmed by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The long interval is significant of a much

wider controversy than the parochial insistence of the Donatists on the worthiness of men to be priests. In the home of Greek philosophy at Alexandria, the question was raised of the nature of Christ: wholly human, wholly divine, or neither, or both, and led to a passionate struggle for control of the Church right across the empire between the protagonists of the various doctrines. In Egypt itself, the struggle began as in North Africa, in recriminations surrounding the persecution under Diocletian, followed by the agreement between Athanasius, the Greek Patriarch of Alexandria, the Coptic monk Pachomius and the anchorite Anthony on the essential divinity of Christ. Such unanimity illustrates the relative ease with which Christianity in Egypt became a national as well as a popular religion, whose strength made the Patriarch of Alexandria a vigorous contender for control of the entire Church and its beliefs. But when at the Council of Chalcedon the majority of Churchmen finally accepted the doctrine of the dual nature of Christ, divine and human, as the Orthodox, Catholic version of the faith, the Egyptians settled for Monophysitism, the doctrine of his sole divinity, and like the Donatists entered into opposition.

III

As Christianity took over the civilising mission of Rome, adding the ideology of a common faith to that of a common citizenship under a common law, the partisanship generated by these contentious doctrines and their quarrelsome champions added popular excitement and violence to the politics of an empire whose unity was more profoundly under threat. The old division between the Latin-speaking west and the Greek-speaking east was accentuated, and the relationship between them reversed, when Constantine founded his city of Constantinople, modern Istanbul in Turkey, which gradually became the seat of government. Bagnall's account of Egypt in Late Antiquity describes a return to prosperity as the setting of more moderate tax quotas enabled the liturgists in the municipal capitals to benefit rather than suffer from their obligations, and emerge as a wealthy landowning class. This prosperity was common to the Greek east at a time when the landowners in the Latin west were abandoning the cities for their estates in the countryside, where they were largely self-sufficient. Politically, the difference was finally conceded in 395, when the empire was divided between the brothers Arcadius in the east and Honorius in the west. The division is the starting-point for Averil Cameron's *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395–600*, at the beginning of a century in which the whole of the west fell into the hands of the so-called barbarians.

Barbarian was the Greek and Latin term for peoples outside the empire who spoke neither of the languages of civilisation, ranging from the highly, in the modern sense, civilised Persians to the tribal nomads of the Sahara, with both of whom the Romans were intermittently at war. But those who overran the empire in the west were Germanic peoples from beyond the Rhine and the Danube, in particular the Goths and the Vandals, nomadic

cavalrymen capable of moving over long distances. In 429 the Vandal horde crossed the Straits of Gibraltar, invaded Numidia in 430, and in 439 captured Carthage, from where their kings ruled the eastern North African provinces of the empire and a Carthaginian-style empire of their own in the Balearic Islands, Corsica, Sardinia and briefly in Sicily. In North Africa they were doubly foreign, as barbarians and as heretics. As barbarians they settled, like the Carthaginians and the first Romans, on estates in northern Tunisia and down the eastern coast, leaving central Tunisia and eastern Algeria in the hands of the existing Roman estate owners. As heretics they were Arians, believers in the human nature of Christ, who treated Augustine's Catholics as the Catholics had treated the Donatists, depriving them of their bishoprics. Ethnically and religiously, they kept themselves apart from their subjects, but ruled them lightly, so that agriculture continued to flourish along with Latin in the limited region under their control. The cities, on the other hand, were largely deserted, and the Mauretanian provinces of the empire, through northern Morocco to central Algeria, were left to themselves. With Roman rule at an end, the balance described by Fentress in *The Berbers* tilted in favour of the native barbarians, the tribal Berber allies and enemies of Rome, who came down from the mountains to attack what remained of the cities, while their chiefs, the successors of Firmus and Gildo, established their own kingdoms, stretching from western Algeria through the Aures mountains in eastern Algeria to southern Tunisia. On the margin of civilisation, these are barely visible either in the written sources or the archaeological record. But like the old Numidians and Mauretanians, and like the Vandals themselves, their kings claimed to belong to the Roman world even as they broke it up, and even while, professing Christianity, they resurrected the style of their ancestors: the cult of royalty represented by the Medracen and the so-called Tomb of the Christian Queen, the tombs of the old Numidian and Mauretanian kings, reappeared in the Djedar, huge pyramidal tombs in western Algeria.

That was not the case with the peoples of the Sahara, whom the zealots within the *limes* had neglected to proselytise, and whose way of life and warfare had by the fourth century been transformed by the adoption of the camel as a pastoral animal rather than a simple beast of burden. Surveyed by Raymond Mauny in Vol. II of *The Cambridge History of Africa*, the argument is summarised by Brett in Mattingly, *The Libyan Desert*. Arabian in origin, as a beast of burden the camel had been in use in Egypt and subsequently in North Africa at least from the time of Strabo. But as a pastoral animal it may have spread into the Sahara from the south-east in the first centuries CE, reversing the progressive concentration of the population in the oases by permitting the reoccupation of the desert by pastoral nomads. The result was conflict rather than cooperation with the settlers of Tripolitania to the north and the Garamantes in the Fezzan to the south. Noted in *The Libyan Desert* by Brett, relying on Mattingly, Roman material disappeared from the Fezzan in Late Antiquity, while its settlements were increasingly fortified. Whatever the trading network may have been, it was interrupted, with only the so-called Tomb of Tin Hinan as evidence of continuity. Located at Abalessa

between the Fezzan and the Niger bend, the structure housed the fifth-century burial of a woman with gold and silver bracelets, together with Roman cups, lamps and coins of the fourth century. But as the pull of the Roman market economy weakened, the greater attraction of plunder culminated in the sack of Leptis Magna by the Austuriani in the fourth century. Such raiding was endemic in the Vandal period, when the Leuathae established a pagan shrine at Ghirza on the desert edge of Tripolitania, and went on to confront the forces of Constantinople when these retook North Africa from the Vandals in the sixth century.

Beginning in 533, the reconquest was part of the Emperor Justinian's attempt to recover the western provinces of the empire from the barbarians. The military operation lasted for fifteen years as his generals fought to subdue the Berber confederations surrounding the Vandal domain. Abandoned since the Vandal invasion in 429, the Mauretanian provinces to the west were never recovered apart from Ceuta on the Straits of Gibraltar. To the east, however, massive fortifications on the site of the largely empty cities secured control of Numidia, old Roman Africa and Tripolitania against the Berbers, once again in precarious alliance with Rome. 'Rome' now meant Constantinople, government by Greeks, and the resumption of heavy taxation; but the native Latin Catholic Church was splendidly restored, provoking the recrudescence, and final suppression, of Donatism. In this way, by the beginning of the seventh century, Roman Africa had been reconstituted under its exarch or military and civilian governor as a solid provincial state comprising eastern Algeria and Tunisia, for the moment detached from Tripolitania, which had been annexed to Egypt. It was moreover wealthy enough in grain and olive oil to launch the naval expeditions that in 610 placed Heraclius, the son of the exarch, on the imperial throne.

IV

By that time Egypt had endured over a century of imperial intolerance of the Monophysite Coptic Church of Alexandria, whose bishoprics and ecclesiastical property had been turned over to Orthodox Catholics. It nevertheless survived as the popular Church, all the more Coptic now that its Orthodox rival was predominantly Greek. Still more influentially, it became the Church of the whole of north-east Africa, of Nubia and Ethiopia. With the conversion of Constantine, Christianity gained prestige as an imperial religion, and by 350 Ezana, the king of Axum, was claiming victory in the name of the Lord of Heaven and the Lord of All, and striking fresh coins with the sign of the Cross. His conversion is attributed to the Syrian Frumentius, a castaway who in the Biblical manner of Moses rose to become the regent of the kingdom, then returned to Alexandria to be consecrated bishop of Axum by the Patriarch Athanasius. Whatever the truth of this story, Frumentius was indeed appointed by Athanasius and the Egyptian affiliation of the Ethiopian Church established, while the emperor Constantius addressed Ezana as his 'brother'. Ezana himself claimed lordship over Meroe in the west

and the Yemen in the east, on the strength of conquests by his pagan predecessors; but there is no subsequent evidence for this empire, or for Christianity, before the sixth century, when Axum reappeared in the religious and political affairs of Constantinople, and a second *Periplus* gave a description of the kingdom that is recognisable in the surviving ruins of the city.

The Christian Topography attributed to 'Cosmas Indicopleustes' was once again written, like the *Periplus*, by a (Christian) merchant of Alexandria in the mid-sixth century to describe the Red Sea. Both Adulis and Axum are included, with a pictorial map showing the stela, a towered palace and a throne with columns. The author gives an account of government expeditions southwards over the mountains to barter cattle, salt and iron for gold; about the same time an ambassador from Constantinople described an audience with the king. As summarised by Jones and Monroe in *A History of Ethiopia*, these first-hand accounts serve, with the coinage, to bring the archaeological record into focus, and to anchor the contemporary references of Justinian's historians and the subsequent written tradition of the Ethiopian Church and monarchy. These deal on the one hand with the establishment of monasticism, and on the other with the conquest of the Yemen. Monasticism was introduced around the beginning of the sixth century by the so-called Nine Saints, Brown's zealous holy men in the form of Syrian and Egyptian Monophysites, escaping from persecution to place the Church in Ethiopia on a firm monastic footing under the successors of Frumentius, who continued to be sent out from Egypt by the Coptic Patriarch. The conquest of the Yemen, which reconstituted the shadowy Axumite empire of the third and fourth centuries, was achieved around 525 by the king Kaleb in response to the persecution of Christians in the country by the Jewish king of Himyar, in the context of the rivalry between Constantinople and the Sassanian Persian empire for control of Arabia. Kaleb's conquest as an ally of Constantinople installed a Christian viceroy as ruler of Himyar, but failed to reopen the trade of the Indian Ocean to the Greeks after it had fallen into Arab and Persian hands. East Africa, as a result, had sunk below the horizon of the Graeco-Roman world.

Nubia, on the other hand, reemerged along with Ethiopia in the written record of the sixth century. The occasion was its conversion to Christianity after a long 'dark age' in which the Meroitic script disappeared, and Nubia was barely mentioned in the Classical literature. After the middle of the third century, the only reference to Meroe is in the long account by Ezana of Axum of his expedition to the region around 350, the subject of the inscription in which he invoked the Lord of Heaven. Given in translation by Shinnie in *Meroe*, the inscription records his victory over the Noba, in rebellion after some previous conquest. The Noba were evidently in possession of the territory and towns of Meroe; a change in burial type from the third century onwards suggests that they had supplanted the old kingdom, perhaps as immigrants from the west; while the mention in the inscription of a capital at Alwa points to the future kingdom of that name. The Noba may equally have occupied the region of Napata; but further north, from the Third Cataract to Aswan, the burial type changes yet again, with the mention in the

Roman sources of two other peoples, the Nobatae in conflict with the Blemmyes to the east of the river, and an inscription to commemorate the victory of the king of the Nobatae. In his *Nubia*, Adams puts these references in archaeological context, with the evidence for a reoccupation of the valley south of Aswan in the first centuries CE, following the introduction of the *saqiya* or horizontal wheel for raising water from the river. In Late Antiquity, however, as the valley came under threat from the desert and the Romans withdrew to Aswan, mound graves reminiscent of ancient Kerma two thousand years earlier point to a basic continuity of population and culture under barbarian monarchs. The immense mound tombs at Ballana and Qustul surrounded two such kings with human and animal sacrifice, again in the manner of Kerma, and with regalia mixing Ancient Egyptian with Roman emblems. But no palaces or temples have been found to establish some kind of political continuity with the past, and the suggestion is that these rulers were indeed invaders of the Classical world, in common with those elsewhere. Only in the sixth century does the political outline become clear with the dispatch of three imperial missions by Justinian and his empress Theodora to achieve the conversion to Christianity of three kingdoms on the middle Nile: Nobatia in the north; Makuria across the great S-bend of the river; and Alodia, i.e. Alwa, in the south. When it does so, it is the kingdom of Makuria in the original heartland of Kush that emerges from invisibility in the archaeological record of the previous century to become the most important of the three, turning Nobatia into its northern province.

V

In ways like these, by the end of the sixth century the economic contraction and political fragmentation of the Roman empire in Late Antiquity had been offset by the expansion of Christianity. A new sacred history spelt out in Scripture had given the world a new meaning and a new purpose, expounded by Augustine, now a Saint and a Father of the Church, in *The City of God*. The idea of a Creator had imposed itself upon the knowledge and beliefs of Classical Antiquity as an explanation for the laws of nature as well as a source for the laws of man. And as the Biblical narrative of patriarchs, prophets and saints took the place of the gods and their legends, so it accounted for humanity in terms of descent from Adam and Eve, and for its peoples as races descended from Noah. Government in the widest sense had been radically affected, not least in the lands beyond the imperial frontiers, in Nubia and in Ethiopia. There, the acceptance of Christianity mapped the final extent of Roman contact with tropical Africa. In doing so, it revealed the fundamental importance of the Nile and the Red Sea as routes across the desert belt, but at the same time the permanence of the Sahara as a barrier to the west between the Mediterranean and the savannah. Coinciding with the end of the Early Iron Age in sub-Saharan Africa, the accomplishment of the peopling of the South with the spread of the Bantu, and the completion

of the growth of Jenne-jeno from village to city on the Upper Niger, the spread of the religion thus rounded off the scene of Africa in Antiquity even as it brought Antiquity itself to an end. As far as Africa itself was concerned, the references in the Bible and the writings of Augustine and his fellows, collected up by Van Wyk Smith in *The First Ethiopians*, were added to those of the Classical authors as texts for the approach to the continent and its history in Europe from the fifteenth century onwards. But the real triumph of the Scriptural dimension on the continent was reserved for the coming of Islam with the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, which superseded Christianity and spread far more widely across the Sahara.



16

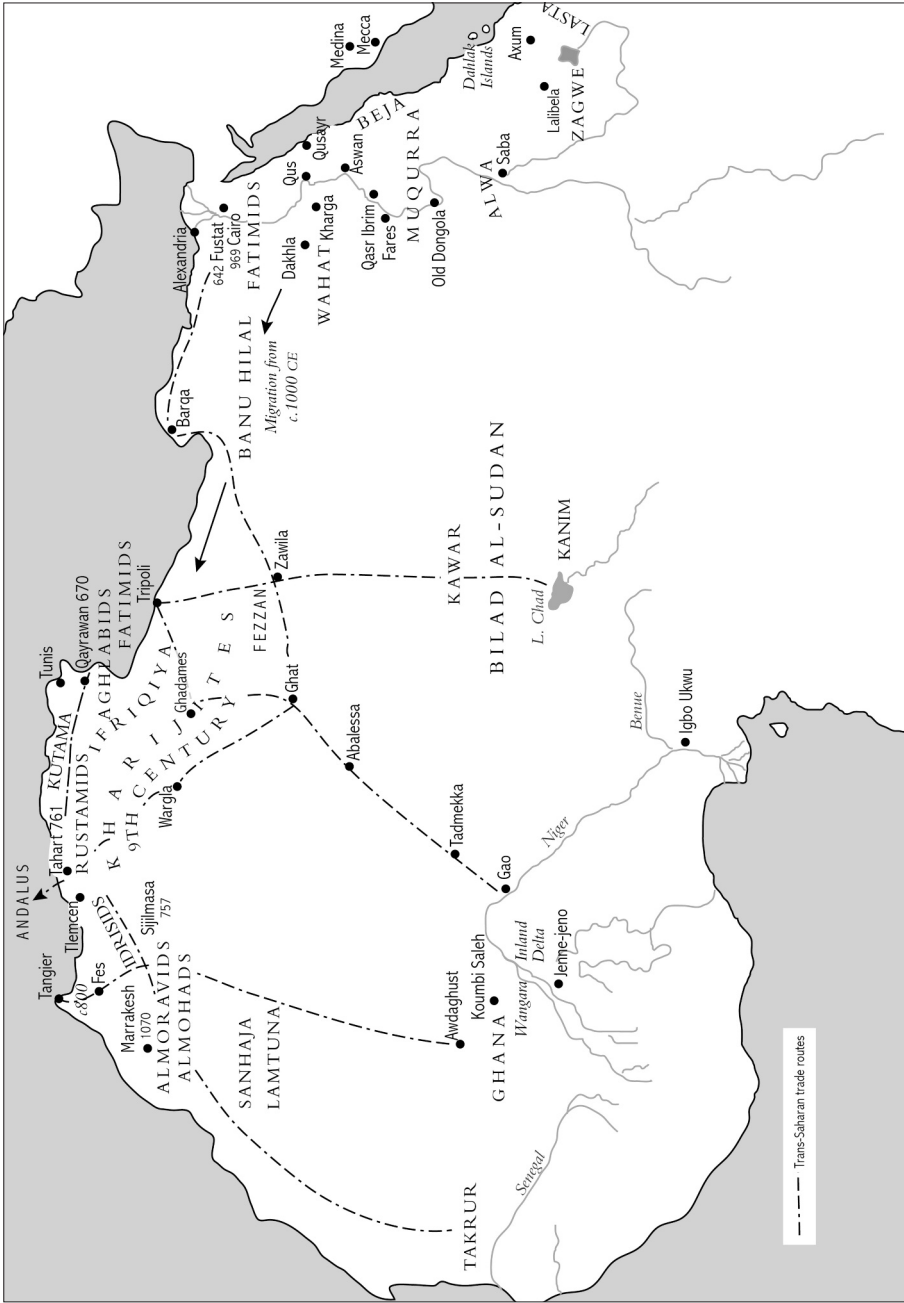
The Arabs & Islam

I

'There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger'

The Arabs who invaded Syria and Iraq in the 630s were not only the last and most successful of the barbarians to overrun the Roman frontier, but the last and greatest of the heretics. As followers of a new man 'sent from God' in the Biblical tradition of Judaism and Christianity, they differentiated themselves from both as the champions of a final revelation. And as his followers, they differed from the rest of the barbarians in the faith that turned them from tribesmen into the members of a disciplined community with a mission to conquer and rule the world. By the 640s they had appropriated the whole of the Persian empire together with the Roman provinces of Syria and Egypt, and were probing southwards into Nubia and westwards into North Africa. The conquest of North Africa was delayed until the end of the century, but was rapidly followed by the conquest of Spain. By 715, a hundred or so years after the date chosen for the beginning of their new era in 622 CE, they ruled an empire from the Atlantic to India and Central Asia from a capital at Damascus.

The conquest within a few years of Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Iran followed twenty years of exhausting warfare between the Persian and the Byzantine empires, in which Egypt had been occupied by the Persians for over ten. When the Byzantines returned, the province was only lightly garrisoned with the aid of local levies, while the population was alienated by renewed persecution of the Monophysites. After the Arab conquest, 640–2, these were rewarded with the recognition of their Church and the acquisition of all property held by their Orthodox rivals. Otherwise, the country continued to be administered as before by the landowning class, with the proceeds of taxation now going to the Arabs as tribute. These created for themselves a new capital, Fustat, out of the encampment of their army on the site of modern Cairo at the junction of the Valley and the Delta; after a thousand



11. The Establishment of Islam in Africa, 7th to 12th Centuries CE

years the seat of government thus returned from Alexandria on the coast to the location of the old Pharaonic capital of Memphis. This relatively smooth takeover was in sharp contrast to the subsequent struggle for North Africa, which emphasised yet again the historic difference between the two regions. Like the armies of Justinian, the Arabs in North Africa were fighting less with the Vandals and the Greeks than with the Berbers. Little is known about the rule of Constantinople in the province from the death of its governor in battle with the Arabs in southern Tunisia in 647, still less about the relationship of the Berbers to their kingdoms or chieftaincies in the previous century. The Arab conquest began in 670, when the Arabs established a war camp at Qayrawan to the south of Carthage, but not until 695–705 was Carthage itself captured, Berber opposition overcome, and Justinian's old province of Africa annexed as Ifriqiya. Thereafter, the recruitment of so many Berber warriors into their army enabled them to advance through the old Roman Mauretania to invade and conquer Spain from the Visigoths between 710 and 715.

Impossible without that recruitment, the Arab invasion and conquest of old Roman North Africa was the final breakthrough from the desert into the preserve of the old empire, drawing in peoples like the Leuathae, who appear in the Arabic sources as the Lawata, and incorporating those further west, the Berbers of the Aures mountains and beyond, for the conquest of Spain. Their recruitment into the Arab armies however, was on the Arabs' terms, in terms, that is, of the Arabs' concept of themselves as a race apart, distinguished by their faith from the rest of mankind in the Biblical line of descent from the sons of Noah: Ham, Shem and Japhet. In taking over the government of Egypt, therefore, they had classified the Copts as a race of Christians entitled to protection in return for the payment of their taxes; when they eventually established themselves in Ifriqiya, they treated the Latin Christian population in the same way. The tribal peoples of the Sahara and North Africa, who had previously been dismissed as *barbari*, 'barbarians', were similarly identified as a race called 'the Barbar', 'the Berbers'. They were, however, defined as pagans, unbelievers who were to be fought until they submitted, not only to the Arabs, but by extension to God, in whose name they had been conquered. The result was ambiguous. The encounter with the Berbers to the west of Egypt began with raids that enslaved the captives, and went on to impose upon the vanquished a tribute of slaves; from these came the first Berber recruits into the army. But from such pacts with the defeated grew the idea, in the course of the protracted conquest of Ifriqiya, that the whole of this great Berber nation had submitted, and entered the community of the faithful at a level below the Arabs at the top. Alliances could thus be made and accepted by various Berber peoples in return for their incorporation into the army, and the prospect of sharing the rewards of further conquest. The 'snowball effect' this produced not only enabled but necessitated the invasion of Spain by a largely Berber army. But there, without the further recruitment of Spaniards into the army, the 'snowball effect' came to an end. Arabs and Berbers alike settled down as the new rulers of the country they called Andalus, while in North Africa the relationship soured.

II

The completion of the conquest was followed by the creation of a provincial administration based upon the collection of taxes and their return as tribute to the seat of the Arab empire at Damascus, at a time in the first half of the eighth century when the demand for revenue was increasing and tax collection was tightening. In Egypt a major structural change was in progress, as the Arabs sought to compel the Coptic district governors, the heirs of the old Roman liturgists who in Late Antiquity had come to form a landowning class, to increase the tax yield at the expense of the peasants. Arabic was introduced in place of Greek as the language of administration; and by the second half of the century tax assessment and collection had been taken over by treasury officials, as in Ptolemaic times. In the meantime, however, the peasantry was, as in Roman times, in flight from village to village to escape the exaction, and in 728 rose in what was the first of a long series of such rebellions. In North Africa those who rebelled were the Berbers, who found themselves returned to the humiliating status of payers of tribute in slaves after enjoying the privileges of conquerors. In this they were joined by Arabs who had either been excluded from the army, or relegated by the waves of new arrivals who came from Syria and Egypt with each new governor. What united them both was the faith, the conviction that all believers were equal, but that only the best were entitled to rule. On both counts the Arabs who governed the empire had betrayed their trust; as sinners they had abandoned their faith and were worthy of death. This conviction went under the name of Kharijism, which in North Africa may have appealed to the tradition of Donatism. Far more extreme than Donatism, however, Kharijism inspired a massive uprising of the Berbers in the 740s that spread from Tangier across to Tripoli, and left the Arabs beleaguered in Qayrawan. But the rebellion failed to spread eastwards; and in 750 the Umayyad dynasty at Damascus was overthrown by the 'Abbasids, a dynasty which claimed to restore the empire to the family of the Prophet. Coming from the far east rather than the far west of the empire, it settled in Iraq, where it built a new capital at Baghdad.

The story is told by Brett in Vol. II of *The Cambridge History of Africa*; in Vol. I of *The New Cambridge History of Islam*; and in Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*. The problem of the sources is summarised in *The Cambridge History of Africa*. For Egypt the mainly Greek but ultimately Arabic papyri continue to document the administration of the country, while *The History of the Patriarchs of Alexandria* records its history from the Coptic point of view. Otherwise there is little apart from the Arabic literature, which appeared in the eighth, but is only extant from the ninth century onwards. As a record of the previous two hundred years, this was not only retrospective. It was critically bound up with the development of the faith, which in the 'Abbasid period acquired the name of Islam, while Muslim became the common name of the believer. Like Christianity, Islam created its own frame of historical reference, a complete set of quite different persons, places and events substituted

for the Christian and the pre-Christian story. It did so, moreover, in an entirely new language and script, which completed this reorientation by cutting off its readers and speakers from the Greek and Latin record of the past. These languages did not suffer the fate of the hieroglyphs, since they survived to the north of the Mediterranean, and Greek science and philosophy passed into Arabic translation. But from the standpoint of African, and of course Middle Eastern history, the continuity of the historical record was broken, and yet another team of specialists is now required in place of the students of the Classical languages – a fragmentation of expertise creating yet another problem of reconstruction of the African past.

The connection between the new faith, the new language and the new literature was integral to the development of the Shari'ah, the central feature of Islam. As it came to be defined in the ninth century, the Shari'ah was a divine code of law governing every aspect of human behaviour, revealed to humanity in the Qur'an or Book and the inspired behaviour or Sunnah of God's Messenger. What had begun as an ongoing process of rulings by Muhammad and his successors, the Caliphs or Lieutenants of God and His Messenger, dealing with the issues that arose with the growth of the community and its empire, was thus taken out of the hands of the ruler. Instead it fell to the scholars to compile and interpret the written record of what purported to be an oral tradition from the Prophet and his companions, and say what the law should be. Without the authority to legislate, the ruler became at best the supreme judge of the community, but essentially an administrator who delegated the task to the *qadi*, the judge whom he appointed to act in accordance with God's injunctions. The effect on government was the same as that of Christianity in the Late Roman empire. It is a famous dictum that there is no Church and State in Islam, since they are one and the same; and it is true that the *qadi* is an officer of state, while the jurists have no formal organisation to compare with that of the clergy. Nevertheless, as joint custodians of God's law, jurists and *qadi* combined to keep the community in obedience to God, while allowing the ruler the necessary discretion to maintain himself in power. That, fundamentally, meant the discretion to tax and to spend, which just as in the Christian empire whose provinces had fallen to the Arabs, meant a fisc or financial administration largely separate from the moral welfare of the citizen. The distinction is quite clear in al-Kindi's *Governors and Judges of Egypt*, a work of the tenth century which relates the history of the country since the conquest in two parallel lists, the first of the heads of state, the second of the heads of the judiciary.

A work like *Governors and Judges* was not only retrospective but also partisan, not only taking the side of Islam against the rest of the world, but sides within Islam. Kharijism was only one of the doctrinal disputes that as in Christianity divided the religious community. They were, however, far more revolutionary. Whereas the Roman empire had adopted Christianity only to become involved in theological argument, that of the Arabs had grown out of their faith, turning the political question of the succession to Muhammad into a religious issue, to be settled in this highly militarised

community by force of arms. The violence engendered by the Kharijite demand that the Prophet's successor should be the best of the faithful, whoever he might be; by the insistence that he should rather be a descendant of the Prophet; and by the expectation of a second Muhammad to finalise his mission, culminated in the 750 in the 'Abbasid revolution. This failed to put an end to the argument, and over the next hundred years the violence continued, contained with difficulty by the new armies of the new dynasty. Those armies were nevertheless a feature of the fundamental changes which had altered the whole relationship between the state and its subjects. Among these changes, the development of the Shari'ah and the distinction between governors and judges was part of a wider separation of the ruler from the ruled. Underlying that separation was the fading away of the Arabs as a warrior elite, and the growth of the Muslim community from an army into a larger and larger cross-section of the population.

III

In Egypt, this evolution was visible in the development of the Arab capital, Fustat, from an army encampment into a civilian metropolis, centred upon its great mosque. What began as the equivalent of the Roman forum, a place of assembly, worship and government, became a building with a prayer hall and courtyard associated with the qadi and the jurists, the leaders of the community, while its commander, the governor, moved his residence elsewhere. This physical separation of functions was complete when the 'Abbasids installed their governor and his army of occupation in a new encampment outside the city altogether, and Fustat became essentially civilian. Over the previous hundred years the original Arab army had been diluted by the acquisition of dependants and offspring, who multiplied from generation to generation to create this urban population, as well as a growing element in the countryside. In the process, the number of warriors entitled to pay became a smaller and smaller minority of the Muslim community. With the coming of the 'Abbasids this Arab militia was marginalised, until in 834 it was abolished after years of resistance in which the Coptic peasantry had joined. The final suppression of that resistance in 832 had called for the arrival of the Caliph himself with an army of Turks. Under a series of Turkish governors, the political influence of the landowning Arab aristocracy was at an end; an Arab peasant population had appeared alongside that of the Copts; the Church had been weakened by destruction of its churches; and the Coptic majority had begun to dwindle. The probable reason was not so much conversion to Islam, which had been generally allowed since 750, as the failure of the Copts to match the rate of reproduction of the Muslim community. In a basically static population of around five million, such failure could only lead to gradual diminution and steady replacement. In the mid-ninth century, after years of conflict, the population was probably much smaller, as yet another reform of the fiscal system suggests. Direct collection was abandoned in favour of a return to the old Roman system of tax-

farming as a means of bringing land back into cultivation. Those who undertook to guarantee the cultivation and revenue of the floodplain enjoyed a measure of tax relief to attract more peasants for the purpose, rewarding the very behaviour the government had previously tried to suppress.

Over the same period in North Africa, governors appointed by Baghdad eventually expelled the Kharijite Berber invaders from Ifriqiya, and as in Egypt, finally managed to put down the rebellions of the Arab militia and the landowning Arab aristocracy. Far harder than the task in Egypt, however, in the end this was only accomplished by the recognition of an Arab governor as hereditary ruler of the province on behalf of the Caliph. The Aghlabid dynasty which he founded in 800 brought out the full political significance of the Egyptian experience. Like Fustat, Qayrawan became a civilian metropolis centred on its great mosque, home to the scholars of the Malikite school of law, who defeated an attempt by the Caliph in Baghdad to behave like the emperor in Constantinople, and decide upon the nature of the Qur'an rather than the nature of Christ. The Aghlabid prince, meanwhile, took up residence in a palace fortress outside the city, a separate royal city for his family, his administration, and his personal army, no longer composed of Arabs and Berbers but Slavs and Blacks, recruited as slaves from outside the lands of Islam. What remained of the Arab army was settled on the western frontier. The concept of the Muslim community as a nation in arms had not died with the ending of rebellion, and came to life in the state-sponsored invasion, conquest and settlement of Sicily that continued throughout the ninth century. But the state itself had come into the hands of autocrats whose government resembled that of the Late Roman empire. Rooted in taxation, it was conducted by a servant, frequently servile body of soldiers and secretaries in which non-Muslims might well be preferred to Muslims. The Aghlabid regime was a model of the future of the state in the lands conquered by the Arabs.

Conditions in Ifriqiya, however, were very different from those in Egypt, where the financial administration, still largely in the hands of the Copts, controlled the entire country. In Ifriqiya the native Latin-speaking Christian population was already in a minority, while taxes on cultivation were either rents paid by the tenants of state lands, or tribute paid by tribal Berbers visited by tax-collecting expeditions. Beyond the range of those expeditions, moreover, those same Berbers had formed themselves into a quite separate Muslim community under the leadership of a Kharijite emigrant from Iraq, who founded the Rustamid dynasty at Tahart on the high plains of western Algeria. Sustained by 'the swords of the Nafusa and the wealth of the Mazata', the Rustamids headed a vast conglomeration of peoples stretching down into the Sahara and across to the Fezzan, their dynasty torn between heredity and election by the faithful as the religious as well as political leaders of the people. This reappearance of a Berber kingdom, in the form of a theocracy under a monarch of foreign origin, testifies to the success of Islam in breaking down the old Roman *limes* to incorporate the rejects of Rome into the new civilisation of the new faith, and establishing itself in succession to Christianity as a necessary condition of state formation. To the south-west of Tahart,

at Sijilmasa on the edge of the Moroccan Sahara, a second Kharijite polity appeared under a Berber dynasty, but to the west a quite different set of Muslim princes from the east was accepted in old Roman Mauretania. These were descendants of the Prophet, who had challenged the 'Abbasids for the Caliphate, then fled beyond their reach. Idris, the original refugee at the end of the eighth century, came first to the old Roman capital Volubilis, still occupied by a Christian population, then founded the city of Fes. With a branch at Tlemcen in western Algeria, the Idrisids multiplied in the ninth century, creating in alliance with the Berbers of the countryside a rash of little Muslim cities under their rule, as described by Brett in the collection *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*.

IV

After the Arab conquests, the factor underlying this establishment of Islam as the organising principle of state and society was economic. The advance of the armies to east and west had created long-distance routes along which successive waves of emigrants came from the heart of the new empire, while tribute flowed back to its capital at Damascus. In North Africa, the flow of tribute was interrupted by the Kharijite rebellion, which broke the political as well as religious unity of the faithful in the empire of the Caliphs. Only Ifriqiya remained to the 'Abbasids; Tahart and Fes were independent, as was Muslim Spain. But the routes remained to stimulate the growth of long-distance trade, while facilitating the rise in every region of a community of scholars, as students travelled back and forth to the centres of learning at Medina in Arabia and Basra in Iraq. By the ninth century such movement was reinforced by the growth of the pilgrimage to Mecca, in which Muslims from the furthest reaches of the Islamic world travelled back in space and in time to the birthplace of their religion. In Africa the effect was to reconnect the west with the east after the political and economic division of the Roman world, and to regenerate the prosperity of the intercontinental economy from the Atlantic to China. It was greatly aided by the development of the Islamic law as an instrument of commerce that was valid throughout the Muslim world. The creation of this common market is described by Lombard in *The Golden Age of Islam*, and again by Chaudhuri in *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*. Its significance for Africa was greatly to enlarge the geographical scope of civilisation to the north of the Sahara. Its significance for African history was to extend the written record of that civilisation to the south of the Sahara, far beyond the limits of the Nilotic Sudan and Ethiopia to which the record of Greece and Rome had been largely confined. From the ninth century onwards, not only do the histories of the Arabs and their empire bear on this periphery of their world; the tradition of the Greek and Roman geographers was revived in a series of descriptions of the world at large, which continued down to the fourteenth century.

In the manner of those geographers, these descriptions populate the world

with the names of its peoples, whom they classify into races in accordance with the Biblical tradition of descent from Noah, and define in accordance with the law of Islam as believers and unbelievers – Muslims, Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians on the one hand, pagans on the other. Again in accordance with the law of Islam, these categories are further refined into those living under the rule of Islam and those outside – believers and unbelievers in a perpetual state of war with the Muslim faithful unless they have entered into a treaty relationship with the Muslim community. It is in accordance with these precepts that the Christian Copts had been placed under Muslim protection as tributary subjects, and the Berbers had been identified as a race and classified as Muslim. Beyond the boundaries of the Arab empire, they governed its dealings with the inhabitants of the surrounding ‘land of war’. In Africa these were the nations of the Blacks, divided between the Christian Nubians and Ethiopians and the pagan remainder. The former were deemed to be in some form of treaty relationship to the Arabs; the latter, beyond the Sahara, awaited the outcome of contact with Islam.

In this way, both Nubia and Ethiopia enter into the literature of Islam from the ninth century onwards. That is just as well, for their Christianity did not result in any indigenous body of literature that has survived from the centuries following the Arab conquests, or indeed from the lifetime of the Christian kingdoms of Nubia. Until the appearance in Ethiopia of a large body of writings in Ge’ez from the fourteenth century onwards, the principal Christian record for both countries is that of the Egyptian *History of the Coptic Patriarchs of Alexandria*, which makes occasional reference to the affairs of these dependencies of the Church at Alexandria. In Nubia at least, the Arabic record has been extended by archaeology, which in the course of excavation has recovered inscriptions and correspondence in both Greek and Nubian. One such find from the eighth century makes reference to the Baqt or Pact, the treaty concluded by the Arabs with the kingdom of Makuria in the seventh century after the repulse of their expedition to its capital at (Old) Dongola. The Baqt was political in so far as it provided for a Nubian tribute of 360 slaves a year, but commercial in so far as it envisaged the exchange of goods; and continued to define the relationship of Makuria, in Arabic Muqurra, to Islam in Egypt for almost seven hundred years. By the end of the seventh century, Makuria had evidently absorbed Nobatia, which was converted into a northern province guarded against further incursions from Egypt with a fortress on the Ancient Egyptian site at Qasr Ibrim. The Nubians themselves were capable of making their own incursions into Egypt; but distance ensured that the relationship was predominantly peaceful, despite the growing control of Aswan by tribal Arabs from the ninth century onwards. In the case of the southern kingdom of Alodia, in Arabic ‘Alwa, distance was such that there is only the presumption of its position in the eyes of the Islamic law.

The same is true of Ethiopia, for which the Arabic record is blank down to the end of the ninth century, apart from discussion of its legal status in the legal literature. When the Arabs took control of the Red Sea, Adulis was deserted for the ports of the Yemen, and Axum lost its position as an impe-

rial and commercial power at the beginning of an obscure period of transition. While it retained its ecclesiastical connection with Alexandria, whose Patriarch continued to send out an Egyptian to head the Ethiopian Church, the transformation of the kingdom is attested by archaeology, which reveals the abandonment of the city of Axum between the seventh and the tenth century. By Edward Ullendorf in *The Ethiopians*, and by Mekouria in Vol. III of the *UNESCO General History*, this is associated with the occupation of Eritrea and its coast by the Beja of the desert between the Nile and the Red Sea; it is explained by Connah in terms of his 'productive land hypothesis', as a result of overpopulation and land degradation. If so, this was a local factor which did not destroy the state itself. When the geographical literature of Islam takes notice of Ethiopia towards the end of the ninth century, it is apparent that Muslim merchants based on the Dahlak Islands and at Zeila, a new port close to modern Djibouti, continued to trade with the interior. The reference to the kingdom by the traveller al-Ya'qubi is meanwhile taken by Tadesse Tamrat in Vol. III of *The Cambridge History of Africa* to point to a capital over 300 kilometres to the south. Archaeologically unconfirmed, such a move in the direction taken by the trading expeditions noted by 'Cosmas Indicopleustes' in the sixth century may have represented their development into permanent occupation and settlement of the central highlands. If so, the origins of the later Ethiopian kingdom may have lain in a manner of state formation familiar from Mair and the empires of the south.

V

The appearance of the Horn and east coast of Africa in the written record of Islam was likewise delayed until the ninth and tenth centuries. But al-Ya'qubi's reference to Iraqi merchants at Zeila points to the continued monopoly of trade in the western Indian Ocean by those merchants from the old Persian empire who by the time of 'Cosmas' had confined the Greeks to the Red Sea. That their trade had flourished in the absence of any documentation was dramatically demonstrated at the time of al-Ya'qubi's writing by the revolt of slaves from the land of Zanj, the east African coast known to the Romans as Azania, put to work on the salt flats of southern Iraq. Along with Nubia and Ethiopia, the coast had been a source of slaves for the societies to the north of the Sahara since Roman times. The slave trade demonstrated by the revolt of the Zanj, however, was in response to the demand for slaves that the Arab conquests had stimulated, and whose satisfaction played an important part in the subsequent growth of the commercial economy and the consequent outreach of Islam. This was notably the case to the west of the Nile, where the taking of Berber slaves by the Arabs gave way after the Kharijite rebellion to the taking of Black slaves by the Berbers, and the opening up of the first regular trade route across the Sahara.

The Garamantes of the Fezzan, already on the defensive against the nomads to the north, had come under more sustained attack when these peoples were swept up into the Arab armies, and came to garrison an

encampment on the eastern edge of their territory. After the great Kharijite rebellion this encampment developed into the oasis city of Zawila, at the south-eastern extremity of the Kharijite realm of the Rustamids at Tahart. By the time of al-Ya'qubi the Zawilans were drawing slaves from the region of Lake Chad, whose kings, he said, enslaved and sold them without cause or pretext. He was making the point that as pagans dubiously enslaved outside the lands of Islam, they could nevertheless be imported as slaves, escaping the injunction of the Shari'ah that the inhabitants of those lands, Muslim and non-Muslim, were on principle free. The legal argument is summarised in Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*; its importance in the ninth century is that it served to prescribe the import of slaves from abroad to meet internal demand. In the Sahara that demand meant that for the first time, the possibilities of camel nomadism for the crossing of the desert were employed to develop the relations of the Garamantes with the lands to the south into a regular trans-Saharan trade. As far as the concept of Africa was concerned, its outcome in the form of a steady supply of slaves from south of the Sahara as far as the eastern coast of the continent, encouraged the classification of the Blacks as an inferior race which is described by Lewis in *Race and Colour in Islam*.

The history of Zawila is summarised by Brett in Mattingly, ed., *The Libyan Desert*. The demand of the Islamic world for slaves, however, was only an element in the demand of its flourishing market economy for commodities from beyond its frontiers, on whose supply the prosperity of Rustamid Tahart was based. Situated on the route of the Arab advance into Spain, Tahart prospered on the trade between Andalus, Ifriqiya and Egypt. At the same time, in alliance with the Kharijites of Sijilmasa to the south-west and those of Zawila to the south-east, it developed a second trans-Saharan route through the northern oasis of Wargla and the southern oasis of Abalessa, the resting-place of 'Tin Hinan', down to the Niger bend. A third ran through Sijilmasa to the Senegal, curving to the west around the desert edge. The principal commodity in their case was gold, procured in exchange for salt. Neither was new. Salt was a major item in the existing exchange between the savannah and the desert that revolved around the Inland Delta of the Niger and the city of Old Jenne, by this time a substantial urban centre. Gold from the edge of the forest to the south must already have found its way out of this system across the Sahara to the north, to draw in the merchants from the Maghrib, 'the West', the Arabic term for North Africa and Muslim Spain. What was new was the commercial connection established by those merchants, who as it were plugged into this exchange economy to initiate a vast expansion of the trade. Not only the Sahara but the lands to the south were thereby incorporated into the world of Islam and its literature.



17

Islam, the Sahara & the Land of the Blacks

Ya Sin: by the Qur'an that prescribes and ordains, you are one of those who are sent on a straight road... to warn a people whose fathers were not warned, and so are unaware.

I

This instruction from the Qur'an stands for the challenge of the faith to the order of state and society established in the Arab empire by the end of the ninth century. Over the next three hundred years Islam became the first worldwide civilisation, stretching beyond the borders of the Arab empire to Tropical Africa and the Far East at the height of the prosperity of Lombard's Golden Age of Islam. Politically, however, the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries were years of revolution, which saw the break-up of the Arab empire and the failure of successive attempts to reconstitute it. Both the break-up and the failures turned on the impossibility of keeping control of such a vast domain, as the Muslim population turned from a foreign minority into a native majority in all its provinces. But the attempts themselves were ideologically driven, and turned on the call of Islam to tribal peoples on the fringe of the community, ungoverned by the state but responsive to the faith. In Africa, successive uprisings, invasions and conquests by these peoples not only determined the history of North Africa and Egypt. In combination with the growth of trans-Saharan trade, they completed the transformation of the desert from a margin of the lands to the north and south into an active centre of the continent.

II

The black slave revolt of the Zanj in southern Iraq, which between 872 and 883 brought the 'Abbasid Caliphate to its knees, was the beginning of the end for the Arab empire, after the previous loss of Spain and North Africa to the Umayyads at Cordoba, the Idrisids at Fes, the Rustamids at Tahart and the nominally loyal Aghlabids at Qayrawan. The revolt was so successful because it was led by a Mahdi, a Muslim messiah claiming to represent the second coming of Muhammad. The disruption it caused in Iraq was the

opportunity for the Turkish governor of Egypt to found his own, Tulunid, dynasty, the first step to the re-emergence of Egypt as an independent state. While both the revolt and the dynasty were eventually suppressed, the expectation of a second Muhammad survived, spreading to North Africa to bring about the overthrow of the Aghlabids in Ifriqiya and their replacement by the Fatimids in 910. Claiming to be the successors to Muhammad in line of descent from the Prophet, the Fatimids set out to challenge the 'Abbasids for the Caliphate. They came to power in North Africa, however, not so much on the strength of this claim, but on the strength of the tribal response to their call to arms. Behind the rising of the Kutama Berbers of the mountains of north-eastern Algeria lay the same resentment of the Arabs that had fuelled the Kharijite rebellion, focussed in the same way by Islam. The success of their rising against the rule of the Arab Aghlabids, however, depended upon what the fourteenth-century North African historian Ibn Khaldun called their *'asabiyya*, their militant clannishness. In the *Muqaddimah* or introduction to his history of the world, he regarded this clannishness as essential to state formation by tribesmen like the Arabs and the Berbers who sank their differences in face of the enemy, and set out on a career of conquest in response to the call of faith. In the history of his North African homeland, the Fatimid revolution was the first of three in which stateless Berber peoples like the Kutama were formed into an army under a religious dictator to create a larger and larger empire. The accounts of their passage from kinship to kingship yield for the first time historical examples of behaviour observed in the ethnographic present, while showing the attraction of revolutionary Islam for such societies on the tribal margins of the Arab empire.

In the story of the approach to African history, the behaviour in question links the Berbers of North Africa to the stateless societies of the Upper Nile, the starting-point of Mair's discussion of 'primitive government'. The link was established by Evans-Pritchard, the social anthropologist from whose studies of the Nuer and their neighbours Mair takes much of her material. In *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, he employed the concept of a segmentary society drawn from those studies to describe the bedouin Arabs of Libya, and account for their unification under the leadership of an Islamic brotherhood in the nineteenth century. This concept of a stateless society split into family units which divided or combined according to circumstance was then taken by Ernest Gellner in *Saints of the Atlas* to apply to the Berbers. The application is disputed; but in *Muslim Society* Gellner made the connection with Islam to develop a much grander theory of social and political evolution in the Islamic world on the strength of Ibn Khaldun's account of state formation – a nice demonstration of the conceptual nature of African history. In the case of the Kutama, their victories brought to power the Fatimid Mahdi, a messianic figure from the heartland of Islam, whose acceptance by the Berbers, like their acceptance of the Rustamids and Idrisids, demonstrated the extent to which the prestige of Islam and its empire had superseded that of Christianity and Rome as the fountainhead of power and authority. Where the immigrant Rustamids and the Idrisids had created their own dominions in a largely stateless countryside, however, in Ifriqiya the Fatimids took over

a state already formed on the model of the Caliphate, in which the Kutama were converted from a militant community of the faithful into a professional army.

III

The story is told by Brett in *The Berbers*; in Vol. II of *The Cambridge History of Africa*; and in *The Rise of the Fatimids*. The corresponding conversion of the Fatimids from messianic revolutionaries into unpopular statesmen was demonstrated in the 940s, when like the 'Abbasids with the Zanj, they almost fell victim to yet another messianic rebel, the Kharijite Abu Yazid. Abu Yazid anticipated the final assumption of power in North Africa by Berber leaders, for which his defeat indeed prepared the way, since it enabled the Fatimids to turn to the conquest of Egypt in 969, and take up their residence in the palace city of al-Qahira ('Cairo') outside Fustat in 973. Ifriqiya was then entrusted to the Zirids, a Berber dynasty of warrior chieftains who had fought for the Fatimids against the Berber allies of their rivals, the Umayyads of Andalus, in Morocco and western Algeria. The long-running battle had wiped out the Rustamids and the Idrisids, and with the departure of the Fatimids left North Africa divided between these 'enemy brothers', the endemic quarrels of tribal society raised to the level of imperial warfare. Under the Zirids, however, the custom of that society in preferring the succession of brothers rather than sons led to the division of Ifriqiya between the main line of the dynasty at Qayrawan and a breakaway branch in the western highlands, in what is now eastern Algeria. When Tripoli was occupied by yet another Berber dynasty, the effect of this takeover of North Africa by tribal rulers was a return to the provincial divisions of the Roman empire.

Pulled by religion and pushed from the desert, however, this arrangement was overthrown in the middle of the eleventh century. Between the coming to power of the Fatimids at the beginning of the tenth century, and their establishment in Egypt towards the end, the 'Abbasid empire had finally disintegrated, allowing Egypt to emerge as the wealthiest, most powerful and most prestigious of its successor states under the grandiose monarchy of the Fatimid Caliphs in the palace city of al-Qahira. With a growing population, the cultivated area of the floodplain expanded, while irrigation in summer allowed for crops of vegetables and the cultivation of sugarcane and cotton, which together with the winter crop of flax supplied the raw materials for the production of sugar and a major textile industry. The farming of every kind of tax enabled a large section of the population to invest in this economy, which included a large commercial sector. By far the greatest concentration of wealth, however, was in the hands of the dynasty and its servants, whose expenditure and investments played the role that Ibn Khaldun ascribed to the state in promoting the growth of a complex urban society of Muslims, Christians and Jews. Surveyed by Yaacov Lev in *State and Society in Fatimid Egypt*, and documented in detail from the records of the Jewish community in Goitein's *A Mediterranean Society*, that society was at the

hub of the intercontinental trade between Africa and Asia, the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The state under which this economy and society flourished meanwhile followed the trajectory envisaged by Ibn Khaldun, from the personal rule of the energetic founders of the dynasty to government by ministers. In the eyes of Max Weber, whose views are summarised by Turner in *Weber and Islam*, the transition was from patriarchalism to patrimonialism, from a government in the hands of a prince and his immediate household to one in which the household had grown into a vast corporation of soldiers and secretaries ruling in the name of the monarch. By the middle of the eleventh century government was in the hands of Wazirs or ministers from the ranks of the secretariat, who controlled the treasury, the chancery and the army through their powers of appointment. It was these ministers who in the middle of the eleventh century confronted a challenge of the dynasty's own making.

The Fatimids had set out to take over the Caliphate, the government of Islam, from the 'Abbasids. But although the 'Abbasids, following the break-up of their empire in 945, were merely nominal suzerains, the Fatimids were unable to extend their own conquests beyond Syria, and were obliged to be content with recognition of their claim to supreme authority for the faith and supreme power over the faithful. In the 1050s, the opposition aroused by this claim led to the conquest of a vast new empire, reaching as far as Egypt, by the Seljuk Turks of Central Asia in the name of the 'Abbasids. In the 1060s, in Egypt itself, the secretarial regime broke down, opening the way to a struggle between units of the army in which central government collapsed and famine set in. When order was finally restored in 1074, the position of Wazir was held by commanders of the army for the next hundred years. The priority then given to the payment of that army at a time when the population had fallen and revenues were reduced was met by a major reform of the financial system, in which land-tax farms were allocated to soldiers as their basic income. Assessment and collection was in the hands of treasury officials assigned to each of the five military provinces into which the country was now divided. By the 1160s the Fatimid Caliph was a mere figurehead, in the final phase of Ibn Khaldun's dynastic cycle and Weber's patrimonial state.

The crisis of the Islamic world in the mid-eleventh century is described by Brett in Vol. IV of *The New Cambridge Medieval History* and in *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*. Its ramifications extended to North Africa, where in 1048 the Zirids broke with the Fatimids, only to be routed by the Arab tribes of the Banu Hilal at the battle of Haydaran in 1052. The invasion of Ifriqiya by these nomads was certainly not the Fatimid response to the disobedience of the Zirids which is a commonplace of the literature, including the regional histories of Julien, *History of North Africa*, and Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib*. It was the latest wave of Saharan nomadism to overflow the old Roman frontier, mounted not by Berbers but by Arabs from the western oases of Egypt, whose migration into Tripolitania in the first half of the century is the historical reality behind Evans-Pritchard's introduction of segmentarity into the study of tribal society in North Africa.

Herders of camels, the Banu Hilal nevertheless entered Ifriqiya as warrior horsemen taking over the pastureland they required as allies or enemies of its rulers. Their victory at Haydaran gave them control of the countryside of central Tunisia and eventually eastern Algeria, forcing the Zirids and their cousins the Hammadids to abandon their inland capitals at Qayrawan and the Qal'a for Mahdia and Bijaya on the coast. Central government disappeared, and Ifriqiya was reduced to a series of city states in alliance with the Hilalians, who roamed the plains and uplands while the Berbers of the hills were once again blockaded. The disintegration of Ifriqiya was all the more radical since the Arabs themselves were disunited; they did not combine to create a new empire, but instead introduced a new element into the population to the north of the Sahara. Much later than in Egypt, their intrusion began a long process of social change, marked once again by Arabisation, the replacement of Berber by their Arabic dialect.

IV

At the far end of North Africa, the effect of the crisis was exactly the opposite in the case of the Sanhaja Berber nomads of the western Sahara. Like the Kutama, these responded to the appeal of a militant preacher, inspired in their case by the jurists of Qayrawan, whose opposition to the claims of the Fatimids had led the Zirids to turn from the Fatimids to the 'Abbasids. From his name, Son of the sura of the Qur'an quoted at the head of this chapter, Ibn Yasin was a new convert to Islam on the borders of the desert to the south of the High Atlas in Morocco, where Muslim frontiersmen had settled in *ribat*-s or fortresses for the defence and propagation of the faith. The ferocity of his preaching turned the Lamtuna, like the Kutama, into a disciplined army for the war upon paganism, heretical Muslims, and eventually Christians. In the 1050s this army of *murabitun*, 'men of the *ribat*' or Almoravids, took over the western Sahara, and in 1070 founded the city of Marrakesh to the north of the High Atlas. From there its commander Yusuf ibn Tashfin went on to conquer central and northern Morocco and western Algeria. For the first time Morocco was then united in a single state, as part of a wider empire that included al-Andalus, annexed by Yusuf in 1091 to prevent its conquest by the Christian kings of northern Spain. Despite their championship of Islam, and their adherence to the Malikite school of law to which the jurists belonged, the Almoravids were nevertheless unpopular as barbarians from the Sahara, and in the middle of the twelfth century were overthrown by the Almohads or Unitarians, yet another army of the faithful from the clans of the High Atlas to the south of Marrakesh. Like the Kutama and the Lamtuna, the Masmuda were formed into an army by a revolutionary preacher, Ibn Tumart, a man of the Atlas whose doctrine was the final product of the opposition to the Fatimids, and the last fling of the messianism that had brought them to power. In his role as the Mahdi, sent by God to uphold the Qur'an as the sole source of enlightenment, Ibn Tumart rejected not only the Fatimid claim to religious authority, but also

the Malikite legalism of the Almoravids. His followers were led to victory by 'Abd al-Mu'min, his Caliph, who took Marrakesh in 1147, and in 1160 extended the empire of the Almoravids eastwards as far as Tripoli.

The incorporation of Ifriqiya into the Almohad empire united the whole of North Africa for the first and last time in its history in a single state. The achievement was the result of the readiness of tribal Berber society to respond to the call of militant Islam, irrespective of the doctrinal differences that engendered the successive missions of the Fatimid Mahdi, Ibn Yasin and Ibn Tumart. It was the more remarkable as the exact opposite of the achievement of Rome: the repression of Berber tribalism and the division of North Africa between civilisation and barbarism. Where the Romans had imposed that division from a capital at Carthage in the north-east, the Almoravids and Almohads abolished it from a capital at Marrakesh in the south-west, far beyond the line of the *limes*. If their triumph was brought about by the energies of Berber clannishness, more or less as described by Ibn Khaldun, the political structure they created was nevertheless in accordance with his model of the state, a framework for the urban civilisation of Islam that had arisen on the Roman side of the frontier, in the lands conquered by the Arabs. While their monarchs, unlike the Fatimids, were themselves of tribal origin, the Almoravids and Almohads turned like the Kutama into the staff of the dynasties they founded; unlike the Banu Hilal, entering North Africa from the opposite direction, they were not immigrants into the population of the lands they conquered. Indeed, having defeated the warriors of the Banu Hilal, the Almohads followed the practice of the city states they had absorbed in Ifriqiya, employing the nomads as warriors in their armies and as agents in the government of the countryside. Under the Almohads, therefore, the intrusion of the Arabs into Ifriqiya extended as far as Morocco, progressively altering the composition and balance of the population.

V

From the point of view of North Africa, the very different invasions of the Banu Hilal and the Almoravids are a further demonstration of the importance of the Sahara in its history. From the point of view of Africa as a whole, they draw attention to the desert itself as a part of Iliffe's especially hostile part of the world. So it may have been; but it was occupied down to the twentieth century by a thin but astonishingly varied population, described in the ethnographic present by Lloyd Cabot Briggs in *Tribes of the Sahara*. The focus of that population was on the oases, where the Garamantian style of agriculture survived despite the drying up, in the Fezzan, of the springs that fed the *foggara*-s, and the resort to wells to water a smaller cultivated area. The slavery almost certainly required to construct the *foggara*-s certainly continued in the Fezzan as elsewhere in the desert; but instead of agricultural colonists like the Garamantes, it was the camel-herding, warrior nomads who came to rule over most of the oases and their cultivators as the aristocracy of a hierarchical, self-regulating society. At the bottom of the hier-

archy were serfs and slaves, some perhaps the survivors of a previous Black population of the desert, but others the product of the slave trade from the south. The extension of that trade right across the Sahara to the north was in response to the demand of the Islamic world for mainly domestic servants; but was only rendered economic by the demand within the desert itself for basically agricultural labour. That demand extended as far north as the palm groves on the Saharan fringe of North Africa; further south it was supplemented by the need for labour in the salt pans and salt mines, to meet the demand of the savannah for this staple product of the desert. As this reciprocal relationship was established between the economy of the desert and trade to the north and south, the Sahara and its heterogeneous population grew from a regional society of the Holocene Dry into the centrepiece of a civilisation that spanned the desert from side to side.

The development of the Sahara is described by Lewicki in Vol. III of the *UNESCO General History*; the development of that civilisation is dealt with in Volume III of *The Cambridge History of Africa*, whose chapters run together the history of North Africa, the Sahara and the savannah to the south. Dealing in that volume with the eastern Maghrib and the central Sudan, Humphrey Fisher brings out the importance of the slave trade in its creation, though it is left to his *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa*, and to *The Human Commodity*, papers on the trans-Saharan slave trade edited by Elizabeth Savage, to bring out something of the importance of slavery itself in the Sahara; both are much stronger on the question of men and women in the Bilad al-Sudan, the 'Land of the Blacks' to the south. That is true of the bulk of the literature, in which the trans-Saharan trade is seen from a West African point of view, while priority is given, for example by Devisse in Vol. III of the *UNESCO General History*, to the trade in gold, the commodity which accounted for the development of the routes to the Niger bend. The crucially related question of Islamisation is likewise dealt with in *The History of Islam in Africa*, edited by Nehemiah Levtzion and Randall Pouwels, and by Timothy Insoll in *The Archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa*, in works which take the desert for the northern frontier of the continent. At least in these early centuries, however, trade and Islam in the Bilad al-Sudan were not only inseparable from each other but from the society of North Africa which promoted them, and from the society whose growth they stimulated in the Sahara.

The key to both was the Shari'a, the Islamic law on which the expatriate communities of Muslim merchants in the Bilad al-Sudan were founded. Not only was it a commercial law that facilitated their transactions from end to end of the world; it was necessary for their very existence in lands outside the realm of Islam. About the end of the tenth century, in a text discussed by Brett in *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, a jurist of Ifriqiya was asked to rule on the legality of the dispositions made by the headman of such a community regarding the estate of a man who had died. He replied that in lands beyond the jurisdiction of a *qadi* appointed by a Muslim ruler, it was necessary for such a person to act to the best of his knowledge and ability, lest the law fall into disuse and the community perish. Moreover, in complete

contrast to the hostility of Ibn Yasin to paganism, it was necessary for him to do so with the consent of the non-Muslim ruler in whose land these Muslims lived. This was a particular application of an established practice, whereby Italian merchants, for example, resided in Fatimid Egypt under the jurisdiction of their own consuls. But in the Bilad al-Sudan, it was not only a means of trade, but the way in which a dynamic new element was introduced into the developing societies of the savannah.

The result, in these early centuries, is apparent in the archaeological record discussed by Insoll, as well as in the Arabic sources. In the desert to the north of the Niger bend, Tadmekka on the easterly route from Ifriqiya and Awdaghust on the westerly route from Sijilmasa were centres where merchants congregated at the junction between the Saharan trade of the savannah and their own trans-Saharan trade. Both depended upon the Berber nomads of the Sahara, although Awdaghust had previously been a Sudanese settlement, and in the eleventh century apparently came under the rule of the Sudanic empire of Ghana. Further south in the Bilad al-Sudan itself, dual settlements came into existence in the region of the Niger bend, best known from the famous description by the Arab geographer al-Bakri of the royal city of the pagan kings of Ghana, some distance away from that of the Muslim merchants. At Koumbi Saleh, the presumed site of al-Bakri's Muslim city, no such royal city has been discovered; but at Gao both royal and Muslim cities have been found together. Less clear is the situation in Takrur on the Senegal to the west and round Lake Chad to the east. Takrur appears, without further detail or archaeological evidence, as a kingdom whose rulers became aggressively Muslim in the eleventh century. Around Lake Chad the kingdom of Kanim, whose rulers provided the merchants of Zawila with Black slaves, was taken over in the second half of the eleventh century by the Muslim founder of the Saifawa dynasty. In neither case is there an explanation, no more than in the case of Ghana, whose kings likewise became Muslim in the Almoravid period, together with those of Gao.

VI

The evidence for this Islamisation and its connection with trans-Saharan trade is partly archaeological, from the Muslim tombstones with their Arabic inscriptions found at Gao, including five of the early twelfth century imported ready-made from Muslim Spain. Published by Paolo Farias in his *Arabic Medieval Inscriptions from the Republic of Mali*, they are documents of the reception of the faith and its language for which the bulk of the evidence is literary, the accounts of the geographers and historians of Islam to the north of the desert. Translated by Levtzion and Hopkins in their *Corpus of early Arabic sources for West African history*, it is these accounts which on the one hand demonstrate the growth of knowledge of this Land of the Blacks on the part of the Islamic world, and on the other have been the starting-point of modern historiography ever since W. D. Cooley published *The Negroland of the Arabs* in 1841. Apart from the basic problem of identifying the places and kingdoms

obscurely named in Arabic letters, this has raised Horton's vexed question of the origin of the said states, and of the role of trans-Saharan trade in their development. The answer given by Fage in *A History of Africa* is essentially that of Horton. Pointing to the northerly location of Ghana and Kanim in the Sahel or 'shore' of the savannah on the margin of the desert, he associated their appearance with the growth of the trans-Saharan trade and its profits. Their characterisation as marginal states, in the archaeologists' sense, is made all the more plausible by A. G. Hopkins' striking description, in *An Economic History of West Africa*, of its pre-colonial capitals as 'social islands of purchasing power' which attracted the long-distance trader, and the equally striking comparison of West African monarchies to 'substantial firms' engaged in commerce. Thus while the ruler of Kanim traded in slaves, the ruler of Ghana controlled the exchange of gold for salt. And if Muslim merchants depended upon the permission of originally pagan kings to trade in the Bilad al-Sudan, the widespread acceptance of Islam by those kings seems to reveal their own dependence upon the merchants and their business.

Of necessity, however, such a picture must in some way agree with the tenth–eleventh century account by the Andalusian geographer al-Bakri of the ruler of Ghana as a monarch holding court for his subjects, worshipping idols in sacred groves, and buried with his possessions and his retainers, the master in his lifetime of an army of archers and possibly horsemen. It must equally agree with the findings of archaeology for the previous development of society in the savannah, most notably those of McIntosh in and around the Inland Delta of the Niger. McIntosh's description of the mound tombs at the northern tip of the Inland Delta point to a chiefly society out on the savannah, to a form of sacred monarchy corresponding to al-Bakri's description of the king of Ghana, and to an indigenous origin in Sudanese belief and practice. At the same time, both their date around the eighth–ninth century and their situation would support a connection with trade, and the transformation of one or more local chieftaincy into some grander empire with the opening up of the desert crossing. That might well be true not only of Ghana but of Gao, at the terminus of a diagonal route across the desert from Ifriqiya and the Fezzan via Tadmekka, and of Kanim, which like Ghana was out on the savannah to the north-east of Lake Chad; the literary evidence speaks of a sacred monarchy established by Black Saharan nomads. Some two to three hundred years after the arrival of Muslim merchants in the Bilad al-Sudan, the acceptance of Islam by such pagan rulers would then be the sign of a close association which had brought about the incorporation of the western and central Sudan into the world beyond the desert. Merchants who were clerics and clerics who were merchants offered the state not only wealth but literacy and numeracy. Their religion meanwhile was the key to admission into the community of Islam and the prestigious realm of a universal divinity, adding to rather than superseding the spirit world of an African king. The outcome was not simply dual settlement, but a dual political culture in which monarchs who professed Islam continued to rule over a majority of non-Muslim subjects in accordance with non-Muslim beliefs. This culture was the norm for hundreds of years.

Important as it may have been politically and economically, the close association between the kings of the savannah and the expatriate Muslim merchants was not the whole story, either of trade or Islam. Around Lake Chad, the information picked up at Zawila in the Fezzan by the Arab geographer al-Ya'qubi, that the kings of Blacks sold their subjects into slavery, suggests that the rulers of Kanim themselves provided the bulk of the slaves for the trade across the central Sahara. To the north-west of the Inland Delta of the Niger, however, the kings of Ghana did not control the supply of gold from the forest margins to the south, where it was mined by the people themselves. For its supply, the archaeological evidence for the continued growth of Jenne-jeno to its maximum size in the tenth and eleventh centuries not only points to the importance of the existing cycle of trade between the desert, the savannah and the forest, centred on the Inland Delta and its apparently self-regulating society. At the same time it shows the extent to which that trade had been stimulated by the trans-Saharan connection, in more ways than one. Jenne-jeno itself remained non-Muslim; but al-Bakri mentions a place called Yarasna, well to the south of Ghana, the centre of a Black Muslim merchant community trading in gold. The identification of such place-names in the Arab geographers is problematic, but Yarasna has been plausibly emended to (the people of) Wangara, and Wangara identified with the Inland Delta; in later centuries the Wangarawa were Muslim merchants from the Delta in Hausaland. It is possible to see in Al-Bakri's report an occupational community of the kind envisaged by McIntosh at Jenne-jeno, and a forerunner of the ethnic Muslim groups who subsequently specialised in the long-distance trade of the savannah and the forest, incorporating the faith into the kinship structures of the Bilad al-Sudan.

Well before such Islamisation, however, the ramifications of that trade stretched not only up the Niger and the Senegal to the goldfields around their headwaters, but down the Niger from Gao to the forest margin of southern Nigeria. The thousands of carnelian and glass beads in the ninth/tenth-century graves at Igbo-Ukwu, from as far away as Egypt and possibly India, testify to the expansion of Hrbek's contact zone across almost half the continent. Its physical structure was the network of routes along which the Arab geographers, and al-Bakri in particular, organised their descriptions of places, peoples and events north and south of the Sahara. Their knowledge of that network as far as the Bilad al-Sudan is indicative of its formation into a commercial system bound up with the market economy of Lombard's golden age of Islam, and of a corresponding enlargement of scale on the part of the trade which it carried. Hopkins describes that trade over the long distances between his 'islands of purchasing power' as fundamentally different from the trade in local produce in the local marketplace, agreeing with Ibn Khaldun that it typically carried goods of high value but easily transportable. But Ibn Khaldun's model of an economy growing through the specialisation of production is broadly the model proposed by McIntosh for Jenne-jeno and its region, while his estimate of the benefit to the economy of the redistribution of wealth by the ruler is likely to hold true of the monarchies characterised by Hopkins as 'substantial firms'. Hopkins

himself, concerned not only to describe the precolonial economy of West Africa but to explain its limitations in the context of modern preoccupations with development and underdevelopment, acknowledges its variety but sees little potential for growth. Nevertheless, while he may be correct in rejecting the possibility of its continuous expansion, the picture we have of the West African savannah, and indeed the forest in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is one of economic diversification suggestive of population growth, at least partly under the influence of trans-Saharan trade. It was certainly coupled with an enlargement of the political scale, with Ghana in particular laying the foundation of an imperial tradition lasting down to the sixteenth century and beyond.



18

Islam & Christianity in the East

I

As the graves at Igbo-Ukwu show, archaeology will always have an advantage over the texts collected by Levtzion and Hopkins in their *Corpus*, since it will continue to provide fresh evidence for our approach to African history. For that approach, on the other hand, the texts in question provide a contemporary written record vastly superior to the meagre account of sub-Saharan Africa in Antiquity, in their reference to persons, places and events below the horizon of the Classical world. Geographically, however, their own approach to the subject remains within the confines of the Classical picture of the world. Coming after the works of al-Ya‘qubi and al-Mas‘udi at the end of the ninth and the beginning of the tenth century, and before those of the Andalusian al-Bakri in the eleventh and the Moroccan al-Idrisi in the twelfth, *The Picture of the World* by the traveller Ibn Hawqal in the second half of the tenth century illustrates the expansion of the Islamic world over the three or four hundred years of Lombard’s Golden Age, but also the limits of its vision. Reliant upon reports that may or may not have been first-hand or contemporary, original or repeated from the works of their predecessors, the writers in question proceed methodically, either by route from place to place, or in the manner of Strabo and Pliny from region to region, from west to east along the bands of climate into which Ptolemy had divided the world. And like Ibn Hawqal, they may do so pictorially, with sketchmaps of each region to illustrate their texts, and a map of the world to complete its description. These gradually approach the modern concept of a map as an accurate representation of the face of the earth, but remain essentially diagrammatic, depicting the globe as a disc on which the land mass of Europe, Asia and Africa is more or less circular within a narrow border of sea. The outer, Atlantic coast of Africa forms a section of this circle stretching round from the Straits of Gibraltar to the East Indies. From there, in accordance with Ptolemy’s concept of the Indian Ocean as an inland sea like the Mediterranean, the eastern coast of the continent is transformed into a northern coast running westwards from

the ocean rim in the far east to the Red Sea in the centre. In the interior, the Nile still rises in Ptolemy's great lakes, but the Niger is an immense tributary flowing from west to east. This conformity to the authority of an ancient text rather than contemporary observation is particularly striking in the case of East Africa, Roman Azania, now the Land of the Zanj, which unlike the western and central Sudan had been in commercial contact with the outside world for a thousand years before the outreach of the market of the Islamic Middle East brought it to the attention of the Arab geographers.

II

The results of that outreach for the trade of the Indian Ocean as a whole are described in Chaudhuri's *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*. Muslim merchants from the Persian Gulf, themselves the descendants of their Iranian predecessors, initially sailed as far as China, but subsequently joined with Indians, Indonesians and Chinese in a series of shorter voyages across the western and eastern Indian Ocean and the China Sea, and south to East Africa. Their arrival on the East African coast was the beginning of its Islamisation, but not in the manner of the western and central Sudan. The difference is apparent in the controversies of the past fifty years. Where the traditional history of the founding of Kilwa by immigrants from the Gulf seemed to be confirmed for the coast as a whole by the archaeology of the mid-twentieth century, more recent findings point to the indigenous origin of its city-states. Where the empires of the Sudan have been construed as marginal as distinct from central states, on the East African coast the argument is between diffusion and independent evolution, between the old and the new archaeology described by Renfrew in Daniel, *The Idea of Prehistory*. As a controversy over the origins of the Swahili, '[the people of] the coast(s)' and their language, it has been exacerbated both by linguistics and by politics. Swahili is a Bantu language whose origins go back to the Early Iron Age, while its heavily Arabised vocabulary points forward to centuries of involvement with the Arab world. That the vocabulary is evidence of substantial immigration and settlement from Arabia and Iran has been rejected on political as well as linguistic grounds as a variant of the Hamitic hypothesis, an assumption of the colonial period of African studies that civilisation south of the Sahara was of foreign origin. Thus where Chittick, in Volume III of *The Cambridge History of Africa*, concluded that even if the immigrants themselves were not numerous, their cities were outposts of the civilised world, Masao and Mutoro in Volume III of the UNESCO *General History* repudiate the suggestion as the product of a colonialist mentality. The balance is held by Connah, whose chapter in the first edition of *African Civilizations* was entitled 'The edge or the centre', and by Insoll in *The Archaeology of Islam in Sub-Saharan Africa*. On both archaeological and linguistic evidence, it comes down in favour of adoption and adaptation of such evidently foreign features as Islam and Arabic by the Africans of the coast, as they incorporated and assimilated the immigrant merchants into their society.

The demonstration comes from the Lamu archipelago off the north coast of Kenya, where instead of the pattern of dual settlement characteristic of the North African presence in the Sudan, excavation by Mark Horton has revealed the growth of African-style villages centred on the compound of a chief into stone-built townships centred on a mosque from the ninth century onwards. From the way in which the indigenous settlement pattern was followed in the course of this rebuilding, it is now accepted that both Islamisation and the development of the Swahili language were the results of a commercial partnership between foreigners and natives, whose involvement in the trade of the Indian Ocean had preceded the rise of Islam. Such cultural integration into the Islamic world was the instrument of still closer involvement in the still wider economy described by Chaudhuri in *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean*. Where previous participation of the coastal society is to be inferred from Roman and Iranian ceramics and glass found in conjunction with local pottery, and from the presence of the banana, the Asian yam, and perhaps the outrigger canoe as evidence of an Indonesian connection, its expansion under Islam is attested by the finding of Chinese in addition to Middle Eastern ceramics, and by the growth of new cities as far south as Kilwa in southern Tanzania. As envisaged by Horton, co-author with John Middleton of *The Swahili*, such participation is likely to have involved a coastal traffic to supply the ocean-going ships of merchants from the Gulf and the Red Sea with gold, ivory and the rest of the exotic products of tropical Africa which had drawn the Greeks and the Romans down the Red Sea and round the Horn. The Zanj revolt in the 870s points to the supply of slaves to Iraq around the beginning of the archaeological record in the Lamu archipelago, though it cannot have resumed on the same scale after the end of the revolt. But the list now included iron.

South of the Lamu archipelago, the architectural evidence for this development is slow to appear, leaving the written record to supply not only the list of commodities, but confirmation of the extent of the trade and the slowness of Islamisation. From al-Mas'udi and his Iranian contemporary Buzurg at the beginning of the tenth century to al-Idrisi in the twelfth, the land of Zanj is basically pagan under its own king or kings. The exception is the island of Pemba under the name of Qanbalu, where the Zanj are partially Muslim under a Muslim king. By the twelfth century Pemba has been joined by Zanzibar as a centre of Islam as well as of trade, which extends far to the south into (the land of) Sofala, perhaps as far as the Limpopo. Beyond Sofala lies Waq-Waq, perhaps to be identified with the East Indies, while Madagascar goes under the name of Qumr. The Comoro Islands between Madagascar and the mainland are not mentioned, but archaeologically they confirm Insoll's picture of a commercial economy increasingly Islamic but not necessarily Muslim: iron was produced for export and Islamic pottery imported with no sign of a Muslim presence before the eleventh century. The same goes for Madagascar with its African and Indonesian population, caught up in the same way in the long-standing commercial activity of the Indian Ocean.

In the manner of Wheeler's *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, therefore, Insoll's account of the archaeology of Islam in Africa extends to the finding

of objects traded on the coast far beyond the range of any Muslim presence. As with Igbo Ukwu, continuing discovery has rendered the line drawn around the zone of Islamic influence on Chaudhuri's map of trade in the Indian Ocean, 1000–1500 CE, well out of date. In Africa, not only should it take in the north and west coast of Madagascar, but extend far inland to encircle the valley of the Limpopo as far as Botswana, the lower Zambezi, the Upemba Depression on the Upper Lualaba, and the earthworks of Uganda. Where the cities of the Kenyan and Tanzanian coast were once thought to be cut off from the highlands by the barren coastal plain, sites that have come to light in the hinterland have been interpreted as collection points for goods from the interior. Further south, while Sofala itself, to the south of Beira on the coast of Mozambique, has proved to be of much later date, the site of Chibuene still further south provides a ninth-century date for the trade of the cities to the north with the region between the Zambezi and Limpopo, which was evidently their principal source of supply. On the evidence of beads found at the Early Iron Age type-site of Gokomere to the north of Great Zimbabwe, such trade existed in Late Antiquity, but came into its own in the Islamic period, when the Limpopo gave access to the elephants of Botswana, whose tusks were fashioned into bangles, most probably for the Indian market. Its growth to include the gold of the Zimbabwean plateau culminated on the river in the twelfth century with the abandonment of the valley site of Bambandyanalo for the hilltop citadel of Mapungubwe. As the seat of an aristocracy, with a population of three to five thousand, Mapungubwe is likely to have been the capital of the earliest state in southern Africa, whose rulers combined wealth in cattle with a concentration of imported luxuries to wield power over both the valley and the plateau. With its foundation, the internal development of the Early into the Later Iron Age of Africa south of the Equator becomes firmly linked, not only to the passage from kinship to kingship, but to the passage from isolation to incorporation into the economy of the world at large.

III

The cultural dimension remains obscure. As at Igbo Ukwu, the value placed upon such items as glass beads and Chinese porcelain at Mapungubwe and elsewhere can only be guessed. Ethnography alone cannot establish their place in the mind of the recipients, no more than the spirit cults of the Shona in the ethnographic present can be related to the archaeological past to provide a specific explanation for historical change. On the coast, the religious dimension is identified with Islam, but its role in state formation is apparent only in the most general way from the archaeology of the cities. The tradition of immigrant founders from the heartlands of the faith reveals its ideological strength, but disguises the underlying process. Much the same is true of the histories of Christian Ethiopia, where the myth of the descent of the reigning dynasty from King Solomon conceals the history of some three to five hundred years between the eighth and the thirteenth century.

That history was certainly the opposite of those of the western and central Sudan and the east African coast. Where these were being drawn into the economy and eventually the religion of Islam, Christian Ethiopia lost its former importance in the trade and politics of the Red Sea. As Arab Muslims took the place of Christian Greeks in the Red Sea, a second trade route into the interior was opened up to the east of the highlands by Muslims moving up the valley of the Awash from Zeila near modern Djibouti. Meanwhile, in the highlands themselves, Axum was abandoned for a capital located much further to the south. This was far from the eclipse described by Ullendorf in *The Ethiopians*, quoting Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*: 'Forgetful of the world, by the world forgot'. Evidence for the survival and growth of the Axumite kingdom into a well-established state located in the highlands further to the south is supplied not only by the brief references of the Arab geographers, but by those of the Christian Egyptian sources, *The History of The Coptic Patriarchs of Alexandria* and the work of Abu'l-Makarim (Abu Salih), *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt*. In the second half of the eleventh century the continued responsibility of the Coptic Patriarch for the appointment of an Egyptian as Metropolitan of the Church in Ethiopia involved him in negotiations with the Christian kingdom on behalf of the Fatimid Caliphate, to allow the entry of Muslims into the country to worship and to trade. Unlike their counterparts in the pagan Bilad al-Sudan, these were not necessarily welcome. But in the other direction, Ethiopian pilgrims came to Jerusalem in the twelfth century, most probably via the Nile. Continuity with the Axumite past is meanwhile attested by the numerous rock-hewn churches in the mountains, culminating in the first half of the thirteenth century at Lalibela, some two hundred and fifty kilometres to the south of the old capital. In the middle of great pits dug in the soft rock, square blocks have been left standing, then hollowed out as churches covered with wall paintings in a style derived from the Coptic art of Egypt. The architecture itself, however, is clearly indigenous, an adaptation of ancient Axumite practice. Named after the greatest king of the Zagwe dynasty, the whole site is a monument not only to the temporal power of the Ethiopian monarchy, but to its religious authority. To Lalibela is ascribed the divine mission to create it as a second Jerusalem, in token of the transfer to Ethiopia of the Ark of the Covenant by Menelik, the son of Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, heir to the kingdom of Israel, and its second founder in this second Promised Land.

The fact remains that the transformation of the Axumite kingdom into the realm of Lalibela is visible only after the event. When the foundation myth of Menelik and the Ark of the Covenant was reduced to writing in the fourteenth century in the *Kebra Negast* or *Glory of the Kings*, the work was composed to celebrate the restoration, at the end of the thirteenth century, of the line of Solomon in place of the illegitimate dynasty of the Zagwe. This appropriation of the legend for a particular political purpose certainly testifies to its power, like the legends of immigration on to the East African coast. But in the same way it glosses over the history of the past three hundred years. The account given by Tadesse Tamrat in Vol. III of *The Cambridge History of Africa*, drawing on his *Church and State in Ethiopia, 1270–1527*,

employs a short chronology to date the advent of the Zagwe to the middle of the twelfth century, some two centuries after a crisis in the tenth century had disrupted the consolidation of the state in the central highlands. In dispute with the monarchy, the Patriarchate in Alexandria had left the country without a Metropolitan for seventy years, during which the kingdom was conquered and ruled for some thirty years by an apparently pagan queen from the south; order was only restored when a Metropolitan was finally appointed. The recovery of the monarchy in the eleventh century depended upon the enlistment of the Cushitic rather than Semitic-speaking Agaw people of Lasta, the region around the new capital, from whom the Zagwe dynasty eventually emerged. A re-reading of the sources by Carolein Levi in her Ph.D thesis 'Yodit', however, has led to the conclusion by K. T. Andersen in an important article, 'The Queen of the Habasha', that the dynasty was in fact founded by the said queen and her son, who thus maintained rather than interrupted the continuity of the kingdom.

Plausible as it is, the re-reading simply emphasises the paucity of the evidence. The conclusion is nevertheless clear, that in the wake of the earlier trading expeditions to the south, the southward shift of the Axumite monarchy into the central highlands may have led to conflict, but ultimately to its acceptance and appropriation by their peoples. In the same way, and at the same time, immigrant Muslims following the valley of the Awash up onto the highlands of Shoa to the south of the Christian kingdom, created the state described by Cerulli in Vol. III of the *UNESCO General History*, under rulers with Ethiopian names. What distinguished the Christian kingdom, and set its development apart from state formation in the ways described by Mair, was the Church, whose bishops and monks colonised the new lands as they had colonised the original Axum, turning their churches and monasteries into the local centres of local communities. As in the Late Roman empire, in mediaeval Europe and Byzantium, it was an institution at the heart of government, in both senses of the word. While remaining dependent upon Alexandria for its Metropolitan, its intermittent disputes with the Patriarchate reveal, as Tamrat says, the growth of a distinctly Ethiopian doctrine, which turned to the Old Testament to justify customs such as polygamy as well as the claim to the ancient kingdom of Israel. Its version of Christianity supplied the peoples incorporated into the new kingdom with a powerful national ideology.

IV

Seen from the outside, on the other hand, Ethiopia was a province, not simply of Alexandria. Under the Fatimids, Egypt had not only resumed its ancient role in world trade, but returned to its political interest in the Red Sea. In the Fatimid picture of the world, Ethiopia was a part of their empire, since the Coptic Church to which it belonged was under their protection, an arm of their state, as described by Brett in 'Al-Karaza al-Marqusiya. The Coptic Church in the Fatimid empire'. The country was too distant for any

systematic attempt at enforcement; but that was not the case with Nubia, where the Christian kingdom of Muqurra (Makuria) had been regarded as a tributary of Islam ever since the Arab invasion in the seventh century. The relationship continued to be defined by the Baqt or Pact, even though the formal tribute of 360 slaves in exchange for wheat was only intermittently paid; it was invoked by the Fatimids on their arrival in Egypt, and spelt out by them at the beginning of the twelfth century. Down to the twelfth century, however, the Egyptian connection was basically advantageous. At the height of Lombard's golden age of Islam, at a time when the state of Ethiopia is largely unknown, the Nubian kingdoms of Muqurra and 'Alwa (Alodia) entered upon a golden age of their own.

Even more than in the case of Ethiopia, the evidence is divided between the external and the internal, the literary and the archaeological. While it is much more abundant for these centuries than it is in Ethiopia, there is no Nubian equivalent of the *Kebra Nagast* and its companion literature to supply the Nubian picture of the Nubian world, despite the fact that Nubian had become a written language alongside Greek and Coptic. Only inscriptions and letters have survived, to be recovered by archaeology from sites particularly in Lower Nubia, between Aswan and the Second Cataract, which have now been flooded. Archaeology has likewise salvaged what representation of the world there is in paintings on the walls of churches, monasteries and palaces. It is a Christian world of kings, queens, bishops and officials under the protection of the Trinity, the Saviour, the Virgin, and the Archangels Michael and Raphael, in which dragons are fought and slain, and warriors ride horses. The full frontal images are roughly Coptic, those of monarchs crowned by the deity are broadly Byzantine; but the imagery is suggestive of the divine kings of Meroe and Ancient Egypt. No legend or myth of ancestry, however, supplies the Nubian context. Inscriptions and letters give incomplete lists of kings and bishops, together with the names and Greek titles of officials; but as both Adams and Welsby point out, in *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* and in *The Medieval Kingdoms of Nubia* respectively, there is not enough to reconstruct the pattern of central and provincial government in Muqurra, still less in 'Alwa. In Muqurra it was evidently a literate administration, conducted by correspondence between (Old) Dongola and provincial capitals; but only at Qasr Ibrim is there a fairly clear picture of the Eparch, who kept control of movement up and down the Nile from this Ancient Egyptian citadel halfway between Aswan and the Second Cataract. It is nevertheless still uncertain whether he was the ruler of the old kingdom of Nobatia on behalf of the monarchy at (Old) Dongola, or an exceptionally powerful guardian of the frontier with Egypt.

The archaeological evidence of settlement, as discussed by Adams and Welsby, reveals three capital cities, at Faras to the south of Qasr Ibrim, (Old) Dongola, and Soba, the capital of 'Alwa, together with a series of towns and villages so far investigated only along the northern reaches of the river in old Nobatia, and a whole series of fortresses stretching almost from Aswan to 'Alwa. A general growth in their size points to a general prosperity as well as security from the ninth century onwards, since the smaller settlements are

unfortified, and suburbs appeared outside the walls of (Old) Dongola. Castle-like palaces are outnumbered by a multitude of cathedrals and churches, together with the few monasteries so far recognised. Wealth was evidently concentrated in the hands of rulers and churchmen, drawn from the agriculture of the straggling flood plain in Muqurra, supplemented by a manufacturing and market economy in the towns, and to an unquantifiable extent by long-distance trade with Egypt and the Red Sea. Such trade reached down to 'Alwa, where the savanna provided a much wider agricultural area, but where archaeology for this period has so far been restricted to the capital, Soba. Limited as these findings may be, archaeology has nevertheless revealed the physical reality underlying the description of Nubia in the Arabic sources.

The presence of Nubia in Egypt is most apparent in the regiments of Blacks in the Egyptian army from the ninth to the twelfth century, together with the Black eunuch generals in government from the mid-tenth to the mid-eleventh. Kafur, the first and greatest of these, came from the Nuba hills to the south of 'Alwa, and rose to become the regent of the country until his death in 968. The chief Egyptian presence in Nubia was the Church, whose bishops were appointed by the Patriarch of Alexandria, and commemorated in their portraits on the walls of their cathedrals. Where the Black eunuchs and troops of the Fatimids formed a palace guard on which the dynasty came to rely against their overmighty ministers, the Church in Nubia was identified with the state to the extent that the king of Muqurra was reported by Abu 'l-Makarim (Abu Salih) in his *Churches and Monasteries of Egypt* to be himself a priest. The reference from around 1200 is retrospective, supplementing the contemporary tenth-century accounts of Muqurra and 'Alwa by al-Aswani and Ibn Hawqal, and the historical record of events in the *History of the Coptic Patriarchs* and the Arab annalists. The whole corpus has been published by Vantini in his *Oriental Sources concerning Nubia*, and quoted extensively in his *Christianity in the Sudan*. Concerned as they are with the dealings of Egypt and the Arabs with the Nubian kingdoms, the same sources have been utilised by Yusuf Fadl Hasan in *The Arabs and the Sudan* to produce a closely overlapping account of their history viewed from the outside.

Two themes predominate, on the one hand the political relationship between Egypt and Muqurra, on the other the occupation of Aswan by powerful tribal Arabs and their advance to the south, punctuated in the early centuries by Nubian incursions into Egypt. The political relationship was determined by the Baqt, the tributary pact of the seventh century that covered the trade between the two countries, not least in slaves, but also served as a periodical reminder of the client status of the Nubian kingdom. From the ninth century onwards it was mediated by the Arabs at Aswan, of which they became the effective and eventually the titular rulers on behalf of the Fatimids, under the name of the Banu 'l-Kanz. In Nubia, it was regulated by the Eparch of the strategic fortress of Qasr Ibrim, known to the Arabs as the Lord of the Mountain, who controlled all movement up and down the valley. The decisive development which brought this three-cornered relationship into existence was the re-discovery in the ninth

century of emeralds and gold in the desert to the east and south-east of Aswan, between the Nubian Nile and the Red Sea. Arab adventurers, who worked the mines with slave labour, not only drove back the native Beja tribesmen of the Red Sea coast. Excluding the Nubians from territory to which Muqurra laid some claim, they outflanked the Nubian fortresses on the Nile to the south of Aswan as far as Qasr Ibrim and the Second Cataract. The Nubian hold on the valley to the north of Qasr Ibrim became increasingly untenable as it was settled by immigrant Arabs, while nomadic Arabs moved further and further south on either side of the river. By the beginning of the twelfth century, the pressure upon Muqurra had reached the point at which Muslim merchants had settled in (Old) Dongola, where a mosque had been built which the Nubians undertook to maintain by agreement with the Fatimids in a revised version of the Baqt. The golden age of the Nubian kingdoms was coming to an end even as the Muslim world itself was changing.

V

The revision of the Baqt was a sign of the renewed interest of the Fatimids in the Nile valley and the Red Sea after the loss of their Syrian empire in the crisis of the mid-eleventh century. It was of a piece with the similar attempt to gain access for Muslim merchants to the kingdom of Ethiopia, and went along with their alliance with the Yemen and their promotion of trade and pilgrimage through the port of 'Aydhab. The route south-eastwards from Aswan to 'Aydhab on the coast of the Red Sea opposite Jedda and Mecca led through the land of the gold mines, which it turned from a Wild West frontier of the Islamic world into a thoroughfare at its heart. Not only did the route draw the trade of the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean through Cairo and Alexandria to the Mediterranean, but channelled the bulk of the pilgrimage to Mecca from Muslim Spain, North Africa and the Bilad al-Sudan. For its regulation a new governorship was established at Qus near Luxor in Upper Egypt by Badr al-Jamali, the Armenian generalissimo who took charge of the Fatimid regime after its collapse into anarchy in the 1060s, and followed by his son al-Afdal, ruled on behalf of the dynasty for almost fifty years, from 1074–1121. Part of his major reform of the administration, discussed by Brett in a series of articles in Vols. I and IV of Vermeulen et al., eds, *Egypt and Syria in the Fatimid, Ayyubid and Mamluk Eras*, Qus survived the long and ultimately terminal crisis of the dynasty that began with the murder of the Caliph al-Amir in 1030, when the crisis of the mid-eleventh century was finally played out in a struggle for power between commanders of the military.

In 1099, responding to the appeal of the Byzantine emperor to expel the Seljuk Turks from Asia Minor, the armies of the First Crusade took Jerusalem from the Seljuks, and went on to occupy the whole of the Syrian coast. Fifty years later, the Crusaders were confronted by the militant Turkish Zengids at Aleppo and Damascus, and in the 1160s fought them for control of Egypt,

when rival contenders for the Fatimid Wazirate appealed for aid to the King of Jerusalem on the one hand, the Zengid Sultan at Damascus on the other. In 1169, victory went to the forces of Damascus, and the Wazirate to their commander Saladin. The Caliph lost what power and authority was left to him when the new Wazir massacred the Black troops of the palace guard, and refused to appoint a successor at his death in 1171. As the new Sultan of Egypt, Saladin rewarded his family and his troops with the land-tax farms of the Egyptians, and set out to take Syria and Palestine, first from the Zengids and then from the Crusaders. His first task, however, was to secure his rear, where the remnants of the Black soldiery, the Arab Banu 'l-Kanz and the Muqurrans combined against him at Aswan. In 1172–4 the alliance was broken by expeditions which recovered Aswan from the Banu 'l-Kanz and briefly occupied Qasr Ibrim. It was, however, the last time for a hundred years that Nubia appeared in the Arabic sources. Only letters from Qasr Ibrim reveal the existence of a kingdom of Dotawo in old Nobatia, in unexplained dependence upon (Old) Dongola. While Saladin and his Ayyubid successors maintained the interest of the Fatimids in the Red Sea, Nubia was ignored in favour of Syria, and the history of Muqurra and 'Alwa can only be inferred from events at the end of the thirteenth century.



19

Ibn Battuta & Ibn Khaldun

I

With the takeover of Egypt from the Fatimids by Saladin, the Kurdish lieutenant of a Seljuk Turkish dynasty, the Seljuk invasion and conquest of the Middle East reached its maximum extent. In Egypt itself, the takeover exemplified Weber's model of the patrimonial state, when the military finally abolished the dynasty they had served, and took its place. In the world at large, it proved to be the beginning of the end for the Caliphal principle which over the past five hundred years had inspired the imperial dynasties which laid claim to the empire of Islam. The invasions of the old Arab empire by the Seljuks and the Crusaders in the eleventh century were followed in the thirteenth by the invasions of the Mongols in the east and the Christians of northern Spain in the west, which between them put an end to the 'Abbasid Caliphate at Baghdad and precipitated the downfall of the Almohads in North Africa. The Ayyubids, the descendants of Saladin, were themselves replaced in Egypt and Syria by the colonels of their regiments, the founders of the Mamluk Sultanate. The Almohad empire in North Africa was divided between a reconstituted Ifriqiyian state ruled from Tunis, and a successor state in Morocco, ruled from Fes; Tlemcen in western Algeria became the capital of a third dynasty. Over the next two hundred and fifty years, the emergence of this line of states to the north of the Sahara was matched to the south by the formation of polities of one kind or another as far away as the Zimbabwean plateau in the first centuries of Oliver and Atmore's *Medieval Africa, 1250–1800*.

II

The overlap in this period between the end of the conventional Middle Ages, marked by the extension of Islam across half the continent, and the beginning of Oliver and Atmore's African equivalent, marked by the exten-



12. The Africa of Ibn Battuta, 14th – 15th Centuries CE

sion of government formation across almost the whole of the land mass, raises the question posed by Hrbek in 'Towards a periodisation of African history', of the common denominator of that history. Prior to the sixteenth century, he found no common theme, only regional development in both his zones of contact and non-contact. In his *Africans*, John Iliffe dealt with the question of contact under the heading of Christianity and Islam, before returning to the theme of colonising society in sub-Saharan Africa. The distinction he then drew was between the west, including the equatorial forest, where agriculture was the norm and pastoralism confined to the desert edge, and the highlands and savannahs to the east and south, where pastoralists mingled with cultivators, and cattle-keeping was a central feature of society. Apart from the coastal cities of the Swahili, 'urban centres', however defined, were few, not to be compared with their proliferation in West Africa. In *Medieval Africa*, a common denominator was found by Oliver and Atmore in 'the enlargement of political scale', grounded in the progress of such colonisation by the end of the Iron Age. No continent-wide significance, however, was attached to the particular starting-date of 1250. The discussion is regional, though the authors make yet a third distinction from Hrbek and Iliffe, between Africa north and south of the Equator, on the grounds that animal and river transport to the north, as compared with human portage to the south, greatly increased the possibilities and therefore the growth of long-distance trade and exchange. Underlying these apparently divisive factors, however, the theme of population growth aligns both *Medieval Africa* and Iliffe's *Africans* with the thesis of Connah's *African Civilizations*. One important qualification is Iliffe's insistence that while the history of population is the history of the continent, growth which was both the cause and the consequence of colonisation was very slow in this especially hostile region of the world, so that, as in Mair's *Primitive Government*, state formation was as likely to be the product of too few people as well as of unusually large numbers.

None of these approaches to the elephant of the African past are blind, but their insight necessarily depends upon their sources. Here, the common denominator for Oliver and Atmore is the ethnographic dimension, which over the centuries they are concerned with takes its place alongside the archaeological and the written. In the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century, oral tradition not only reaches back to the origins of the Interlacustrine kingdoms and perhaps to those of the Luba, but to those of the states which appear in the Arabic literature, the kingdoms of West Africa and the cities of the Indian Ocean coast. North as well as south of the Sahara, oral tradition does indeed make an appearance in that literature, which is notably represented by the works of two North African authors of the fourteenth century, the traveller Ibn Battuta followed by the historian Ibn Khaldun. Ibn Battuta left Tangier for Egypt and Mecca at the start of a life that took him away to China as well as to East and West Africa. The narrative of his journeying has been translated by H. A. R. Gibb and C. F. Beckingham as *The Travels of Ibn Battuta, 1325–1354*, and abbreviated by Gibb as *Ibn Battuta. Travels in Asia and Africa*. It forms the basis of *The Adventures of Ibn*

Battuta by Ross E. Dunn, an account of the lands he visited which situates Africa in the Muslim world of the first half of the fourteenth century. Towards the end of that century a similar task was accomplished by Ibn Khaldun, whose history of the world grew out of a ministerial career that began at Fes and took him via Tlemcen and Tunis to Cairo. Only *The Muqaddimah* or Introduction is available in English, apart from passages covering the Bilad al-Sudan translated by Levtzion and Hopkins in their *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources*. Its great merit is that, unlike the personal narrative of Ibn Battuta's *Travels*, Ibn Khaldun's voluminous work is an attempt not only to record but to explain the evolution of nations and states. So far as Africa is concerned, this must stand as the first approach to a modern understanding of its history, the first attempt to identify the factors in its evolution.

Ibn Khaldun succeeds in this respect because his approach was broadly as well as narrowly anthropological, looking not only at the behaviour of tribal societies, but at the formation of cities and dynastic states according to the rules of economics and politics. In one sense he is traditional, following the geographers in their description of the world by bands of climate inhabited by different races. His subject, however, is the way in which those races had given rise to those nations who had entered into history as empire builders through their *'asabiyya* or fighting spirit. His inspiration came from the Berbers, who had created the Fatimid, Almoravid and Almohad empires, and in his own day the dynasties of the Marinids, Ziyayids and Hafsidis at Fes, Tlemcen and Tunis respectively. But his discussion embraced the Arabs, and by extension those other nations, from the Ancient Egyptians onwards, whose achievements were the story of mankind. At least since the response of the Arabs to the message of the Prophet, religion had been a major spur to such conquests, which had generated the states to the north of the Sahara with which he was familiar, and founded the cities in which he lived. But while Islam, the religion in question, was the principle of the modern civilisation to which he belonged, it had done no more than shape the natural urges of humanity, and not always that. No religious mission had brought to power the Marinids in Morocco and the Mamluks in Egypt, however much they had justified themselves as defenders of the faith. And it was certainly absent from the motivation of the Arab tribes of the Banu Hilal and Sulaym, who had spread across North Africa from the eleventh century onwards. These were no empire-builders qualified for entry into the historical record as a great nation; they were nevertheless saved for that record in the *Muqaddimah* by Ibn Khaldun, who was fascinated by their tribalism and their intrusion into state and society from Ifriqiya to Morocco. The explanation he offered for their behaviour was accompanied by a long ethnographic description of their genealogies and their doings down to his own time and personal experience, together with a version of the saga of their exploits which was their national myth. A whole dimension of the history of North Africa has thus been rescued from neglect.

III

That dimension is demographic, an illustration of Iliffe's theme across the whole of northern Africa from the Nile to the Atlantic, and from the Mediterranean to the Sudan. It is not necessarily a question of population growth, but certainly one of change in its composition and structure. By the time of Ibn Khaldun in the late fourteenth century, the nomadic Arabs of the Banu Hilal and the Banu Sulaym had not only spread to the north of the Sahara from Egypt to Morocco, but had separated into an aristocracy of warrior tribes and a residue of pastoral nomads, often too poor to survive except by settling as peasants, as in the oasis of Biskra described in Chapter 8. Out of the conflict generated by their settlement at Biskra came a petty dynastic state. More generally, however, nomads and peasants alike looked for protection to Arabs of a different kind, a class of holy men who had come into existence in opposition to the warriors, as colonists along cross-country routes and on cultivable land. Where the warriors held the countryside by force, the holy men or marabouts kept the peace, guaranteed the safety of travellers and marketplaces, and offered protection to settlers, and indeed to whole tribes in their vicinity. The relationship was that of a stateless society, but was incorporated into the government of the Hafsids at Tunis and the Ziyarids at Tlemcen, who employed the warriors and patronised the saints with grants of land and the rights to taxes. Ruled in this way, the population as far as the borders of Morocco was restructured. Berber society kept its independence only in the hills and mountains, whose higher ranges were for the first time densely settled. Elsewhere, old identities were lost as nomads and peasants came to form an Arabic-speaking population subject to the exactions of the state, its agents and its allies. Underlying an interminable history of dynastic warfare in which the warrior Arab tribes took a leading part, this blending of kinship and kingship, described in Brett and Fentress, *The Berbers*, and in Brett, *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib*, became the pattern of the state down to the nineteenth century.

In Morocco under the Marinids, the freedom of the warrior Arab tribes settled on the Atlantic plains was restricted; Berber tribal society remained predominant; and the marabouts or charismatic holy men who had made their appearance under the Almohads were themselves Berber. The Marinids themselves were suspicious of their hold over the population, and created colleges at Fes to spread the practice of the Islamic law to the countryside. But although the name 'marabout', *murabit*, signals their descent from the zealots of the *ribat* on the frontiers of the faith, they were not themselves revolutionaries like the Almoravids; their mission was to bless rather than reform the way of life of their tribal society. Documented in the ethnographic present by Ernest Gellner in *Saints of the Atlas*, they pursued the internal colonisation of that society by Islam, which after its unification of North Africa through the three great revolutions of the past, was firmly established as a principle of authority in tribal affairs. Like their counterparts

to the east, described once again in the ethnographic present by Evans-Pritchard in *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, they operated on internal frontiers to keep the peace, in Gellner's case between the inhabitants of the High Atlas and nomads from the south. In the time of Ibn Khaldun, however, the mountains were a political frontier. The Marinids had lost control of the lands to the south to the Banu Ma'qil, those tribes of the Banu Hilal who had migrated westwards along the northern edge of the desert to establish themselves as overlords of the oases, then advanced into the western Sahara to encounter the actual descendants of the Almoravids. No longer dedicated to war upon the heathen, as clerical clans engaged in trade and the cultivation of Islamic scholarship, these descendants became subordinate to the warrior tribes of the incoming Arabs. Those tribes in turn were assimilated into the hierarchical society of the desert as the Hassaniya, whose Arabic dialect came to take the place of Berber as the spoken language. Only in the highlands of the Ahaggar, Adrar and Air to the east did the Berbers of the Sahara, the Touareg of today, remain as warriors, merchants and scholars under the loose authority of a sultan at Agades.

IV

Together with those of the western Sahara, the scholars in question had begun to produce the Arabic literature described by Harry Norris in *The Tuaregs. Their Islamic legacy and its diffusion in the Sahel*. The manuscripts of religious writings, traditional histories and poetry are mostly of later date, but their composition goes back beyond the fifteenth century, when the scholars were in correspondence with the Egyptian jurist al-Suyuti. His fame beyond the desert bears witness to the prestige of Egypt, which under the Mamluk Sultans was once again an imperial power, as well as the major centre of literature and learning described in *The Cambridge History of Egypt*. As the way to Mecca, it was more than ever a magnet for the lands to the west of the Nile, attracting Ibn Battuta at the outset of his career and Ibn Khaldun at the end of his. Not only, said Ibn Khaldun, were the Mamluks the greatest of dynasties, but Cairo was the greatest of cities, which in the time of Ibn Battuta may have had a population of 500,000, a tenth of the population of the country. Into that population, the Mamluks themselves were imported as slave boys, at first from Central Asia and later from the Caucasus; they formed a class of mounted warriors from which native Egyptians, including their own sons, were excluded, and from which the Sultans were drawn. They were, on the other hand, thoroughly Egyptianised, contractually employed by the Treasury as land-tax farmers to maintain the irrigation system and raise the principal taxes, until their pensionable retirement from active service. While solving the problem of power in the patrimonial state, therefore, this final development of the army into a ruling caste left government where it had always been, in the hands of the clerical administration, still staffed to a significant extent by Copts. In the population as a whole, however, these were now a small minority, overtaken by the growth of the

Muslim majority as the population recovered from its setback under the later Fatimids.

With the spread of Arab nomadism to the south of Egypt as well as in North Africa and the Sahara, that growth extended up the Nile at the expense of the Nubian Christians and their kingdoms. By the Mamluk period, the Arab bedouin clustered around Aswan were settling in the valley from the capital of Upper Egypt at Qus as far as the Nubian frontier fortress of Qasr Ibrim. Driven out of Aswan by the forces of Saladin in 1172–4, the Banu 'l-Kanz had taken over the valley to the south, marrying into the Nubian population and bringing about its Islamisation. To this ongoing process, the Mamluks lent decisive weight. Like Saladin when he came to power, they were more concerned to take over Syria, but responded in the same way to revolts by these Arabs, and to the sack of the port of 'Aydhab by King David of Muqurra in 1272. The punitive expedition of 1276 not only overthrew David, but began a period of fifty years of further expeditions and support for rival candidates to the Nubian throne. The end of the Christian kingdom came in 1326, when the throne was finally taken by an Arab prince of the Banu 'l-Kanz by right of succession from a Nubian mother. Under his Nubian Muslim successors, the kingdom survived until overwhelmed at the end of the century by the progressive southward movement of the Arab tribes. Spreading out into the grasslands still further to the south, these may then have been largely responsible for the disappearance of 'Alwa by the end of the fifteenth century. For Ibn Khaldun the fate of these kingdoms, narrated by Hasan and Vantini, represented the destruction of civilisation by nomad primitivism; but formed part of the general pattern of Arabisation and Islamisation as the nomads themselves were assimilated into the populations of North Africa, the Sahara and the Sudan.

V

Compared with the millennial history of the state in the Nilotic Sudan, its withering away in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was a relatively brief interlude before its resurrection in the sixteenth. But like the previous disappearance of Meroe, it was associated with the eclipse of a belief, in this case Christianity, on which the state had been founded for hundreds of years; and as in the fourth and fifth centuries, a new religion, in this case Islam, was slow to come into political force. The contrast is once again with Ethiopia, which had flourished as Meroe declined, and now reached a comparable height of power and prosperity. Whereas the waning of Meroe may have been associated with the rise of Axum, however, there was now no such correlation. The scriptural dimension that had informed the growth of states across the northern half of the continent from Late Antiquity onwards, gave ideological force to the further expansion of the Christian kingdom away to the south across the central and southern highlands of Ethiopia rather than back towards the Red Sea and the Sudan. It was not a question of immigration by stateless nomads, but of conquest by the armies of a peasant state.

The expansion was the work of the Solomonid dynasty, which replaced the Zagwe at the end of the thirteenth century with its claim to have restored the line of Menelik, son of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Wherever it came from, it came with the blessing of the Church in the person of the saintly Tekla Haymanot, the founder of the monastery of Debra Libanos over three hundred kilometres to the south of Lalibela in the region of Shoa. While the Metropolitan continued to be an Egyptian sent by Alexandria, its abbot became the principal ecclesiastic of a kingdom centred in the Amharic-speaking regions of the south-central plateau. Church and state combined to fund not only the building of churches and monasteries, but a literature in the now scriptural language of Ge'ez, mostly translations of religious texts in Greek and Coptic, but including the *Kebrā Nagast*, the foundation legend of the monarchy, and a series of chronicles recounting the deeds of the kings. An indigenous written record, these narrate the warfare to east and west and north and south that turned the state into an empire under a King of Kings, which by the fifteenth century once again reached down to the Red Sea, and much further into the interior. The state at its heart stretched from Axum in the north to Shoa in the south, where the peasants had hereditary rights to their land, but the king himself was the landowner, granting its revenues to the Church and to the nobles, ministers and army commanders who ruled the provinces on his behalf and at his pleasure. The system is described by Crummey in *Land and Society in the Christian Kingdom of Ethiopia*, its operation by Tadesse Tamrat in *Church and State in Ethiopia* and again by Abir in *Ethiopia and the Red Sea*: the monarch had constantly to contend with the vested interests of the Church, his courtiers and his governors. But the impressive performance of a monarchy whose capital was a mobile camp the size of a town was described in the 1520s by the Portuguese priest Alvarez, whose account is summarised in Jones and Monroe, *A History of Ethiopia*. It comes from the very end of the period, just before two hundred years of conflict with the Muslim states to the south and east came to a head.

The celebration of that conflict in the chronicles demonstrates its importance in the formation of the empire as it expanded into the Rift Valley. Running south from the Red Sea along the eastern edge of the plateau until it cut through the middle of the Ethiopian highlands to the south of the Christian kingdom, the Rift Valley had been developed by Muslim merchants as the principal trade route into the interior for gold and ivory, and by the beginning of the Solomonid dynasty was occupied by a series of Muslim states climbing up from the Awash river in its lower reaches. The remains of their hilltop settlements and mosques have been set in context by Insoll in his *Archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa*; the most important was Ifat, which had replaced the old Muslim state of Shoa. But in the fourteenth century they were all conquered and converted into provinces under members of their old ruling families, except for the Walasma dynasty of Ifat, which withdrew to the east to rule the state of Adal. From their capital at Harar they returned across the Rift Valley in the fifteenth century to engage in perpetual border warfare with the Ethiopians.

VI

The rise of Adal in opposition to Ethiopia was not in isolation. Harar was part of the wider world of the Indian Ocean, looking north to the port of Zeila and south across the desert to Mogadishu, the one at the exit from the Red Sea, the other at the head of the route down the East African coast to Sofala. Both were visited by Ibn Battuta in 1331, before sailing down past Mombasa to Kilwa. Zeila he detested for its smell of fish and meat; but of Mogadishu he has nothing but praise for his reception by the Somali sultan and his Egyptian qadi in the course of his ceremonial conduct of public affairs, likewise for the piety of the people of Mombasa and those of Kilwa. Valuable as his account of Mogadishu in particular may be for its depiction of a government of standard Muslim type closely concerned with trade, the full picture continues to derive from archaeology. As described by Insoll, it is by now very full indeed for the period of Ibn Battuta's visit, with mosques in the Comoro Islands and the port of Mahilaka in Madagascar indicating the extent to which Muslims had colonised places where previously they had only traded. On the mainland and offshore islands, building in stone proliferated in the midst of mud and timber building, suggesting the growth of a wealthy merchant ruling class. It reached its height at Kilwa in the Great Mosque and the palace of Husuni Kubwa, constructions of the Mahdali dynasty celebrated by Ibn Battuta. This high point of city life on the East African coast coincides with that of Great Zimbabwe in succession to Mapungubwe, indicative of an equally high point in the gold and ivory trade through Sofala. The existence of the gold trade is confirmed by Ibn Battuta, who places its source at Yufi in the land of the Limi of Janada. But in his account of West Africa, Yufi and the Limi are on the Niger. Whether or not Yufi should be amended to Nupe in Nigeria, Limi to Lamlam, a vague name in the Arab geographers for peoples south of the savannah, and Janada to Janawa, in other words 'Guinea', here we are evidently at the limit of his knowledge, with no proper conception of the continent as a whole.

The same ignorance is displayed in his account of West Africa, where beyond the mysterious Yufi he follows the geographers in having the Niger flow across to the Nile. Otherwise, his eyewitness to the Sahara and the western Sudan on his journey from Morocco to Mali is all the more valuable for being fresh in his mind when he returned to Fes to dictate his memoirs. His circular tour took him out on a route controlled by the Massufa, one of the old Almoravid tribes, from Sijilmasa via the salt mines of Taghaza to Walata on the edge of the savannah, round through the land of the Blacks via the Inland Delta and Timbuktu to Gao, and thence through Takedda in the Touareg country of Air back to Morocco via the Hoggar mountains and the oasis of Tuat. The centrepiece of the journey, however, was an eight-month excursion to the capital of Mali, the successor to the empire of Ghana, whose dominions he had entered at Walata. At the capital of this

Muslim dominion he resided, no longer in a separate township for Muslims but in a separate quarter for the white expatriates, the merchants and the scholars with whom he generally stayed south of the desert. With these North Africans he was at home; Saharan Berbers and Sudanese Blacks, on the other hand, whether Muslim or pagan, were strangers whom he observed ethnographically. The contrast with the East Coast, where he emphasises the thoroughly Islamic character of Mogadishu and its government, is apparent in the non-Islamic features of the regime of the Mansa, the monarch, in which traditional offices such as the linguist and the praise-singer, and traditional customs such as female nudity and dusting the head as a sign of obedience, consorted with the presence of a Sudanese *qadi* and the performance of prayer. As opposed to Kilwa, whose sultan waged holy war on the pagans of the interior, such non-Muslims comprised the majority of the population, for whom the authority and power of the Mansa derived from an ancestral spirit world.

Ibn Battuta's account is supplemented by that of his contemporary al-'Umari, who witnessed the extravagant pilgrimage of Mansa Musa through Cairo in 1324. No more than the capital of pagan Ghana, however, has the city he visited been satisfactorily located; Insoll's rejection of Niani as a site of the sixteenth rather than the fourteenth century leaves the traditional history recorded in two seventeenth-century works by Sudanese rather than North African authors, the *Ta'rikh al-Sudan* and the *Ta'rikh al-Fattash*, without archaeological support. Their story is corroborated only by Ibn Khaldun, whose unknown source must date from within a hundred years of the creation of the Malian empire in the thirteenth century. Related by Nehemia Levtzion in his *Ancient Ghana and Mali*, this is the tale of the Mande-speaking peoples, from the Soninke of Ghana in the north to the Mandinka of Mali in the south, told in the recognisable terms of African kingship. Ghana is presumably Wagadu, whose foundation is associated with a snake; its place was taken in the twelfth century by the blacksmith kings of the Soso; these in turn were overthrown by the hunters of the Mandinka, by the hero Sundiata at the head of the Keita clan. Islam plays no part except to provide legendary ancestors for peoples whose sense of kinship contrasts with the territorial principle of the Mandinka *kafu* or township. In Chapter 8 the *kafu* was described as a basis for state formation, for statelets serving in this case as building blocks of empire. The mention of blacksmiths and hunters, however, points to the creation of the empires themselves by the followers of such specialised and dangerous occupations, as with Angola and the Luba-Lunda empire at a rather later date. Their prestige as masters of the spirit world went with their weaponry: swords and spears and bows, and with their use of horses, for mobility if not yet, perhaps, as cavalry.

By the time of Ibn Battuta's visit, Mali stretched far more widely than Ghana, right across the savannah from the Atlantic to beyond the Niger bend, taking in the Inland Delta and Gao to the east, and the Senegal and Gambia to the west. In this culmination of the long build-up of empire in the western Sudan, any distinction between a central and a marginal state

dissolves into a history of overlordship, much as in Ethiopia. By its exploitation of both agriculture and long-distance trade in the form of provincial tribute and commercial taxes, imperial government contributed to the progress of the exchange economy between the desert, the savannah and the forest, not least through the growing employment of cowries from the Indian Ocean as currency. At the centre of that economy in the Inland Delta of the Niger, Jenne had been refounded on a new site as a Muslim city, a home of Sudanese Islamic scholarship as well as the commerce of the Mande Dyula, clans of Muslim merchants who conducted the long-distance trade of the savannah, east and west and south and north as far as the Saharan merchant cities of Walata and Timbuktu. The trans-Saharan trade in gold from the savannah and forest in exchange for desert salt was supplied by miners who were, like blacksmiths, practitioners of a mysterious art which left them free from interference. The salt, on the other hand, was mined at Taghaza by slaves brought up from the Sudan. Tied in this way into the economy of the Sudan, the Sahara and North Africa through the trans-Saharan trade, Taghaza was a particular example of the universal employment of slaves from side to side of the desert. Men, women and children, they appear at almost every turn of Ibn Battuta's narrative, from the royal household down to himself and his acquaintances, as purchases, gifts, or servants in a seemingly affluent society.

The slaves may have come from inside or outside the empire. They may not yet have been employed in agriculture, as they were in the desert oases and later on in the savannah: the city-states of Hausaland over to the east, where they were brought in as colonists, were still in embryo. In the fourteenth century, however, Hausaland had not only been settled by Dyula merchants from the west and merchants from Kanim/Borno in the east, as described by Murray Last in the third edition of Vol. I of *Ajayi and Crowder's History of West Africa*. The six hundred women slaves in Ibn Battuta's caravan from Takedda back towards Morocco are most likely to have come from there; perhaps in payment, copper mined and smelted at Takedda with the help of slave labour was sent south into Hausaland and east to Borno, from whence came beautiful slave girls and boys. Borno to the west of Lake Chad was then a province of Kanim to the east, the kingdom which from the eighth century onwards had been the principal source of slaves for the trans-Saharan trade. Muslim since the eleventh century, its Saifawa dynasty had taken possession of the Fezzan in Libya to control the route across the desert through the oases of Kawar, where slaves worked the salt deposits as well as the gardens; in *Salt of the Desert Sun*, Paul Lovejoy has suggested that such salt production for the market of the central Sudan was worth more than the export of slaves into and across the Sahara. The worth of that trade, on the other hand, was measured in trans-Saharan imports, some simply prestigious, some, like horses, equally valuable for slave-raiding. Like the trade in salt, the volume of the slave trade was limited by the difficulty of transport; as John Wright says in *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, numbers counted in the nineteenth century can never have been much larger. But it does mean that those numbers can be used to estimate its previous volume. To his figure of some

3,500,000 crossing the desert from the eight to the fifteenth century must be added a more notional 2,500,000 for the routes down the Nile, across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. What is clear is that by the end of the Islamic Middle Ages, people rather than gold and ivory represented the major export of tropical Africa to the wider world.

PART IV

The Unification of Africa



THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION



20

The Age of Empire

I

The Muslim and Christian states of Africa with which Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun were familiar in the fourteenth century CE: Marinid Morocco, Hafsid Ifriqiya, Mamluk Egypt, Solomonid Ethiopia, Mahdali Kilwa, Mali under its Mansa and Kanim/Borno under the Saifawa, were the final products of the Middle Ages in Africa, from the time of the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in the fourth century CE and the Arab conquest of the African portion of his Roman empire in the seventh. Beyond the boundaries of their knowledge, the list overlaps with the states or polities of which they were not aware, but which had emerged or begun to form by the end of the Later Iron Age: those of Great Zimbabwe and Bigo, the dominions of the Luba, and the kingdoms of Kongo and Benin. Meanwhile in western Europe, four hundred years of population growth had covered the continent with a multitude of kingdoms, principalities and city states. By the end of the fifteenth century, however, this general evolution had been interrupted. Kilwa had faded, Great Zimbabwe had been abandoned, and the empire of Mali had shrunk away to the southern savannah. The sultanate of Morocco was confined to the north of the country, while that of the Mamluks in Egypt was impoverished. In western Europe, on the other hand, the establishment of the so-called new monarchies of England, France, Spain and Portugal marked the birth of the nation states of the modern world, while in eastern Europe and Asia Minor the Ottoman Turks had taken Constantinople from the last Byzantine emperor, and recreated the former Byzantine empire as a powerful Muslim dominion. Out of this diversity there came in the sixteenth century the formation of empire right around the globe, inaugurating a new age of the world in which Africa now played a central part.

The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 was once considered, with regard to its effect on Europe, as the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times. Its importance for the beginning of those times



13. Africa in an Age of Empire, c.1450 to c.1600 CE

in Africa is linked to the subsequent annexation of the Muslim kingdom of Granada by Spain in 1492. Far and away more significant, however, both for Europe and the world, was the other event of that year, the European discovery of America by Columbus in 1492. For Africa, its significance sprang from the progressive discovery by the Portuguese of the sea route round the continent to the Indies between 1434 and 1498. Both of these major European discoveries were linked to the fall of Constantinople and Granada, in that they were motivated in large measure by the long-standing conflict between Christendom and Islam in the Mediterranean, and the strategic perception of Islamic North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East as a barrier between Europe and the Indies to be outflanked by sea. But their significance for Africa derived from a completely different event, the arrival in the Mediterranean of the Black Death in 1346. This demographic catastrophe reduced the population of Europe and the Middle East by up to one third, while the recurrence of plague over the next 150 years retarded its recovery down to the sixteenth century. The consequences, described for Egypt and Syria in Michael Dols, *The Black Death in the Middle East*, were an acute shortage of labour. In Egypt, where agriculture was the most important source of revenue, the consequent shrinkage of the cultivated area impoverished the Mamluk state. Although the more sparsely populated countryside of the Maghrib was less affected, the density of the urban population meant that cities right across the Middle East, North Africa and Europe, together with their industries, were particularly badly hit. Africa south of the Sahara, on the other hand, remained untouched, the slow but steady growth of its population envisaged by Iliffe in contrast to the sharp fall to the north. The contrast was translated into the ability of the trade across the Sahara to meet an increased demand for Black slaves, simply to replenish their numbers. While their death rate at Cairo equalled that of the free population, their price, as Dols notes, did not rise.

Demand for such slaves, however, was not confined to the Islamic lands of the Mediterranean, but extended into southern Europe. Black slaves imported from North Africa into southern Europe were fewer than slaves acquired by war and piracy in the Mediterranean, and by trade with eastern Europe. Their numbers, however, increased with the arrival of the Portuguese off the coast of Senegal in the 1440s and the creation of a seaborne trans-Saharan trade route, which immediately offered the African slave dealers a profitable alternative to the hard and risky land route across the desert; Arguin island off the coast of Mauritania became the point of despatch for some 700–800 slaves a year. The market in this case was not only the familiar one for domestic slaves, mainly women, but also for labour, most significantly in the manufacture of sugar, the earliest industry to require a factory mode of production and its attendant workforce. Developed on a large scale in Egypt and Syria from Fatimid times onward, by the fifteenth century the industry had spread through Cyprus and Sicily, Spain and Portugal, to reach the Spanish Canaries and Portuguese Madeira, where slaves of various origin were employed in the mills. By the end of the century it had been established on the Cape Verde Islands, 400 kilometres to the west of Senegal, and on

São Thomé, virtually on the Equator, 300 kilometres to the west of Gabon. There, not only was the labour entirely Black but entirely slave, imported directly from the mainland, while the factory mode of production was expanded to include the growing and cutting of the sugarcane on plantations. With the opening up of the Americas in the sixteenth century, it simply remained to transplant this model, first to Brazil and then to the Caribbean. There, yet another demographic catastrophe, the decimation of the indigenous population by disease and extermination, meant that the necessary labour was likewise transported from West Africa in the beginning of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

II

This particular mode of entry on the part of sub-Saharan Africa into the new Atlantic world alongside the old worlds of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, is today the most notorious feature of the new age on the continent, a reflection of its long-term significance for the history of the world at large. Its importance for the approach to African history consists in the paradox that the principal export of a notoriously thinly-populated continent should have been its people, whether across the Atlantic, the Sahara or the Indian Ocean. The explication of the paradox is central to the problem of African history, beginning with sources which, in the case of the written record of European activity, continue to present a view from the outside, but one which, unlike so much of the earlier literature, was now the product of first-hand experience and observation. What the record demonstrates is that the slave trade and the sugar industry it served were for the first two hundred years incidental to the world-wide empire-building that began in the fifteenth century and culminated in the sixteenth. For the Portuguese, whose imperial enterprise is described by Malyn Newitt in *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire*, it was a means to turn the Atlantic islands and Brazil into viable colonies while they traded along the West African coast for pepper and above all gold, before rounding the Cape and winning for themselves control of the spice trade of the Indian Ocean. Only towards the end of the sixteenth century did the centrality of Africa to this maritime empire in the Indies begin to be matched by its centrality to sugar-based empire in the New World. Meanwhile, the position of Africa on the Mediterranean had turned it into a battleground between the rival empires of Spain and the Ottomans. How the continent moved in this way to the centre of world affairs is the first step to evaluating the result for Africa itself.

The roots of this world-wide empire-building are traced on the European side in the classic work of J. H. Parry, *The Age of Reconnaissance. Discovery, exploration and settlement, 1450–1650*, more recently in Fernández-Armesto's *Before Columbus: exploration and colonisation from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1229–1492*. Politically, they are to be found in the Ottoman capture of Constantinople in 1453 and in the Reconquista, the Christian conquest of Muslim Spain that culminated in the capture of Granada in 1492. Econom-

ically they grew out of the commerce of the Mediterranean in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; intellectually out of the translation of Ptolemy's *Geography* into Latin around the beginning of the fourteenth century; and technically out of the development of ocean-going ships, firearms, and map-making. Parry sums up the mixture of motives: conquest at the expense of the infidel; conversion of Muslims and pagans; land for colonisation; commercial profit; all within the growing sense of the world as a sphere whose circumnavigation promised a way to China and the Indies for Europeans barred by Islam from access overland or via the Red Sea. His subject, then, is the overseas expansion of Portugal and Spain from the late fifteenth century onwards. Fernando-Armesto deals rather with the long build-up over the previous two hundred years, dwelling on the Italians of Genoa and Venice and the Catalans of Barcelona, whose fleets throughout the period dominated the commerce of the Mediterranean and its trade by sea with northern Europe. Within the Mediterranean they created their own island empires; out in the Atlantic they were instrumental in the discovery of the Canaries, Madeira and the Azores in the course of the fourteenth century; while along the North African coast their expatriate colonies of merchants at Alexandria, Tunis and elsewhere traded by agreement with their rulers, the Ziyonids, Hafsid and Mamluks. Their predominance was a measure of the size and strength of the European economy, whose production and consumption had overtaken those of the Arab lands in the Golden Age of Islam, partly despite and partly because of the Black Death. The development of the European sugar industry was a case in point; more important was the way in which Europe had turned to North Africa for grain and wool, and become a major market for West African gold and East Indian spices as well as slaves. In their capacity as suppliers and middlemen, the rulers of North Africa and Egypt became increasingly dependent for their revenues on overseas trade with Europe.

Calling for peace rather than war, this relationship was eclipsed from the fifteenth century onwards in the course of the military revolution and clash of empires described by Hess in *The Forgotten Frontier*: the use of the new firearms in the formation of the Portuguese, Spanish and Ottoman empires at either end of the Mediterranean, and in their conflict in North Africa. Dynastic disputes had undermined the construction of a centralised state in Morocco by the Marinids, whose power shrank back to the region of Fes. In 1415 the Portuguese captured Ceuta, in 1471 Tangier; and by 1520 they had taken every port on the Atlantic coast as far south as Agadir with the exception of Rabat and Sale. Meanwhile the Spaniards had not only defeated Portuguese efforts to seize the Canary Islands, which they had brutally colonised, enslaving or exterminating its native Berber population, the Guanches. By 1510, following their capture of Granada in 1492, they too had crossed into North Africa to seize Mers el-Kebir, Oran, Bijaya and Tripoli together with control of Algiers and other ports along the Mediterranean coast, in reaction to the vengeful raiding of Spain by Muslim corsairs. Like the Marinids and their successors the Wattasids of Fes, the Ziyonids of Tlemcen and the Hafsid of Tunis were too weak to prevent them. At the

other end of the Mediterranean, however, the Ottomans conquered Syria and Egypt from the Mamluks in 1517, and rapidly came to sponsor the establishment at Algiers of their own corsairs from the Aegean. Acting in much the same way as Cortés and Pizarro, their Spanish contemporaries in Mexico and Peru, the captains of these corsairs set out to carve a dominion for themselves on the frontier of Islam in the west. Though the Spaniards went on to take control of Tunis from 1535 to 1574, by the time peace was finally concluded in 1581, these Beylerbeys had conquered the dominions of the Ziyarids and the Hafsidids with the help of Ottoman troops, driving the Spaniards from all except Mers el-Kebir and Oran, and rising to command the imperial Ottoman fleet. At sea, piracy on a grand scale had replaced trade; on land, the corsair base at Algiers had taken its place alongside Tunis and Tripoli as a capital city. The old Byzantine-Arab state of Ifriqiya had finally ceased to exist, and in its place, the modern states of Algeria, Tunisia and Libya had come into existence alongside Egypt as provinces of the Ottoman empire.

III

In the more localised conflict between the Portuguese and the Moroccans, the Muslim counterattack came from within the country, from a messianic movement which originated in the south at the beginning of the sixteenth century, went on to recapture most of the ports from Agadir to Azemmour, and in the middle of the century replaced the Wattasid successors of the Marinids at Fes. The country was then reunited in a new Moroccan empire under the Saadians, a dynasty of Sharifs or descendants of the Prophet. The Portuguese returned periodically to the idea of conquering this realm, but from the days of their prince Henry the Navigator in the middle of the fifteenth century, they were in practice drawn away to the discovery and development of the sea route to West Africa and India. And although this too was religiously driven by the idea of sailing around Africa, perhaps to find an ally against Islam in the legendary Christian kingdom of Prester John somewhere in the East, its progress depended upon its profitability, upon direct access to West African gold and the spices of the Indies, and the establishment of commercial relations with the peoples en route. Thus the Moroccan ports which they fortified and garrisoned became trading posts where they acquired horses and blankets to sell in West Africa. By then the exploration of the route to India had been completed in four stages, the first as far as Sierra Leone between 1434 and 1460, the second from Sierra Leone as far as Cape St Catherine on the coast of Gabon between 1471 and 1474. The third, between 1482 and 1486, reached past the mouth of the Congo as far as Walvis Bay on the coast of Namibia, while the fourth began with the discovery of the Cape in 1488 and ended with the voyage of Vasco da Gama to India in 1498. Exploration had been followed up with settlement: the colonisation of the Cape Verde Islands in 1460; the building of Elmina Castle on the Gold Coast in 1482; the establishment of trading stations at Gwato

and Warri on the estuaries of the Nigerian coast in 1486; the settlement of São Thomé in 1493; the opening of relations with the kingdom of Kongo between 1491 and 1506; and on the east coast, the building of forts at Sofala and Mozambique in 1505 and 1508. Following the advance of Islam across Africa from the north and east, this incorporation of the continent into the nascent Portuguese empire from the west and south was the next major step towards its unification.

The event was crucially signalled, not simply by the appearance of the first written accounts of the continent beyond the horizon of the Arabic sources, but by that of the first maps to depict its true shape. Beginning with the discovery and representation of the southern trend of the western coast in the 1480s, within a year or two of Vasco da Gama's voyage the Ptolemaic image of a land mass stretching to the east had been abandoned for one stretching to the south, whose outline was verified by observation rather than theory. The result is expressed in the title of Francisc Relação's *The Shaping of Africa*, a new and more accurate notion of the physical form of the continent to serve as the arena for the play of Africa in the European mind. Its entry into the mind of Africa rapidly followed, as the Mamluks of Egypt were made aware of the arrival of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean by the blow to their revenues from the spice trade, while around the coast, the Portuguese set out to propagate their Christian view of the world at the same time that they joined its various sectors together on the basis of existing patterns of trade. Along the coast of Lower Guinea from Ghana to Cameroun and from there to the Congo, they took over from an coastwise canoe traffic when they carried slaves, cloth and beads westwards from the region of the Niger Delta to trade for gold at Elmina, and cloth and beads southwards to the kingdom of Kongo to exchange for slaves and for the copper bracelets they called manillas. This takeover of coastal traffic for the purpose of longer-distance trade resembles the way in which such traffic on the East African coast had long been incorporated into the trade of the Indian Ocean, from which the Portuguese, coming up from the south to the land of Sofala, displaced the Swahili and their partners coming down from the north. The effect was felt in the interior. Trading as they now did with the kingdom of Kongo on the one hand, and that of the Mwene Mutapa on the northern edge of the Zimbabwean plateau on the other, the Portuguese entered into a pattern of exchange which like the Bantu languages and peoples spanned the continent from side to side. That was certainly the case in West Africa, where at Elmina and on the coast of Senegal and the Gambia they drew gold and slaves away from the trans-Saharan trade.

Dependent as they were upon their African suppliers, their dealings nevertheless reflected the differences between each sector, differences which in turn are reflected in the modern literature. While the importance of the Portuguese sources is not in dispute, the story of their activities as told for West Africa in the third edition of Vol. I of Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa* is marginal to the internal history of each region, leading up to the spectacular growth of states and slave trading in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. On the Congo and the Zambezi, on the other hand,

the penetration of the Portuguese inland has linked them from the outset to the empires of the south in the UNESCO and Cambridge histories. From Senegal round to Sierra Leone, the Portuguese exported slaves from the little principalities which had either broken away from the empire of Mali or been created by invaders, while at Elmina on the Gold Coast they imported slaves for gold-mining in the incipient states of the Akan; at Gwato and Warri on the coast of Nigeria they encountered the kingdom of Benin at the height of its power. The monarchy whose constitution was examined in 'The mind of Africa' had in the middle of the fifteenth century set out on a career of conquest lasting down to the end of the sixteenth, on the strength of a dynasty of warrior kings who dominated their households, their office-holders and their nobility. The Portuguese were welcomed as suppliers of copper and brass, coral, glass and European cloth, but were doubly frustrated, first by a prohibition on the export of male slaves, for which they turned to the little states of the Niger Delta, and secondly by their failure to bring about the conversion of the kingdom to Christianity, the ideological purpose of their imperial mission. With the kingdom of Kongo the reverse was true.

For fifty years, from the conversion of the Manikongo and his court to Christianity in 1491 to the death of the baptised king Afonso in 1543, the mission was an unqualified success for both partners: for the Portuguese who had won the kingdom for the faith, and obtained a steady supply of slaves in return, and for the Kongolese monarchy, which employed Christianity to form a new and exclusive aristocracy ruling a more centralised, more oppressive state, one which monopolised the new and profitable trade with the Europeans. The arrangement broke down with the erosion of the commercial monopoly: rogue Portuguese slave traders supplying the plantations on São Thomé and Príncipe dealt not only with rogue Kongolese suppliers, but with the Ngola a kiluanje, the blacksmith king *par excellence* of the southern state of Ndongo. In 1556 the armies of Ndongo defeated the Kongolese with the aid of the Jaga or Yaka, warriors from the interior; ten years later, with popular support, the Jaga overran the entire kingdom of Kongo, and were only evicted by the Portuguese in 1574. The following year, however, in 1575, the Portuguese went on to found Luanda on the Angolan coast, which through their encouragement of slave raiding in the interior, took the place of Kongo as the principal centre of their slave trade at a time when the sugar plantations of Brazil had added a whole new dimension to their African enterprise.

On the far side of the continent, the quest for gold took precedence over conversion and slaving as the Portuguese followed the Swahili up the valley of the Zambezi to trade with the lords of the goldfields on the Zimbabwean plateau. These were the heirs of Great Zimbabwe on the northern and western instead of the southern edge of the highlands, kingdoms of the Shona under the overlordship of the Mwene Mutapa to the north of Harare. Here for the first time, in the copious Portuguese literature as well as in oral tradition, the state that originated at Mapungubwe and flourished at Great Zimbabwe is revealed as an empire to stand alongside those others of the south, a cluster of princedoms sharing the same royal lineage, formed in the

opinion of Oliver and Atmore in *Medieval Africa* by the kind of emigration characteristic of the Lunda, and possessing all the common features of African kingship in Mair's *Primitive Government* and *African Kingdoms*. Throughout the sixteenth century their rulers made the Portuguese pay for the privilege of trading, while the one attempt to convert the Mwene Mutapa himself ended in massacre. But the Portuguese not only succeeded in ousting the Swahili from the trade, but in colonising the lower Zambezi valley. Their 'captains' at Mozambique ran their own little empire for their own profit, while the upstream garrisons at Sena and Tete were joined by the Africanised owners of large estates, who quickly developed into African-style kinglets.

IV

Reaching back towards the north, the Portuguese encirclement of Africa came to an end at the southern gateway to the Mediterranean, the entrance to the Red Sea. Portuguese hegemony in the Indian Ocean, described by Newitt in *The First Portuguese Colonial Empire* and by Chaudhuri in *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean*, included the Swahili coast, whose cities were held to their treaty obligations by a second 'captain' stationed at Malindi north of Mombasa. Excluded from the Portuguese commercial empire but punished for rebellion, these cities nevertheless maintained their old trade in ivory, skins and slaves with the Red Sea, while continuing to import slaves from Madagascar as agricultural labour. As Muslims they were indifferent to the Christian mission, which had enjoyed some success among pagans on the Zambezi. That mission, however, returned to the fore in Ethiopia, as the Portuguese finally encountered the Islamic enemy, the Mamluks followed by the Ottomans in the Gulf of Aden, and the long-standing conflict of the Solomonids with the sultanate of Adal was caught up in the confrontation between the rival empires. Alarmed by the arrival of a Portuguese fleet off Jeddah, the port of Mecca, the Ottomans supplied the Imam Ahmad Grañ of Adal with the firearms to pursue a holy war in which Ethiopia, at the height of its power, was from 1529 overrun and devastated, until in 1542 the Imam was killed in battle by Portuguese musketeers. But although Ethiopia had been rescued, the Portuguese had meanwhile lost interest in securing the entrance to the Red Sea. The conflict itself dragged on until the end of the century, by which time Adal was defunct, Ethiopia was beset by the invasion of the plateau by Oromo (Galla) nomads from the south and the Ottomans had taken possession of Massawa. The Jesuit missionaries who maintained the Portuguese connection had alienated the Ethiopians by their rigid Catholicism, and the alliance failed to develop.

Instead, in 1592 the Portuguese occupied and fortified Mombasa to guard against Ottoman fleets in the Indian Ocean. By then the Ottoman empire in Africa had reached its maximum extent, having annexed Nubia north of the Third Cataract to Egypt. In Weber's terms, summarised by Turner in *Weber and Islam*, it was the greatest of the patrimonial states of Islam, an elite

of soldiers, secretaries and jurists ruling over a mass of subjects in the name of the Sultan. In the terms of Hess in *The Forgotten Frontier*, it was an empire in which foreign soldiers ruled over a miscellaneous collection of lands and peoples. Its formation, summarised by Holt in *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent* and now in *The New Cambridge History of Islam*, Vol. 2, had nevertheless brought peace and prosperity to those lands in a second golden age of Islam, in which cities such as Cairo, Tripoli and Tunis were once again growing in size after the plagues and warfare of the past. Across the Sahara it was associated in this imperial age, not only with the growth of trade from the Central and Nilotic Sudan, but with the appearance of new dominions from the Red Sea to the Atlantic. 'Alwa, the last of the Christian states on the Nile, had finally been overrun by the Arabs, the 'Abdallab; but at the beginning of the sixteenth century these in turn had been forced back by the Funj, a pagan people coming down the Blue Nile, who went on to establish a Muslim monarchy to which the 'Abdallab were subordinate. As the Arabs spread down into the savannah to the west of the Nile, a further relationship was formed with the Tunjur, pagan monarchs in the highlands of Darfur and Waday. The Funj and most probably the Tunjur operated, in the phrase of Hopkins in *An Economic History of West Africa*, as substantial firms involved in trade with Egypt. Coming in this way into contact with Islam, the Tunjur kingdoms between the Nile and Lake Chad completed the incorporation of the old Bilad al-Sudan into the Muslim world. Around Lake Chad itself, where the incorporation had begun some seven hundred years before, the Mais or rulers of Kanim had been displaced at the end of the fourteenth century from their original homeland to the north-east of the lake by the Bulala from around Lake Fitri, halfway between Chad and Waday. By the sixteenth century, however, their conquest and colonisation of Borno to the west of the lake had enabled them to reconquer their former territory to the east. By the second half of the century, supplied with guns and horses by the Ottomans in Tripoli and enriched by the Ottoman demand for slaves and gold, the Mai Idris Alooma vied with the Askias of Songhay, the successors to the Mansas of Mali as rulers of the Niger bend, for supremacy over Hausaland, the intervening savannah of northern Nigeria and Niger.

The understanding of Hausa history depends upon the answer to Horton's vexed question of state formation. The Hausa today are one of the most prominent peoples of West Africa, the speakers of a language belonging to the Chadic branch of Afro-Asiatic. In the first and second editions of Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa*, their evolution is described by Abdullahi Smith in terms of the gradual passage of a stateless agricultural population from village to town to walled cities in which traditional chiefs became traditional office-holders under hereditary rulers. In the third edition, Murray Last sees in these city states the outcome of a competition for the resources of Saharan followed by trans-Saharan trade, which governed the history of the Bilad al-Sudan from the eighth century onwards. The process which in Fage's *History of Africa* began with the appearance of Kanim and Ghana on the edge of the desert not only generated the larger empires of Mali and Kanim/Borno on the savannah further to the south. From the

fourteenth century onwards in Hausaland, the rivalry of Muslim merchants from west and east for control of the trade in gold from (modern) Ghana would have cut short the growth of indigenous states in the manner proposed by Smith with the establishment of warrior Muslim rulers at Kano, Katsina, Zaria and elsewhere. While Hausa gradually took the place of the original Niger-Congo languages of the region, a slaving frontier developed towards the south, from which these rulers drew the labour for the colonisation of their territories. Having come to power in the fifteenth century, however, in the sixteenth they were forced to defend themselves against the invasions of Borno to the east and Songhay to the west.

For the sixteenth century, the story is taken over in Ajayi and Crowder by John Hunwick, relying for the first time upon a contemporary or near-contemporary literature of Sudanese origin to describe the two empires and the Hausa states. That of Songhay was the culmination of the empire-building that began in the western Sudan with Ghana and continued with Mali. In the second half of the fifteenth century the Mansas of Mali lost control of the Niger bend and the Inland Delta to Sonni Ali, the ruler of the Songhay at Kukiya downstream from Gao. At his death in the fatal year of 1492 the throne was seized by his Soninke commander, the Askia Muhammad Ture, who converted his predecessor's conquests into the nucleus of an empire which in the course of the sixteenth century extended northwards to the salt mines of Taghaza in the Sahara, eastwards to the copper mines of Air, and westwards to the Senegal. Even more so than Mali, it was a multi-ethnic state of provinces governed by princes of the royal family in command of cavalry armies, together with tributary rulers in Air and Hausaland. At Gao, the capital, the Askia held court in the manner of the Mansas of Mali. Taxes on agriculture in the Inland Delta and on trade through Jenne and Timbuktu may have been more efficiently collected by a more literate administration; a still denser network of trade routes in the hands of merchant families and kinships enabled the Moroccan Leo Africanus to go further than Ibn Battuta as Moroccan ambassador to Songhay, Borno and finally Egypt. Islam in the hands of scholars belonging to those families at Jenne and Timbuktu certainly carried more weight, economically through trade, culturally through the copying, writing and accumulation of books, and politically through criticism of government practice. Their censorship was a measure of the Islamisation of state and society over the past five centuries; its counterpart was the assumption by the Askias of the role of defenders of the faith, even as their government continued along traditional lines. Thus integrated into the trans-Saharan world of the Moroccans and Ottomans, what they fatally lacked in this early modern age was guns.

The conflict when it came was not with Borno in Hausaland but with Morocco under its new Saadian dynasty, when Songhay was caught up in the clash of empire in North Africa. The Saadians, who in the middle of the sixteenth century had driven the Portuguese from the southern Moroccan coast, ousted the Wattasids from Fes, and recreated a Moroccan empire, were nevertheless aware of their vulnerability to attack not only by the Portuguese and the Spaniards but by the Ottomans, who assassinated their Sultan in

1557. But in 1578 they triumphantly survived a Portuguese invasion in which the king of Portugal was killed, earning the title of al-Mansur, the Conqueror, for their new Sultan Ahmad. As a Sharif or descendant of the Prophet he claimed the Caliphal title of Commander of the Faithful to assert his superiority to the Ottoman Sultan, giving audience from behind a curtain to emphasise his elevation over his subjects. But modelling his regime on that of the Ottomans, he created the equivalent of their janissaries, their regiments of musketeers, out of Muslim refugees from Spain and Christian renegades. The administration was entrusted to a Wazir at the head of a council of ministers, tax collection to judges from the ranks of the scholars of Islam. The palace he built for himself at Marrakesh provided the theatrical setting. Opposition from tribes and from the marabouts or holy men who had helped to bring the dynasty to power was ruthlessly suppressed. Abroad, his alliance was courted both by Spain and her enemies, the Dutch and the English, who supplied munitions in exchange for the sugar he was producing with black slave labour in the south. Spectacularly, however, he attempted to outdo the Spanish conquerors of Mexico and Peru by seizing the goldfields of West Africa.

From the beginning of the century, the Saadians had claimed the salt mines of Taghaza in the possession of Songhay. Having taken control of the neighbouring oases of Tuat, Ahmad turned this claim into a cause for war, more widely justified by a demand for recognition as supreme ruler of Islam. In 1591 his musketeers marched across the desert and destroyed both the army and the empire of Songhay at the battle of Tondibi. In possession of Timbuktu, and in control of the salt for gold trade, Ahmad gained both gold and the epithet al-Dhahabi, the Golden. But unlike the Spaniards in the New World, his musketeers were unable to annex the dominions of the empire they had overthrown. A hundred years after the fall of Granada, Tondibi not only put an end to the long history of empire in the western Sudan. Together with the Portuguese fortification of Mombasa in the following year, in Africa it marked the end of the empire-building of the sixteenth century, two hundred years before it resumed on the continent in the nineteenth. The characterisation of the intervening two hundred years is crucial to the approach to African history.

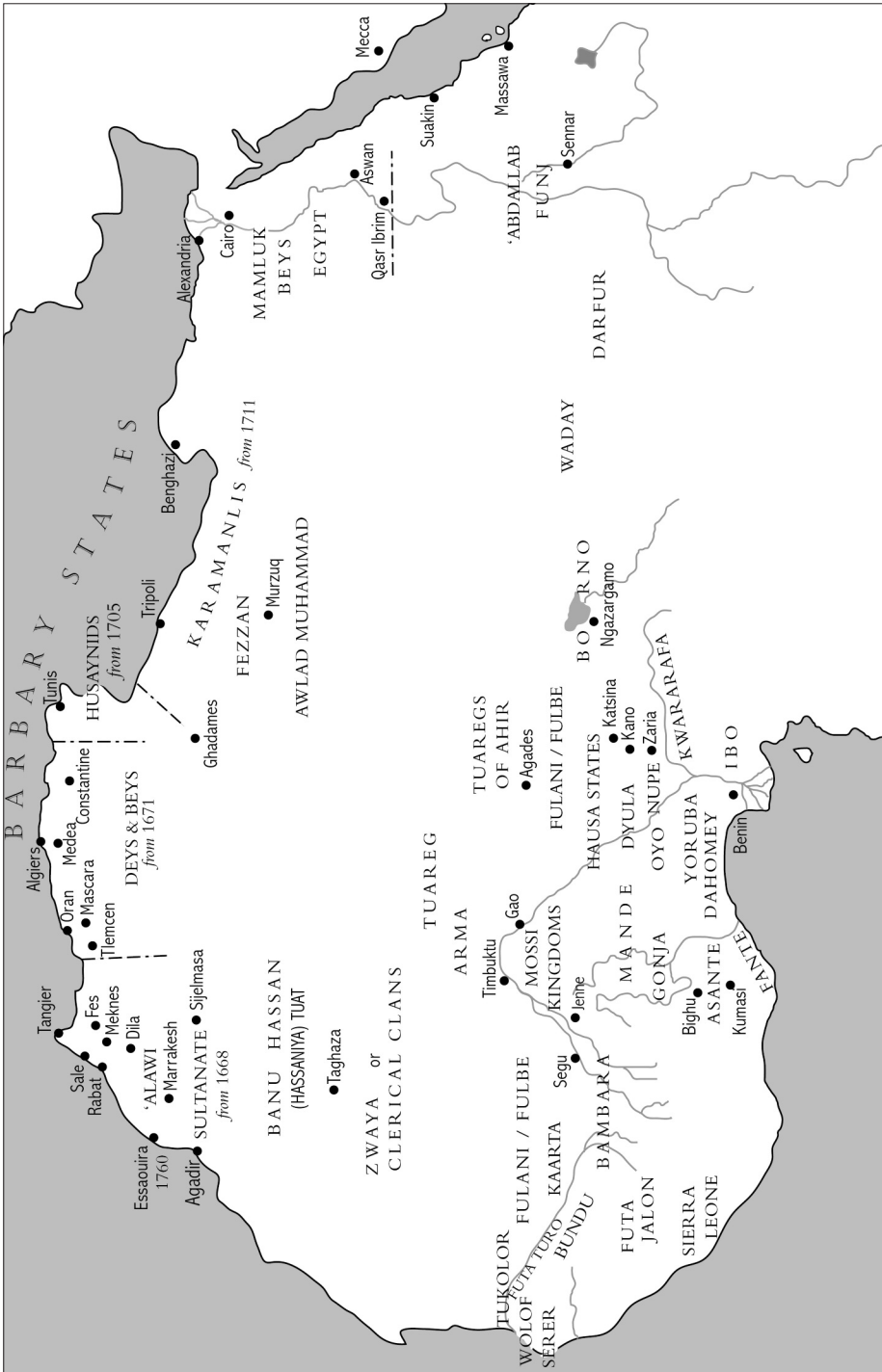


21

An Islamic Africa

I

Around the turn of the sixteenth into the seventeenth century, the previous age of empire came to a close. Both Spain and the Ottoman Sultanate were impoverished by the spiralling cost of unprofitable wars, aggravated by the great inflation attributed to the influx of silver and gold from the Americas. Morocco, which had destroyed the empire of Songhay, fell apart once again in the succession dispute which followed the death of Ahmad al-Mansur in 1603. Portugal, annexed by Spain following the death of its king in Morocco in 1578, failed to maintain its monopoly of trade with West Africa and the Indian Ocean in the face of competition from the Dutch and the English followed by the French. The effect of the empire-building of the sixteenth century nevertheless lived on in the hostile relationship of Africa north of the Sahara to Europe, and the centrality of Africa south of the Sahara to Europe's global trade with the Americas and the Indies. The raids upon European coasts and shipping by the corsairs of the new Barbary states, from Morocco through Algiers and Tunis to Tripoli, turned the warfare of the previous century into a highly profitable commercial operation. But where the corsairs brought their captives into slavery in Africa, from south of the Sahara slaves were exported in larger and larger numbers as the demand of the Americas overtook the traditional demands of the Middle East. Transactions in both cases took place on the coast, which for Europeans formed a frontier that extended right around the continent, punctured only to a limited extent by the Portuguese in southern Africa and Ethiopia. As a result, the maps which outlined the land mass of Africa in relation to the rest of the world with a fair degree of accuracy, continued to fill the interior with the stuff of ancient and mediaeval literature. Maps produced at Istanbul show that the Ottomans were likewise familiar with the new shape of the continent. But as they looked south across the Sahara from their position on the northern coast, its southern frontiers continued to be those of Islam in the savannah from the Atlantic to the Red Sea, and inland from the Horn and



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the Swahili coast. Within these limits, as the Ottoman provinces in Egypt and North Africa moved towards independence; as the cities of the east coast struggled to shake free of the Portuguese; and as the western Sudan was abandoned by the Moroccans, the legacy of empire was the continued development of Islam as a principle of social formation and political action.

The concept of an Islamic Africa in the mind of a sixteenth-century North African is explored by Natalie Zemon Davis in *Trickster Travels*, her biographical study of Leo Africanus, the Moroccan diplomat who spent some nine years in Rome, from 1518 to 1527, first as a captive and then as a Christian, before returning apparently to Tunis and presumably to Islam. Writing in Italian for the benefit of a readership largely ignorant of the subject, he composed a Description of Africa in which a travelogue in the manner of Ibn Battuta is formatted by climate and by race in the manner of the Arab geographers. In *The Negroland Revisited*, Pekka Masonen sums up the argument that he had never in fact visited the Sudan; Davis follows Hunwick, *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire*, in thinking that he did. What matters is the result, a perception of the continent very much in the manner of Ibn Khaldun, whose work is introduced by Leo to a European audience long before the original became available. Across the Sahara from the Maghrib, the Bilad al-Sudan is still seen as a foreign country of foreign Black folk; but the principal distinction is between Muslims and pagans, civilisation and barbarism, inside and outside the lands of Islam. The Islam he describes is by no means fanatical, and in an age of religious imperialism open to peaceful coexistence. In the same vein, the account of the interior is sympathetic as well as informative, even if the European mapmakers could not follow it on the ground: in their maps, the Niger continued to run into the Nile, and improbable mountains and rivers criss-crossed North Africa as well as the Sahara.

Hunwick's *Timbuktu and the Songhay Empire* meanwhile supplies the view of an Islamic Africa from south of the Sahara in the seventeenth-century histories of Songhay by the scholars of Timbuktu, in particular the *Ta'rikh al-Sudan* of al-Sa'di. For these scholars, the past was formed by the Islamic era, in which the legendary heroes from whom the peoples of the western Sudan traced their descent had been succeeded by Muslim monarchs. In that perspective, the casual acceptance of paganism that had characterised the empire of Mali had given way to a much more categorical definition of the faith. The incorporation of Timbuktu into the empire of Songhay in the fifteenth century had provoked the familiar opposition in Islam between scholars and rulers, and activated the dispute over paganism and pagan practices that dated from the time of al-Qabisi and Ibn Yasin. Around the end of the fifteenth, beginning of the sixteenth century, in the generation preceding that of Leo, the authorities for compromise versus intolerance had still been foreign – the Egyptian al-Suyuti versus the North African al-Maghili. By the seventeenth century, the scholars of Timbuktu studied by Saad in his *Social History of Timbuktu* had taken their place as authors in their own right, their scholarship firmly based upon their extensive libraries of works from across the Sahara. The situation in which they found themselves, however,

had radically changed with the demise of Islamic empire in the western Sudan. In place of the Askias, they were confronted by the reappearance of pagan kingdoms. On this southern frontier of the Islamic world, the boundaries between Islam and paganism were becoming critical, even as they continued to be blurred in practice by the passage of Islam into the common repertory of the spirit world. At the level of myth, this was apparent in the assimilation of Islam and its Biblical notions of descent from the sons of Noah into legends of origin laying claim to ancestors from the East. Arab descent had been claimed by Berbers from at least the tenth century onwards; south of the Sahara the clearest example is the Hausa legend of Bayejidda, Abu Yazid. It can be compared with the legend of Shirazi ancestry on the East Coast; with the Ethiopian claim to descent from Solomon; and for that matter, with the mediaeval English claim to Trojan ancestry. In Africa, such legends reveal a heightened historical consciousness of the place of each people in a Scriptural story of the world as a whole. They do not amount to a notion of African history. But if the idea of Africa is absent, they are nevertheless a product of the actual history that created the Africa of Leo Africanus. In that history, these legends find their place.

They certainly find a place in the modern historiography of that Africa, in which the Scriptural dimension of its history finds expression in the twin titles of Hess and of Levtzion and Pouwels, *The Forgotten Frontier* and *The History of Islam in Africa*. Where Hess contrasts the civilisations of Islam and Europe in the aftermath of clash of empires in the sixteenth century, going their separate ways to the north and south of the Mediterranean before their conflict was renewed in the nineteenth century, Levtzion and Pouwels turn to the history of the faith to the south of the Sahara before its communities came under colonial rule in the final phase of European imperialism. The common factor is the religion as the formative principle of conduct, whether as ideology, identity, or government in all its senses. That begs the question of its definition. In principle, historians cannot decide upon the truth of any particular faith, but only describe the range of its beliefs and observe the different ways in which believers act upon them. *Islam Observed* is indeed the title chosen by Clifford Geertz for his consideration of the difference in character of the faith in Morocco and Indonesia, without judging its performance by conformity to some criterion of right and wrong, truth or falsity. In Africa the doctrinal definition of Islam as the Shari'a or law has nevertheless been regularly taken to evaluate the Islam of its different societies in terms of the observance or non-observance of its prescriptions, and by extension to evaluate the society itself. In the colonial period to the north and south of the Sahara such evaluations joined with the descriptions of African political systems to serve the purpose of colonial rule, with varying degrees of success. But whether or not they did so, the result has been the description of what has been called mixed as opposed to pure Islam. In the mid-twentieth century the conclusion of Alfred Bel in *La religion musulmane en Berbérie*, of J. S. Trimingham in *Islam in West Africa* and *A History of Islam in West Africa*, and of I.M. Lewis in the Introduction to his edited volume *Islam in Tropical Africa*, was that this mixed or African Islam had triumphed

over all attempts to impose a more rigorous form of the faith upon quintessentially African societies and ways of thought. Two decades later, in *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, Mervyn Hiskett rather considered that the history of Islam in the west and central Sudan had been a triumph for the power of literate ideas. Ten years on, however, in 1994 he gloomily anticipated in *The Course of Islam in Africa* that this Scriptural Islam would either become a personal faith or give rise to yet another holy war upon unbelief in all its forms. Whatever conclusion they have come to, these authors have in fact done so from the point of view of those who do indeed believe in the truth of this Islam as the standard by which the faith is to be measured, and have at intervals endeavoured to impose it on their societies. The rise to prominence of this radicalism over the past hundred years has made it all the more difficult for the historian of Africa to abandon this essentialist view of Islam, and to keep the conflict between the Scriptural and the ethnographic approach to the history of Islamic Africa in Geertz's perspective.

II

To turn to that history from the history of Islam in Africa is to observe that in the centuries following Leo's Description, it continued to be shaped by the factors of trade and communications that had created the Africa with which he was familiar in the Golden Age of Islam. As John Wansbrough remarked of the Mediterranean in his *Lingua Franca in the Mediterranean*, by the sixteenth century a map of Islamic Africa would be heavily inked with the traces of movement, a network of routes and terminals developed over the past thousand years to enclose the Sahara in a vast space of political, cultural and economic activity. By the seventeenth century, indeed, something of the prosperity of the Golden Age had returned, fundamentally because the population of the Mediterranean world was growing again after its disastrous fall in the wake of the Black Death, but also because of the Ottoman conquests in the previous century. Just like the Arab conquests, these had brought wealth into the hands of the state, whose expenditure created a large new market in the manner described by Ibn Khaldun. And just as the market economy created by the Arab conquests had survived the disintegration of the Arab empire, so in the seventeenth century it endured while the Ottoman state lost control of its provinces. The decline of the empire with the cessation of the conquests, which the Ottomans explained by Ibn Khaldun's prognosis of the fate of dynasties, and Weber by the evolution of the patrimonial state, was in contrast to the growth of its cities, described by André Raymond in his *Grandes villes arabes à l'époque ottomane*. Common to both the decline and the growth was the takeover of the patrimonial state by its army of soldiers, secretaries and notables, which was particularly marked in Egypt. At the height of their power in the sixteenth century, the Ottomans had placed the country under a viceroy with a garrison of infantry and cavalry, and centralised the administration under district governors and officials of the Treasury. By the beginning of the seven-

teenth century, however, the troops of the garrison were in revolt over pay, while the Mamluks had reasserted themselves as a semi-hereditary aristocracy bearing the Ottoman title of Bey. As tax-farmers, at the head of large households, the Mamluk Beys came to control the countryside, the district administration, and the Treasury itself, while taking command of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. Cairo meanwhile saw the troops of the garrison enter into a profitable alliance with the merchants of the city under the guise of protection. The outcome was a three-cornered struggle for control of the state between the Ottoman viceroys, the troops and the Beys, which lasted until the final victory of the Beys at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

To the west of Egypt, a similar conflict characterised the Ottoman Turkish regimes in the Barbary states. Newly created by foreign armies which kept themselves apart from their subjects, to the extent of introducing their own Hanafi school of Islam, these were nice examples of the working of the wheel of state – no justice without the army; no army without taxation; no taxation without wealth; no wealth without justice. Justice in the form of good government was modelled upon the administration at Istanbul, a divan or council of senior officers presided over by a Pasha, a governor sent from Istanbul. As in the past, its primary concern was with taxation to pay an army composed of Turkish janissaries recruited from Anatolia, and cavalry of local origin. The previous North African practice of levying taxes by regular military expeditions then served as an efficient and increasingly effective means of bringing the countryside under control. As Ibn Khaldun had noticed, such extraction of wealth from the countryside kept it poor but benefited the city. At the same time, as in Egypt, it underlay the competition within the army for power. Whereas factionalism in the army and within the Beylicate prevented the restoration of an Egyptian monarchy, at Tripoli, Tunis and Algiers the outcome of a century of frequently vicious infighting was the establishment of rulers independent in all but name of the Ottoman empire. At Tripoli, where the city had been rebuilt and refortified after the Spanish occupation in the sixteenth century, the Dey, the representative of the *ojak* or corps of janissaries, took over from the Pasha, to be overthrown eventually by a Bey from the *kuloghullari*, the ‘sons of slaves (of the Sultan)’, the offspring of the janissaries by marriage with local women. At Tunis the conflict was between the Dey and the Bey who commanded the cavalry, led the tax-collecting expeditions, and controlled in consequence both the country and the finances. At Algiers a more complicated struggle developed between the Pasha, the Agha or commander-in-chief of the army, the Dey of the janissaries and the corsair captains, to the exclusion of the *kuloghullari* and the three Beys who ruled the interior of the country from the regional capitals of Constantine in the east, Medea to the south and Mascara in the west. By the beginning of the eighteenth century both Tunis and Tripoli were hereditary monarchies created by the Beys, who at Tripoli took the title of Pasha, while the Dey of Algiers was a monarch elected, and as frequently deposed and murdered, by the *ojak*.

The growth of population in Egypt, which brought land back into cultivation, enabled the country to return to the export of grain as the granary

of the Ottoman empire. Meanwhile the spice trade with Europe had resumed, and a new commodity, coffee, was making the fortune of the Cairo merchants, as well as adding a whole new dimension to the social life of the Ottoman city in the form of the coffeehouse. In North Africa, the economy surveyed in Julien's *History of North Africa* benefited from the influx of refugees from Spain, some Muslim, some Jewish. The Moriscos, the last of the Spanish Muslims expelled in 1609, were welcomed at Tunis for their agriculture and their industry, while the Jews established commercial connections with Italy and Istanbul. Tunis itself was once again a major city and a major port, not only exporting produce such as wool and leather to Europe, but manufactures like tiles and red caps to the Ottoman East. The fortune of Algiers, described in William Spencer's *Algiers in the Age of the Corsairs*, was meanwhile built upon the enterprise of those corsairs, a commercial business which flourished on the sale of captured merchandise, the ransoming of captives, and the enslavement of those too poor to raise the ransom money. Practised to a lesser extent at Tunis and Tripoli, by the end of the seventeenth century the operation was turning into a state monopoly as European naval bombardments induced the Deys and Beys to conclude treaties in which such privateering was restrained in return for tribute.

III

In *Muslim Society*, Ernest Gellner contrasted these exclusive military regimes with those founded in Khaldunian fashion upon the tribal structure of North African society. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the contrast was between these former Ottoman provinces and Morocco, where the conflict that followed the collapse of the Saadian empire of Ahmad al-Mansur led to its restoration under a second dynasty claiming descent from the Prophet. The conflict turned once again upon the appeal of Islam to a tribal population, in the person of the holy man or marabout pitted against the *sharif* or descendant of the Prophet. In the middle of the seventeenth century the greatest of the three marabouts whose tribal followings had enabled them to fill the space vacated by the Saadians, came near to reuniting the country from a base at Dila in the mountains south of Fes. In the 1660s, however, they were overthrown by *sharif*-s from across the mountains in the region of Sijilmasa, the founders of the 'Alawi dynasty. Like the Saadians before them, the 'Alawis claimed their authority by right of descent from Muhammad, while the empire over which they ruled was yet another *makhzan*, a magazine or treasury state which lived to tax and taxed to live in the name of justice. The difference, brought out by Brett in *Ibn Khaldun and the Medieval Maghrib* and again in *The Berbers*, lay in the abandonment of the Ottoman model of central government espoused by Ahmad al-Mansur. The wheel that was turned by the great Sultan Mawlay Isma'il from his vast palace city of Meknes was driven by the simple expectation of the monarch that he and his army would be provided for by the tribute of his subjects, collected by the provincial governors to whom were delegated the

tasks of building, feeding, clothing, arming and generally supplying this enormous household complex. Its sanction was a Black slave infantry and a tribal cavalry; its scope was limited by its ability to tax the tribesmen of the mountains and deserts, who revered the sacred monarch but resisted the demands of his servants.

The result was a regime that balanced the main factors at work in North African government and society. The equivocal relationship with Europe was visible at Meknes, built to rival the palace of the French monarchy at Versailles with the slave labour of European captives of the corsairs who scoured the Atlantic coasts as far as the British Isles from their base at Sale. The relationship with the Bilad al-Sudan was visible in the Black slave army, partly conscripted from slaves already in Morocco, partly recruited through the slave trade, and rapidly turning into a warrior tribe in its encampment. In the tense relationship of the dynasty with the tribal population, this was the iron fist of the state in the not-so-velvet glove of Islam. The equally tense relationship of the 'Alawis with religion is summed up by Clifford Geertz in *Islam Observed*, in the story of the scholarly saint al-Yusi, who agreed to lift his curse on the tyrannical Mawlay Isma'il in return for recognition as a *sharif*, a descendant of the Prophet; it is examined more closely by Jacques Berque in *Ulémas, fondateurs, insurgés du Maghreb*. Scholars in the cities had opposed Isma'il's conscription of Black slaves; the marabouts continued to be central to the government of the tribes in their relationships with each other and with the state; the descendants of the Prophet claimed a superior holiness as scholars, saints and rulers. To the east of Morocco, all three of these figures were involved in the attempt of the Pashas, Deys and Beys to establish a working relationship with their Arab and Berber subjects, examined once again by Berque in *L'intérieur du Maghreb*. Out in the Sahara to the south, they came into their own.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, a dynasty of Moroccan *sharif*s, the Awlad Muhammad, had taken the place of Kanim-Borno in the Libyan Fezzan at the invitation of the population. The characteristic function of the holy man as arbitrator rapidly gave rise to a new state with a new capital at Murzuq, as described by Hesnawi in *Fazzan under the Rule of the Awlad Muhammad* on the basis of documents which from this time onwards become increasingly available, right across North Africa, in family as well as state archives. Government in Sudanese fashion through relatives and slaves was combined with the North African practice of granting or selling land to persons who would see to its cultivation and pay its tax – tribal chiefs, *sharif*s, and marabouts whose literacy made them indispensable to the regime. Colonised in this way, a cultivated area which had shrunk with the drying-up of the springs which had fed the Garamantian *foggara*-s was thus partially restored with the digging of wells, while Murzuq took the place of Zawila at the hub of the routes across the central Sahara, and likewise in its politics. The profit from the Ottoman demand for slaves and that of the rulers of Borno and Hausaland for firearms and horses was balanced against repeated attempts at conquest by the Turks at Tripoli, and the acceptance by the Awlad Muhammad of a tributary status.

In the western Sahara no such state formation took place; the role of the holy man in society, trade and politics was that of an authority in the highly complicated stateless society described for the nineteenth century by Stewart in *Islam and Social Order in Mauritania*. That society was the product of some five hundred years in which the Arabs of the Banu Hassan, descendants of the Banu Hilal, had established their superiority as warriors over the Berber scholars and merchants descended from the Almoravids. Those Berbers, formed into *zwaya* or clerical tribes, were in turn at the head of a Berber population of herdsmen and cultivators, beneath which was a class of *haratin*, descendants of Black slaves, and yet another of slaves as such. In oral tradition, this social order was finally stabilised in the seventeenth century by the war of Shurr Bubba, an outbreak of Islamic militancy which ended with the victory of the Hassaniya, but confirmed the control of both production and trade by the clerical clans, for which they paid tribute to the warriors in return for the protection of their caravans. Their trade was basically Saharan, the exchange of desert salt for the goods of the savannah, but continued to supply the trans-Saharan market of Morocco with gold and slaves. Their wealth supported a high level of scholarship, while their prestige made them the keepers of the peace. These two models of the Muslim holy man in action in the western Sahara and the Fezzan governed his operation to east and west in the Sudan.

IV

The increasing quantity of documentation brought to light in the eastern Sudan by O'Fahey and Spaulding, the authors of *Kingdoms of the Sudan*, supplements the Arabic and European literature described by Holt and Daly in *The History of the Sudan*. Both reveal the influx of Muslim holy men from North Africa, Egypt and Arabia into Waday, Darfur and the Nilotic Sudan, where they developed into a native class of clerics. At the beginning of the seventeenth century one of these clerics, a Nubian *sharif*, seized the throne of Waday from the Tunjur; in the middle of the century a Muslim took power in Darfur. As in the Fezzan under the Awlad Muhammad, such holy men were welcome in both these newly-Muslim monarchies and in the Funj sultanate on the Nile, where as in the Fezzan they received grants of land and commercial privileges. And as in the Fezzan, they became in return essential to the administration of these states on behalf of the ruler and his extended household; so much so, that in time they tended to form their own little empires. Their input was all the greater since with the Islamisation of Waday and Darfur, the savannah belt became a route of pilgrimage to Mecca from the west, an alternative to the route across the desert to Egypt. The development of trade meant the appearance of market towns, of which the greatest was the Funj capital of Sennar. With these towns came the introduction of Islamic norms to populations for whom Islam was the mark of submission to the ruler. As Spaulding remarks in Levtzion and Pouwels' *History of Islam in Africa*, those to the south who did not submit in this way

were made tributaries of gold, ivory and slaves under pain of raiding and enslavement along a southern frontier of constant warfare.

The colonisation of the eastern Sudan by Muslim clerics, as they moved from saintliness to legal scholarship in the service of the state, completed the incorporation of these lands into the Islamic world following the disappearance of the Christian kingdoms of the Nile. In the central Sudan, where Islam had a far longer history, the Muslim cleric was less of a pioneer in states whose formation and development dated back to the thirteenth century and well beyond. Politically, the region extended from the empire of Borno around Lake Chad, westwards through the city states of Hausaland, and northwards to the Tuareg Berber sultanate of Ahir at Agades. Its history in this period was one of perpetual warfare, compounded in the second half of the seventeenth century by the invasions of the Kwararafa, a horde of uncertain identity which swarmed across the southern frontier from the valley of the Benue. Such warfare, as Insoll observes in *The Archaeology of Islam in sub-Saharan Africa*, generated the walls enclosing the cities of Hausaland and those of Garoumele and Ngazargamo, the capitals of Borno, but played its part in their prosperity. This was especially so in Hausaland, where the survival into the present of Kano, Katsina, and the other Hausa cities is in contrast to the abandonment of the cities of Borno, an empire centred on the dynasty as against states centred on the town. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both were engaged in a dense network of Sudanese, Saharan and trans-Saharan trade, which transformed the cities of Hausaland into centres of industry whose wealth supported the expansionism of the rulers, and in turn was promoted by their taking of slaves. Captured either in war or in raids upon pagan populations to the south, and chronicled by Fisher in *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa*, such slaves were the colonists who cultivated the land around the Hausa cities while populating the households of their rulers. Commercialised as 'the human commodity', they were meanwhile, as they had been for a thousand years, sent north to sustain the servile population of the desert, and to supply the demand of the Ottoman empire in exchange for its products, not least the horses and armour of the royal warbands, and the guns which in the seventeenth century made Mai Idris Alooma of Borno the greatest ruler of the Sudan.

Much as it had been in the empires of Mali and Songhay, Islam in these states was identified with merchants, scholars and rulers who professed a faith that co-existed with the spirit worlds of the population at large. As a form and an instrument of government, it operated as what Adeleye in Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa* calls a fifth wheel of state. But as in Songhay, the rulers of Borno had moved towards a more rigorous and exclusive identification of their regime with the holy law, while again as in Songhay, the holy men, the scholars, were beginning to voice their criticism of the practices of government throughout the region. Such criticism reflected the spread of learning from north of the Sahara, and was accentuated by the immigration into the region of Fulbe, or Fulani, scholars from the west. Rather than entering into the service of the state in the manner of the eastern Sudan, these settled as teachers in the population at large. In their atti-

tude to the state, they represented a growing departure from the accommodation recommended by al-Qabisi towards the intolerance advocated by Ibn Yasin. In the western Sudan, following the collapse of the empire of Songhay, conditions favoured the growth of such intolerance into an Almoravid-style militancy.

With the death of Ahmad al-Mansur, the Moroccan empire in the western Sudan was left to the Moroccan garrison at Timbuktu. This was rapidly transformed into the Arma, an indigenous military aristocracy of noblemen and their households under a *basha*, a governor in a similar position to the Dey at Algiers. As the successors to Songhay, they continued to rule with increasing difficulty over the Niger bend, from Jenne to Gao. Timbuktu itself was meanwhile dominated by what Saad in his *Social History of Timbuktu* calls a patriciate of scholars and merchants closely related to the clerical tribes of the western Sahara, and similarly associated with those of Jenne. The end of empire ended their confrontation with the state, which in the hands of the Arma provided the necessary measure of protection, while leaving them free to maintain the city as the Islamic capital of the western Sudan as well as the hub of its trade across the desert. While that trade continued to flourish, it did so beyond the limits of the Arma's reach in a post-imperial world of mingled ethnic communities and largely pagan monarchies, for whom Islam was yet another component of the ancestral world. In the savannahs of what is now Burkina Faso, between the Inland Delta and the lower Niger, the kingdoms of the Mossi were ruled by the masters of the people, cavalrymen of uncertain origin whose subjects were the indigenous masters of the earth. Between the Inland Delta and the Senegal the Bambara kingdoms of Segu and Kaarta were based on the *kafu*, the Mande township, and a society stratified by status and occupation. The reconstruction of their histories, outlined in Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa*, depends upon oral tradition, as do in large measure three further developments taking place across the region. The first is the evolution of the pervasive trading network of the Muslim Mande Dyula, self-governing clerical and commercial clans whose activities spread out from Jenne, westwards towards the Atlantic, southwards to the goldfields of the forest and its margins and eastwards into Hausaland. The second is the spread of the pagan Fulani (Pulli, Fulbe) cattle-herding nomads eastwards from the Senegal into the lands of the Bambara, the Inland Delta, and as far as Hausaland. The third is the rise of a revolutionary Islam, associated with the parallel spread of Muslim Fulani scholars.

As warriors, the nomadic Fulani were active in the formation of states from Futa Toro on the Senegal to Segu on the Niger, alongside their intrusion into regions from the highlands of Futa Jalon at the head of the Gambia to the lowlands of the Inland Delta. As merchants, the Mande Dyula maintained both the commercial economy and the lines of communication that knitted the savannah and its peoples into a single society linked to the wider world of Islam. As scholars, both they and the Muslim Fulani maintained the tradition of Islam as a form of government in the absence of a Muslim state. On the one hand they fitted easily into the categories of a society from which the veneer of Islamic empire had been stripped away, forming their

own self-governing communities in and among the rest. On the other, the Fulani clerics in particular were prompted to turn against the paganism by which they were surrounded, in conjunction with the scholars or marabouts of the Tukolor of the Atlantic region to the west, and those of the Berbers of the Sahara to the north. It was the Berber Nasir al-Din who in the manner of Ibn Yasin had preached the holy war in the desert in the middle of the seventeenth century, only to be defeated and killed in the war of Shurr Bubba. But out of the revolution he stirred up on the Senegal came the maraboutic state of Bundu, leading in the eighteenth century to a proclamation of holy war in Futa Jalon by Fulani clerics. Out of that came a militant state that supported itself by war, by the accumulation of captives to build up its population, and by their sale to the Atlantic slave traders on the coast. Along this southern frontier of Islam in Africa, the European dimension was inescapable.



22

Between the Americas & the Indies

I

Historians have not looked kindly upon the Ottoman empire in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, comparing the growing weakness of its central government and the traditional nature of its economy with the growing power and wealth of western Europe. Admiration for that growth, however, has been matched by growing criticism of European imperialism, and in the case of Africa by denunciation of the slave trade that fed the sugar industry that contributed so much to the prosperity of England in particular. When we come to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in other words, the study of African history moves beyond the search for evidence of the past and the problem of its interpretation, out into the realm of evaluation and controversy, in which the whole of the subject from Antiquity onwards has since been caught up.

That realm is not simply the preserve of the modern historian looking back upon the past; it came into existence at the time. The morality of enslavement was of concern to both Islam and Christianity, the ruling religions of the period, for whom all human beings were, in principle, equal in the sight of God. Islam solved the problem by restricting enslavement to non-Muslims outside the lands of Islam; Christianity was in two minds. As a justification for the enslavement of Black Africans, the Biblical curse upon the descendants of Noah's son Ham was offset by the egalitarian and humanitarian concerns that culminated in the course of the nineteenth century in prohibition and abolition, and passed in the twentieth century into the principle of human rights. Meanwhile the outrage those concerns had engendered by the end of the eighteenth century over the brutality of the Atlantic slave trade is now part of the historical consciousness of the world, feeding back into African history as a sense of permanent damage done to the continent by rapacious Europeans. It has in consequence proved a milestone not only in the history of the continent but in the approach to that history, beginning its formulation as a subject of passionate concern today. On the

one hand it has narrowed the subject down by defining the continent geographically, racially and historically as sub-Saharan, Black and victimised, its present state blamed upon past exploitation. On the other, it has determined the approach to the history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries from that day to this. As Robin Law observes in *The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade upon Africa*, the modern attempt to assess the extent of that exploitation and consider its consequences continues to follow the lines laid down in the eighteenth century by those who denounced the trade for its devastation of the continent, and those who excused it as an offshoot of a land already blighted by war and slavery. As the argument has developed in the perspective of a continent caught between the Americas in the west and the Indies in the east, the notion of victimisation has meanwhile been challenged from the African point of view; John Thornton's *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, for example, aims to present the Black African as an active contributor to the colonisation of the Americas. While this championship of African initiative in adversity is now widely accepted in the approach to American history, in Africa it points to the responsibility of Africans themselves for the supply of African slaves to the European slave traders. Beyond the polarity of the argument over the consequences, their complicity brings the subject back to the question of social structure in general, state formation in particular, and the explanation of why, for the past thousand years, the principal export of sub-Saharan Africa should have been its people. In arguing for the roots of the Atlantic slave trade in African slavery, Thornton not only enters the controversy over Lovejoy's *Transformations in Slavery* but the debate signalled by Horton in his 'Stateless societies' over government in its widest sense. Underlying both is the contention of Iliffe's *Africans* that the key to the history of the continent lies in its peopling by the frontiersmen of mankind.

II

Behind them all is the question of numbers, where for the first time since Greek and Roman Egypt statistical information becomes available. The attention which the slave trade has attracted has brought to light the records of the ships which transported the slaves to the Americas. From these, in the 1960s, Philip Curtin in *The Atlantic Slave Trade: a census* first derived the estimates which have brought down a previous estimate of around twenty-five million to a total of some twelve million slaves exported across the Atlantic from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, as compared with John Wright's estimate of two-and-a-half million for the trans-Saharan trade over the same period. Summarised for example by John Fage in *A History of Africa* and by Iliffe in *Africans*, as well as by Curtin himself in Curtin, Feierman et al., *African History*, these estimates break down very roughly into two million for the seventeenth, six million for the eighteenth and three million for the nineteenth century. Of these, at the height of the trade in the eighteenth century, at the rate of some sixty thousand a year, sixty per cent

came from West Africa and forty per cent from West Central Africa. The problem is that the size of the population from which these numbers were taken is unknown. Despite their respective theses, Lovejoy does not discuss it, while Iliffe restricts himself to an estimate of twenty-five million for the area affected by the Atlantic trade. The effect upon that population of continual emigration on this scale becomes important in retrospect, when considering the long-term effect of the slave trade on Africa. But down to the end of the eighteenth century, the more important question is the mechanism of the trade, the organisation of the supply, and the extent of its reach across the continent.

Thornton's emphasis upon the supply of Africans by Africans may draw attention away from the Europeans and their ships on the coast, the key to the entire enterprise. The coast in question stretched for some five thousand kilometres from the mouth of the Senegal on the edge of the Sahara, almost to the edge of the desert beyond the savannah to the south of the Congo, running for most of the way past the equatorial forest around the Gulf of Guinea. At its densest in Liberia and the Ivory Coast, and again in Cameroun and Gabon, the forest was thinly populated and lacking in opportunities for slaving, so that the trade came to focus upon Senegambia and Sierra Leone; the Gold Coast (modern Ghana) followed by the Slave Coast as far as Lagos; the Delta of the Niger; the savannah to the north of the mouth of the Congo; and Angola to the south. It was conducted in three ways: through European forts from St Louis at the mouth of the Senegal to Accra near the mouth of the Volta; by treaty with African rulers from the Volta to the Congo; and by colonisation and warfare in Angola. Meanwhile it changed hands: in the seventeenth century the Dutch took over from the Portuguese in West Africa, while in the eighteenth century the English and French took over from the Dutch. The English were particularly successful not only because of their naval superiority, but because they allowed independent merchants to operate alongside the chartered Royal African Company which they created in line with those of the Dutch and the French and the state monopoly of the Portuguese. Given the appearance on the Gold Coast in the second half of the seventeenth century of the Swedes, the Danes and the Brandenburgers, the result was not only a crowd of competitive merchants but a Babel of competitive languages in place of the simple succession of Greek, Latin, Arabic and Portuguese to complement the multifarious oral traditions of the region in the sources for African history. The common denominator was the slave ship and the numbers of its human cargo.

The individuals who composed that cargo were drawn from the whole range of peoples inland from the coast, captured in war, taken in raids, kidnapped or condemned into slavery as a punishment. From the Senegal to the Congo they were supplied to the Europeans by a variable mixture of rulers, agents of rulers, and enterprising merchants, and paid for with a wide variety of European manufactures, tobacco and guns. In Angola they were procured away from the coast by agents of the Portuguese at Luanda, by military expeditions, and as tribute from client rulers. Whatever the method, their supply in response to European demand was an extension of the slavery

that occupied one end of the spectrum of dependent relationships in African society, along with the methods of procurement that were typically used by the powerful to provide themselves with armies of settlers and followers. Thornton's example of the slave population assembled on the land around their capital by the kings of Kongo is only one of many to compare with the contemporary practice of the rulers of the city states of Hausaland. Meanwhile the militant Muslim state of Futa Jalon, which sold its surplus slaves to the traders on the coast, was only following the lead of its predecessors in the western and central Sudan, who for centuries had exported slaves into and across the Sahara. The Atlantic trade falls into place as the most glaring example of the paradox, that historically the most important export of Africa, Iliffe's especially hostile region of the world, should have been its people, all the more because, as Thornton and others have pointed out, those people became the colonists of the Americas. The question raised by Lovejoy is whether the growth of this export trade, from its beginnings across the Sahara, the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean to its expansion across the Atlantic, was nevertheless transformative, progressively altering the nature of slavery on the continent into a much more oppressive institution for a range of new purposes. While not going so far as Walter Rodney's *History of the Upper Guinea Coast* in suggesting that there was no slavery prior to the slave trade, the contention of Lovejoy's *Transformations in Slavery* not only runs counter to the view of Miers and Kopytoff in their *Slavery in Africa*, that as an existing feature of African society, slavery was not necessarily more benign. It has to take into account Fage's opinion that in West Africa the Atlantic trade was incidental to the use of slaves for economic and political development. The various arguments are conveniently brought together by Collins in his *Problems in African History. The Precolonial Centuries*. Their evaluation depends upon that of the economic and political developments in question.

III

Political developments there certainly were. Along the West African coast and inland, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the growth of states and statelets from the Gold Coast past the existing kingdom of Benin to the Niger Delta, while the empires of the south proliferated across the savannahs of the Congo basin. As oral tradition combines with the growing European documentation that began with the kingdom of Kongo over a hundred years earlier, these enter the chronological record as so many instances of the ethnographic dimension at work, not simply as products of behaviour and belief, but as makers of the history of the continent as a whole. The individual histories of the West African states are most conveniently narrated in Vol. I of Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa*. In Oliver and Atmore's *Medieval Africa*, they are usefully treated together with those of the Sudan to the north, bringing out the importance, in Ivor Wilks' phrase, of the northern factor in their history alongside that of the Atlantic trade. In Senegambia, where the Sudan extends to the sea, the little principalities of the Wolof, Serer and

Mande belonged to both worlds, a coast where European traders settled and married to form merchant dynasties, and a hinterland of Muslim revolutionaries; further round the coast, Sierra Leone was supplied with slaves by roving Mande warriors followed by the Fulani of Futa Jalon. State formation came into its own on the Gold Coast, where the savannah reaches through the forest down the valley of the Volta to a coast lined with the castles of the various European nations, each with its governor and garrison. These dealt in the first instance with the little coastal states of the Fanti and the Ga; but behind these, by the end of the seventeenth century, the forest kingdom of Asante had emerged out of a century of warfare between rival Akan states. By the end of the eighteenth, Asante had extended its empire over the savannah to the north, taking in the Mande state of Gonja. Gonja in turn had taken in Bighu, the market town of the Mande Dyula who traded in the gold of the Akan goldfields, selling it from the very beginning to the Portuguese at Elmina. Besides gold, Asante profited from an important trade to the north in kola nuts, while Muslim clerics had arrived at the capital Kumasi to provide literacy together with prayers and amulets for the welfare of the Asantehene, the sacred monarch.

The criticism levelled by Tom McCaskie at Ivor Wilks' political and institutional history of Asante in his *Asante in the Nineteenth Century* for its neglect of the mystique of Asante kingship, illustrates the difficulty for historians of moving beyond the initial task of constructing a narrative of events to an explanation over and above the familiar considerations of wealth and power. But granted that such considerations were indeed at work, Asante conforms to Fage's model of a society which employed slaves on a large scale in gold mining, farming, and the households of the great, trading the surplus of its captives taken in war into slavery abroad. Further to the east, in what is now confusingly called the Republic of Benin, the Aja kingdom of Dahomey likewise emerged in the eighteenth century at the expense of its rivals, annexing the states of Allada and Whydah to gain direct access to the coast. In both oral tradition and the European record, Dahomey grew from an immigrant lineage into a highly centralised despotism celebrated with human sacrifice. It was nevertheless tributary to the Yoruba state of Oyo away to the north-east on the savannah between the forest and the Niger, which like Asante had built itself an empire in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Dahomey was only one among many such tributaries and allies in a dominion of comparable size. In this complex, the northern factor was still more important for the horses which gave victory to the cavalry of Oyo over the infantry of its neighbours to the south-west. While looking back like Benin to a legendary origin at Ife in the forest, and to a mythical founder of the city in the storm god Sango, Oyo belonged in this respect to the realm of the Hausa, looking back to a more immediate origin in the fifteenth and sixteenth century in warfare with its immediate neighbours to the north, most notably with Nupe across the Niger. The northern factor was equally crucial in the development of the slave as well as the horse trade. Slaves were imported from the north to farm the estates and to serve in the palace as the officials who disputed control of the state with the chiefs of the

city and the chiefs of the army, again as in the manner of Benin. But whether imported from the north, taken in war or received as tribute, they were at the same time exported to the south in return for the European goods required for the trade with Hausaland. By the end of the eighteenth century, not only had Oyo gained direct access to the coast. It had become, in the expression of Robin Law in *The Oyo Empire*, a middleman in a commerce that linked the terminals of the trans-Atlantic with those of the trans-Saharan trade.

By comparison Benin, the powerful kingdom which like Kongo had first attracted the attention of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century, traded in pepper, ivory and cotton cloth but rarely in slaves following its sixteenth-century ban on the export of the men demanded for the plantations of the Americas, and its subsequent loss of control over the coast to slave traders and the breakaway state of Warri. The ban may have resulted from the need for slaves in the kingdom, but the loss of control of the coast followed the monarch's loss of control of the government with an end to the long succession of warrior kings who had ruled in patrimonial fashion through the palace and town chiefs they had appointed in place of the old hereditary office-holders. For over a hundred years the chiefs in question fought each other for power under a succession of titular rulers until an effective combination of monarch and minister came into force in the eighteenth century, at a time when Oyo in its turn became embroiled in the same kind of conflict. Inland in the forest, Benin continued to dominate; the aura of the Oba, like that of the Asantehene, ensured the preservation of the nuclear state. But its failure to participate in the slave trade was offset by the spectacular growth of slaving along the coastline of the Niger Delta as far as the Cross River west of Mt Cameroon. From the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, the coastal villagers who traded upstream in large canoes came together to meet the demand of the Atlantic slavers in statelets based on the trading ports of Bonny, Brass and a handful of others; the trade was conducted by families who created commercial firms or 'canoe houses'. They were supplied with slaves from the interior, primarily from the Ibo of the immediate hinterland, villagers kidnapped either by their neighbours or by the priests and agents of the Aro Chukwu oracle, who created a whole network of trading posts throughout the region. The result from this limited area was the largest single supply of slaves in the course of the eighteenth century, and a political system, part chieftaincy, part company, part religious or secret society, which was the exception to the general rule. Whereas elsewhere in West Africa Fage's contention appears to hold true, that slaves for the Atlantic trade were a by-product of state formation and development from which the statesmen gained a further income in imported goods, in this case it was their supply which brought about a major transformation of government.

IV

South of Mt Cameroon as far as the mouth of the Congo, villages and family 'houses' developed in much the same way in response to commercial demand. The original participation of the Portuguese in the coastal traffic from the Delta of the Niger to the Congo had tapped into a trade in copper and ivory from south of the forest which grew in response to the demand of the Portuguese followed by the Dutch followed by the French and the English. Over the next two hundred years the trade extended up the Congo river system into the forest, from the Vili through the Teke to the Bobangi, until by the end of the seventeenth century it had begun to supply slaves to Loango on the coast, and by the end of the eighteenth century had reached across the forest to the edge of the savannah to the north. Here in what Oliver and Atmore call the heart of Africa, the development of this commercial system is epitomised in the title of Robert Harms' *River of Wealth, River of Sorrow*, and summarised by Vansina in Curtin, Feierman et al., *African History* with reference to his *Paths in the Rainforest*. The family 'houses' which carried on the trade were based on villages which became towns at the intersection of the routes they controlled, while their heads became a new class of chiefs whose rise to wealth and power came at the expense of older authorities, including the kings of Loango and its neighbours on the coast, and the slave traders of the kingdom of Kongo across the river. Theirs was a trading system which the Portuguese extended far to the south, when from the late sixteenth century onwards they finally had the opportunity to operate inland from the coast. Their success was at the expense of the kingdom of Kongo itself, which unlike Benin had profited from the arrival of the Portuguese, but which accompanied it into relative isolation from the Atlantic trade as the Portuguese moved their operations southwards to Luanda and its Angolan hinterland, and in the course of the seventeenth century turned from its allies into its enemies. By the beginning of the eighteenth century its power was effectively broken, though its authority remained, a transformation of evident importance for the history of the region, but one which has elicited two conflicting explanations, one in the manner of Wilks and the other of McCaskie in the difference of their approach to the history of Asante.

As told by David Birmingham in Vols. III and IV of the *Cambridge History*, the tale of the disintegration of the centralised Christian monarchy of the early sixteenth century hinges upon its restoration by the Portuguese after the Jaga uprising of 1569. This opened up the kingdom to Portuguese merchants who created their own 'houses' for trade with the interior, while Christianity as the institutionalised religion of the state generated a factional conflict between a Portuguese and a native priesthood, exacerbated by the intervention of Dominican and Jesuit missionaries. By the beginning of the seventeenth century the Portuguese had meanwhile established a colony at Luanda with a nuclear garrison, an African mercenary army, and an increas-

ingly Africanised immigrant population at the outset of what Oliver and Atmore call a gigantic slave-trading enterprise designed to supply the plantations of Brazil. Not only did this colony take the place of the kingdom of Kongo as their base in the region. It brought them into conflict with the kingdom as they pushed inland across its southern borders, giving rise to forty years of intermittent warfare which ended in battle in 1665, when the king was killed, and a succession struggle broke out that lasted until 1709. Only prestige then remained to a throne that presided over a fragmented land from which the Portuguese had been expelled. Dealing with this critical period in his *The Kingdom of Kongo. Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718*, however, Thornton argues against the explanation of change by predominantly foreign factors, including the slave trade, preferring to explain the history of the kingdom in terms of domestic politics, and to see its transformation as the outcome of resistance to the taxation and enslavement of the population by the monarchy and its aristocracy, coupled with clan rivalry for the throne. A major part was taken by religion, as Christianity blended into the underlying beliefs in the spirit world. At the beginning of the eighteenth century religious fervour culminated in the messianic preaching of one Beatrix, compared by David Birmingham to Joan of Arc, only to subside with the reversion of the monarch from the role of Christian autocrat in a centralised state to that of the original 'blacksmith king' at the head of an empire commemorated in oral tradition by legends of migration from the capital San Salvador.

Thornton's focus on the role of what may fairly be described as domestic political thought in the history of the Kongo kingdom, however the factors in its transformation are weighed up, is endorsed by Wyatt MacGaffey, who based his *Kongo Political Culture* on interviews conducted in the twentieth century. With or without such corroboration, the role of such thinking must be assumed for all the other empires of the south in the era of the Atlantic slave trade, in reaction to aggression, response to the attraction of trade, or in accordance with local ambitions. Thus to the south of the kingdom of Kongo, in the land of the blacksmith kings, Miller's study of the Mbundu in his *Kings and Kinsmen* supplies the extra dimension for the history of Angola under the Portuguese, when their own slave-raiding expeditions and those of the Mbundu chiefs of the hinterland whom they compelled to pay a tribute of slaves came up against the Ndongo kingdom of the Ngola a Kiluanje, and beyond it those displaced offshoots of the Lunda, the roving warbands of the Imbangala. By the end of the seventeenth century Ndongo had been refounded away to the east as the kingdom of Matamba, together with the newly established Imbangala kingdom of Kasanje. Some four hundred kilometres from the coast, these states provided the merchants operating out of Luanda with the bulk of their slaves, until in the eighteenth century those merchants collaborated with the chiefs of the Ovimbundu to the south to found a series of statelets in the highlands inland from Benguela. Whereas the economic picture painted by Vansina in his *Paths in the Rainforest*, of the commercial network spreading northwards up the Congo into the forest is one of diversity and growth in spite of the loss of people to the

slave trade, in this southern region of Angola it is one of unrelieved depopulation, offset only around Luanda from the concentration of slave women not required for the export trade in men. Matamba and Kasanje, on the other hand, evidently thrived, as did the Lunda empire of the Mwata Yamvo that took shape beyond them to the east. As described by David Birmingham in the *Cambridge History*, this was a dominion which, in familiar fashion, relied upon the concentration of a servile population to render its land productive, while profiting from a limited export of slaves to obtain the exotic goods with which to reward its aristocracy. Without the extent of the information available for the Kongo, it is difficult if not impossible to integrate the ethnographic account of the formation and character of the empire with this materialist explanation for its success, and see the political process at work not only in general terms of prestige, power and wealth, but in the mind of its rulers and its subjects. It is all the more difficult, in an age in which this great development of government and society coincided with the demands of the outside world, to assess the balance of the internal and external factors at work in the history of the continent as a whole.

The balance clearly varied from place to place. The contrast between what Vansina calls, in Curtin, Feierman et al., *African History: from earliest times to independence*, the northern and southern network of trade in West Central Africa, follows on from the similarities between his northern network and trade in the Niger Delta, matched by the contrast between the Delta and the coast further to the west. These differences qualify the general observation that from being the margin of Hrbek's zone of contact with the world of the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the Atlantic coast and its hinterland to the south of the Sahara had become a primary zone of contact in its own right, governed by an increasing demand for slaves in exchange for European imports. Its engagement in such dealings may have been prepared by Wilks' northern factor, the association of the forest with the savannah and the trans-Saharan trade, going back at least as far as Igbo Ukwu in the tenth century; but their scale was quite new. It contributed to the growth of more complex and interrelated societies from end to end of the region, in which the wealth that was generated by the production and export of slaves gave an ironic twist to Connah's 'productive land hypothesis'. The societies themselves nevertheless grew along familiar political lines, casting doubt on the transformation as distinct from the expansion of slavery to meet the demand. Vansina agrees with Miers and Kopytoff in seeing the slave trading of his northern network growing out of traditional slavery with the traditional purpose of increasing the wealth, power and prestige of the 'big man'; the same might be said of the Niger Delta. Further to the west, that was equally true of the states for which the trade in slaves came either second to their employment within the kingdom, or in the case of Dahomey, first. The economy itself may have grown; but as Hopkins observes in *An Economic History of West Africa*, it was not thereby structurally transformed.

The situation to the south of the Congo raises the different question of the destruction caused by the slave trade in the form of depopulation. This is a major problem, in answer to which Law can only set out the hypotheses

in his *Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade*. In the absence of statistics, Hopkins considers that in West Africa the annual loss may have been no higher than the rate of reproduction; in Angola, Iliffe in *Africans* concurs in the general opinion that it was much higher, driving the slavers to look further and further afield. But the possibility raised by Lovejoy that here as elsewhere, concentrations of slave women unwanted for the Atlantic trade may have led to population increase is only one of the imponderables that in Iliffe's words, make the question virtually unanswerable. One of these is the incidence of imported disease, including smallpox; another is the introduction of maize and cassava from the New World, crops comparable to the potato in Europe in their ability to feed a larger number of people. Now ubiquitous staples, their arrival in Africa followed on from the introduction of the South-East Asian yam and banana over a thousand years earlier to complete the range of basic food crops on the continent. That they were associated with state formation, and through state formation with slavery and the concentration of population, may be inferred from the oral traditions studied by Vansina, of the foundation in the seventeenth century of the kingdom of Kuba on the savannah to the north of the Lunda region, by people originally from the forest. Its founder was a culture hero who introduced the crops; subsequently the kingdom imported slaves in exchange for ivory. In doing so, Kuba joins the whole range of examples of societies that imported slaves in order, as Iliffe puts it in *Africans*, to colonise the land. In buying rather than selling them, it points like Benin to the priority of internal over external demand, and an answer to the paradox that a land in need of its people should have exported them: their import and export were two sides of the same coin.

V

The priority, in so many instances, of internal over external demand for slaves points to the wider question of the balance between the internal and the external in the history of Africa in this period. For comparative purposes, not only the strength but the independence of internal factors is demonstrated by the growth of the Interlacustrine kingdoms in isolation from the trade of the Indian Ocean until late in the eighteenth century. But if there is a common denominator for such developments across West and Central Africa in the incremental growth of population, exploitation of resources, social complexity and political ability, the regional differences raise generalisation to the level of abstraction. On the eastern side of the continent as on the western, the only common denominator in evidence is the European factor, with once again its differential impact on its different targets. In the Indian Ocean, the main feature of the period is the replacement of the Portuguese by the Dutch, French and English as the dominant commercial and imperial powers, and the erosion of their empire from Africa round to Indonesia. As in Angola, the Portuguese nevertheless managed to retain their colony in Mozambique, almost three thousand kilometres away across the continent,

from where they reached back towards Angola up the valley of the Zambezi, with limited success. Their largely Africanised *prazeiros* or estate holders occupied the lower valley for some seven hundred kilometres as far as their trading-post at Zumbo, at the head of what is now the lake of the Cabora Bassa dam. Their *pombeiros* or merchants traded for gold with the loose empire of the Mwenemutapa and his tributary kingdoms on the plateau, until these were wiped out at the end of the seventeenth century by yet another heir to the realm of Great Zimbabwe, the kingdom of Butwa away to the south-west under the powerful and aggressive Rozwi dynasty. The gold trade of the plateau was strictly controlled thereafter by the new rulers, and the estate holders and traders looked north in the direction of Lake Malawi for a little gold mining and slaving. The slave trade could not compare in scale with the Angolan operation, but in the course of the eighteenth century slaves were being exported, on the one hand to the French plantations on the islands of Mauritius and Réunion, on the other to the Dutch colony at the Cape. Both destinations revealed the retreat of their original empire. In Africa to the north of Mozambique the link with Ethiopia was severed with the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1634, followed in 1698 with the fall of Mombasa to the Omanis of the Gulf. To the east and south, Madagascar had been opened up to an export trade in slaves with their European rivals as well as with the Swahili of the East African coast, while the settlement of the Dutch at the Cape had begun the colonisation of the interior.

Completing the Portuguese encirclement of Africa at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Ethiopia had been a qualified success for their Christian mission. A Catholic presence had been established in the country, but as an ally against Islam, the kingdom had barely been saved from the jihad of Ahmad Grañ. Nor had it become a major trading partner like the Christian kingdom of Kongo, and in the second half of the century had become marginal to the strategy of the Portuguese at Goa. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the Christian mission nevertheless came back to the fore with the adoption of Catholicism by the emperor Susenyos, the spearhead of an attempt to reform both church and state in the face of a different kind of invasion. Cattle-keepers as well as cultivators from the highlands beyond the Rift valley to the south, the Galla, more properly the Oromo, shared with those other stateless peoples of East Africa, the Karimojong, Turkana and Masai discussed by Mair under the heading of 'diffused government', an age-set system with an inbuilt warrior ethos. Pushing outwards in every direction, with the acquisition of horses the Galla raided the territories of the settled states of Adal and Ethiopia until, in the manner of the Banu Hilal in North Africa, they broke through the defences of the Ethiopian kingdom in the 1570s to occupy its southern and eastern provinces, as predators but also as immigrants mixing with the population. Unlike Adal, which disintegrated in face of the irruption, the Christian monarchy nevertheless survived away to the north and west despite, even because of Susenyos' failure to impose Catholicism as the national religion. His abdication in the face of united opposition in 1632, followed by the

expulsion of his Jesuit mentors, ended the Portuguese connection with a return to the old faith, the rebuilding of the cathedral at Axum and the construction of a permanent capital at Gondar to the north of Lake Tana. Though Galla immigration continued, the Solomonid tradition ensured the continuance of the ancient kingdom, even though by the end of the eighteenth century the monarch was a figurehead, and government was shared out among provinces ruled by the so-called *masafent* or 'judges'.

The expulsion of the Portuguese from Mombasa by the Omanis in 1698 was the climax of a hundred years of Swahili rebellion and Omani raids; it was followed by a hundred years of Swahili rebellion against the Omanis based at Zanzibar. The trade of the coast nevertheless resumed its traditional orientation towards the Gulf, with ivory significantly taking the place of gold. Significantly, because for the first time trade developed with the highlands of the interior as far as Lake Victoria, as its peoples were enlisted first as hunters and then as carriers who by the end of the eighteenth century were bringing back overseas commodities to the Interlacustrine kingdoms. By then these carriers were also supplying slaves, notably through Kilwa to the new French sugar plantations on Mauritius and Réunion. That in turn was a hundred years after the Dutch, French and English had found a source of slaves in Madagascar, an island big enough (much larger than England and Scotland) to count as a mini-continent, whose history and dealings with the slave-traders in this period resembled those of Africa itself. As Kent argues in volume V of the *UNESCO General History*, it was the period of the formation of the modern peoples of the country, after the population itself had been established with the end of African immigration in the sixteenth century. Whatever the Indonesian input may have been, the features of the economy and society were those of the mainland: cattle-keepers and farmers; masters of the earth and masters of the people; sacred monarchies and kingdoms formed by immigrants and emigrants. With a tradition of Islam in their pagan kingships, the mercantile Antalaotra may have faintly resembled the Swahili; the origins of the Sakalava empire, which by the eighteenth century occupied the whole of the west coast, may have lain with immigrants from Great Zimbabwe, while its growth was by emigration of its royals. The Betsimisaraka rulers of the east coast sprang in the Portuguese manner from the alliance and intermarriage of European adventurers with Madagascan chiefs on the basis of the trade in slaves. By the end of the eighteenth century, the slave trade from the great island and from Mozambique had expanded enormously to feed not only the market in and around the Indian Ocean, but the demand of the Americas.

A proportion of such slaves fetched up at the Cape, where in 1652 the Dutch had founded a station for their fleets en route to the East Indies in a very different part of the continent from the Tropics to the north, both climatically and in terms of its population. The little belt of Mediterranean climate at the southern tip of the continent, together with its hinterland of steppe and desert, was occupied by San hunter-gatherers and Khoi pastoralists whose common languages form the fifth great language family of Africa. Presumed to have shrunk away southwards in face of the spread of Bantu

from the north, that family is equally presumed to represent an earlier population to the south of the Equator which has been progressively assimilated into the Bantu world, from which the Khoi are presumed to have adopted the herding of cattle. The way of life of these stateless societies is on the one hand a measure of the distance travelled economically, socially and politically by the Bantu world since the colonisation of the southern half of the continent by farmers and herdsmen began in the Early Iron Age. At the same time it allowed for quite a different European presence from anywhere else on the continent at the time, and for a very different relationship to its people. By the end of the seventeenth century the Dutch settlement had become a colony of farmers who in the course of the next fifty years took over the strip of land along the southern coast for slave plantation agriculture. The colony differed from the settlements of the Portuguese in the Tropics in the European kind of cultivation made possible by the climate, and in the expropriation of a native population unable to compete with the newcomers for the land. Farming at the Cape, ranching on the uplands to the north, and raiding for cattle, women and children, drove out the San or Bushmen from their hunting territories and the Khoi or Hottentots away from their grazing grounds; those who remained did so as servile labourers and drivers working alongside imported slaves. Beyond the expanding frontier, some of the Khoi helped with a trade in cattle and ivory, but others, equipped with horses and guns, turned to frontier warfare. Together with other refugees and runaways, they transformed themselves into the Griqua, raiders and rustlers under new captains. On a smaller but nevertheless significant scale, it is a story comparable to those of North America and Australia in the takeover of the land by immigrant settlers who became its native inhabitants. With the Griqua to the north of them, these Dutch Africans meanwhile continued to push eastwards until in the 1770s they encountered the Xhosa, and the resemblance to North America and Australia changed. The southernmost of the Bantu population of the eastern highlands and coast, the cattle-keeping Xhosa were quite different from the Khoisan, more numerous, with a king of their own; they were not so easily displaced. While Cape Town grew into a flourishing city, the frontier became a battle zone of conflict with the more strongly organised kind of society with which Europeans were accustomed to deal elsewhere in Africa. Such a confrontation was equally new, the beginning of a territorial and racial conflict which in the course of the next century acquired a continental dimension, feeding into the imperialism that took over from the slave trade as the principal factor in the relationship with Europe, and as the principal source of historical controversy. In South Africa itself, where the conflict was most complicated and most long-lasting, it was sustained on the European side by the conviction of the colonists that the land and its people had been given to them by God, a myth of origin comparable to that of the Pilgrim Fathers in America, but little different from all the others in the political culture of Africa. It heralded the proliferation of a whole range of justifications for the coming European invasion of the continent, in which myth and legend entered into the course of conquest as rationalisations before and after the event.

PART IV

The Unification of Africa



THE EUROPEAN INVASION



23

A History in Change

‘God is great. You are a beautiful people.’

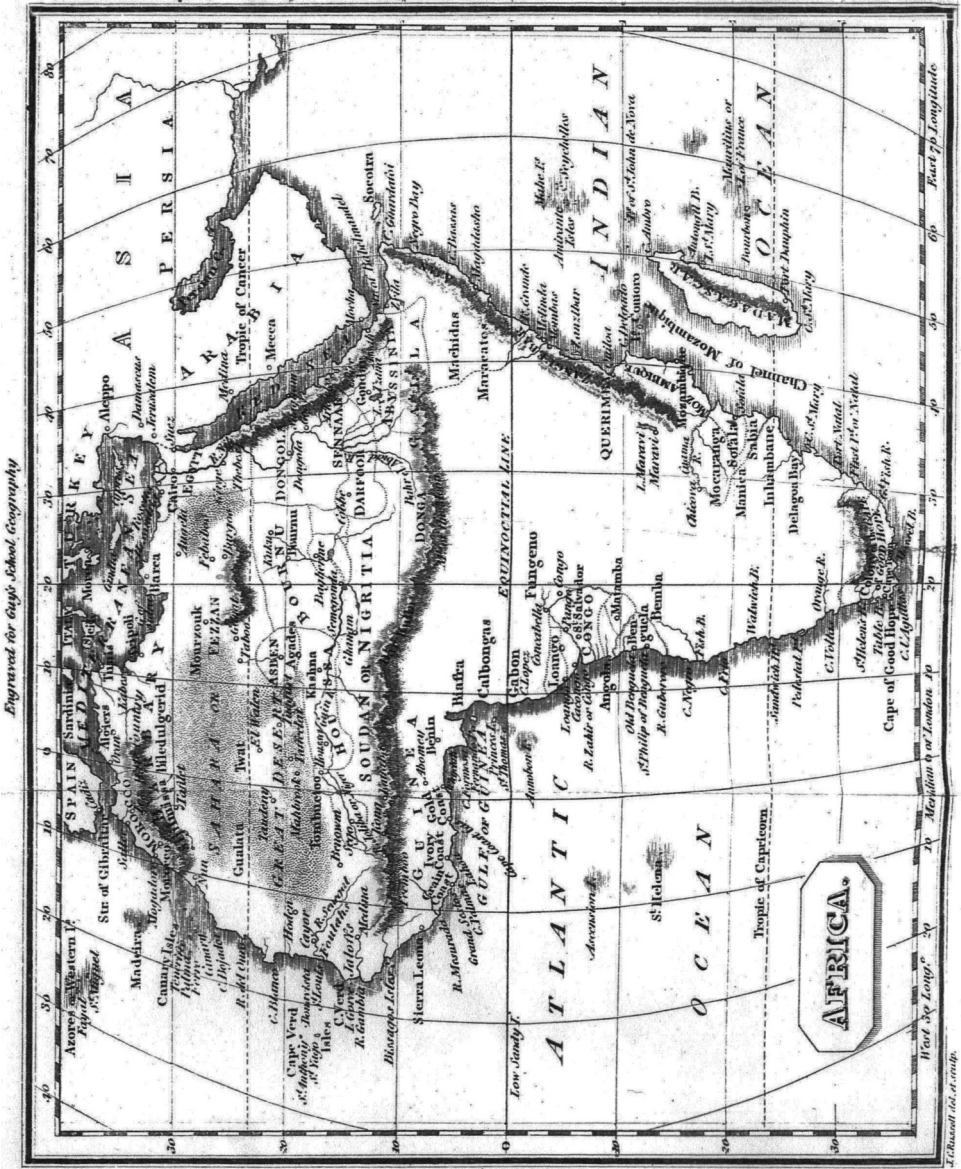
Sultan Bello of Sokoto to Hugh Clapperton, 1824

In E. W. Bovill, ed., *Missions to the Niger*, IV, p. 678

I

If ever there were winds of change in Africa before 1960, they blew around the turn of the eighteenth into the nineteenth century. Historians may disagree about the character and consequences for the world of the American, French and Industrial revolutions, their claim to have created the world in which we live today. In Africa they were nevertheless connected with the series of events which Hrbek, in his attempt at a periodisation of African history, is not alone in regarding as a division between the old and the new, between Oliver and Atmore’s medieval Africa and the modern age. The change which these events inaugurated is measured very simply in the balance of the general histories: in the UNESCO history, three out of the eight volumes deal with the last two centuries, for which the Cambridge history takes four, no less than half its total. That is the measure of the quantity of information that becomes available with the progressive invasion of the continent by Europeans from the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards. By extension, it is a measure of the attention this has attracted, and the controversy which it has generated. Following on from the argument over the slave trade, the question hangs over the nature of the change on the ground.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, the straws were already in the wind. In 1760 the Sultan of Morocco opened his country to trade with Europe through the port of Essaouira, while in 1770 James Bruce reached the Ethiopian capital of Gondar. Over the following years, while the Dutch came into conflict with the Xhosa some six hundred kilometres east of the Cape, the preaching of Islamic reform took hold in Hausaland. In 1787 the campaign against the slave trade was inaugurated in Britain; a year later, in 1788, the African Association was founded to promote the discovery of the interior of the continent. In 1791–2, Sierra Leone was chosen by British philanthropists for the settlement of freed slaves and the promotion of legitimate trade. Later in the decade, the French Revolution that began in 1789



16. Africa as known to Europeans, end 18th Century CE

Map predating the exploration of the Niger, published to illustrate *Guy's School Geography*, no date, but at least nine editions prior to 1830. Knowledge of the interior has barely advanced over that of the Arabs, whose knowledge was summed up for a European public in the *Description of Africa* by Leo Africanus in the first half of the sixteenth century.



17. A History in Change, c.1800 – c.1880 CE

led to yet another war between Britain and France, which spilled over into Africa when Britain took possession of the Cape in 1795 and Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798. Meanwhile, on behalf of the African Association, Mungo Park in the western Sudan was engaged in the search for the true course of the Niger, whether or not it flowed into the Nile. All these events presaged the opening up of the interior of Africa to European trade and conquest, and the internal upheavals which combined with this external intervention to transform the situation in the continent and of the continent in the course of the nineteenth century.

The elements of that transformation took shape in the first decades of the century. North of the Sahara, the expulsion of the French from Egypt by the British and the Ottomans in 1801 led in 1805 to the effective independence from Istanbul of the Ottoman general Muhammad 'Ali, who set out to build a European-style state at the heart of a new Egyptian empire, formed in Africa by the conquest of the Nilotic Sudan from the Funj in 1820–1. In 1816, following the end of the Napoleonic wars in Europe, the British fleet bombarded Algiers into submission, effectively putting an end to the piracy of the Barbary states. In 1830 the French took the city, and began the conquest and colonisation of Algeria. South of the Sahara in West Africa, the jihad of the Fulani reformer Usman dan Fodio, which began in 1804, overthrew the city states of Hausaland to create an Islamic empire ruled from Sokoto. Meanwhile in 1807 Britain outlawed the slave trade, and in pursuit of the vision of opening up the interior of the continent to legitimate commerce, dispatched the expeditions of the 1820s which crossed the Sahara from Tripoli in the north, the West African forest from the Nigerian coast in the south, and in 1830 sailed down the Niger to the sea. South of the Equator, in 1806 Britain finally took possession of the Cape from the Dutch, beginning the conflict with the Afrikaners or Boers which in the 1830s ran into the Mfecane, the great diaspora of peoples in flight from the armies of the Zulu warrior Shaka. Displaced in the 1820s from what is now Natal, whole groups of Nguni and their neighbours set out on their own careers of conquest and settlement over to the west and far to the north, to the point at which the Ngoni coming up from the south came close to encountering the Maasai coming down from the north in what is now Tanzania. Across the line of these migrations up and down the highland spine of the continent, trade routes meanwhile developed from east to west, from the Swahili coast to the Congo basin, in response to the demand for ivory and slaves. The driving force for this vast expansion was the enterprise of Sayyid Said, Sultan of Muscat and Oman, who came to power in 1806, and transformed the Omani outpost at Zanzibar into the capital of a new Swahili empire on the coast.

II

In the approach to African history, these events at the beginning of the nineteenth century are doubly important. In the first place, they created that

ethnographic present into which European observers made their entry from the time of Mungo Park onwards. The successful tracing of the course of the Niger by successive British missions, the first step towards the modern mapping of the interior of the continent, was accompanied by the description of its peoples on the ground in the journals kept by Mungo Park and his successors, from Oudney, Denham, Clapperton, Lander and Callié in the 1820s to Barth, Richardson and Nachtigal in the middle of the century. By that time there were many others, notably the Portuguese Baptista and Amaro followed by Antonio Gamitto and by Livingstone, who between them had crossed the continent from Mozambique to Angola, while around 1860 Baker, Burton and Speke went on to cross it from Zanzibar to Egypt via the Nile and Lake Victoria. The background and history of this exploration up to 1830 is narrated by Hallett in *The Penetration of Africa*; the exploits of the British among them are anthologised in Perham and Simmons, *African Discovery*; Bovill's edition of *The Missions to the Niger* brings the earlier works together. The record which they created of places and peoples established the basis upon which the subsequent studies of historians and ethnographers have built up over the past hundred and fifty years.

As a record it is nevertheless equivocal. The observations of these outsiders conscious of the cultural difference are divided between astonishment at the unexpected orderliness of kingdoms like Asante and Buganda, curiosity regarding the variety of manners and customs, and an attitude of superiority whose complexity is described by Hallett in Vol. 5 of the *Cambridge History of Africa*. The record they created was moreover purposeful, the agent as well as the product of the new European interest in the continent, and of the ideas which lay behind it. After all the arguments in favour of the slave trade as the means of rescuing the Black African for Christianity, its abolition became the necessary preliminary to his salvation from paganism and its way of life. The accompanying British belief in legitimate trade as the means to bring the continent more happily into the modern world was meanwhile matched by the belief of the French that their conquest and colonisation of Algeria was the only way forward for a primitive society. The determination of Muhammad 'Ali to create a modern state in Egypt had no such humanitarian justification, but as Magali Morsy remarks in her *North Africa 1800–1900*, sprang from the same conviction that the future lay in progress towards the European model of civilisation. By the same token, all were agreed upon the primitive nature of Africa and its peoples north as well as south of the Sahara. As a judgment of the state of the continent at the beginning of the nineteenth century, this is a notion which has survived in the approach to African history, turning the sense of victimisation engendered by the Atlantic slave trade into a controversy over its outcome which pervades the entire subject. Central to that controversy is the ambiguous concept of underdevelopment, formulated in the middle of the twentieth century at the time when African history first took shape as a subject. Various defined as a step along the way to development into a European or Western-style economy, society and form of government, or as a state of affairs to be remedied if such development were to take place, the term has been applied to Africa in

the third sense of inbuilt dependence on the developed world, a situation traceable to the backwardness which at the beginning of the nineteenth century exposed the continent to European penetration and occupation. Thus Lucette Valensi, in *On the Eve of Colonialism: North Africa before the French Conquest*, speaks of the archaic society of an underpopulated land, immobilised at a low level of development, advanced only by comparison with the fearful economic and technological backwardness of Black Africa, its trading partner across the Sahara. Her diagnosis and description of this state of affairs in North Africa at the beginning of the nineteenth century is an extreme example of the way in which historians have summed up the outcome of the previous history of the continent at the beginning of the nineteenth century, in order to account for what was yet to come.

Such an approach is illustrated once again in the case of North Africa by Elbaki Hermassi in his *Leadership and National Development in North Africa*, a discussion of the problems with development theory which goes on to paint a political picture of North Africa in the eighteenth century, as the starting-point of a history designed to explain the state of the region in the post-colonial period. As an example of the Whig interpretation of history, a selective view of the past in the light of the present, it is not alone. As regards the state of the continent in 1800, the previous celebration of the unfolding of civilisation in Africa gives way to an unfavourable comparison with the rest of the world at the beginning of its more recent history. Explanations whose roots go back to the eighteenth century, as Law points out in *The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade upon Africa*, divide between those who regard the inferiority of the continent objectively, as an actual deformation of the society and economy by external factors, and those who consider it to have existed only relatively, in the essential difference of Africa from the rest of the world. In both cases we are into the realm of apologetics – the justification of Africa and its peoples in the face of its detractors, and polemics – confrontational arguments. North of the Sahara, in *A History of the Maghrib*, Abdallah Laroui attacks those who blame the backwardness described by Valensi upon cultural inhibitions, and ascribes it to a long history of repeated conquest. South of the Sahara, in volume V of the *UNESCO General History*, J. E. Inikori regards the slave trade as vital to the development of Western Europe and North America, which in turn was responsible for the subsequent dependence of the continent upon their capitalist economy and its consequent inability to develop in the same way; the argument is epitomised in the title of Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. On the other hand, in *An Economic History of West Africa* and in *Africans*, both Hopkins and Iliffe respectively see the possibilities for such development largely excluded by the natural limitations upon growth in Iliffe's especially hostile region of the world. In the absence of the right conditions, what made economic sense in Europe made no sense in Africa.

The argument of Hopkins for the failure of Africa to develop along European lines is certainly conjectural, but derived from the study of what both he and Ralph Austen, in his *African Economic History*, call the domestic as distinct from the colonial and post-colonial economy; it has to do with the

absence of sufficient demand to stimulate production, invention and marketing to the extent of transforming them along capitalist lines. That of Laroui and Inikori, on the other hand, is counterfactual, concerned with what might have happened if Africa had been left to its own devices. Crucial to both is the continent's relatively low level of population. North of the Sahara, in the aftermath of the Black Death, the population from Morocco to Egypt had probably risen back to a modest total of around twelve million. South of the Sahara, by Iliffe's reckoning, its level by the seventeenth century was the result of slow growth over the millennia on the part of the frontiersmen of mankind in the naturally difficult conditions of life on the continent: in Fyfe and McMaster's *African Historical Demography*, the most extensive discussion of the subject, Caldwell suggests a total of fifty million rather than the commonly cited hundred million for the continent as a whole. If the losses attributable to the Atlantic slave trade are taken into account, however, the consensus reported by Fage in *A History of Africa* is that from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards the growth of this population was not reversed but probably halted at a time when such growth had resumed in Europe and Asia. Given the fundamental constraints upon economic activity which he enumerates, Hopkins doubts if without this massive emigration, the economy of West Africa, and by extension that of sub-Saharan Africa as a whole, could have developed in a different way. In *African Historical Demography*, on the other hand, Christopher Wrigley argues with Lovejoy that its development was thoroughly distorted by the Atlantic trade. In the same two volumes, Thornton analyses the loss from region to region and between men and women, while holding to the view, in *Africa and Africans*, that the Atlantic trade was a vigorous offshoot of the indigenous economy. In *African Economic History*, Austen considers that the trade was one of the external factors which have brought about the lasting dependence of Africa on the outside world, but argues that its indigenous, domestic economy has adapted itself to external pressures rather than undergone any radical change. Law meanwhile remarks, in *The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, that since today the problems of Africa are in large measure a consequence of the trading relationship struck up with the rest of the world as the abolitionists' alternative to the slave trade, the blame should rather lie with the failure of their project.

III

This dilemma of the historian who attempts to evaluate the confrontation at the beginning of the nineteenth century between the old Africa and the new Europe is captured in the exclamation of Muhammad Bello, Sultan of Sokoto, when Clapperton explained to him that in England there were no slaves, only paid labour: 'You are a beautiful people.' It is hard to say whether this was said in admiration or ironic disbelief. Clapperton, extolling the merits of legitimate trade with the greatest industrial and commercial power in the world, was addressing a ruler who was in his own eyes at the forefront

of progress. Bello was the master of the empire created by the preaching of his father Usuman dan Fodio, which had roused the nomadic Fulani to join in the overthrow of the Hausa rulers of the Hausa city states, and bring to power Islamic scholars ruling by the Islamic law. To the east in Borno, it was opposed by the equally Islamic regime of el-Kanemi, the shaykh who had repelled the invasion of Usuman's holy warriors, and taken control from the old and ineffectual Saifawa dynasty. To the west in the Inland Delta, it was rivalled by the jihad of Ahmadu Lobbo, who from 1816 had established yet another Fulani regime in the region of Masina. This triumph of Islamic state formation across the central and western Sudan was the West African expression of a wave of Islamic revivalism, which had provoked the revolt of the Wahhabis in Arabia against the attempt to reform the Ottoman empire on European lines. On the crest of that wave, the Sultan was well aware of this conflict between Europe and Islam in the Middle East and as far away as India, asking Clapperton why the British had bombarded Algiers in 1816. He was nevertheless willing to be persuaded of the advantages of trade with Britain, though hardly of its counterpart, the abolition of slaving. A principal justification for the jihad in Hausaland had been the enslavement of Muslims by its rulers, leading Humphrey Fisher to ask if Usuman dan Fodio had been a Muslim William Wilberforce. But as Abdullahi Mahadi remarks in *Savage, The Human Commodity*, its aftermath across the region was an intensification of slaving at the expense of non-Muslim peoples, for the purposes of the domestic economy and the trans-Saharan trade. The result was an empire which was not only progressive in Islamic terms, but wealthy and powerful.

A similar exchange was generated by the mission of Dupuis to Kumasi in 1819, a sequel to that of Bowdich in 1817, quoted in Wolfson, *Pageant of Ghana*; like that of Clapperton in Bovill's *Missions to the Niger*, their accounts revealed the impressive organisation of a great and prosperous African state at the height of its power. And although in this case there was a long-standing commercial relationship with the British on the Gold Coast, the question of slavery met with a similar response. After complaining to Dupuis, in his capacity as British consul, about the prices charged for goods including guns and gunpowder, the Asantehene asked why, when the British had once thought the slave trade good, they now thought it bad; he refused to believe that it was for reasons of humanity. Certainly, if the British refused to trade in slaves, that was their affair. In all its forms, slavery remained a feature of all the ten states, ranging from Senegal to Cameroon, that are listed together with Asante in Forde and Kaberry's *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*. It was integral to their societies, whose description from the ethnographic record along functionalist lines brings out their cohesion and their strength. Apart from Asante, the outstanding example is the absolute monarchy of Dahomey; most significant of their behaviour in their historical context is that of Oyo. The empire of the eighteenth century broke up after 1810; Ilorin in the north fell to the Muslim Fulani of Hausaland; Yorubaland to the south disintegrated into warring city states; between the two, the empire was recreated at modern Oyo, on a smaller scale but with

the old constitution of the Alafin, the Oyo Mesi and the Ogboni cult. Meanwhile warfare among the Yoruba led to captives, and captives to slaves, exported in large numbers to Brazil despite the British embargo. With states and their societies across the region organised in the same way for war, West Africa throughout the first half of the nineteenth century continued to flourish very much as before. Its strength in relation to the Europeans on the coast was demonstrated at the battle of Asamankow in 1824, when the British governor of Sierra Leone, Sir Charles McCarthy, perished in an ill-advised attack on Asante.

Its weakness was demonstrated two years later at the battle of Dodowa, when Asante was defeated by the British and their Fanti allies on the coast: its divisions could be exploited, while allies of the Europeans could, as previously in Angola and Mozambique, turn into European clients and eventually subjects. But not until the 1840s did the British finally convert the presence of their merchants on the Gold Coast into a form of British government, or take control of Lagos until the 1850s, the decade when the French set out from St Louis at the mouth of the Senegal on the conquest of the interior. Until then, in the years after the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the colony of Sierra Leone at Freetown was the principal European possession in West Africa. Taken over by the British government in 1808, the colony was the centre from which the naval operation against the slave trade was directed, Christianity preached and practised, and legitimate trade promoted. The operation against the slave trade ended in mid-century when the trade itself was finally prohibited in the Americas. But by then a Christian Creole population had been created at Freetown and the American settlement at Monrovia from slaves recaptured at sea or repatriated from the United States, one which spread out along the coast as agents of the new European values, skills and purposes on the continent. The purpose of legitimate trade was achieved with the export of groundnuts from the Senegalese savannah and especially palm oil from the forest, the value of which was so high that the mouths of the Niger, from which the greatest number of slaves had once been taken, became the Oil Rivers. By Hopkins' reckoning in his *Economic History*, the value of such exports by the middle of the century surpassed the value of the slave trade at its beginning in the course of economic growth and economic change. He sees the production of groundnuts and palm oil as a commercial opportunity for small farmers which began the commercialisation of land and labour; ironically, however, as Lovejoy points out in his *Transformations*, the demand was such that palm plantations worked by slave labour were created to meet it. If Fyfe in the second volume of Ajayi and Crowder's *History of West Africa* is correct in thinking that as a result of these developments, coastal West Africa was changed far more radically in the course of this half century than ever it had been in the period of the slave trade, then on both these counts the changes were still for the most part on African terms. The dependence on Europe signalled by the export of primary products in return for manufactures was not immediately apparent.

IV

To the south of the Equator, the change that came about in the first half of the nineteenth century owed little to abolition. The slave trade continued out of Angola and Mozambique until it dwindled with the abolition of slavery itself in Brazil in 1855, but continued to flourish internally as the Portuguese sought to use slave labour in plantation agriculture for the purpose of legitimate trade. Moreover, it acquired a vast new dimension as it expanded into the interior from the east coast. Where the fanning out of the slave trade from the Atlantic coast had drawn at least some of the empires of the south into the Atlantic system, they were now even more widely attracted into the trade of the Indian Ocean. What then had begun as an initiative of the Swahili ended by revealing the geography and the peoples of the interior for the first time to the eyes of the world. And it was accompanied by the irony that the trade in slaves grew largely in response to an intensified demand for the age-old commodity of ivory, considered as an item of legitimate trade, but produced by the plunder of a natural resource. After slave-raiding, it was the first example of what is called in German a *Raubwirtschaft*, an economy based on robbery. To meet a demand that was now European as well as Indian, regular routes grew out for the first time away from the Swahili coast, up on to the highlands and across the continental divide into the Congo basin, into the world of the Interlacustrine kingdoms and those of the Luba and Lunda. They supplied not only ivory but slaves, partly for the Americas but more particularly for the sugar islands in the Indian Ocean: the Seychelles, Mauritius, Réunion and the Comoros; and for the clove plantations on Pemba and Zanzibar. These were the creation of the enterprising Sayyid Said, Sultan of Muscat and Oman, who took up residence at Zanzibar as ruler of the Swahili coast and controller of its trade. That trade expanded inland as the ivory frontier retreated westwards with the killing of the elephants; hunters became carriers in a great semicircle northwards from the Yao to the east of Lake Nyasa through the Bisa to the west, the Nyamwesi to the east of Lake Tanganyika and south of Lake Victoria, as far as the Kamba and Mijikenda of the Kenya hinterland. Beyond this arc, hundreds of kilometres inland, Buganda and Bunyoro were drawn into contact with the coast, together with the great sweep of the Luba and Lunda states and their derivatives across the middle of the continent, from the Maravi on Lake Nyasa and the Bemba to the south of Lake Tanganyika, westwards across the headwaters of the Congo through the Lunda kingdom of the Kazembe and the Luba kingdom of Lomami, to the Lunda domain of the Mwata Yamvo. By the middle of the century the central route from Zanzibar across Lake Tanganyika into the Congo basin had been colonised by the Swahili themselves, creating a vast sphere of Swahili influence, religious, political and cultural as well as commercial. Only the Lunda in the west continued to look towards the Atlantic, where the ivory trade was conducted through Benguela on the Angolan coast by Chokwe hunters and Ovimbundu traders.

By that time also, the story pieced together in the Cambridge and UNESCO histories and recapitulated in Oliver and Atmore, *Africa since 1800*, was complicated by the Mfecane, the westward and northward migration of warrior bands and peoples set in motion in the 1820s by the ferocious campaigns of Shaka, the founder of the Zulu kingdom far to the south in Natal. The controversy over the underlying cause of the eruption, usefully summarised by Isichei in *A History of African Societies* and by Curtin, Feierman et al. in their *African History: from earliest times to independence*, has pointed to a land and its people caught between the ivory and slave-trading of the Portuguese to the north and the more distant slave-raiding of the Griquas over the mountains to the west. But rather than equate the militancy of the Zulus with that of the Imbangala before them as a reaction to external pressures, the most common explanation is internal to the cattle-keepers of the downland between the scarp of the Drakensberg and the south-eastern coast. Here, a population on the increase, perhaps as a result of the introduction of maize, may have been affected on the one hand by drought and famine, and on the other by a shortage of pasture for the growing herds of cattle which were the preferred source of wealth. What Fage in *A History of Africa* calls the truly enormous consequences of the fighting which culminated in the victories of Shaka thus fall into place as the latest and most spectacular product of the cattle-keeping culture that had generated the states of the Interlacustrine region and contributed to their formation on the Zimbabwean plateau. The lines of migration are mapped in the atlases of African history, as warbands grew into whole peoples and states with the incorporation of captives and the subjection of the conquered, while other states formed out of the resistance to the invaders. South of the Zambezi, the best known of the migrants are the Ndebele who conquered the Shona of the Zimbabwean plateau; best known of the opponents are the Sotho who founded the enclave kingdom of Lesotho in modern South Africa. To the north of the Zambezi, where the invading Ngoni ran into the Yao and the Nyamwezi along the line of the Great Lakes and across the trade routes from the coast, their warriors helped to militarise the whole region, creating their own robber chieftaincies, provoking peoples such as the Hehe to do the same in self-defence, and meanwhile recruited by other raiders and traders for their own expeditions. In familiar fashion, many settled down as masters of the people to rule over the masters of the earth; but the practices of state formation which had created the dominions of the Luba and the Lunda in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries now served to destroy them. In the first half of the century their rulers had profited from the trade in ivory and slaves; in the second half they were ousted by the hunters and traders turned invaders and conquerors: the Nyamwezi to the east, the Chokwe to the west, and finally by the Swahili themselves in the person of Tippu Tip. Part Swahili, part Nyamwezi, in the 1870s he and his soldiers created their own state to the west of Lake Tanganyika in the name of the Sultan at Zanzibar. Only the states of the Interlacustrine region to the north continued to deal with such merchants on their own terms.

In the convulsion of the southern half of the continent by the invasions

of the Mfecane and the explosion of demand for ivory and slaves, the involvement of Europe was both more and less direct than in West Africa. Portuguese Angola and Mozambique were both slave-owning as well as slave exporting societies, which like those of West Africa turned to slave labour to produce the commodities, such as coffee, which were now in demand for legitimate trade. The slave-owning society of Dutch South Africa, on the other hand, which imported the bulk of its slaves from elsewhere, was thrown into crisis by the British annexation of the Cape in 1806. Abolition of the slave trade in 1807, which cut off the main supply, was followed by the abolition of slavery itself in 1833. Servility of labour was maintained under the name of apprenticeships; but the absolute dominion over the non-European population which the Afrikaners or Boers, the Dutch settlers, considered to be their God-given right, was limited by the legal protection afforded to the Khoisan and others. Prevented from further expansion to the east, from 1836 onwards many of them set out on the Great Trek, northwards across the plateau, the High Veld, over the Drakensberg mountains on its eastern edge, and into conflict with the armies of the Mfecane. While guns prevailed over spears, defeating the Zulus and driving the Ndebele across the Limpopo, the Trekkers were themselves driven back by the British annexation of Natal in 1844, but created their own states on the High Veld, the Orange Free State and the South African Republic. Stretching over a thousand kilometres from the Orange River boundary of the Cape to the Limpopo, their independence was recognised by Britain in the 1850s. Such a leap in the frontier of European knowledge as well as presence in Africa south of the Equator was promptly matched by a second such advance, driven by the missionary impulse behind the anti-slavery movement at the Cape. Forced to take a line to the west of the new Boer republics, David Livingstone reached the Zambezi in 1853, then crossed the continent from side to side more or less on the line of the river. A third such leap began in 1856, when Burton and Speke set out from Zanzibar for the interior of East Africa.

In reaching as far north as the Lozi kingdom on the upper Zambezi and then past Lake Nyasa to Lake Tanganyika, Livingstone was following the routes of the Mfecane, of the Kololo and the Ngoni, into the midst of the turmoil of the interior. In taking the cause of abolition as well as Christianity into the middle of the continent, Livingstone and the missionaries who followed were moreover contributing to that turmoil by their interference in the slave trade at its source rather than on or near the coast, as in West Africa. Ironically, the target of their indignation was not only the Yao and the Nyamwezi but the Swahili under the rule of a Sultan who in his homeland of Muscat and Oman and latterly at Zanzibar was a client of Great Britain. Although Britain gradually succeeded in halting his export of slaves, the slave plantation economy he had created at Zanzibar extended right along the Swahili coast and inland along the Swahili trade routes to the settlements beyond Lake Tanganyika. Those routes provided the entry into East Africa for Burton, Speke and their successors, explorers sponsored by the Royal Geographical Society and the British government to map out the interior, but whose appearance and whose guns conveyed the message of power in

the hands of strangers from another world. Where the Sultan of Sokoto had shown some marginal interest in the 'beautiful people' who solicited his attention, the Kabaka of Buganda declared to Speke, 'I love you because you have come so far to see me and have taught me so many new things'. For the moment they depended heavily upon the goodwill of their guides and their hosts. But the power of the gun in their hands was demonstrated two years later in neighbouring Bunyoro by Samuel Baker, who having followed the route of the slave traders up the Nile from the Egyptian Sudan, repelled one of their attacks on the kingdom.

The tale of their exploits, as told for example in Rotberg's *Africa and its Explorers*, is thus one of political as well as geographical intrusion into a realm of which they had been almost totally ignorant, although it was in the process of transformation by the world to which they belonged. In that realm, the widespread destruction and replacement of the old order that was taking place obscures the developments that may have resulted along either African or European lines; in retrospect they can only be surmised. Against the conclusion of Fage in his *History of Africa* that the slave trade may have prevented the operation of Connah's productive land hypothesis may be set his acknowledgement of the use of slaves to create a productive population, and his observation that their export seems to have had little effect on population densities. It is surely the case, as he suggests, that the new states coming into existence would have created a new order, on African, Islamic or European lines. The possibility of a modernising Islamic state is illustrated by the career of Tippu Tip, that of a European-style state by the Merina kingdom of Madagascar. From the late eighteenth century onwards, the bulk of the island came under its control from a capital at Tananarive in the highlands. Like that of the Zulu kingdom, its expansion rested on the introduction of a food crop, rice, to sustain a growing population. But it flourished on imported guns, European advisers, conversion to Christianity by British missionaries, and a consequent European education, in a battle with those it had conquered and with its own conservative aristocracy. On the mainland, Buganda was similarly targeted by both Muslim and Christian missionaries, to similarly divisive effect. More significant of the future, however, was the arrival up the Nile of Baker in Bunyoro, first running up the British flag, then coming in 1872 to annex the country for Egypt.



24

After Napoleon

I

In the approach to African history, the lasting achievement of Baker and his fellow explorers was to put the interior of Africa literally on the map, while in the eyes of their fellow countrymen they were shedding the light of Europe upon the Dark Continent, with all that this implied of superiority and inferiority. As Rotberg points out in *Africa and its Explorers*, in the eyes of the Africans they encountered, they were judged by what they were good for. Unsuccessful as it was, Baker's attempt to annex Bunyoro for Egypt in 1872 was nevertheless a token of something quite different, the empire-building that began with the conquest of Egypt by Napoleon in 1798 and continued across northern Africa under the influence of France rather than Britain, its broad sweep described by Magali Morsy in her *North Africa 1800–1900*. Intended as a step in the direction of British India, Napoleon's expedition was a dramatic demonstration of the centrality of Africa to the strategic calculations of the two rival powers. Its actual achievement was to puncture the northern frontier of the continent, which had been held against Europe by the Ottomans and Moroccans since the sixteenth century, and open up its line of Ottoman states to political, social and economic development along European lines. Napoleon's overthrow of the regime of the Mamluk Beys was followed in 1802 by the expulsion of the French by a British and Ottoman force, and in 1805 by the seizure of power by the Ottoman commander Muhammad 'Ali. Independently of Istanbul, and with the help of French advisers, by 1840 he had replaced the old tax-farming system in the hands of the Beys with a centralised bureaucracy staffed by French-educated personnel. Its purpose was on the one hand to conscript an army in the French manner from the peasantry, instead of the traditional recruitment of militias from abroad, and on the other to find the wealth to pay for it. For this, in addition to the traditional taxation of the grain harvest in spring, irrigation works were undertaken for the cultivation of summer crops. Of these the most important was cotton, whose export, monopolised

by the new monarch, became a principal source of revenue. To supply the army, Muhammad 'Ali likewise invested in armament and textile industries as well as others including sugar, paper and glass, while an Arabic printing-press was installed at Cairo. The industries largely disappeared after 1841, when he was obliged by European pressure to abandon his monopolies and open the country to foreign competition. But the strong, centralised state he had created in place of the diffused regime of the Beys remained as a prime example of how European institutions and technology could be employed outside Europe by an enterprising ruler to turn the wheel of Ibn Khaldun's state into a machine for the pursuit of power.

The fact that Muhammad 'Ali's career is treated by both Peter Holt in *Egypt and the Fertile Crescent* and by Malcolm Yapp in *The Making of the Modern Near East* is not only typical of the way in which Egypt is located by historians in the Middle East rather than in Africa, but an indication that his own ambitions lay within the Ottoman empire rather than outside; his new model army was employed to annex Syria in a manner familiar since the days of the Pharaohs. By contrast, his conquest of Nubia in 1820–2 was a preliminary that failed in its purpose of supplying slaves for the army he had in mind, since three-quarters of the thousands he brought to Egypt died. As narrated by Holt and Daly in *The History of the Sudan* and summarised in the *Cambridge History*, the conquest was nevertheless, like the Pharaonic empire of Kush, far more enduring than the few years of his occupation of Syria. The Funj Sultanate, in the hands of a squabbling dynasty of regents, capitulated; the confiscation of slaves from their Nubian owners, which provoked an early revolt up and down the river, was abandoned together with the project for a Black slave army; and the whole of the Nilotic Sudan was incorporated into a viceroyalty ruled from a new capital, Khartoum. A more radical departure in the history of a region which had been linked with Egypt for thousands of years came with the crossing of its southern frontier, the Sudd or barrier formed by the wetlands of the White Nile and the floating vegetation which barred the way upstream from the north. These were the habitat of a population belonging to a quite different world from that of Islam, the predominantly stateless Nilotes studied by Evans-Pritchard and discussed by Mair in *Primitive Government*. The frontier was not only natural but hostile; among the Dinka, the Nuer and the Anuak, the Shilluk on the river itself raided far downstream in their canoes. But in 1840 Muhammad 'Ali's fleet sailed right through to the foot of the Ugandan highlands at Gondokoro (Juba), and thereafter the whole region of the White Nile and its tributaries, from the Sobat in the east to the Bahr al-Ghazal in the west, was opened up, not to government from Khartoum but to the ivory trade. In this there was a strong resemblance to the trade of the Swahili, but in human terms it was still more destructive, since in the midst of a hostile population, the traders operated with private armies out of fortified *zariba*-s or encampments, and began to raid for slaves and cattle. Their advance from Gondokoro up into the highlands to the frontier of Bunyoro meanwhile created the route taken by Speke on his return down the Nile from Buganda and Bunyoro in 1862, and by Baker from Egypt to Bunyoro in 1862–4 and 1872–3.

Baker himself had been preceded at Gondokoro by European merchants and missionaries stationed at the flourishing new capital city of Khartoum, a sign of the extent to which Muhammad 'Ali's empire had opened up the whole of the Nile Valley to European penetration, and how close this had already come to the Equator and the lands entered by Livingstone from the south and Burton and Speke from the east. In Egypt itself, this laying of the geographical and ethnographic foundations for historical study blended with the publication and dissemination of the works of the Arabic geographers and historians, so that Lane's *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* was followed by the printing of the monumental *Khitat* or topography by the fifteenth-century al-Maqrizi, a vast account of the localities of Islamic Egypt and their history. Al-Maqrizi himself had been well aware, but fundamentally ignorant of, the Pharaonic past of his country, which became something of a European obsession from the moment of Napoleon's arrival with a team of French scholars, who compiled their own version of the *Khitat* in their equally monumental *Description de l'Égypte*. The key to that past, however, was the decipherment by Champollion in 1832 of the hieroglyphics on the trilingual stone unearthed by the French at Rosetta and confiscated by the British. With the beginning of Egyptian archaeology, the reading of the hieroglyphics opened up the history of Ancient Egypt to the rapidly growing discipline of Egyptology, a revelation of the distant past of the continent on which the study of its wider history began to turn. As far as the history of Egypt itself was concerned, however, the result on the one hand was a lack of interest in the intervening Graeco-Roman and Islamic periods, evidenced as late as the 1970s in the second edition of the Oxford University Press volume *The Legacy of Egypt*. On the other hand, promoted by Muhammad 'Ali and his successors to establish themselves as heirs to the Pharaohs as the legitimate rulers of Egypt, Ancient Egypt came to serve a new purpose as the foundation of a national history of an Egyptian nation that culminated in the foundation of a new nation state. The creation of that state was the unintended outcome, what Holt calls the by-product, of Muhammad 'Ali's immense ambition for himself and his family. The history which defined it was set out in *Histoire de la nation égyptienne*, commissioned by the monarchy in the 1930s, in which two out of the six volumes are devoted to the Pharaonic past. Politically motivated, a new and distinctively European form of history was thus introduced into Africa.

II

To the west of Egypt, Muhammad 'Ali had his imitators in the Ottoman provinces of Tripoli and Tunis, independent of Istanbul in all but name. Political entities since the sixteenth century, like Egypt these had the makings of the modern nation states, as Hermassi argues in *Leadership and National Development in North Africa*. At Tripoli, however, the process begun by Yusuf Pasha Karamanli was cut short. As ambitious as Muhammad 'Ali, he had taken advantage of the Napoleonic wars between France and Britain to supply the British fleet

at Malta with grain and cattle; to build up his own corsair fleet; and with the increase in his revenue to create a standing army with which to assert his control over Cyrenaica and seize the Fezzan from the Awlad Muhammad, the Sharifian dynasty which had ruled at Murzuq since the sixteenth century. Although largely desert, the territory of modern Libya was thus secured. But the post-war decline in his revenues from piracy and trade could not be offset by the attempted cultivation of cotton, as in Egypt; and while Tripoli became the starting-point for the various British expeditions to the central Sudan, a proposed conquest of Borno came to nothing for lack of funds. By 1832 Yusuf was deeply in debt to European merchants whose demands were upheld by the British and French authorities under whose protection they operated, and his inability to meet a final British demand led to his deposition. In 1835, with the question of the succession deadlocked, Istanbul was prompted to intervene, and the country was reabsorbed into the Ottoman empire with just so much government as was required to keep the peace.

Unlike Tripoli, Tunis since the sixteenth century had been the capital of a much smaller country without a Saharan hinterland to excite any imperial ambition in its rulers, but with a larger population and a far more centralised state. As the tale narrated by Kola Folayan in *Tripoli during the Reign of Yusuf Pasha Qaramanli* came to an end, the very different story told by Leon Carl Brown in *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey* began. From his accession in 1837 to his death in 1855, what Brown dismissed as a mere kick at the anthill of traditional society was an attempt to modernise the state in the manner of Muhammad 'Ali, one which succeeded in spite of its failures. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the country ruled by the Husaynid Beys was a traditional Makhzan or Treasury state, in which an army of soldiers and secretaries, headed by a household elite of Ottoman slave origin, lived off the taxes of the countryside while the cities, Tunis in particular, lived by religious scholarship, trade and craftsmanship. These profited from the market of the Ottoman empire, exporting both pictorial tilework and little red skullcaps, the product of a putting-out industry in which the materials at each stage of manufacture were supplied by the entrepreneur to the relevant craftsmen, forming the kind of production line that immediately preceded the industrial revolution in Yorkshire. The regime, however, was not static. In alliance with Istanbul, the Beys were strengthening their control of the military and of the provincial administration; the settling down of tribal peoples as taxable cultivators went together with increasingly central control of taxation and the taxpaying population. Ahmad as a result was easily able to take the decisive step of raising an army by conscription in the French manner of Muhammad 'Ali. At the same time he abolished slavery, the most important effect of which was to transform his staff of Mamluk ministers and commanders into a Tunisian aristocracy. Conscription did not survive his death, financial extravagance and embezzlement, which led to revolt in 1864 against increased taxation based on a census of taxpayers. That in turn brought to a halt a still more radical attempt at modernisation in the form of a Constitution, which in 1861 had provided for a consultative assembly and a code of law. Although the Constitution was then suspended, it was,

like the census, evidence of the increasing competence of the state, which in the 1870s enabled Ahmad's former Mamluk Khayr al-Din to initiate a further programme of fiscal, educational and administrative reform along the same French lines as Egypt.

Different again was the tale told of Morocco by Mohamed El-Mansour in *Morocco in the Reign of Mawlay Sulayman* and continued by Richard Pennell in *Morocco since 1830*. In a much larger country than that of Tunis, the population was much denser than that of Tripoli, but spread across the ranges of the Atlas, it was far less compact than at Tunis. Politically it was held together, as Hermassi says in *Leadership and National Development*, by a combination of charisma with consent to the rule of a descendant of the Prophet, whose control over the country was more limited than his authority. The government of the 'Alawite dynasty was decentralised, descending from the Sultan through his *qaid*-s or governors to chiefs and marabouts who represented the Sultan to the people and the people to the Sultan, down to the elders of essentially stateless, tribal populations. It revolved in traditional fashion around taxation, which earned the state the name of the Makhzan or Treasury, and the name of Siba for those areas, more or less extensive, which at any particular time were running to waste, in other words refusing to pay. Collection itself depended upon the threat or use of force by the *qaid* or the motley army of the Sultan himself, mustered when dissidence grew out of hand. For thirty years in the middle of the eighteenth century such dissidence had flourished in the succession disputes that followed the death of the great Sultan Mawlay Isma'il in 1727; and it was to regain a measure of control that in 1760 the new Sultan Sidi Muhammad opened the south of the country to trade with Europe through the port of Essaouira. A basic purpose was to use the grain collected by taxation to buy the munitions imported since the days of the Saadian Sultan Ahmad al-Mansur in the sixteenth century; but the admission of European merchants broke a long-standing embargo on trade with the infidel in the course of holy war. To overcome the religious opposition of the jurists, Muhammad invoked his right as the heir to the Prophet to determine the Law of Islam, a stance which along with a fluctuating but increasing trade with Europe carried the monarchy through the troubled reign of his son Sulayman to prosperity under 'Abd al-Rahman in the 1830s. Trade had by then become a principal source of revenue, handled through a new class of rich Muslim and Jewish merchants in collaboration with those of Europe. But what appeared to be a mutually beneficial relationship in line with the British concept of legitimate trade, was interrupted in 1845 by a different kind of confrontation with Europe, defeat by the French at the battle of Isly.

III

Fifteen years after the French captured Algiers in 1830, Isly was a consequence of their long struggle to conquer the rest of the Ottoman Regency. After Napoleon's invasion of Egypt, their capture of the city was the second

break through the African frontier of Islam to the north of the Sahara. In doing so it had decapitated a state which was both the most powerful of the three created by the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, and the most conservative. The orderliness of its government through the Diwan or council of ministers, which presided over the prosperity of Algiers and controlled the Beys who ruled the bulk of the country from the provincial capitals of Constantine, Medea and Oran, contrasted with the arbitrary choice of the Dey by the Janissaries who had held power for the past hundred and fifty years. Only in the few years before the conquest had the last Dey put himself out of reach of instant deposition and murder by his fellow members of this corps of Anatolian Turks, by taking up residence in the Qasbah or fortress at the top of the city. But as a possible move towards a regular succession and the modernisation of the regime, this was aborted by his expulsion from the country in 1830 along with the Janissaries, leaving the French to decide on his replacement. The ostensible purpose of their expedition had been to put a final stop to the corsairs, 'the scourge of Christendom', but was in fact an unsuccessful attempt to win an election at home with a military victory abroad. In choosing to keep what they had won, they were rapidly drawn into the complications of annexation, colonisation, and the conquest of the whole of the country. Annexation to France in 1834 created a European government for a non-European population. Colonisation, beginning with the arrival of speculators, introduced into that population a body of European settlers; while the army was required to wage a long and brutal war to make good the claim to the whole of the territory ruled from Algiers by the Dey. In and around Algiers a civilian regime was constructed; but any advance into the interior was blocked by the Bey of Constantine to the east, and to the south and west by Islamic militancy. At the same time that the Boers and the British were advancing inland from the Cape with relative ease and at relatively little expense, the French found themselves committed to a vast military effort on the part of their own conscript army in a country of which they were fundamentally ignorant.

Constantine, where the Bey claimed the succession to the Dey, was taken by storm in 1838, and his now independent state taken over. No such straightforward victory, however, was possible in the west and centre of the country, where the removal of the Dey had opened the way to the creation of an entirely new state on very different principles. In the Mahdist tradition of Islamic revivalism, Abdolkader ('Abd al-Qadir) had been designated by the marabout his father to lead the tribes in the province of Oran who had suffered from the exactions of the Turks, in war upon the infidel. Uniting them in a new community of the faithful under a new government with a standing army, a chain of command, and a revenue from taxation, by 1839 he had taken control of well over half the country in the course of alternating warfare and pacts with the French. In so doing he was acting no differently, although in different circumstances, from the Fulani leaders of the jihads in Hausaland and the Inland Delta, which had created the Caliphate of Sokoto and the state of Masina. All were representative of the wave of Islamic revivalism which had spread across the Middle East and Africa at the same

time that the rulers of the Ottoman empire and Morocco were turning to Europe and European models to revive the fortunes of their states. Where in the central and western Sudan the targets of this revivalism were the local practices of local rulers, across the Sahara its criticism of traditional Islam took on a global dimension as it encountered the challenge of Europe to Islam itself, to the religion and the civilisation. And where the response of the statesmen represented by the Tunisian Khayr al-Din was to call upon Islam to adapt itself to European ways, that of the revivalists was to reject both the ways and the rulers who adopted them.

Revivalism was on the one hand scholarly, aimed at the implementation of the Islamic Law, and on the other hand apocalyptic, looking for the coming of the Mahdi to inaugurate the final age of the world. This was an ancient pair of opposites, whose conflict underlay the revolutions of the Fatimids, Almoravids and Almohads in the formative period of Islam in North Africa. Since then the Mahdist vision of the man sent from God had taken the form of the saintly holy man, who followed the ways of Sufism. The cult of such saints was anathema to the Wahhabis, who in the late eighteenth century had created a militant state in Arabia on the basis of a return to the purity of the Law in the time of the Prophet. Nevertheless, legalism and Mahdism alike were combined in the Sufi brotherhoods which proliferated across the Muslim world from the second half of the eighteenth century, but divided out among their charismatic saints and followers in frequent opposition to each other. Thus the claim of Muhammad Bello at Sokoto to supremacy on behalf of the Qadiriyya was rejected at Masina by Ahmadu Lobbo of the Tijaniyya, who was in turn resisted by the Kunta of Timbuktu. The Tijaniyya was a brotherhood of Moroccan origin which made an exclusive claim to divine inspiration, and for that reason had been adopted by the Moroccan Sultanate to reinforce its claim to authority for the Law. But it was opposed in North Africa by the Qadiriyya, the brotherhood of Abdelkader, who destroyed its following in Algeria as a rival to his own claim to command the faithful. He himself was destroyed by the French between 1839 and 1847 in the course of campaigns which devastated the countryside, doomed by the expectations of his followers to wage a holy war that he could not win. Both the war and the ideological conflict spilled over into Morocco, where patriotic enthusiasm drove the Sultan to take up the cause, only to see his forces routed by the far superior army of the French at Isly in 1845. The outcome described by Amira Bennison in *Jihad and its Interpretations in Pre-colonial Morocco* was a domestic challenge to the Sultan's authority, met by the denunciation of Abdelkader as a false pretender to the throne. But its legacy in the second half of the nineteenth century was the exposure of that authority to the challenge of Europe.

IV

In the context of North African history, Abdelkader emerges as the latest in the line of inspired revolutionaries who mobilised a tribal population for

the creation of a new and better state in place of the old. In Europe, in the age of romantic nationalism, he was very differently cast as the hero of a people struggling to be free; in that capacity he has become the hero of the modern Algerian nation, the champion of a history of popular resistance to the European invader. The history of such resistance throughout northern Africa provides Magali Morsy with the theme of her *North Africa 1800–1900*, an example of the way in which it has become a major strand in the history of the continent as a whole in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has certainly replaced the French vision of themselves as the heirs of Rome, bringing western civilisation back to a land blighted by the invasion of Islam, the Arabs and the Turks from the east – a version of history that found its final expression after the Second World War in Eugène Guernier's *La Berbérie, l'Islam et la France*. By then it was a response to resistance in the form of Algerian nationalism, but from the beginning it had championed the French conquest on the grounds of progress – an expression of that other theme of development, which after 1830 in Algeria had been caught up in the revolutionary politics of France itself. Summarised by Charles-Robert Ageron in *Modern Algeria*, the dispute was between the state, which stood for the extension of civil rights to the native population; the army, which was opposed to French settlement, and thought that the way forward was through the introduction of that population to modern technology; and the settlers, who claimed the country for themselves as the bearers of civilisation. The issue was decided by the defeat of France in the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, which put an end to any opposition to French settlement, established the Muslim population as subjects but not citizens, with only limited voting rights, and left the settlers to control both the government and the economy in their own interests. Opposition to the systematic deprivation and oppression of the bulk of the Muslim population nevertheless continued, to be expressed after the end of the French Algeria in the list of its wrongs recounted by Ageron in the 1960s. Relating the parallel history of the resistance which developed in the twentieth century into the rise of Algerian nationalism, his *Modern Algeria* is a specific example of the way in which the contemporary approach to African history has been shaped by the arguments provoked by the European penetration of the continent in the nineteenth century.

The tale he tells is nevertheless exceptional, because of the French commitment to incorporate Algeria into France, and thus into its domestic politics. Neither north nor south of the Sahara was there anything comparable. In the western Sudan, the French encountered the same phenomenon of Islamic revivalism when in the 1850s they set out from their station of St Louis at the mouth of the Senegal to conquer the valley of the Senegal. They did away with the old jihadist state of Futa Toro, but encountered the force of the *jihad* of al-Hajj 'Umar, a second Tijani revivalist who in the 1850s incorporated the state of his predecessor Shehu Ahmadu in Masina in a much larger empire, from Futa Jallon in the south-west to Timbuktu in the north-east. Its overthrow was for the moment out of the question. Like Algeria, the colony which they went on to create was indeed an innovation on the

continent. But at the time when the army ruled in Algeria, the French adopted a similar policy of training up their African subjects, in this case to the growing of groundnuts for export. The result was a different kind of colony, one which relied upon the native population for its development rather than on immigrants from the home country.

North of the Sahara, the possibility of French expansion into neighbouring Tunisia and Morocco was blocked by British concern to protect the integrity of the Ottoman and Moroccan empires, already violated by the conquest of Algeria. Tunisia, fearful of going the way of Libya, back into the Ottoman empire, or going the way of Algeria into the possession of France, tried to balance the influence of all three powers. Morocco relied heavily upon Britain to maintain its independence, but at the price of a treaty in 1856 which opened up the country to free trade. Tunisia followed suit in 1857 in the agreement called the 'Ahd al-aman which led up to the Constitution of 1861. Both states were then fully exposed to a different kind of European encroachment, the exploitation of their position by the European consuls. In a system that dated from the Middle Ages, and subsequently formalised in the Capitulations granted by the Ottoman empire, their jurisdiction over their nationals resident in the country enabled them to act not only as protectors of the expatriate community and its interests, but as agents of the states they represented. Not only did their protection turn their nationals into a privileged elite. When their jurisdiction was extended to Tunisians and Moroccans anxious for the same advantages, a state within a state began to form. This was especially the case in Morocco, where the original purpose of trade with Europe, the raising of revenue for the strengthening of the state, was subverted by a trivial war with Spain in 1859–60. The cost was a British loan to settle the indemnity exacted by Spain as the price of peace, to be repaid out of customs duties over a period of twenty years; the disappearance of Moroccan land and Moroccan subjects into a Europeanised sector of the economy and the society; and internal rebellion at the inability of the Sultan to defend the land of Islam against the infidel. While the European colony undertook its own form of modernisation with the introduction of consular postal services, the belated attempt of the Sultan Mawlay Hasan at the modernisation of the state in the manner of Muhammad 'Ali was largely frustrated. During his long reign from 1873 to 1894, conscription was introduced in the hundreds of little districts created in place of the large old provinces, which were governed by a new class of officials. But his success in asserting his power as well as his authority came from his recourse to the traditional military expedition, the first Sultan for many years to tour the country at the head of his armies, and certainly to cross over the High and Middle Atlas to the edge of the desert. It was beyond his power to make good the claim of his dynasty to the Saharan empire of the past, but his achievement was to mark out the more limited territory of modern Morocco.

At the other end of northern Africa, the same factors entered into the confrontation of Europe with Egypt, although the country was very different. Not only had the modernisation of the state by Muhammad 'Ali created an

efficient government, but society itself had been altered. While the Turkish aristocracy formed a class of hereditary landowners, the peasants were becoming proprietors. While these continued to bear the burden of taxation and conscription, a middle class of rich peasants had developed out of the village headmen. From these the officer corps of the army was increasingly drawn, as well as the majority of delegates to the Assembly of Delegates created in 1866. Together with the Europeanised elite created by Muhammad 'Ali, they contributed to the formation of a nationalist opposition to the despotism of his successors, as well as to the European pressures that built up during the reign of his grandson Isma'il from 1863 to 1879. By that time, technological modernisation undertaken by the dynasty with European expertise had transformed the country with a network of railways, roads, bridges, harbours and irrigation canals. As in Morocco, however, this came at a price, both literally and figuratively. The matter of consular jurisdiction was less serious than the involvement of the country in the rivalry of Britain and France, and the debts incurred by Isma'il in the 1860s and 70s. In the 1850s the building of railways from Alexandria to Cairo and from Cairo to Suez at the head of the Red Sea had revived the role of Egypt as the middleman between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean, but at the same time converted it into the vital link in a new British route to India. In the 1860s and 70s British control of that route was threatened by the building of the Suez Canal, the work of the French engineer De Lesseps, a disciple of the philosophy of mutual aid and technical expertise put into practice in the 1850s by the army in Algeria. The cutting of the Canal was a triumph of this doctrine of progress through technology which goes under the name of Saint-Simonianism, and a spectacular precursor of the kind of project in vogue for the developing world after the Second World War. But it depended on a massive investment by creditors requiring repayment, while it completed the sea route via Egypt to British India; and its construction set in train a revolution in European diplomacy as well as a political revolution in Egypt itself. Its opening in 1869 was followed in 1875 by the British government's strategic purchase of Isma'il's large shareholding in the Suez Canal Company, and in 1878 by Britain's annexation of Cyprus as a naval base for the defence of the Canal.

The annexation of Cyprus, which was part of the Ottoman empire, brought to an end Britain's championship of the integrity of the Ottoman empire against the ambitions of other European states, with repercussions that affected the whole of Africa. In Egypt it fed into the growing crisis provoked by the indebtedness of Isma'il, whose loans from European sources far surpassed his revenues from the export of cotton. The crisis began with the solution imposed by his European creditors, a vast extension of consular rights to include the takeover of the native state itself in order to secure repayment. From 1876 onwards the revenues and expenditures of Egypt were progressively placed in charge of British and French controllers and government ministers, until in 1879 Isma'il himself was deposed, leaving his son as a mere figurehead, and the Egyptians in active opposition to the new regime. Rather than submit to the appointment of a collaborationist admin-

istration, the constitutionalists of the Assembly of Delegates joined with the officers of the army to force their way into the government. The mounting alarm of the British and the French at this apparent threat to their interests, most notably in the case of Britain to the security of the Canal, culminated in 1882 in a British invasion which defeated the Egyptian army under its colonel 'Urabi Pasha. The appointment in 1883 of Evelyn Baring as British agent and consul-general completed the passage of the country under British control.

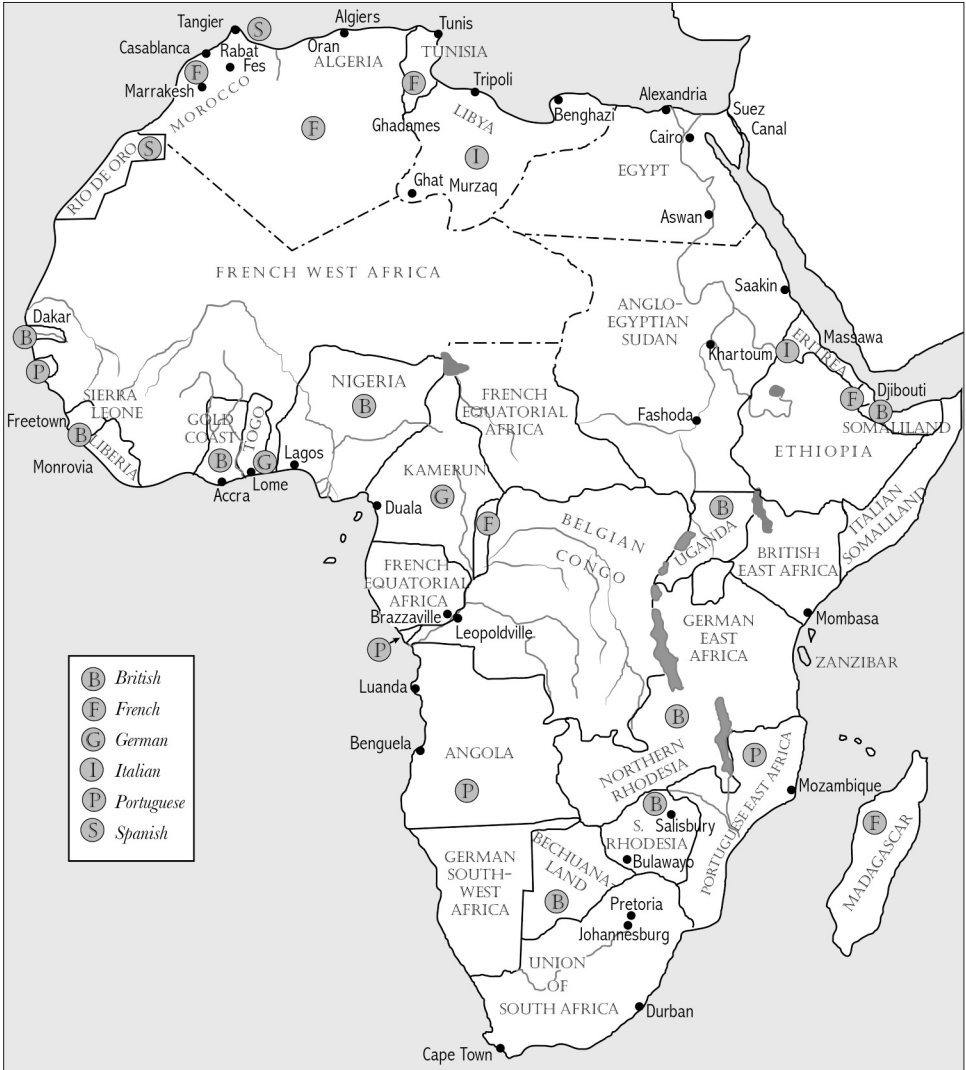


25

The Reconfiguration of Africa

I

In 1883, the British management of the state created by Muhammad Ali was not the original intention; it followed the failure of the puppet regime, set up by the British and the French in 1879, to resist the Egyptian nationalism which had developed along with the growth of that state. The decision to take it over rather than withdraw was nevertheless taken to protect the commercial and strategic interests of Britain. As such it was in line with previous British acquisitions to the south of the Sahara, made since the abolition of the slave trade and the wars against Napoleon had begun the formation of a British empire in Africa at Sierra Leone and the Cape in the first decade of the century. Natal in 1845 and Lagos in 1861 were both annexed to keep out the Boers on the one hand and to guard against Dahomey on the other. The final establishment of the Gold Coast Colony in 1874, fifty years after the death of its first governor, Sir Charles MacCarthy, in the first Asante war of 1824, followed as in Egypt from a military action to put an end to any Asante threat with the sack of the Asante capital Kumasi earlier in the year. Such acquisitions on the margins of the continent were part of rather than contrary to the general British policy of keeping Africa and its interior, to the south as well as to the north of the Sahara, free from the dangers of European competition and conquest. In South Africa, the threat from the Boers was localised; but elsewhere, that of the French was not. Napoleon had been expelled from Egypt, which had fallen to a non-European empire-builder. But to the north of the Sahara the French had conquered Algeria and the lower valley of the Senegal to the south, and in 1881–3, in the course of the Egyptian crisis, they imposed their protectorate upon Tunisia with British consent. Thereafter, the danger materialised with surprising suddenness in the so-called Scramble for Africa, which by the end of the century had done away with informal British domination of the approaches to the continent, and divided out the bulk of the land mass between the so-called European Powers.



18. The Reconfiguration of Africa: 1914

Map based on *A Literary and Historical Atlas of Africa and Australasia*, J.G. Bartholomew, Everyman's Library, London and New York, c. 1914

This vast extension of European rule across the continent formed the next and greatest step towards the unification of Africa on the ground and its conceptualisation in the mind. It did so in the first place because the rush by European statesmen to stake a claim to its territory turned Africa and its interior into a centre of international attention. It did so in second place since it introduced government, organisation and communication on European lines and European principles to the whole of the continent. That in turn involved the Africans themselves, the people who were now required to remain rather than to leave in order to work the homeland rather than the Americas for profit, an economic as well as political experience with profound social consequences. For the historian, the crucial product was a written record which for the first time covered all of Africa. The tales of travellers into the interior multiplied alongside increasing press coverage of events that were documented in the paperwork of European administration and commerce, and retold in narratives of conquest and settlement. The paperwork in turn blended into the reports of scientific studies on the lines laid down by Napoleon in Egypt, frequently commissioned by the said administration for policy-making purposes, until some fifty years later the results were extensively summed up in a single volume. Published in 1938, *An African Survey: a study of the problems arising in Africa south of the Sahara*, compiled under the direction of Lord Hailey, was designed and produced by the British imperial and academic elite as an aid to government in its approach to the question of African development. It may stand for the mass of official and semi-official publications covering the whole of the continent, while at the same time standing out in the approach to African history as a statement of the position of the subject reached some ten years before its academic study separated out from the concerns of empire.

The significance of the *Survey* in this respect is that it is not a history, even of the colonial period, despite all its necessary references to previous events and legislation. It was nevertheless compiled on the historical assumption that the continent was destined to achieve the European goals set for it by its European masters. Its stated aim was to contribute to the process of African history in its most formative period by providing the information for the decisions which would determine the future, and by calling for further, intensive study of the 'unusual conditions' of the continent to solve the problems of social and material development. In doing so, it nicely describes the situation of the blind men and the elephant at the height of the colonial period. The one-eyed man who attempts to see the whole is in this case the European ruler responsible for government, whose vision unites the factual and objective descriptions which the *Survey* aims to provide. That vision recognises the need to look at every aspect of African life, into which the written dimension now extends. It does not matter that ethnography is still based on Seligman's *Races of Africa*, or that the language map is not yet clear. What is important is that in the fifty years since the beginning of the Scramble, with the further aid of photography and sound recording, the specialist studies invoked by the *Survey* had not only contributed to the immense and growing volume of information about the continent in the

colonial present, but identified, described and formatted all those other forms of evidence for the African past whose study is essential to its recovery. The irony is that these forms should have been unearthed in this way, literally as well as figuratively, in the languages and categories of the non-African civilisation responsible for the creation of a different kind of unity from that of the past. What the *Survey* makes clear is that, if the approach to African history is now beset with controversy, it is not simply because of the problems of the blind, but because of its roots in the imposition of that civilisation on the continent. The unity which resulted from colonial rule was a unity of conflict between different societies, in principle and in practice, extending down to the present day in argument over what was and what might have been. The mass of information generated by colonialism has been polarised by the controversies that originated at the time, and have since in large measure determined the lines of inquiry.

II

Controversy is all the more lively since the origin of this unity lay in division, or rather redivision. Unlike the Roman and Arab conquests of Africa north of the Sahara, the imposition of colonial rule on the continent as a whole was not the work of a single conqueror with a single language, but of many. Played out in Africa, the rivalries of Europe resulted in its reconfiguration into a multitude of separate territories grouped together under the rule of Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain. Liberia and Ethiopia were the exceptions that proved the rule, testing it only to confirm its applicability. What Oliver and Atmore in their *Africa since 1800* call the partition of Africa on paper, to be followed from 1891 onwards by the partition of Africa on the ground, was recorded at the time in a compilation whose title is self-explanatory: Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty*. The lines drawn by these treaties cut into and across the deserts, savannahs and forests that were home to the clusters of peoples and states whose formation in the course of Oliver and Atmore's African Middle Ages is described in their *Medieval Africa* region by region. Except along the Mediterranean coast, where the new divisions coincided with those established by the Ottomans in the sixteenth century, all of these clusters were either split up or combined in new ways in the new political entities, their languages overlain by the new language map of the new rulers.

It is certainly true that over the centuries, in the perspective of Hrbek's contact zones, the evolution of these regions, peoples and states had been increasingly linked and progressively modified by the spread of Islam on the one hand and the outreach of the Atlantic slave trade on the other. In the course of the nineteenth century the process had accelerated with the substitution of trade in cash crops and ivory, the penetration of the interior by European explorers and missionaries, and the beginnings of conquest in North Africa, the Nilotic Sudan and South Africa: preliminaries to the Scramble which overlapped with three huge spheres of African enterprise –

the militant Muslim states of the Sudanese savannah; the Swahili trade network in East and Central Africa; and the warrior kingdoms of the Mfecane in the south. Coming at the end of what was already a century of revolutionary change, however, the European partition extended a very different principle of state formation right across the continent. Enforced by the military superiority of European-type armies, whose organisation was an essential element of that principle, this extension has supplied a very different answer to Connah's final question in *African Civilizations* of 'what are the common denominators?' and created a very different subject of historical study under the name of colonialism. As an approach to the history of the continent, this began at the time with the conviction that such a thing as African history did not exist before the arrival of the Europeans, and has continued as a lens through which that history is directly and indirectly studied. This dominance of the approach is reflected in the general histories, where the regional treatment of regional diversity, regarded by Hrbek as inevitable given the partial nature of previous denominators, is subordinated to the thematic treatment illustrated in Collins et al.'s *Historical Problems of Imperial Africa*. The end of precolonial history is signalled by Isichei in the date of 1870 which closes her *History of African Societies*, in the plural. The radical nature of the new is announced in chapters entitled 'The colonial period' in Fage's *History of Africa*, 'Colonial invasion' followed by 'Colonial change' in Iliffe's *Africans*; and by the title of Vol. VII of the UNESCO History: *Africa under Colonial Domination 1880–1935*.

In the approach to African history the study of this domination begins with its origin. The creation of the new map over a period of some twenty to thirty years was precipitated by the chain of events from 1882 to 1885, which left the new rulers to come to grips with the realities of the continent they had so hastily taken over. Which of those events was the catalyst has been debated since Robinson and Gallagher, in *Africa and the Victorians*, proposed the British takeover of Egypt; the arguments are excerpted in Robert O. Collins, *Historical Problems of Imperial Africa*. Much has turned on the ratification by France at the end of 1882 of a treaty concluded by the explorer de Brazza with a chief of the Teke on the western bank of the Congo, the middlemen in the old ivory and slave trade from the margins of the forest. Staking a claim to possession of the vast interior of the French settlement of Libreville on the coast of Gabon, ratification was seen in France as compensation for the capture of Egypt by Britain, but provoked King Leopold II of Belgium to make similar territorial claims to the east bank of the river. The principle and the programme of partition was then established between 1883 and 1885, when Germany by the same method of treaty-making laid claim to Togo and Cameroon in West Africa; to what is now Namibia in the south-west; and to Tanganyika in East Africa. At the same time Germany convoked the Berlin conference of 1884–5 to reach international agreement on how the process should continue. On the basis of that agreement, between 1885 and 1891 Britain salvaged what remained of its previously predominant influence on the coast from Sierra Leone to East Africa, and set out on its own career of empire-building in the interior.

As Oliver and Atmore point out, despite the principle of effective occupation agreed at Berlin, down to the 1890s European claims remained largely titular, the diplomatic solution to a European conflict set in an African theatre. For that setting two reasons have been put forward in the context of growing European interest in the commercial possibilities of the continent. That chosen by Oliver and Atmore was the ambition of King Leopold II of Belgium, who had seized the opportunity, declined by Britain, to open up the trade of the Congo basin on the strength of Stanley's discovery in 1877 that the river was navigable above the Inga rapids near its mouth. With Stanley as his agent, Leopold built the road up which the parts of steamers were carried for assembly on the river above the falls. Provoked by the French claim to the western bank of the river, by the end of the Berlin Conference in 1885 Leopold had converted this commercial operation into an enormous private empire under the name of the Congo Free State. Behind the French claim, however, lay an imperial ambition, which for Newbury and Kanya-Forstner, in the article excerpted in Collins' *Problems*, and for Sanderson in Vol. 6 of *The Cambridge History of Africa*, was the true cause of the Scramble. France's drive into the interior, up the valley of the Senegal in the 1850s, had been resumed at the end of the 1870s as a drive to win an empire in West Africa that would open up a vast market for French trade. It chimed with the ambition to extend the French empire in North Africa from Algeria to Tunisia and Morocco, and eventually across the Sahara. Not only had Tunisia been occupied in 1881, as compensation offered for the annexation of Cyprus by Britain in 1878. South of the Sahara, where the British had been unwilling for the flag to follow trade, the French were convinced that trade would follow the flag from the Senegal to the Niger and beyond. Already in 1881 they had laid claim to Madagascar, and early in 1882, before the British action in Egypt, they had occupied Porto Novo along the West African coast from Lagos. They reached the Upper Niger at Bamako in 1883, although the British blocked them in the Niger Delta and further upstream, where George Goldie's National African Company took on a military and political role endorsed by its incorporation as the Royal Niger Company in 1886. But the intervention of Germany in the growing competition ensured the triumph of the Napoleonic principle of conquest and occupation over the hands-off approach of Britain to the continent.

III

It remained to finish the map. Continuing European rivalry deferred the conquest of Libya by the Italians until 1911, as part of a deal which enabled the division of Morocco between France and Spain to go ahead in 1912. The conquest of both countries then lasted for over twenty years; to the south of the Sahara, so-called pacification likewise dragged on, but in essence the map was complete by the early years of the new century. A huge French empire had appeared in the north and west, stretching from North Africa across the Sahara and the Sudanese savannah to the rainforest, which reduced the West

African possessions of Britain, Portugal and Germany, together with Liberia, to a series of enclaves inland from the coast. To the east and south a similarly enormous British empire stretched, after the annexation of German South-West Africa and Tanganyika in the course of the First World War, up the Nile and down the highland spine of the continent, from Cairo to the Cape. Together these empires surrounded the savannahs and forest of the Belgian Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, separated the Portuguese possessions of Angola and Mozambique, isolated Ethiopia, and confined the possessions of Italy and Spain to the margins. How this was accomplished varied from the French, who relied from the beginning upon the army, to the Germans and the British, who looked in the first instance to chartered companies to establish an administration before the scale of the operation obliged them to take direct responsibility, to Leopold's regime in the Congo, which extorted rubber and ivory from its new subjects before it was taken over in 1908 by the Belgian government. On the highlands from the Equator to the Cape the process was complicated by the presence or arrival of European settlers, enemies as well as allies of colonial administrations in the attempt to create an economically as well as politically viable series of states out of the lands and populations so brusquely reconfigured in this way.

For Lonsdale, surveying the history of the Scramble in conclusion to Vol. 7 of *The Cambridge History*, white settlement was the second of three features of this empire-building, after the alteration of the frontier between two systems of trade and belief, the Muslim and the Christian. The most obvious victim of this alteration was the Swahili network in East and Central Africa, where the Swahili merchant adventurer Tippu Tip was taken into Leopold's service in the Congo Free State, ending the prospect of a Zanzibari empire under British protection, and diverting the trade he had conducted from the coast of the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic. In the Interlacustrine region, the Swahili connection came to an end in Buganda and Bunyoro when the pro-British Christian faction at the court of Buganda expelled its Muslim rival, and assisted the British in the conquest of Bunyoro. Elsewhere in East Africa the various partners of the Swahili likewise succumbed to the British in Kenya and the Germans in Tanganyika. In Tanganyika, the Swahili rebelled, but once defeated were incorporated into the colonial state, qualified by their commercial expertise to serve as the personnel of the colonial administration. For the trade in slaves and ivory on which the Swahili network had been plotted, the British and German companies which took over in East Africa had no immediate substitute; in the Congo basin, both Leopold and the French turned to wild rubber, another natural resource scandalously exploited for quick profit. Rubber was a token of the difference from West Africa, where the export trade in slaves had already been superseded by one in agricultural products handled by European firms. There, the effect of the ending of African independence, in which the French conquest of Dahomey and the British conquest of Benin and Asante stood out from a host of small-scale operations, was to eliminate the bargaining power of the African partners in this trade. For Hopkins in *An Economic History of West Africa*, it cleared the way for the creation of what he calls an open economy, a level field for

the control of production and trade by the colonial state and the commercial firms for which it was the agent. Such a result emphasises the economic incentive for the Scramble, since, as he says, it was trade which had first brought Europeans to Africa, and trade which had remained the basis of their relationship with the continent from the fifteenth century onwards.

To the north, the aim of penetrating the Saharan–Sudanese system of trade and belief had been a motive for the British expeditions of the first half of the nineteenth century from Tripoli to Sokoto and Borno, members of the chain of new Islamic empires that controlled its southern frontier. The Saharan approach, however, had been abandoned in the 1850s with the opening of the route up the Niger from the south, a reorientation of the trade of the central Sudan which was completed in the context of the Scramble with the conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate and the other Muslim states of what is now northern Nigeria between 1896 and 1906. Their annexation by Britain was the main exception to the French occupation of the rest of the Sudan as far as Darfur, which otherwise destroyed the major Islamic states and networks of the western and central Sudan generated by the jihads of the previous hundred years. The commercial rewards of this annexation fell far short of the original French hopes for an immensely profitable empire in the region. The principal French success was on the Senegal, where the production of groundnuts by the native population had been part of what Hopkins calls the staple economy of the pre-colonial period. Like the reorientation of the trade of northern Nigeria, the efficient organisation of this production by the marabouts, who as in Algeria had once been exponents of holy war, not only altered the frontier between Lonsdale's two systems of trade and belief, but emphasised the fate of the previous network of trans-Saharan trade. With its commercial importance threatened from the fifteenth century onwards, in the course of the nineteenth century the Sahara had turned from a commercial ocean in the midst of the Islamic world into a commercial backwater dependent upon the lingering trade in slaves documented by John Wright in *The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*. That trade nevertheless continued to sustain the Sanusiyya, a revivalist brotherhood whose operations stretched from Cyrenaica to the central Sudan. These were yet another militant Muslim opponent for the French to overcome after the seventeen years of warfare required to eliminate the jihadist empires founded by al-Hajj 'Umar in the Inland Delta, and more recently by Samori on the forest margins to the south. In turn, the driving of the Sanusiyya back into the desert required the defeat of their slave-trading partner to the east of Lake Chad. Rabih, though not a holy warrior, was nevertheless an offshoot of the last great jihad of the nineteenth century, a military adventurer driven out of the Egyptian Sudan by the rising of the Mahdi Muhammad Ahmad on the Nile.

IV

In the context of the Scramble, the British takeover of government in Egypt should have entailed, not a reconfiguration, but the acquisition of a ready-

made African empire. Under the Khedive Isma'il, Egypt's Sudanese dominion, the first great venture of nineteenth-century imperialism into the interior of Africa, had not only been brought up to date with river steamers and a telegraph line linking Cairo with Khartoum. It had been enlarged by further conquest and occupation, and transformed with the assistance of European advisors and officials into a regime dedicated to the abolition of the slave trade on which it had originally been built. Combined with the trade in ivory, that trade in the hands of well-organised Sudanese merchants dominated a vast region to the south and west of Khartoum, from the frontier of Bunyoro on the highlands of East Africa, through the low-lying marshlands of the Sudd to the highlands of Darfur, from where it extended across the Sahara to the Mediterranean. Beginning with the dispatch of Baker up the White Nile in 1871, by 1874 the whole of this region had been converted into the three enormous provinces of Equatoria, Bahr al-Ghazal and Darfur. Meanwhile in 1865 the Sudanese coast of the Red Sea had come into Isma'il's possession with the acquisition of the ports of Suakin and Massawa from the Ottomans, although the attempted acquisition of Mombasa was blocked by the British, and invasions of Ethiopia ended in defeat. The consolidation of these gains, however, required the resources to replace the networks of the slave traders with an effective administration which Isma'il did not possess; the appointment of the British general Gordon as governor of Equatoria and then of the Sudan itself did little to help. The deposition of Isma'il in 1879 exposed the regime at Khartoum to a revolutionary uprising which left the British to meet the challenge of militant Islam.

Like 'Abd al-Wahhab in Arabia and Usuman dan Fodio in the central Sudan, Muhammad Ahmad, a holy man of the Sammaniyya brotherhood, preached a holy war upon infidelity. Unlike these, however, he did so as the Mahdi, the apocalyptic agent of God to bring about the final triumph of Islam. Expectation of the Mahdi and the universal rising which would greet his appearance ran right across the Muslim world, the climax of a century of anticipation; but the world remained to be convinced that Muhammad Ahmad was the man. His success was rather as a revolutionary in the manner of Usuman dan Fodio and in the tradition of the Fatimids, Almoravids and Almohads. Between 1881 and 1885 his basically tribal army of Baggara Arabs overwhelmed the forces sent against it, until at his death in 1885 the bulk of the Egyptian Sudan was left in the hands of his Caliph 'Abdallahi. So rapidly created at precisely the time when the Scramble began, the new state set out to reproduce the very opposite of the European model, a version of that of the Prophet and his Companions as an army of the faithful commanded by the Mahdi and his Caliph or lieutenant. Its success, like that of the Sokoto Caliphate under Muhammad Bello, was a remarkable achievement on the part of 'Abdallahi in holding together the disparate elements in its composition: the saints and scholars, the nomadic Arabs, the recruits from the southern provinces, and the core population of Nubia along the banks of the river. He did so by relying on the administrative personnel of the Egyptian regime, while secluding himself with a bodyguard army in a fortress palace

at Omdurman, in the manner of Islamic rulers over the past thousand years. As Holt and Daly remark in *The History of the Sudan*, the strength of his regime was such that it was only overthrown in 1897–8 by outside force, a major British invasion which repossessed the old Egyptian Sudan at a time when the Scramble was coming to a head. At Fashoda on the Nile at the entrance to the Sudd, British imperialism then clashed with French in the form of a French expedition aiming to take the French empire across the Sudan as far as Ethiopia, but whose unequal confrontation with the Anglo-Egyptian army established British control of the north-south axis of the Nile against French control of the east-west axis of the savannah.

At the southern end of the much longer Cape to Cairo axis, however, the suppression of the Mahdist state in the Sudan pales as a military operation by comparison with that of the Afrikaner republics of South Africa, the climax of British empire-building in southern Africa, and crucial to the creation of the British empire on the continent. From the Cape to north of the Zambezi, the political map of southern Africa at the beginning of the Scramble had been formed in the first half of the century by the arrival of the British at the Cape, the outburst of the Mfecane, and the Great Trek of the Boers. In the middle of the century the northward stream of missionaries from the Cape had inserted a further element into the resultant conflict of *Bantu, Boer and Briton*, the title of Macmillan's account of its origins. The catalyst for the conflict that culminated in the Boer War, however, was not competition for land or the prospect of riches from trade, but the actuality of diamonds and gold. In 1871 Britain had annexed Griqualand West on the borders of the Cape and the Orange Free State to secure for the Cape Colony the diamond mining at Kimberley. The wealth from its mines made the fortune of the colony, which was granted full internal self-government in 1872, and in particular of Cecil Rhodes, who achieved a monopoly with the formation of De Beers Consolidated Mines in 1888, and as Prime Minister of the Cape from 1890 returned to the British ambition to incorporate the breakaway Afrikaner republics into a united South Africa. Thwarted by defeat in the Transvaal at Majuba Hill in 1881, the achievement of that ambition had become both more difficult and more urgent with the discovery of gold in the Transvaal in 1886. This threatened to transform the republic into a truly independent state while at the same time requiring investment and immigration from the Cape for its exploitation. In response to this challenge, in 1889 Rhodes had already created the British South Africa Company, chartered to establish a British government on the Zambezi. Like the Royal Niger Company and the British and German East Africa Companies, this was an imperial instrument by which his soldiers and settlers took the missionary route northwards through Bechuanaland (Botswana) to jump past the Afrikaner republics into central Africa. By 1894 they were in possession of Southern and Northern Rhodesia, modern Zimbabwe and Zambia, and Rhodes was in a position to invade the Transvaal from the north. The failure of that invasion in the Jameson raid of 1895 ended his ministerial career, but his aim of a united South Africa, which in the context of the Scramble had become a British priority, was accomplished

by eventual victory in the long and costly Anglo-Boer war of 1899–1902. That left the third party to the original conflict, the multiplicity of the native Bantu-speaking peoples configured by the Mfecane, under varying degrees of British administration and supervision over a vast swathe of territory as far north as Lake Tanganyika. The original competition for land, however, not only resurfaced under a growing weight of regulation, but extended beyond the new South Africa into the new Rhodesia with the introduction of white settlement, Lonsdale's second frontier of change.

V

In Rhodesia, white settlers were an instrument of conquest; elsewhere, in German and British East Africa and in Madagascar, they followed in its wake. Madagascar in particular required yet another protracted war on the part of the French between 1894 and 1904 to turn the protectorate they claimed to have established in the 1880s into a colony under French administration. Madagascar was exceptional in that it had been united at the end of the eighteenth century in the Merina empire under a dynasty which had embraced Christianity as the state religion, introduced western education, and endeavoured to secure international recognition of its sovereignty. In disregarding its claim to independence, the French were obliged to suppress not only the monarchy but rebellions by its supporters and its opponents. The outcome was in complete contrast to that of the similar attempt of the Italians to impose a protectorate upon Ethiopia following their takeover of the Egyptian possessions of Massawa and the coastal strip of Eritrea, relinquished to them by Britain after the loss of Sudan to the Mahdi. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the provincial dynasties of the Masafent or 'Judges' who had divided the Ethiopian empire between them in the late eighteenth century were eclipsed by an upstart almost Mahdi-like in his vision of his destiny as a Christian world conqueror. In 1855 his victories culminated in his coronation as King of Kings under the charismatic name of Theodore. The vision ended in suicide in 1868, after it had provoked a quarrel with Britain and defeat by a British expedition to free his British prisoners. But in the context of the Scramble, the empire that Theodore had recreated survived as the throne was taken first by John, lord of Tigre in the north, and after his death in battle with the armies of the Caliph 'Abdallahi in 1889, by Menelik, lord of Shoa in the south. Survival required the defeat of the Egyptians in the 1870s and then of the Italians, whose invasion ended in rout by Menelik at the battle of Adowa in 1896 – the very opposite of the fate of the Mahdist state in the Sudan two years later. Named after the fabled founder of the Ethiopian monarchy, equipped with modern weapons, and courted by the French in particular, who began the construction of a railway from their port of Djibouti for the export of the principal cash crop, coffee, Menelik went on to conquer or claim the whole of the highlands to the east, west and south as far as British Kenya, to establish the modern frontiers of the country.

Meanwhile the Scramble was completed by the First World War. In the diplomatic run-up to that war, the Entente Cordiale between Britain and France in 1903 not only ended their rivalry in Africa, but allowed the French to move towards a protectorate in Morocco to match their protectorate in Tunisia. That in turn precipitated a crisis with Germany in 1911 which cleared the way for its eventual imposition in 1912, and for the invasion of Ottoman Libya by Italy. With both countries still to be effectively conquered, the diplomatic solution to the conflict of European interests in Africa was overtaken in 1914 by the First World War itself. With the defeat of Germany, the Scramble came more or less to a close with the acquisition of the various German territories by Britain, France and Belgium. The Africa surveyed by Lord Hailey was effectively in place.



26

The Reorganisation of Africa

I

The Committee believe that Lord Hailey's Survey brings to the problems of a continent which has excited at various times heroism, greed, pity, political passion, and a scramble for control, a clear and objective study of significant facts on a scale and of a quality never previously available. They believe that this volume will mark a new era in the history of that continent, not only from the quality of the work itself but because it will enable those responsible for policy to consider it in the light of the problems of Africa.....as a whole.

The omission from this Foreword to *An African Survey* is 'south of the Sahara'; the volume excludes North Africa and Egypt, as well as, with regret, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia and Italian Africa. But it might well have extended to the whole of colonial Africa, since the significant facts or features with which it deals were common to the French empire in North Africa and that of the British on the Nile; they were the categories into which the activities and concerns of all colonial governments fell, from the peoples they ruled to the manner of their government, to agriculture, industry, trade and communications, and to health and education. All were surveyed from the point of view of development, including the prospect of future self-government. With the regrettable as well as the stirring aspects of the Scramble now safely in the past, and European control secured and secure, a benevolent despotism could put its power and authority to good use in the service of its subjects.

As the topics listed in the *Survey* show, however, behind the achievements it records and the intentions it expresses lay the twin imperatives of colonial government, on the one hand to come to terms with those subjects, European as well as African, and on the other to pay for itself. Having destroyed with its power the authority of indigenous government, it was obliged, as Lonsdale says in the concluding chapter of volume VI of the *Cambridge History*, to acquire a fresh authority for its rule. At the same time it was required to use its power to levy taxes and labour services, as well as to appro-

prate land, in order to maintain itself while setting in train the kind of development which would make each territory not only self-sufficient but profitable. In discussing the problem of what to do and how to do it, the *Survey* emphasises the benefits rather than the costs to the native population of the revolutionary changes that stemmed from these imperatives. At a very basic level it was justified in so doing; the initial costs incurred by the imposition of colonial rule in terms of population loss through warfare, disease and forced labour had given way by 1938 to general population growth in a continent generally at peace. Of that increase, the *Survey* itself is unaware; in the absence of the records it hopes to see compiled, it suggests that growth from an estimated average of 150 million at the time of writing was at best very slow. The compilation of such records from that time onwards has nevertheless enabled Caldwell in volume VII of the *UNESCO General History* not only to suggest that at 165 million, the figure stood at the upper end of the *Survey*'s bracket, but to project this back to some 120 million in 1880, rising with gathering speed to 129 million in 1900 and 142 million in 1920. If, as he says, such growth had been in progress from the food-producing revolution onwards, and would have continued to accelerate without the European conquest, its heightened speed was a consequence of colonial rule. It reflected the way in which, over the past fifty years, society in Africa had broken through the old constraints of Iliffe's especially hostile region of the world, only to encounter others. The success of the colonial enterprise in bringing about such a radical change was at the root of the problems which the *Survey* was designed to address. Its call for population statistics was a recognition that the reorganisation of the continent over those fifty years had created a situation that challenged the ability of government to handle.

There is no question in the *Survey*, either that it could not or would not do so. The information it records is designed to ensure the continued success of colonial rule in the development of the continent. Failure is not envisaged; as Jacques Berque observed in his *French North Africa: the Maghreb between two world wars*, in these countries France never realised that she was mortal. The factors making for that failure within twenty-five years of the publication of the *Survey* in 1938 have only become clear with the benefit of hindsight denied to Lord Hailey and his team. The subsequent study of African history for which they mapped out the programme has placed their work in quite a different perspective. In that perspective, the *Survey* reflects what Berque calls the flavour of life at the time, the experience of the present in ignorance of the future, whose recovery is now seen as an essential duty of the historian. Meanwhile, however, writing in the year of Algerian independence in 1962, Berque had set himself the task of catching the straws in the wind of that experience in the 1920s and 1930s, whose drift was towards the subsequent outcome. In 1962 that drift was described for the whole of the continent in Oliver and Fage's *Short History*, the first modern history of Africa. The evenness of its account allows for the authors' evident preference for the emancipation of Africa from colonial rule, a preference typified in the post-colonial literature by the heavy emphasis on the development of an African

opposition in vol.VII of the *UNESCO General History*. In the post-colonial world to which, like the *Short History*, the volume belongs, that emphasis in turn is a statement of opposition to the *Survey's* view of the colonial enterprise as both benevolent and beneficial. In the 1960s and 70s that view was nevertheless taken up by L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, whose *Burden of Empire* is central to the extensive range of their publications on colonialism south of the Sahara. As a retrospective defence of colonialism against its detractors, the position they adopted has become the standard against which the claims of the *Survey* for the development of Africa by Europe have since been measured.

II

As recorded in the *Survey*, with the qualification that so much more remained for the colonial powers to do, the achievements celebrated by Gann and Duignan amounted to a radical reorganisation of life on the continent, beginning with the structure of government. The territorial division of the continent in the course of the Scramble had not overturned the need in the precolonial period for people rather than land, but by its very nature had made the possession of land rather than people the basis of government by the state. The right which the state now claimed to regulate the affairs of all the inhabitants of its territory gave it the authority to legislate by act or ordinance on any subject it chose, as the *Survey* makes clear in its chapters on systems of government, law and justice, native administration, and taxation. It is not quite so clear, in its summaries of the resultant apparatus of government in the various territories of the various empires, that this right and that authority was, for the time being at least, invested as much in the statesmen as in the state. As Christopher Fyfe pointed out in 'Race, empire and the historians', the unspoken definition in the *Survey* of 'those who are responsible for policy' as White rested upon the largely unavowed but very simple principle upon which the whole of this new edifice of government was in practice founded, namely a colour bar that reserved the direction of affairs to a master race. As a principle, this found a limited justification in the separate legal status of Europeans and Africans, a separation going back to the ancient insistence that expatriates, from the Romans to the Muslims to European nationals, should continue to be judged by their own laws, not those of their country of residence. The growing power of Europe had seen this separation develop into the protection of the interests of such expatriates by their national representatives, which by the beginning of the Scramble had been interpreted in Egypt in particular as the right to take over the native state. By 1910, the justification for that takeover had mutated into the view of the man who had done so, Sir Evelyn Baring, now Lord Cromer, expressed in the Egyptian entry in the eleventh edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*: the Egyptians were unfit for self-government. It was an opinion in remarkable contrast to the praise in the ninth edition for the modernising enterprise of the Khedive Isma'il. And although as a formal principle of

government, the rule of Europeans had been limited to the Boer republics of South Africa, as a practice it set in right across the continent in the course of the Scramble.

This reservation of responsibility for the making and execution of policy to an ethnic elite of foreign origin supplied the administrative personnel of broadly similar regimes of colonial governors ruling on behalf of colonial ministries of the parliamentary governments of the colonial powers, which differed only in the degree of centralisation in Paris, London, Brussels, Lisbon, Rome and Madrid, and the extent to which they incorporated an advisory or legislative council. As in Egypt, their European personnel was augmented by much larger corps of junior officers, clerks and soldiers who were extensively if not predominantly African. Over most of the continent, however, these were too small in number to form a bureaucracy responsible for all the tasks confronting this novel form of government. The response to the conflicting imperatives, of reconciling the population to the new order while at the same time imposing new burdens upon it, was to delegate responsibility for its management to native head men who were either newly appointed to new offices or confirmed in their old positions as servants of the new state. From one end of the continent to the other, these head men ranged from great monarchs like the Kabaka of Uganda and the Caliph of Sokoto, through their chiefs and lesser rulers down to village headmen. Such indirect rule was formulated as a doctrine by the British when they left existing rulers with a degree of authority to govern as before, a practice in contrast to the more extensive interference by the French and Belgians in government at the grass roots. The contrast, however, tended to be more apparent than real, since direct rule by the French continued to depend upon the chiefs they appointed, while indirect rule by the British involved a large measure of supervision and control of justice and taxation. The common denominator was the legislative framework within which all rights depended upon enactment by the state, so that the exercise of customary forms of government by customary authorities was no longer founded in customary practice but in statutory law.

Within this general structure, the principle of White rule was both complicated and reinforced by the advance of European immigration and settlement, the second of Lonsdale's frontiers in vol. 6 of the *Cambridge History*. The creation in this way of a resident European population in the north, south and east of the continent depended in the first place upon the acquisition of land at the expense of its previous occupants, by immigrants who claimed a superior title and a superior status to the Africans they dispossessed. In taking possession of the land in this way, such immigrants served as an instrument of colonial policy, but as they grew into substantial European communities, they claimed a share in government. At the extremities of the continent, the precedents had been established long before the Scramble in Algeria and at the Cape. By the beginning of the Scramble, settlers in Algeria were in possession of some 12,500 sq. kilometers of the best agricultural land, rising to 25,000 by the time the *Survey* was published in 1938. By that time such farmers were the core of an indigenous European

population of some 750,000, about ten per cent of the whole; as French citizens its members were represented in the French parliament; they were in control of French-type local government within the areas of their settlement; and from 1900 they dominated an Algerian assembly in charge of an Algerian budget. In the south, where after the end of the Boer war the new Union of South Africa was incorporated into the British empire as a fully independent dominion with its own parliamentary government, an Afrikaner parliamentary majority sealed the division of the land between Black and White to the advantage of the European with the passing of the Natives Land Act of 1913, while by 1938 it had effectively restricting the franchise to a White population of some two million, perhaps twenty per cent of the whole. As the colonisation of territories which were acquired in the course of the Scramble proceeded, these two extreme examples of power in the hands of a European population became models of the kind of self-government to which the nascent settler communities aspired, and which brought them into conflict with governors ruling on behalf of London and Paris.

Both in Algeria and in South Africa, the prerequisite of both settlement and settler power was control of the land by the state, in accordance with the authority it claimed to convert all kinds of previous landownership and land occupation into recognisable rights within the comprehensive legal framework of the territorial state. That authority enabled it, as in the Natives Land Act in South Africa, to determine the occupancy of the land by natives and Whites. With the extension of European rule to the rest of the continent, the extension of that control and that ability became fundamental to the government of each territory, so much so, that along with 'Native Administration', 'The State and the Land' is easily the lengthiest topic of *An African Survey*. The use to which that ability was put in making land available for European immigrants in the north, east and south of the continent was only a part of its employment for the purpose of development. Where European settlement was introduced, its social and political significance nevertheless gave it a special place in the colonial regime. From 1900 onwards, such settlement was systematically introduced into Tunisia and then into Morocco and Libya, as these belatedly came under French and Italian rule. As in Algeria, it depended upon the state for the allocation of land which had been appropriated for the purpose, as well as for the laws which governed its purchase. But the status of Tunisia and Morocco as protectorates ruled by the French on behalf of the Bey and the Sultan kept the settlers out of government except as a powerful lobby; in Italian Libya, they were no more than the beneficiaries of Fascist policy. In the south and east of the continent, from South-West Africa to Uganda, land was made available for settlement by the Germans and the British in territories which after the First World War were amalgamated by the British into a mixture of protectorates, colonies and, in the case of Southern Rhodesia, a semi-dominion. But only in South-West Africa, Southern Rhodesia and Kenya did settlement develop on any great scale, to produce a White electorate to legislatures with varying powers of legislation. As in South Africa, the number of Europeans was increased by mining for diamonds in South-West Africa, a variety of minerals in Southern

Rhodesia, and copper in Northern Rhodesia, where mining enlarged the small settler population to a sufficient size for representation in the legislative council. While South-West Africa became a virtual extension of South Africa, in the other three territories the demand of these electorates was for exclusive White control of an independent government on South African lines. As in Algeria in the previous century, the control of the administration by the government of the metropolis was challenged by the immigrants whose settlement in the colony was part of its imperial policy.

III

As previously in Algeria and South Africa, much of the confrontation was over the rights of the native African population, whose interests in Kenya, in a government statement quoted in the *Survey*, were declared by London to be paramount. Its political character is spelled out in the long section on native administration. In the context of the *Survey*'s declared aim to promote the development of Africa, however, its wider significance is contained in the French distinction between colonies of exploitation and colonies of settlement. In the former, it was the natives who were to be the producers, in the latter the immigrants. The conflict between these two different philosophies of empire went back at least as far as Algeria in the mid-nineteenth century, when it was won by the settlers. In the first half of the twentieth century, the French endeavoured to maintain a balance between them in Morocco; in East Africa, settlement failed to develop in Uganda, Tanganyika and Nyasaland in the face of native production of cotton, coffee and tobacco. Elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, the various territories were all colonies of exploitation, sometimes in the worst possible sense: after the ending of Leopold's atrocious regime in the Congo, the state and concessionary companies in Angola and Mozambique resorted to similar methods to find substitutes for the old staples of ivory and slaves. But in the open economy described by Hopkins as a creation of the territorial state and its legislation, production of cash crops headed by groundnuts, palm oil, cocoa and cotton was largely in the hands of Africans dependent for their market upon European commercial firms. The transition to such production, which had begun in the pre-colonial nineteenth century, was nevertheless complicated by the appearance alongside commercial agriculture of commercial mining, which with the main exception of tin mining in Nigeria was in the hands of European companies with the necessary capital and skill. Mining had already revolutionised the economy of South Africa; in the form of mining for copper, it now did the same for Northern Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. Mining outside South Africa for gold was widespread, notably in Southern Rhodesia, the Belgian Congo and the Gold Coast, both of which also mined for diamonds. Mining for chrome, asbestos and coal was of major importance in Southern Rhodesia, likewise for cobalt and uranium in the Belgian Congo, for phosphates in Morocco and for iron in Algeria. What Berque in *French North Africa* called the recourse of colonial

enterprise to the subsoil of the continent placed a new value upon Africa in the world, some three or four hundred years after it had supplied the mediæval economy of Europe and Asia with gold.

With its input of capital, scientific knowledge and skill, mining certainly satisfied the criteria of those theorists of colonisation in mid-nineteenth century Algeria, who had argued that this kind of investment rather than the introduction of European settlers was the key to development. Theirs was the spirit which had inspired the building of the Suez Canal, and their view which was taken by the British on the Nile when at the beginning of the twentieth century they constructed the Aswan Low Dam on the First Cataract, which for the first time gave complete control of the annual flood. In the 1920s it was exemplified in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan by the Gezira Scheme, the building of a dam on the Blue Nile for the irrigated cultivation of cotton by tenant farmers, precisely the people whom the French theorists had hoped to benefit. The scheme was nevertheless unique, although held out as a model for the future by the *Survey*. Far more important was the investment of capital and technology in the construction of ports and railways, which together with roads for motors and steamships on the navigable rivers provided the interior of the continent with a system of mechanised transport in place of human and animal portage. Given the territorial division of the continent, the system was not complete, since for the purpose of development, it was designed to link the interior of each territory to the coast, rather than join them up. The exceptions were in North Africa, where Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia were connected by rail, and in southern Africa, where the need to evacuate the copper and other minerals of the Belgian Congo and the two Rhodesias, as well as their tobacco and other farm products, required a rail link through to South Africa and across Angola and Mozambique. The great hole in the system was in the Sahara, where the French vision of a trans-Saharan railway never materialised, and in the eastern Sudan and the Equatorial forest, which were traversed only by road. With air transport still in its infancy, the main route to sub-Saharan Africa was still by sea, where the shipping lines flourished on the growing trade of the continent, and where they continued to link the territories along the coast.

The growth of the rail network inland from the coast is well illustrated in Fage's *Atlas of African History*, where it is shown together with the commercial products of each territory. Its lines on the map represent the physical transformation of the trade routes into the interior developed in the course of the nineteenth century, and the means to their extension in the first half of the twentieth. The significance of its lines on the ground, however, is not simply economic. The railways themselves are well beyond the horizon of Connah's *African Civilizations*, but if we follow his definition of civilisation as an urban phenomenon, then the railways are the latest form of his archaeological evidence for its growth, in this case in the colonial period under the impact of the external trade which he singles out as a factor in his discussion. Cities as such find no place in *An African Survey*; but as points along the railway lines, they signify not only the reorganisation of the African economy, but the consequent reorganisation of society on the continent. Whether as

ports, new settlements, new state capitals, new centres of the various mining industries, or simply as existing cities taken over by government or otherwise touched by the new forms of transport and communication, those points represent the appearance of a new kind of African city and African society. Regulated to a greater or lesser extent by Europeans for European purposes, but populated by African immigrants from the countryside, that city was at the centre of Caldwell's population growth.

The European purposes were political and economic; their social consequences are discussed in the *Survey* under the heading of 'The Problems of Labour'. The need for an African workforce meant that throughout the new territories of colonial Africa, colonial governments resorted both to communal labour of a kind traditionally owed to chiefs, and to compulsory labour for public works such as roads and railways, and for agriculture. The inadequacy of such measures for railway construction in particular led to the importation of workers from India, South-East Asia and the West Indies; in East Africa the Indian immigrants rapidly developed into an enterprising business community vital to the commercial life of the cities. Of much longer-term significance was the recruitment of African wage-earners, attracted from the villages either by the carrot of a higher income or the stick of hardship, perhaps the loss of land or cattle, or the need to pay a hut tax. Whatever the incentive, the result as described in the *Survey* was the migration of large numbers of the male population from their homes to distant places of work, the first step to permanent settlement and natural reproduction in the new locality. For the *Survey* such migrants posed all kinds of problems, of feeding, housing, health and education, not to speak of policing, while at the same time they left the countryside without the men to maintain the traditional way of life that the British at least were anxious to sustain. The attitude of the *Survey* is that such a state of affairs was a necessary evil to be ameliorated rather than prevented, commenting that the disintegration of social life was an almost inevitable result of the contact of primitive peoples with European civilisation. Its authors, naturally, do not draw a comparison with the slave trade and its effects, although the demand for labour was essentially the same, leading to a similar removal of men from the countryside, and their subjection to a discipline which in South Africa in particular was comparably harsh. Despite their avowed concern with the welfare of such workers, and with the development of the continent in general, the whole of their discussion envisages the creation of a wage-earning proletariat under the direction of European employers and managers.

The discipline of African workers in South Africa was intended to prevent the development of this workforce into a resident population. But over Africa as a whole, with or without the offer of employment in some European enterprise, such a population was created in the cities by a continual influx of immigrants in search of a livelihood. Where the *Survey* looked on the dark side at the disintegration of traditional society, Gann and Duignan celebrated instead the emancipation of the African from its constraints when they compared the vast range of opportunities now available to the African in place of the limited life of the past. Whatever the realities of those opportu-

nities for the descendant of the Ndebele warrior at Bulawayo whom they chose to exemplify this choice, the migration in search of them represented the latest wave of Iliffe's frontiersmen in the process of colonising his especially hostile region of the world on behalf of the human race. From that point of view, both the authors of the *Survey* and Gann and Duignan were correct: this new wave of colonisation, accompanied by a growth in population, was indeed made possible by the development of new sources of income from new sources of wealth; it was the latest example of Hopkins' contention in *An Economic History of West Africa*, that in matters of economics, Africans were as rational, or irrational, as anybody else. Whether what the *Survey* calls development was in fact the exploitation of the continent denounced by Walter Rodney in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, it does not alter the fact of this form of growth. What is important for the approach to African history is that Gann and Duignan's retrospective approval of this radical change is not only in line of descent from the *Survey*, but from the prediction of the Algerian settlers a hundred years earlier, that the creation of a European economy by Europeans was the only way to benefit the native population. It is against that prediction that its achievements may be measured.

French Algeria is a case in point. More than South Africa, which evolved in the course of conflict between Boer and Briton following the British takeover of the Dutch colony, Algeria was the first and most radical example of the systematic creation of a European colony on the continent. With its foundations laid well before the Scramble, its evolution worked out in practice the consequences of that creation ahead of the process at every stage in the sub-Saharan territories of the new empires. Primarily agricultural, it represented the arrival of a new set of colonists to attack the problem of farming in Iliffe's especially hostile region of the world with new methods and new aims. The original intention, as described by Ageron in his *Modern Algeria*, was to repopulate the country with French peasant smallholders in place of the extensive cultivation and pasturage of the native population. But small plots cultivated with deep rather than scratch ploughs exhausted the soil, while the growing of cereals was unremunerative. The problem was solved twice over, at the time of the Scramble by the planting of vines for wine, and in the first half of the twentieth century by dry farming, cereal cultivation on a three-year cycle which at any time left two-thirds of the land fallow. It was in fact a return to the extensive farming which the native population had previously practised as most suitable for a land on the edge of the desert. For the European population it meant that most of the land thus cultivated was now owned by a few rich farmers and companies, while the rest had retreated to the new French cities that had grown around the old medinas of the Ottoman period. For the largely rural native population, it meant confinement to the marginal lands left to support increasing numbers on ever-smaller plots, and the beginning of a comparable emigration from the countryside to the towns in search of work. In his *French North Africa*, Jacques Berque summed up the overall situation by the time the *Survey* was published in 1938, as land without people, people without land.

The process had been hastened by The First World War, 1914–18, and completed by the Great Depression of the early 1930s. Both in itself and in its conformity to these global crises, it was an extreme example of the European experience elsewhere in Africa, most obviously in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, which experienced the same difficulties in finding and practising a form of agriculture capable of sustaining a comfortable European way of life, while depriving the native population of land. Outside such colonies of settlement, the First World War and the Great Depression combined to undermine the optimism of the Scramble, which at the height of European prosperity had prompted the rapid investment in railways, largely built by 1914, and promoted the growth of trade. Over the next twenty-five years the level of this economic activity sank down as the crises took effect. As with landholding in Algeria, in West Africa small European firms gave way to much larger ones, whose attempts to remain profitable were at the expense of the African producers who supplied them. As described by Hopkins in his *Economic History of West Africa*, their purchasing power, and that of the population in general which had come to rely upon imported goods, was reduced, with predictable results. While cocoa farmers on the Gold Coast tried to keep up the price of their beans by holding back supplies, railway workers went on strike. Investment was curtailed, government staff were laid off, and subsidies required from London and Paris as the attempt to make each territory pay for itself was abandoned. By the late 1930s, as in the 1920s, a limited recovery was taking place, to justify in some measure the optimism of the *Survey*. But the sense that the volume would mark a new era in the history of the continent, through the application of modern knowledge to the solution of its problems by its European rulers, has no sense of the history that was actually taking place. Its talk of the British preparing the African for independence, just as the French were aiming at cultural assimilation, did not extend to doing so. The French in Algeria had at least begun to extend the franchise to their Muslim subjects, incorporating them politically into their government, as they had done in Senegal with a handful of those culturally assimilated. In Egypt, where the nationalism that sprang from the state created by Muhammad Ali had been repressed by the British for over thirty years, its recrudescence after the First World War had obliged them to concede a limited independence to a constitutional monarchy in 1922. But elsewhere the colour bar was almost absolute. To set it aside would have required a very different volume from the *Survey* with a very different purpose, one that incorporated the demands of the Africans themselves into the discussion of their future.



27

The Reaction of Africa

My son, my son, thou treatest me
But as I have instructed thee

I

William Blake's couplet, in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, accompanies his etching of a youth threatening an old man with a spear. In the volume that was never written by Lord Hailey and his team, a description of the way in which Africans had adopted and adapted the political philosophies of Europe to demand both equality and independence from their European superiors would have headed the list of contents. The section of the *Survey* which deals with education certainly states that in contrast to a traditional upbringing designed to reproduce the traditional community from generation to generation, the European kind of education sponsored by the colonial state was, and was intended to be, an instrument of change to fit the African to cope with the new conditions of life on the continent. But while this education may have served to open up the new career prospects celebrated by Gann and Duignan, the *Survey* comes close to admitting that its purpose was to reproduce the new colonial order in which the African in question was cast in a subordinate role. What it complains of is the unsuitability for this purpose of such secondary and higher education as there was, with a European curriculum which may have broadened the student's mind, but was hardly relevant to that role. What it does not discuss is its relevance to the growth of an African opposition to that role.

In relation to government, 'the educated' as distinct from 'the tribal native' figures under the heading of 'Native Administration' mainly as a chief or councillor capable of working with the district administration in local government, but also as a person whose ambitions are unlikely to be wholly satisfied with such employment. That he might be allowed to break into the European establishment on terms of equality, let alone superiority, was not, however, a practicable proposition or an immediate objective; whatever his present demands might be, such an entry was at best for the distant future of representative self-government, as the section on 'Systems of Government' makes clear. He was nevertheless important because his criticism was influ-

ential, all the more because he could not be seen in complete contrast to his tribal opposite. The categories to which each of them belonged were situated, like those of freeman and slave within the society of 'the tribal native', at either end of a broad spectrum formed in this case by the ever-growing class of those Africans envisaged under the heading of 'Education', who were moving in various ways and to varying degrees into the European world. Faced with the need to separate rising criticism of the system from the growing protest of those who laboured under it, especially in the cities where incorporation into that world was most advanced, the concern of the *Survey* is that the authority of government should continue to be accepted by its African subjects at every stage of this evolution; but the problem is administrative rather than political, and there is no investigation of the actual views of the people themselves. The aim of government was to enlist cooperation; opposition was to be overcome by intelligent management. Experience, in the form of European science and skill, was to prevail over African innocence.

From their point of view, the authors of the *Survey* had reason. Since before the Scramble, African opposition to European rule had always been the other face of cooperation. In their efforts to create their own states, both 'Abd al-Qadir in Algeria and Menelik in Ethiopia had been willing to come to terms with the invading French and Italians. In the Sudan, the Caliph of the Mahdi, 'Abdallahi, showed no such willingness; but the destruction of his state exposed the willingness of the surviving leadership to co-operate with the government of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. The leadership in question was divided between the rival brotherhoods of the Khatmiyya and the Ansariyya under the posthumous son of the Mahdi, both of which nevertheless came to work with and profit from the British-led regime. The major revolt of 1871 in Algeria, whose suppression finally cleared the way for French colonisation, was not simply an expression of hostility to the French; it was initially led by a member of the warrior Arab aristocracy on whom the French had relied to govern the tribal population, but whom they had begun to set aside. In striving to demonstrate by rebellion his indispensability as an ally, El-Mokrani was unsuccessful. However, following the suppression of the revolt, the brotherhoods whose members from Abdelkader onwards had been in the forefront of the opposition to the French conquest turned as in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan to enjoy the patronage of a colonial regime which needed the authority of such figures to control its subjects. To the south of the Sahara, in East and especially West Africa, the choice of cooperation after an initial defeat was extensively made by African rulers out of fear, not of the European but of their own subjects. As Lovejoy describes it in *Transformations in Slavery*, the cause of abolition in the nineteenth century had inspired both slave revolts and slave desertions on a grand scale, incidentally providing the British and the French with loyal recruits to the colonial armies which carried out the conquest. The effect of conquest, however, was not the completion of this social revolution but its interruption, as the maintenance of the social order by the rulers of the Sokoto Caliphate, for example, became the price to be paid for the trouble-free rule of a tiny minority of Europeans over the miscellany of the societies they had under-

taken to govern. The disappearance of slavery had to wait upon the transformations of the societies in question in the context, as Lovejoy puts it, of the absorption of Africa into the world economy. Meanwhile its preservation was an aspect of the way in which, right across the continent, opposition to European conquest had generally proved negotiable. The approach failed only with stateless societies like those of the southern Nile and Nigeria, opposed to the introduction of rulers of whatever kind.

The Nuer and the Tiv, those societies without rulers described by both Mair and Horton, were in the language of the *Survey* quintessentially tribal, at the furthest extreme of the spectrum of African society under colonial rule; their opposition to conquest was strictly local, just as they themselves were isolated by the social anthropologists who came to study them, with the blessing of colonial authorities for the contribution such studies might make to their good government. Such a contribution was avowed by Fortes and Evans-Pritchard in their Introduction to *African Political Systems*, a collection of studies more or less contemporary with the *Survey* which stands almost as an appendix to the section on 'African Peoples'. The relationship of such studies to the administration, which is the principal concern of the *Survey*, is put in context by Andrew Roberts in 'The imperial mind', his introductory chapter to vol. 7 of *The Cambridge History of Africa*, with the observation that the endless definition of such peoples as separate entities for administrative purposes substituted an artificial mosaic of 'tribes' for the fluid identities and interrelationships which are now recognized as characteristic of the ethnographic past and present. In 1954, only sixteen years after the publication of the *Survey*, but in the very different post-war context, Daryll Forde suggested in his introduction to yet another collection, *African Worlds*, that such individual studies would serve that other purpose of the *Survey*, an understanding of the reactions of Africans to their progressive integration into the western world. Turning to those Africans at the other end of the social spectrum, however, there was no concern to create a comparable field of interest and study, whether sociological or political. In the absence of a perceived threat to White supremacy, a brief paper by Lord Hailey himself on 'Nationalism in Africa', published in 1937, considered the problem of 'the educated native' of minor importance. With regard to his prospects, the *Survey* recognized that in South Africa, the Rhodesias and Kenya, there was no hope of overcoming White opposition to his advancement, and that elsewhere in British Africa, the aim of Indirect Rule to confine him within the limits of a native administration under existing chieftaincies was the very opposite of the aim of eventual self-government on European lines, for which he was the obvious candidate. But there was no study of his views or appreciation of their place in the world of African opinion.

II

In this respect, it was the Europeans who were the innocents. The bibliography of Andrew Roberts' chapter entitled, in vol. 7 of the *Cambridge History*,

‘African cross-currents’, contains a long list of almost exclusively African writers of the period who addressed the position of the African under European rule. The chapter itself, as he says, is concerned with the circulation of ideas among educated Africans south of the Sahara, but the same circulation was taking place to the north, as described by Brett and Daly in their chapters on the Maghrib and Egypt. Both to the north and to the south, it was the accompaniment of that unification of Africa on the ground which dated from the French invasion of Egypt and the British campaign against the slave trade around the beginning of the nineteenth century. The Napoleonic legacy of modernism; the development of the cause of abolition into a missionary Christianity which provided the bulk of the schooling of Africans south of the Sahara; and the input of reformist Islam to the north, had by the end of that century combined to promote the unification of Africa in the mind, not only of Europeans but of Africans themselves. In the first half of the twentieth century that unification was carried still further by the international connections which flowed from the integration of Africa into the world: by the higher education of Africans in both Europe and America; by international socialism and trades unionism, which allied the cause of African rights with Left-wing opposition to the Right-wing philosophy of empire in the parliaments of Europe; and by the rise of an assertive Black consciousness among Africans of the slave trade diaspora, predominantly in the United States. It was certainly stimulated by the about-turn on African representation in government by European governors who had once favoured it in practice and not simply as an eventuality.

Egypt had not been alone in opposing a nationalist demand for representative government to European management of the nation’s affairs. The creation of the Gold Coast Colony followed the collapse of a comparably nationalistic coalition, the Fante Confederation, which had briefly united the kings and chiefs along the coast with the new mission-educated class of the population in a demand for constitutional government. The culmination of fifty years of wrangling over British leadership against the Asante and jurisdiction over their affairs, the Confederation was a tribute to the success of the abolitionist cause in winning West Africans for liberal European values, but a victim of the European racialism growing up in the course of the century. The opposition of rights to racial discrimination on the Gold Coast was part of a wider pattern. British rejection of the Confederation’s demands was in contrast to the introduction of a British-style constitution for the Cape Colony in 1853. With the further introduction of internal self-government in 1872, this provided for a parliamentary government elected by everyone qualified by property and salary, irrespective of race. The principle of racial inequality, however, had simply been exported to the Boer republics of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, which had broken away from British rule precisely on this score, and returned with the creation of the Union of South Africa; by the 1930s the provision for Black and Coloured representation had been whittled away to virtually nothing. At the other extreme of the continent, the similar conflict between the French state and the French settlers in Algeria over the question of equal rights for the native

Muslim population was resolved in favour of the settlers after the formation of the Third Republic in 1871, when the right of that population to citizenship and political representation was similarly restricted to a minimum. As European rule extended across almost the whole of the continent over the next thirty years, this conflict over the status of Africans as subjects or citizens transformed the abolitionist opposition of freedom to slavery into an even more powerful determinant of the course of African history.

The transformation was inseparable from the transformation of society itself, the process described for West Africa in the aftermath of independence by Peter Lloyd in his *Africa in Social Change*. Perceived, regretted, accepted and encouraged by the *Survey*, the entry of increasing numbers of Africans, to an increasing degree and increasing extent, into the government, society and economy of the European regime, continued the conflicts developing across the continent from the beginning of the nineteenth century. The upsurge of tension within slave-owning societies and states, which the prospect of freedom had stimulated but which colonial rulers had been anxious to suppress, found its counterpart in the growing opposition of Africans to the terms of their employment and the market for their produce in the European sector. After the initial boom of the colonial economy came to an end with the First World War, its fluctuating growth through the 1920s, the Great Depression of the early 1930s and the beginnings of recovery prior to the Second was marked by the dissatisfaction of workers and cash croppers with low wages and low prices for their produce, and correspondingly high prices for their purchases. As described for each region in vol. 7 of the *Cambridge History*, that dissatisfaction was expressed in strikes and demonstrations over a period which also saw the formulation of political demands, the appearance of political associations, and at least to the north of the Sahara, the formation of political parties. All colonial governments struggled to prevent the union of economic and social discontent with political agitation. Despite Lord Hailey's confidence in the non-existence of nationalism, by the time of the Second World War they were nevertheless close to failure; in the immediate aftermath of the war, the connection was made in the demand for self-government, in other words independence.

III

Once again, as the voice of colonial opinion, Lord Hailey had reason; his stumbling-block was nationalism, the European ideology that came out of the French Revolution, and which he had seen at work in India. Nationalism, by definition, requires a nation, of which he found no trace in Africa, at least south of the Sahara. Africa itself was far too large for self-consciousness; and the pan-Africanism of Marcus Garvey in America was faintly ridiculous. The colonial states themselves, on the other hand, were too large; each of them encompassed a multitude of the different tribes identified by the colonial authority, with little in common and frequently mutual hostility. In these circumstances, the demand of those influenced by European ideas

was rather for the rights of citizenship within the European state system. He did indeed concede that in states with a European population, most notably South Africa, that demand was resolutely blocked; but so far as he could see, African resentment had so far failed to crystallise in a radical, racial alternative. The appearance of nationalism only ten years after the publication of his article in 1937, as a crucial feature of the demand for independence after the Second World War, not only confounded his expectations, but has in consequence demanded its own explanation. That explanation has been crucial to the approach to African history.

The vital question of the nation addressed by the post-war nationalists is begged by Hrbek in 'Towards a periodisation of African history', when he writes of the achievement of political independence by the majority of African nations. It is answered by Lonsdale in the final contribution to Ranger's *Emerging Themes*, under the title of 'The emergence of African nations'. His starting-point is the definition of a nationalist movement or party as an organisation under the leadership of a political elite, which on the one hand aims to take control of a central government, and on the other responds to the aspirations of the masses, from which it draws a popular following. Given that in colonial Africa the central government in question was that of a territory for the most part defined by the European partition of the continent, the nation addressed by such a movement was necessarily its population. But since to the south of the Sahara, at least, the critical union of politicians and people only came about after the Second World War, the formation of such a nation as a political entity with a political consciousness had likewise to wait upon this conjunction. To bring it about, as Lonsdale remarks in conclusion, nationalists everywhere have nevertheless looked to the past in order to find their nations in the present, taking as national heroes such figures as al-Hajj 'Umar in Mali, Samori in Guinée, and Abdelkader in Algeria, while assuming the names of ancient empires for the independent states of Mali, Ghana and Benin. In this perspective, the nation is founded in the African past, and formed in the present by the initial and ongoing resistance to colonial occupation. In the approach to African history, this question of the sources of the post-war successes of nationalism has extensively structured the literature since the publication of *A Short History of Africa* in 1962.

In that history, Oliver and Fage gave the label of collaboration and resistance to African cooperation with and opposition to the imposition of European rule, linking the political issue of African rights to the political choices made by Africans in response to the European takeover of the continent. They took the view that the ultimate futility of resistance to the imposition of European rule meant that those rulers and peoples who agreed to cooperate with the colonial regime enjoyed far better treatment and prospects than those who refused, a contrast between winners and losers which is spelled out in the successive editions of Oliver and Atmore's *Africa since 1800*. Thus in Buganda the conflict between anti-British Muslim and pro-British Christian factions resulted in the deposition of the Kabaka and the installation of Sir Apolo Kagwa as a knight of the British empire at the head of the Lukiko, the *Survey's* prime example of a native parliament. Meanwhile the

centuries-old conflict between Buganda and Bunyoro ended in a Bugandan-British victory, and the relegation of Bunyoro to a neglected region of the Ugandan protectorate. By contrast, in Vol. VII of the *UNESCO General History* H.A. Mwanzi praises the resistance of the king of Bunyoro in alliance with the deposed Kabaka of Buganda, and condemns the Bugandans as self-seeking agents of imperialism who became an object of hatred to the majority of Uganda's people. In ways like these, the question of collaboration versus resistance has become a crux of the argument over the nature of colonial rule, and the development of an African opposition that succeeded in its overthrow. The example of Uganda shows how complicated are the issues.

The polarities are clear. Mwanzi's chapter in Vol. VII of the *UNESCO General History of Africa: Africa under colonial domination*, falls under the heading of African initiatives and resistance in a work that develops the theme of the Russian historian A.B. Davidson, whose contribution to Ranger's *Emerging Themes of African History* took the view that African resistance and rebellion against the imposition of colonial rule was the decisive factor in the struggle for independence. Against this was the view expressed at the time of independence by Margery Perham, the Oxford historian who with her older colleague Sir Reginald Coupland, the Professor of Colonial History, was a member of Lord Hailey's *Survey* team, and went on to preside over the development of African studies, including African history, in Britain after the Second World War. As quoted by Adu Boahen in 'Africa and the colonial challenge', his first chapter in Vol. VII of the *UNESCO History*, she considered that Africans in general settled down under colonial rule, which they accepted for the material benefits it brought, while their head men enjoyed a profitable alliance with government. It was the opposition to this state of affairs by those Africans who had as a result received a European education, only to find their advancement blocked, that nevertheless proved crucial. Their appearance as candidates for the leadership of the continent was declared by Oliver and Fage to be the most important event in African history. The problem has been to find the common ground on which these two divergent theses might come together; to see how, in Lonsdale's terms, the nationalist elite found the necessary popular support to win power.

However it is regarded, what the example of Uganda shows is the continuation within the colonial system of pre-existing conflicts between African states, peoples, and social classes, as they struggled to come to terms with the fact of conquest. What it does not show is the frequent interchangeability of collaboration and resistance in the three-cornered contests that resulted. Both features have been emphasised by Terry Ranger in the long series of contributions to the volumes he edited, *Emerging Themes of African History* and *Aspects of Central African History*, to Gann and Duignan's *Colonialism in Africa*, and to Vol. VII of the *UNESCO History*, in the course of an attempt to substantiate Davidson's thesis by tracing the mutation of initial resistance into subsequent nationalism through intermediate forms of defiance. One of these in particular was the turn to millenarianism, either by the priests and prophets of the spirit world, or by the breakaway African churches, or by

Muslims in a rash of Mahdist uprisings and migrations away from infidel rule, as described by Richard Gray and Charles Stewart in vol. 7 of the *Cambridge History*. The appearance in Christianity of “Ethiopians”, enthusiasts and prophets’ such as John Chilembwe in Nyasaland, Elliott Kamwana, the founder of the Watch Tower in Central Africa, and Simon Kimbangu in the Congo had already been noted by Lord Hailey as a possible expression of nationalism; militant Islam was feared as an expression of pan-Islamism, the cause of a single great Muslim nation throughout the world. What Ranger sees is the wide appeal of such movements, cutting across social boundaries, and an enthusiasm which passed, often directly, into mass nationalism.

From Lonsdale’s point of view, such religious movements were only one of the strategies adopted by Africans who eventually turned to nationalism to articulate their aspirations. To the south of the Sahara, the crucial focus on central government was prepared in the course of local government, where the *Survey’s* educated or not-so-educated native learned to work with or against the colonial state through the mechanisms of the *Survey’s* native administration. Focussed on local issues, his discontent was not so much with his own prospects as with the failure of local government to meet the concerns of his people, alarmed by the radical policies of the state and resentful of oppression by the chiefs who were its agents. Out of such local battles emerged a class of local politicians with sufficient experience to pursue the demand for entry into central government at the national level. The popular support for that demand came not so much from the most obvious participants in social change: the immigrants into the cities; the new working class in the mines or on the railways; and those like cocoa growers most engaged in the commercial economy. Trades unionism was feeble, justifying Lord Hailey’s disregard for it as a form of nationalism. Popular support rose up in the end from the mass of peasantry coming into existence across the tribal boundaries fixed by the state. Over this mass the state had no other control than the chiefs who were part of the problem; taken up by local campaigners, however, the grievances of the peasantry swelled into a rebelliousness which was a key to the success of nationalism.

IV

Lonsdale’s view of the importance of local battles for local rights in the formation of his nationalist elite is endorsed by his Cambridge colleague John Iliffe in *Africans*. Developed in a second article excerpted in Collins et al., *Historical Problems of Imperial Africa*, his other thesis of a peasant rebellion which had, unusually, thrown up its own leaders, is at variance with Frantz Fanon’s famous celebration of peasant revolution in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon’s description of such a revolution as the spontaneous response of a peasantry, oppressed by colonialism, to a call to arms by a minority which had broken away from parties vainly seeking power by negotiation, was drawn from his experience of the Algerian war of independence in the 1950s. But it drew upon the psychological thesis of the Tunisian writer Albert Memmi

in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. Published in the original French in 1957, this maintained that the colonised, having failed to gain admission into the society of the coloniser by slavish imitation of his habits, turned of necessity to the overthrow of the colonial system to regain self-respect. Both works may be read as a product of the history of North Africa in the years since 1900, where as in Egypt the territorial state was not the arbitrary creation of partition, the nation was pre-formed, and the development of nationalist opinion and nationalist parties preceded even the First World War. It is likewise where, in Morocco, Libya, and by extension Ethiopia, the colonial conquest was not merely delayed, but involved the most intense fighting at a time in the 1920s and 30s when Africa south of the Sahara was sunk in Lord Hailey's colonial peace. Although all three of these wars were lost, Ethiopia challenged all the justifications of imperialism for the subjection of Africa at a time when the principle of national independence had been affirmed in the aftermath of the First World War with the creation of the League of Nations. In Morocco and Libya, meanwhile, the resistance of tribal populations was orchestrated by the kinds of nationalism whose development across Egypt and North Africa is described by Albert Hourani in *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798 to 1939* – the nationalism on the one hand of the *watan* or homeland, and on the other, that of the *umma* or Muslim community.

The nationalism of the homeland was that of the nation state, developing under the impact of modernisation in Egypt and Tunisia in the course of the nineteenth century, and asserting itself in opposition to imperial and colonial rule in the twentieth. In Egypt before the First World War, Mustafa Kamil was of the generation of the Young Turks of the Ottoman empire, encouraged by the transformation of Japan into a state on a par with Europe to demand not only constitutional reform, but in his case complete independence. In the aftermath of the war, Britain found that the country was ungovernable unless the demand of the nationalist spokesman Sa'd Zaghlul for such independence were met with the creation of a constitutional monarchy in 1922. Such a concession was denied by the French in Tunisia, where the Young Tunisians of 1905 evolved in the 1920s into the Destour or Constitution party, and in the 1930s into the more radical and populist Neo-Destour party of Habib Bourguiba. In Algeria, their contemporaries, the Young Algerians, continued under various names to campaign for equal rights in a homeland that was officially not Algeria but France. However, they were overtaken in the 1930s by the equivalent of the Neo-Destour, the populist movement of Messali Hadj for independence. In Morocco the demands of Allal el-Fassi for reform of the French Protectorate in the 1930s were something that Lord Hailey would have considered, along with the French authorities, as the agitation of an educated few denied a place in government, coming belatedly at a time when France and Spain had only just completed their conquest of the country. Beginning with the French occupation of the Saharan oasis of Touat in 1900, this had continued beyond the creation of the Protectorate in 1912 as a running battle with a population which had previously rebelled against the monarchy and its capitulation

to European demands. In the name of the Sultan, the French took over the lowlands which they could exploit, but were obliged to subdue the Berbers of the Middle Atlas, and leave those of the High Atlas to El Glaoui, the greatest of the mountain chieftains, in an extreme example of indirect rule. Those of the mountains of the Rif in what was now the Spanish zone, however, not only inflicted an overwhelming defeat on the Spanish at the battle of Anoual in 1921, but became the nation of *A Country with a Government and a Flag*, to quote the title of Richard Pennell's study. Its architect was Abdelkrim ('Abd al-Karim), who set out like Abdelkader in the previous century to mobilise a tribal population for the holy war, and in doing so to create a centralised state with its own ministers, army, and law. Inspired by the call of Islamic reform to return to the original simplicity of the holy law within the framework of a modern state, he was the last in the long line of such North African revolutionaries to make the attempt. What might have developed into a new Moroccan Sultanate was only crushed in 1926 by massive, largely French, force.

Abdelkrim gained no recognition from Europe. The French social anthropologist Robert Montagne, quoted by Pennell in *A Country with a Government and a Flag*, dismissed his achievement as yet another example of Berber tribalism, historically insignificant; and it is the case that after his defeat, the Rif reverted to tribal disunity, while its warriors entered the armies of Franco in the Spanish Civil War. In the national history of Morocco, Abdelkrim has been relegated to the provincial margins of the national struggle for independence. In *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, on the other hand, the insights of social anthropology were applied by Evans-Pritchard to describe not only the segmentary structure of a tribal society, but the way in which it had served to form a nation in response to external challenge. It would have done so under the leadership of the Sanusiyya, a reformist brotherhood akin to the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, which had been founded by an emigrant Moroccan in the mid-nineteenth century. Driven out of the central Sudan by the French, it had consolidated its hold over the tribal population of Cyrenaica as the arbiter of its disputes and its intermediary with the outside world. The evacuation of the Ottomans after the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911 had left its leadership to negotiate a provincial autonomy with an Italian government based in Tripoli, until the accession of the Fascists in 1922 united the population in a guerrilla war which ended only with the capture and execution of the Sanusi shaykh 'Umar al-Mukhtar in 1931. The destruction of tribal society and the exile of its leaders had nevertheless left the population with a strong national consciousness which made it an ally of the British in the Second World War, and was to make it the nucleus of the Libyan state created by the United Nations in 1950 as a monarchy under the head of the Sanusiyya, enthroned as King Idris. Al-Mukhtar, its leader in the final war with the Italians, has become the national hero, celebrated in the film *Lion of the Desert*.

Evans-Pritchard's conclusion may be a little forced, in that it depends upon a smooth transition of Islam from a component of tribal life to the formative principle of a supra-tribal nation in accordance with the rules of

a segmentary society. But it brings out the strength of Hourani's other form of nationalism, that of the Muslim community. In Egypt this began under the British with Muhammad 'Abduh's advocacy of the reform of the Islamic law to meet the needs of a modern nation, but with the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna' inspired not only a populist movement but one in opposition to the secular modernism of the Egyptian state. At the same time in the 1930s, Ben Badis turned reformist Islam into a nationalist creed in Algeria, defining the country apart from France as the separate homeland of a separate Muslim people. Islam in principle and practice was likewise an element in the programme of Abdelkrim, justifying the creation of a modern state. In the pre-colonial, Wahhabi style of reformism which had informed the state-building of Usuman dan Fodio and his fellows in the Central and Western Sudan, its importance in Libya is that having resisted the French followed by the British followed by the Italians for a hundred years, the political community it created came to provide the British with a successful candidate for the government of the entire country after the war. For that, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, published a year before Libyan independence in 1950, provided a powerful justification for a British policy which created what was in effect a British and American client state.

For the approach to African history, however, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* has a wider importance. A product of the kind of scientific study relied on and demanded by Hailey's *Survey* for the purpose of colonial government, instead it anticipated the coming of national independence to the continent as a whole. It did so not only ethnographically but historiographically, as the outstanding example of Evans-Pritchard's contention that to understand any society, most evidently those of Africa, it is essential to know its history. As the study of African history took shape after the Second World War, the work marked the fusion of the two disciplines as an essential feature of its programme. That cannot be said for the literature on Ethiopia, the scene of the last war of European conquest on the continent, where there was no such application of ethnography to explain the resistance. The *History of Ethiopia* by Jones and Monroe, published in 1935 on the eve of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1936, looks backwards rather than forwards to the dilemmas of the previous century, torn between admiration for the new emperor Haile Selassie as a cautious moderniser, and regret that the Italians had alienated world opinion by their poor presentation of an excellent case for imperial expansion. For Richard Greenfield in *Ethiopia: a new political history*, published in 1965 long after the Italian invasion, the flight of the emperor and his restoration by the British in 1941, the regret is rather that he had returned as an old and conservative autocrat, whose opposition to radical reform had created a revolutionary situation in a backward country. While guerrilla warfare against the Italians had been conducted by patriots who had emerged as the champions of Ethiopian tradition and the Ethiopian aristocracy, the origin of the forward-looking nationalism common to the rest of the continent lay rather with the modern education which, as in Muhammad 'Ali's Egypt, had been promoted by Haile Selassie in the course of his rise to power in the troubled years following the death of Menelik in

1913. As in Egypt, that education had supplied the regime with its technical personnel, from whom came the Young Ethiopians described by Richard Caulk in vol.7 of the *Cambridge History*. Taking their name like the Young Tunisians and Young Algerians from the Young Turks of the Ottoman empire, they had called before the Italian invasion for the thoroughgoing modernisation of government by a monarchy whose historic task was the unification of a nation divided ethnically and religiously among its scattered provinces. After the war, in Girmame Neway, they had produced a spokesman for the purpose to match the voices to the south as well as north of the Sahara which were finally calling for an end to colonial rule.

PART V

The Arrival of African History



THE PRESENT DIMENSION



28

The Resurgence of Africa

Today's Africa may not know exactly where it is going, but it is on the march, and marching fast – towards western standards

I

John Gunther's *Inside Africa*, which opens with this statement, was published in 1955, the year before the independence of Tunisia, Morocco and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1956, followed by that of the Gold Coast in 1957, began the rapid end of European empire in Africa. The work of an American journalist, it aimed to describe the whole of the continent for the benefit of a Western readership in need of information about a part of the world that had suddenly come to the fore. He wrote it as a traveller who had visited all of its countries, which he described one by one largely on the basis of interviews. Written by a Westerner from a Western point of view, his work was the latest of the long line of accounts of the continent by an external observer, and certainly the most comprehensive, reflecting as it did the unification of Africa over the previous hundred years, together with its division into a multitude of separate territorial units. Meanwhile, coming as it did at the very end of the period of reconfiguration and reorganisation under colonial rule, its focus was on the reaction of the continent in the form of nationalism, whose note, he says, was being sounded almost everywhere. The unity thus conferred on the continent as well as the book was summed up in the phrase: on the march. The only ambiguity was the destination.

Any reference to the title of Charles-André Julien's *L'Afrique du Nord en marche* is unacknowledged. Published only three years earlier in 1952, this was a history of the rise of nationalism in North Africa since the beginning of the century, and the formation of nationalist parties in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia which fully met Lonsdale's criteria for such organisations. At a time when there was no question of independence for the French territories either north or south of the Sahara, it was written to demonstrate that the growth of this nationalism had reached the point at which continued blindness to the legitimacy and strength of its demands could only lead to revolution. The blindness in question was that of Eugène Guernier in *La Berbérie*,

l'Islam et la France, a history of North Africa published in 1950, which affirmed the necessity of ever closer union with France. As an attack upon this principle of French rule in North Africa, *L'Afrique du Nord en marche* was censored by the colonial authorities. But Julien was evidently right, not least because ever since the First World War the demand for constitutional reform by nationalists on the one hand, liberal and left-wing opinion in France on the other, had thrown the French in North Africa increasingly on to the defensive, obliged on the one hand to resort to violent repression, and in Algeria to concede a progressive extension of the franchise. The crucial element of popular support had been obtained in the 1930s, when in the opinion of Jacques Berque in *French North Africa*, immigration into the cities had created a mass following for Lonsdale's political elite. At the same time the confrontation had acquired an international dimension. While the League of Nations, to be followed by the United Nations, spoke the language of national independence and liberal democracy under the inspiration of the United States, the Soviet Union promoted international Communism on behalf of the subjects of colonialism, and Fascism showed the way to mobilise popular support for aggressive action. From the Middle East, as described in Hourani's *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age*, the broader concepts of a great Islamic nation and an Arab nation, both far wider than the territorial units into which both were divided, flowed into the definition of the nation as the population of each state. The religion and the language which defined these two entities were properties of the people of each North African country, to which nationalists might appeal in their drive to win control of that state.

For French North Africa, the hub of this Arabic thought was Egypt, the northern African state with the biggest population, the largest Islamic and Western-educated classes, and the longest tradition of nationalism and national politics. Like the French, the British had fought a rearguard action to preserve their hegemony, but in this case by conceding internal self-government at a time when elsewhere in Africa, colonial government was settling in for the indefinite future. In the course of the First World War, Britain had converted an unofficial into an official protectorate, but when challenged after the war by the Wafd party of Sa'd Zaghlul, had created a constitutional monarchy in which the nationalists were obliged to compete with the royalists and the king, and both were opposed by the Islamists of the Muslim brotherhood. Although the limited independence which had been agreed in 1922 was followed, at least in theory, by full independence in 1936, these internal politics had prevented effective opposition to continued British influence. Not only had Britain continued to govern the supposedly Anglo-Egyptian Sudan as a separate state, but retained the ultimate sanction of an army stationed on the Suez Canal, which in the exigencies of the Second World War had suppressed Egyptian opposition with the removal of an anti-British prime minister in 1942. Only after the war did this subordination come to end with the military coup which overthrew the monarchy in 1952, and finalised in the Suez crisis of 1956 with the failure of the Anglo-French invasion to dislodge its leader, the vociferously anti-imperialist Arab nationalist Colonel Nasser.

For the French meanwhile, aiming to end Egyptian support for rebellion in Algeria, that failure was a milestone in their battle to retain their empire in North Africa. As demands for reform in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia turned into increasingly insistent demands for independence, these had been blocked by the post-war proposal to convert the French empire into a French union, in which the enfranchisement of the indigenous population would go together with the maintenance of the French connection. The retention of that connection was demanded with equal insistence by the settler population in all three countries. The resultant deadlock was only broken by the revolution that Julien predicted and which immediately followed the publication of *L'Afrique du Nord en marche* in 1952: guerrilla warfare in Tunisia and Morocco in 1953 was overtaken in 1954 by the outbreak of what Alistair Horne called 'a savage war of peace' in Algeria. The immediate result was the concession of Tunisian and Moroccan independence in 1956.

II

North Africa may have been on the march since the beginning of the century; but Moroccans date their push for independence to the meeting of the Sultan with President Roosevelt at Casablanca in 1943, and Algerians to 8 May 1945, when a nationalist demonstration at Setif on Victory in Europe Day led to the killing or wounding of some two hundred Europeans and the indiscriminate killing of some thousands of Muslims in retaliation. It was certainly the case in Africa south of the Sahara that the Second World War precipitated the formation of nationalist parties and the demand for independence. For that reason, it appears in the histories of Africa both as an end and a beginning, the event that made European empire in Africa unsustainable and independence inevitable, but equally as an episode which fast-forwarded a process already in train. The difference is signalled by the *Cambridge History's* choice of the beginning of the war in 1940 as the starting-point of its final volume 8, while the UNESCO *History* prefers to begin its volume VIII in 1935. The single-volume histories follow suit. Where Oliver and Atmore in their *Africa since 1800* regard the war as a turning-point, and Curtin and his colleagues in their *African History: from earliest times to independence* consider it the catalyst for change already in the making, Fage in his *History of Africa* introduces it as a factor in the resumption of independence, while Iliffe in his *Africans* barely mentions it. From Hrbek's point of view in *Emerging Themes*, the argument opens up the whole question of periodisation. For Hrbek, the starting-point of his journey back from the present into the past was the achievement of African independence around the year 1960, the outcome of a process in which there had indeed come a point at which the result was set in train. In taking the Second World War as the point in question, Curtin *et al.* conclude their own journey from the past to the present with a last chapter in which the 1940s and 1950s become the final phase of the story. In Paul Nugent's *Africa since Independence*, on the other hand, they become the introduction to a tale that

Hrbek, presenting his paper in Dar es-Salaam in 1965, could only adumbrate.

For the approach to African history, this changeover in mid-century from an end to a beginning is significant of more than the passage of government out of European into African hands. Writing in the field of contemporary history at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Nugent has the advantage over Hrbek and his fellow contributors to *Emerging Themes*, not only in the knowledge of what was yet to come, but in distance from the decades down to 1980 in which volume 8 of the *Cambridge History* was conceived and written. The advantage lies partly in hindsight, partly in the accumulating body of literature by which to judge the event, but particularly in the growing availability of archival sources for the post-war period. The earlier absence of such sources is reflected in the introduction to the Cambridge volume by its editor Michael Crowder, in which he remarked that his own history of West Africa under colonial rule, published in 1968, had ended in 1940 rather than 1960, and noted that of necessity, the majority of his contributors were political scientists, sociologists and economists rather than historians as such. As students of the situation in the present rather than the past, they belonged to the next generation of the specialists who had proliferated in the colonial era with the encouragement of government, and whose record has proved essential to the study of African history; their recruitment for the *Cambridge History* clearly demonstrates their ongoing contribution to the subject. On the one hand they have been able to rely on the growing volume of statistics collected not only by government but by international agencies, of which the United Nations is the chief. On the other, like the historians themselves, they have had at their disposal the international news in the press, on the radio, on film and increasingly on television, and the advantage of interviewing the actors in the story. In this respect, the journalism of John Gunther's *Inside Africa* differs from the account of independent Africa in the original, 1962 edition of Oliver and Fage's *Short History* mainly in that it is written in the present rather than the past tense.

Meanwhile the actors in the story did not confine themselves to interviews. The growing number of nationalist parties issued their own newspapers, pamphlets and manifestos, and a long list of their leaders published their own, frequently biographical statements of their commitment, from Allal el-Fassi in Morocco and Bourguiba in Tunisia through Awolowo, Azikiwe, Bourguiba, Kaunda, Kenyatta, Nkrumah and Senghor to Sekou Touré in Guinea. South of the Sahara, these personal manifestos swelled the already large body of writing surveyed by Claude Wauthier in *The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa*, which under the name of *Négritude* or 'Blackness' in French, celebrated the achievements and values of the Black African nation. In 1961 the list of all such politicians and their publications, compiled by Thomas Hodgkin in *African Political Parties*, came out together with Ronald Segal's more comprehensive inventory of all parties and politicians on the continent in *Political Africa*, closely followed by his *African Profiles*. Six years on from John Gunther's *Inside Africa*, not only do these document a march well on the way to completion except in Southern Africa. Fleshing

out Lonsdale's definition of such parties with their actual description, they outline a whole new field of African history which might well be called the domain of the acronym, the abbreviation composed of the initial letters of the full name: ANC for the African National Congress in South Africa, for example. Hodgkin lists over two hundred such acronyms for almost all the parties he mentions; by the beginning of the twenty-first century, the list in Paul Nugent's *Africa since Independence* has expanded to include the whole range of organisations on the continent, filling no less than ten pages. This proliferation of the acronym may stand for the way in which the dedicated institution, political, social, economic and cultural, has become the frame of activity as well as the channel of action on the continent, and the framework of historical study of the period since 1945. Nugent employs it as a chapter title for the way in which Africa has been invaded anew by international agencies; but in fact the acronym dominates the whole of his essentially political narrative. The parties which are represented by their initials have entered into a kind of political history very different from that of the colonial period, and certainly from anything that came before. In the process their histories and their records have become central to the construction of national histories, while their pronouncements have passed smoothly into the historiography of the continent, not least on the part of a new elite of native historians.

For Africa as a whole, as well as its individual states, these historians find their voice in the UNESCO *General History*, designed like the *Cambridge History* to reflect the growth of knowledge of the African past in the course of the transformation of the continent in the post-colonial present. In volume VIII, published almost ten years after the comparable volume of the *Cambridge History*, in which historians as such are in a minority, they find collective expression in the voice of their editor, Ali Mazrui, whose Introduction celebrates the success of the resistance to colonialism which is the theme of the previous volume under the editorship of Adu Boahen. The transformation, he says, echoing Memmi and Fanon on the subject of the coloniser and the colonised, was as much psychological as political, as Africans were not only shocked into self-recognition, but in fighting for their own dignity, shocked the rest of the world into reconsideration of what it means to be human. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon's description of the change in the mentality of Algerians from inward to outward, backward to forward-looking in the course of the Algerian war of independence was more of a prescription for their future as a modern nation than an account of what was actually happening. Written after the event, Mazrui's is a similar statement of the same ideal of freedom to enjoy the rights of man, a major element in the wind of change that John Gunther found blowing through the continent five years before Harold Macmillan coined the phrase in 1960. Just how important that ideal was to the achievement of independence is the question that historians have set themselves to answer. Like all metaphors, the wind of change was made up of a multitude of factors whose relative weight in the balance depends, at this particular moment in the life of the elephant, upon the observer.

III

Periodisation, as attempted by Hrbek and practised by John Hargreaves in *Decolonization in Africa*, solves the problem by taking the factors in question as they came to the fore. They take shape in the 1930s, the decade of the Great Depression and the preparation of the world for war, in the discontent engendered by economic hardship and social change; in the growing articulation of political demands in the international context; and in the beginning of colonial concern with the future. All were intensified in the course of the war, which created severe shortages while increasing the demand for forced labour as well as African troops. Within Africa the pre-war balance of power was altered by the elimination of Italy from Libya and the Horn, and the rise of South Africa to prosperity and prominence as a major contributor of men and materials to the war effort. That effort in turn came to depend upon the support of the United States, all the more because the fall of France in 1940 took out Britain's partner in Africa, leaving the bulk of the French empire to become what amounted to enemy territory, to be recovered by British, American and Free French invasion. Dependence upon the United States in turn meant compromise with American anti-colonialism, whether in the form of pressure for outright independence or for international supervision with independence in view. Both Britain and the Free French government of De Gaulle accordingly found themselves propelled by economic and political necessity into the new era envisaged by Lord Hailey's *African Survey*, obliged to contemplate as a matter of urgency not only economic but also political development towards self-government. Ironically, it was Lord Hailey himself, in *Native Administration and Political Development in British Tropical Africa*, who now undertook to report on the rising political consciousness of Africans, and to recommend a cautious move towards the delegation of political responsibility. By the end of the war, both Britain and France were planning for accelerated development and welfare, while proposing to convert their African empires on the one hand into an extension of the Commonwealth, and on the other into a French Union.

The extent to which Africans themselves were actively on the march towards independence by the end of the war was largely limited to Egypt and French North Africa. The restoration of the Emperor Haile Selassie to independence in Ethiopia after a mere four or five years of Italian occupation was exceptional, though it foreshadowed a future British willingness to grant independence as the price of friendship and alliance. But at the same time it was significant of the extensive use of African troops and labour by the British and the French in their campaigns, not only in Africa but in the Far East and Europe. Such widening of the horizons for volunteers and conscripts extended the experience of migration in search of work beyond the continent to the world, and induced the same desire for change that was felt by returning servicemen in Europe after both world wars. To the south as well as the north of the Sahara, their dissatisfaction fed into what Harg-

reaves calls the mobilisation of African discontents, although as he points out, to the south of the Sahara this was largely limited to opposition to working conditions and government policies. Such opposition was notable in French but particularly British territories with a White population, whose comparable ambition for a fresh start was reinforced by fresh immigrants from Europe, and stimulated their own opposition to government policies which envisaged the advancement of Blacks. While the long-standing demands of the educated elite for political representation built up in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast and Nigeria, and the ANC, the African National Congress in South Africa, pressed for racial equality, only in Madagascar and Nigeria were there sub-Saharan nationalist parties for independence, struggling to appeal to the population at large beyond their ethnic base in the Hova and Igbo respectively. Political mobilisation in favour of constitutional reform nevertheless took hold right across French West and Equatorial Africa with the French move to establish a new constitution not only for France but for the new French Union, in which the overseas territories would be represented in Paris by elected deputies. In contrast to its failure in North Africa, the constitution which was voted in 1946 offered these territories to the south of the Sahara an alternative to their independence that created the framework within which their political history evolved over the next fifteen years. No such master plan was devised and implemented by the British; for their African subjects, a common programme of action remained at the ideological level of Pan-Africanism, the original American doctrine now taken over by African and Caribbean trade unionists and expatriate radicals, notably Kwame Nkrumah. But as yet this had little leverage.

In contrast to Britain and France, the lesser colonial powers, Belgium, Portugal and Spain, felt neither obligation nor pressure to alter course. For Britain and France, on the other hand, the conflict between their desire and ability to keep their empires while at the same time emancipating them from their direct control was reinforced over the next ten years as the Cold War with the Soviet Union set in. American anti-colonialism was then moderated by American anti-Communism, which approved of these empires for the military and political defence of the Free World, promoting that march towards Western standards which John Gunther took as the theme of *Inside Africa*, while resisting its capture by the counter-attraction of Soviet Communism. In their endeavours to retain or regain their Great Power status, the gradualist approach of Britain and the integrationist approach of France to the transformation of their empires thus received a conditional justification, along with their repression of opposition to their policies. Strategically, Britain sought an alternative to the Suez Canal Zone with the establishment, under United Nations auspices, of the new Libyan state in 1950. The first colonial territory to achieve independence on the continent, that independence was heavily dependent on British and American subsidies linked to their establishment of military bases. At the other end of the Cape to Cairo axis, South Africa continued to be as essential as it had ever been to British imperial strategy. Economically it was more urgently important as a trading partner, and especially as the principal source of gold for the embat-

tled Sterling Area, making it Britain's turn to collaborate, however unwillingly, with the Afrikaner Nationalist government which was elected in 1948 on a platform of complete racial apartheid. Beyond such immediate considerations, French as well as British investment in their African possessions was intended to help restore their own prosperity, by developing them as suppliers and consumers of metropolitan imports and exports.

IV

None of these ambitious policies achieved its aim. Economically the inability to make the necessary investment without defeating the object of the enterprise by opening the colonies to American money and American exports, meant that progress was modest, and offset by financial constraints; the hardships of wartime persisted. Much of the development that did occur was down to the post-war wave of European immigration into French North and West and British East and Central Africa; but this only heightened the three-cornered conflict between colonists, natives and government brewing since the beginning of the century, and now threatening the new vision of empire. Right across the continent, in fact, that vision was called in question between 1946 and 1956, as demand for change developed with such speed as to take the initiative out of the hands of London and Paris. For Lonsdale, the decisive factor which set Africa on the march to the south of the Sahara was the same as that identified by Jacques Berque to the north: the conversion of popular discontent into popular support for the national independence demanded by his nationalist elite, and mobilised for the purpose by the political parties which multiplied across the continent. This was notably the case in the Gold Coast, where from 1949 onwards Nkrumah at the head of his CCP (Convention People's Party) repeated the achievement of Zaghlul thirty years earlier in Egypt, proving by electoral victory that the country was ungovernable unless the demand for independence were met. But the corollary, Nkrumah's acceptance as the head of the new Ghanaian nation, was at the expense of the Asante and their kingdom. Although his achievement was repeated by Julius Nyerere in Tanganyika, elsewhere, in Nigeria and Uganda for example, Asante was significant of the welter of different groupings that emerged within each territory as self-government in some shape or form became official colonial policy. Formed for the most part on ethnic lines, these converted the administrative divisions of colonial society into political constituencies, complicating the nationalist appeal for national unity at the same time that they increased the pressure on colonial government to give substance to the new nations by the concession of independence to each territory and its population.

In French territories, African demands were framed by the constitution of the new French Union, so that Houphouët Boigny, Nkrumah's equivalent in the neighbouring Ivory Coast, was a member of the National Assembly in Paris. For the outcome of decolonisation, however, the distinction between Britain and France was less important than the division

between territories with and without an influential settler presence to make settler demands for settler privileges at the expense of the native majority. Thus Britain from 1953 onwards conceded the case for a peaceful transfer of power to a national government in territories where there was no such presence, or at best a minimal one: in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, West Africa, Uganda and Tanganyika. In British Central Africa, however, the transfer came about at the cost of abandoning a proposed Central African Federation of Southern Rhodesia, Northern Rhodesia and Nyasaland and separating them along racial lines. While African nationalists came to power in the new states of Zambia and Malawi, the European minority in Southern Rhodesia not only continued to form the government, but eventually declared its own independence in 1965. In Kenya such a solution was out of the question. When in 1951 White settlers were murdered by landless and land-hungry Kikuyu in the Mau Mau rebellion, the British army was required to suppress it in four years of scandalous brutality which in the end, as David Anderson explains in his *Histories of the Hanged*, left Britain and the Kenyan Whites with no option but to arrange for independence under Black majority rule. In this respect Kenya followed in the wake of Madagascar, where famine in 1947 had provoked a rebellion suppressed by the French army with similar violence, only to be followed by a similarly peaceful transition to national independence.

Despite a hostile settler minority, such a transition began to be accepted by France in French West and Equatorial Africa following the British lead in the Gold Coast and Nigeria. The catalyst for change, however, was to the north of the Sahara, where the settler presence was much greater, the provisions of the French Union for representative government had been evaded, and the rebellions predicted by Julien in 1952 had far wider repercussions than Mau Mau. While opposition to the independence of the two Protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia collapsed with the outbreak of guerrilla warfare in Algeria at the end of 1954, the army was called in on a far larger scale than in Kenya to uphold the status of the country not as a colony, but as an integral part of France. It proved to be indefensible. In 1958 the gradual progress made since 1919 towards equal rights for the Muslim majority, which were provided for in the constitution of 1946, came about too late, overtaken and outdated by the demand for independence. In opting for independence, the FLN or National Liberation Front was not only going with the post-war flow, but taking it to extremes in a war of atrocities committed by both sides. Not only did it compel the concession of independence to Tunisia and Morocco, and provoke the French to participate in the invasion of Egypt in 1956. In 1958 it precipitated a revolution in France itself which brought De Gaulle to power, and led to the immediate grant of independence, with or without a French connection, for all French territories south of the Sahara. In 1962 it ended with the withdrawal of France from Algeria and the exodus of virtually the entire settler population. The fame of a victory cheered on by the world at large brought Algeria together with Egypt and Ghana to the forefront of the Third World, the bloc of newly independent, anti-colonial, Asian and Africa states initially formed at

Bandung in Indonesia in 1955 as a positive alternative to the West and to the Soviet bloc.

V

Despite the actual or imminent independence of almost the whole of British and French Africa by the time of the triumph of the FLN, the resurgence of Africa was far from complete. Spain remained in the Spanish Sahara; more importantly, so did Portugal in Angola and Mozambique. Southern Rhodesia was exclusively in the hands of the White minority, while the Sharpeville massacre of demonstrators by the South African police in 1960 was followed in 1961 by South Africa's withdrawal from the British Commonwealth, the intensification of apartheid and the stifling of all African opposition, peaceful or otherwise; the country was no Algeria, where despite its size and domination of the government, the European minority had depended for its preservation upon the political will and military commitment of an overseas metropolis. Meanwhile the resurgence itself had been marred, and not only by the horrendous violence of the Algerian war. In the Congo, where Belgium had made neither plan nor provision for representative government, the wind of change that blew through French Africa in 1958 brought about the decision to abandon the country. In the haste of the Belgians to leave, and in the absence of an effective nationalist movement, the orderly central government of this huge territory collapsed along with that of Rwanda and Burundi, to be replaced in 1960 by the rivalry and secessionism of its multiple peoples. The conflict was made worse by the rivalry of America and the Soviet Union, which rendered ineffective the efforts of the United Nations mission to bring about a government of national unity. The descent of the country into war and military dictatorship signalled the end of what appears in retrospect as the relatively benign post-war period of emancipation from colonial rule. Instead it marked the beginning of a subsequent era in which, to adapt Chinua Achebe's title of his novel of the arrival of colonial rule at the beginning of the century, things once again fell apart.

So, while the anticipated end of empire had come about with such rapidity in the few years following the publication of *Inside Africa*, the march of the continent towards Western standards which John Gunther had so confidently announced was inconclusive. The key question he had raised, of what would take the place of empire, remained unanswered as the Western standards of liberal democracy that he had in mind conflicted with those of the dreaded Communists, with those of Arab nationalism and Islam, and with the assertion of purely African values by Nkrumah and his followers in the politics of each new state. As those politics came to take the place of the campaign for self-government, so Western and indeed African opinion began to turn against the new rulers. In Algeria, where the revolution had been almost universally welcomed, doubts began to appear almost immediately in the literature discussed by Brett in 'Anglo-Saxon attitudes'. In at least one respect, however, Western standards were firmly in place. The period from

1945 to 1960 saw the large-scale introduction of Western university education, whether in the form of universities created by the British in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, Nigeria and Uganda, and subsequently elsewhere, or the education of African students in Britain, France and America – eventually, indeed, in the Soviet Union. The result was the foundation of the whole new discipline of African history by a crop of both Western and African historians who were not only enthused by the prospect, but by the prospect of a history constructed on the principles of Western historiography – the aim to recover the remains of the past, for the evidence of the past, for the life of the past, whatever the problems the endeavour might present. The pursuit of that endeavour as an aspect of the wider cultural life of the continent, alongside the evolution of government, society and economy, is a fundamental aspect of contemporary history to be spelled out in any account of the last, long half century.



29

Africa in Contemporary History

I

As summarised so far in this book, the account of the African past down to the achievement of independence in the 1950s and 1960s has been written in the historical present, that is, in the period since the Second World War, when the history of the continent was established as a subject of historical research in accordance with the criteria of modern historiography. Inevitably, as a period of historical writing, this present itself is a part of the past, just as the anthropological present stretches from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day. In much the same way, it has a history of its own, as three or even four generations of historians have succeeded each other in the attempt to find out what can be known and what may be said about the millennia since the emergence of man on the continent. In the process they have been on the march, myself included as a member of the second generation, in tandem with the events themselves as these have continued to unfold in the contemporary world. In finding and utilising all the various ways of turning the idea of prehistory into history, they have made a major contribution to the idea of history itself as the study of the human past. By doing so in Africa, they have transformed the idea of the continent as well as effecting its integration into the history of the world. At the same time, in saying what they have to say, they have equally been influenced, not only by the new ways of looking at the past and the new lines of inquiry that have emerged in the general field of historical study. They have been affected, in more ways than one, by the way in which the resurgence of Africa after the Second World War has played out in the field of contemporary history.

The history of this history is introduced by Roland Oliver's autobiographical *In the Realms of Gold*, the account of his formation as a historian of Africa which recounts his seminal role in the formation of African history as a subject. In the poem of Keats from which the title is taken, 'On first looking into Chapman's Homer', the realms of gold stand for what is familiar in contrast to the revelation of a wonderful new world. Here they stand for

the new world itself, and the excitement as well as the difficulties of its revelation. That excitement was part of the post-war enthusiasm for African independence, in readiness for which the foundations of the discipline had been laid in Africa as well as in Britain, France and America. A glance at the suggestions for further reading in the first, 1962 edition of Oliver and Fage's *Short History of Africa* will show that the little history which was written prior to 1945 dealt mainly with Africa North and South, while the histories that proliferated in the 1950s turned to the Tropical centre, to the lands explored in the nineteenth century, colonised in the course of the Scramble, and now in the course of liberation to take responsibility for their own affairs. In 1959 one outcome of this new focus was Basil Davidson's *Old Africa Rediscovered*, a history of Tropical Africa which prompted Thomas Hodgkin to make his own allusion to Keats' poem when he compared the enthusiasm of its readers to that of Keats himself on discovering a vast new dimension of knowledge. The book was an assertion of the possibility of African history which closed with the optimistic statement that history was beginning anew, that Africans would now make their future in the growing knowledge of the African past. To that end its reviewer, Thomas Hodgkin, had based himself in independent Ghana as one of the founders of African history in Africa itself. In 1961 he contributed to *The Dawn of African History*, a slim volume of radio talks, edited by Roland Oliver, which brought together some of the pioneers of the subject to bring the case for the history of Africa as a whole to the attention of the general public. It appeared at a time when Oliver, in his own words, was working at full throttle to spread the word from a base at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, while John Fage was doing the same at Birmingham. In 1960 they launched the *Journal of African History* as the chief organ of the new discipline, bringing together with the historians all the various specialists in archaeology, linguistics, anthropology, biology and so on required for the reconstruction of the African past: the extent of its programme is displayed in *Papers in African Prehistory*, a collection they published in 1970. Meanwhile in 1962 they published the *Short History* as a statement of the subject for the future. For the present, it was a key contribution to the Penguin African Library, a series which reflected the way in which the continent and its questions had come to the attention of the world. The iconic image on the cover of the first edition, of a thoughtful old man putting his ballot paper into the box for the very first time, stood for the John Gunther-like expectation of the fruits of the political kingdom that Nkrumah had famously sought and won.

II

What's to come, however, is still unsure, and by common consent, the high hopes of independence have been disappointed. Historians have in consequence been faced by the need to come to terms with the reality of events as they have unfolded rather than as they were anticipated, to explain the course they have taken, and to reconsider their previous estimates of the

character of African history. For Stephen Ellis in 'Writing histories of contemporary Africa', the study of this contemporary history has indeed become a methodology for the approach to African history as a whole. His proposal to work back to the past from the history of events since 1970 by identifying themes that call for historical explanation is a justification for the pursuit of what Herbert Butterfield, in the book of that name, called the Whig interpretation of history, regarding the past in the light of the present, and paying the greatest attention to those aspects considered to have the greatest bearing on the situation today. Condemned by Butterfield for its teleology, its imposition upon the past of a purposeful pattern that did not exist at the time, such an approach in the case of Africa may have the merit of discovery, of revealing features whose significance has been overlooked. The attempt was made by Jacques Berque in *French North Africa*, when he set out to see whether the signs of post-war revolution were in fact visible to the actors in the 1930s, or have become apparent only in retrospect. It is on the other hand by no means straightforward, given the problem of knowing what is actually going on at the present time.

In first place is the familiar question of evidence. As it was for Oliver and Fage in the final chapter of their *Short History*, so it is now for the current affairs of the continent: knowledge is a matter of breaking news supplemented by reportage and commentary. However well-informed, such commentary is liable to falsification, given the John Gunther- and indeed Hailey-like predictions inherent in any attempt to make sense of the action: a good example is Hugh Roberts' *The Battlefield: Algeria 1988–2002*, a series of essays on the crisis as it unfolded, that concludes with a prescription for a law-abiding, democratic future which so far has failed to materialise. Retrospectively, as events continue to unfold, alternative possibilities are closed off, and more and more sources and studies become available, a pattern will emerge. But however it is constructed with the benefit of hindsight, any such pattern will have that element of a Whig interpretation, of a story leading up to the options of the moment, whose outcome is uncertain. It is a problem that runs through the autobiography of Eric Hobsbawm, aptly entitled in the Chinese manner *Interesting Times*, as he struggles through his career as a historian of the dreadful events through which he has lived since the First World War, in the knowledge that although, like Jacques Berque, he has experienced them, and can say what it was like to be living at the time, as a historian he has nevertheless been on the losing side in his judgment of the outcome.

As a native of South Africa, Paul Nugent has certainly lived through the contemporary history of the continent, whose 'interesting times' began in the 1950s and are by no means over. As a writer of that contemporary history, he is equally aware of the problems, from the evaluation of the sources to the description of the events to the identification of the underlying factors which explain their character. The classic distinction which he evokes is that of Fernand Braudel in *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, between the superficial history of events and the *longue durée*, the longer-lasting features of the environment in which they take place. The



19. Independent Africa: the Political Grid, 2012

question is what those features might be, and in what ways they have influenced the course of events to produce a history that might, as Hobsbawm says, have been otherwise, but was not – what, in other words, has actually been going on beneath the surface of the news. In Connah's term, it is a question of the common denominators. The problem is well illustrated by the way in which the prospect of a great future for the continent, envisaged in 1962 by Willie Abraham in *The Mind of Africa* on the basis of the virtues of traditional African society, had given way thirty years later to the much more cautious recognition of the complexity of African identities and the obstacles they have placed in the way of such an outcome in Kwame Appiah's *In My Father's House*. Rather than promoting the progressive unity of the continent, the complexity of those identities has been recognised as a major contributor to its divisions, to the wars, the famines and the pestilence that have ravaged societies in Africa over the last half century. But as far as the continent as a whole is concerned, the fourth horseman of the apocalypse has been ruled out by the population explosion which has turned a total of some 200 million in 1950 into a billion in 2009. The death toll from warfare has been immense. Famine along the southern edge of the Sahara and in Ethiopia has been largely man-made in years of drought by the failure of government to act, but everywhere and at all times by war and the huge refugee populations it has created. As for pestilence, the diseases of infancy, malnutrition and lack of sanitation in both town and country have been compounded by the AIDS epidemic, spread across the continent along the roads that carry long-distance traffic, and now endemic in the cities that have grown and grown since independence by immigration and settlement from thousands into millions of inhabitants. The paradox is that despite all such threats to life and limb, the population of the continent is now *five times* larger than in the mid-twentieth century, turning Africa from the second least, after Australia, into the second most populated continent in the world after Asia. The irony is that after the immigration of Europeans into a supposedly empty continent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries following the ending of the slave trade, the emigration of Africans has now resumed. The difference is that now it is not, by and large, desired or welcome (if that is the right word for their reception in the Americas).

Underlying all the others, the problems of such growth have been Iliffe's immediate justification for taking the peopling of the continent as the central theme of African history. In so many ways, it has outrun the growth of the resources required to meet its demands for food and employment, education and health – a far cry from the assumption of Lord Hailey's *African Survey* that development would contend at the most with a very slow increase. The development of both the economy and social services, which the *Survey* regarded as a principal task of government, was taken up in the first flush of independence with ambitious targets to be variously achieved in accordance with current theories of the merits of capital works, capital investment, and socialism. All such programmes, including the spectacular dams on the Volta in Ghana and the Nile at Aswan in Egypt, have failed to meet expectations of self-sustaining growth, but nevertheless contributed to an early rise in

gross domestic product and national income. For a majority of countries, however, this growth came to an end in the 1970s with the rise in the price of oil and its effect on the world market – the moment, for Ellis, when contemporary history began. For Africa, it meant a return to the hardships of the 1930s, with a fall in the value of agricultural exports, a rise in the cost of imports, a decline in state revenue and now, the piling up of foreign debt. What should in principle have compensated for this fresh crisis of dependency on world trade was the sustained demand for essential African minerals, from gold and diamonds through uranium, coltan, copper, zinc, cobalt, manganese, nickel, bauxite and iron to oil and gas. But as in the past, and notably now in the case of oil and gas, their production has not involved the great bulk of the population, while too often the revenue generated by their export has either been lost to the state in debt repayment, misspent, or misappropriated by the middlemen, from politicians to warlords, who license or control their extraction and sale abroad. The great exception is South Africa, where agriculture and mining have combined with industry to create a developed economy on Western lines. But even here, the population has been growing beyond the capacity of the system to provide for its needs. That is generally true of the continent as a whole, where the state has either struggled or failed to keep up with the numbers of its people.

III

This fundamental aspect of the *longue durée* underlies the political history of events, recounted at length for sub-Saharan Africa in Nugent's *Africa since Independence* according to themes which likewise apply in varying measure to North Africa and Egypt: the politics of identity within the new political communities; the form of government; capitalism versus socialism; military regimes; democracy; aid and trade; and African unity. For all of these, one common denominator is external to the continent: the continued interest and involvement of the outside world in its affairs. In the international context of the period since 1960, the surge of international support for the achievement of independence has overflowed into large-scale intervention, political, military and economic. That in turn has been facilitated by the general weakness of the new states, whose internal struggles for power have been matched by their continued dependence upon external markets. From the outset in the 1940s and 50s, the concern of the international community to bring the new states of Africa into the United Nations on a footing of equality with the rest of the world was complicated by the race between the United States and the Soviet Union to establish their influence over the continent at the expense of each other. The anti-imperialism which African nationalists shared with the Asian members of the Third World worked to the advantage of the Soviet Union, which offered trade and aid to offset the colonial connections of the past, quite apart from the attraction of its socialism as a programme for building the new nations. While Ghana looked both East and West, Egypt turned from the United States to the Soviet Union

for armaments and the construction of the High Dam at Aswan, and Algeria opted for socialism. But where control of the state itself was at stake, the choice between East and West was a choice of allies in the struggle for power. The vacuum left by the abrupt withdrawal of Belgium from the Congo in 1960 sucked both of the superpowers together with the United Nations into a contest which ended in the long dictatorship of Mobutu, backed by America despite the failure of the state he ruled. Fifteen years later, the prompt departure of Portugal from Angola and Mozambique in 1975 left the battle between rival revolutionaries to continue, as pro-Soviet regimes, aided in Angola by Cuban forces, contended with opponents backed by the United States in concert with White South Africa; the conflicts continued long after both the Soviet Union and South Africa withdrew at the end of the Cold War in 1989 and the passage to Black majority rule in 1994. At more or less the same time, in 1974, the overthrow of the American-backed Emperor Haile Selassie in Ethiopia by the military coup of the Soviet-supported Mengistu precipitated a conflict with Eritrean and Ethiopian rebels in the north and Somalia to the east which again has dragged on long after the overthrow of Mengistu himself in 1991. In the context of the Cold War, on the other hand, American pressure was instrumental in bringing a peaceful end in 1980 to the White regime in Southern Rhodesia, and more importantly, in contributing to the ending of Apartheid in South Africa in 1990–4, the last great step in the decolonisation of the continent.

The geographical spread of the Cold War across the continent is conveniently mapped by Oliver and Atmore in *Africa since 1800*. Of the two former imperial powers, Britain kept a low profile throughout its duration, failing to deal effectively with the Southern Rhodesians until they themselves were ready to accept a settlement in 1980. France, on the other hand, retained a military presence in its former West and Central African colonies in support of regimes which politically remained much more closely associated with the former metropole than the states of the British Commonwealth. Meanwhile, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the contest since the end of the Cold War in 1989 removed the strategic occasion for Western intervention, only to see it replaced by yet another threat. As violence continued to erupt across the continent, it was compounded by the rise of militant as well as radical Islam, from Algeria through the Sudan to Somalia, and more widely throughout Islamic Africa. On top of a general concern with the humanitarian and economic effects of such a widespread crisis of the state in Africa, anxiety over the threat of Islamic terrorism has renewed the urgency felt by the West in collaboration with the United Nations to continue to intervene, directly or indirectly, in the affairs of the continent. Of the originally anti-Western states to the north of the Sahara, Egypt long ago became an ally of the United States. Algeria, crippled economically by the failure of socialism in the 1970s and politically by vicious Islamic terrorism in the 1990s, is reliant on Western markets and Western support, while Libya has admitted the need for good relations. To the south, the Sudan fought a long rearguard action against international pressure to concede the independence of the non-Muslim south, and

continued to resist such pressure to make peace with the rebels of Darfur. In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe has likewise held out against pressure to accept the possibility of electoral defeat, as has Laurent Gbagbo in Ivory Coast. Somalia has remained intractable, following a disastrous American invasion in 1992. Warfare in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast was brought to an end by 2006, partly through the action of British and French troops, partly through mainly Nigerian troops dispatched on behalf of ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States. But as the threat of war returned to Ivory Coast in 2010–11, the outstanding problem remained the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the ex-Belgian Congo previously called Zaire, invaded by Uganda, Rwanda and genocidal militias in the aftermath of the Rwandan massacres of 1994. While African UN troops have been unable to keep any kind of peace, talk of non-African military intervention has in this case come to nothing.

IV

When writing virtually in the present tense about these most recent developments, it is hard to weigh Western support for the former dictatorial regimes of Presidents Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia against pressure for democracy in Zimbabwe and Ivory Coast, except to say that like support for the independence of the southern Sudan, they have in common a conservative interest in political stability and conflict resolution, even where it has been ineffective. For good or ill, it is in the shadow of this post-imperialist concern with their outcome that the many debilitating conflicts of post-colonial Africa have been played out. What these have in common is on the one hand the aggregation of different peoples within the boundaries drawn by the colonial partition of the continent, where they cohabit in single political communities despite the failure of the nationalist vision of the 1950s to unite them on a national basis. On the other hand is the competition of their leaders to win control of the government of the states which these boundaries define. Both the aggregation and the competition are closely related to the growth in numbers, which has turned Iliffe's originally thin agricultural and pastoral population at work in the colonisation of almost unlimited land into a much denser and extensively urbanised population in the manner of Connah's productive land hypothesis, but far beyond the limits of his archaeological examples. The first has been intensified by migration into the cities and by immigration from outside the country, the second by the differential appeal of politicians to the different peoples involved; between the two lies the competition of the peoples in question for land and employment. The situation as described in West Africa in the 1960s by Peter Lloyd in his *Africa in Social Change* has continued to develop along the same lines to feed into the political histories of the older as well as the newer states to the north and south of the Sahara.

The outcome in the former Spanish Sahara and in Eritrea was war that broke out in the 1970s for independence from the old African empires of

Morocco and Ethiopia, both of which had survived their conquest by France, Spain and Italy to line up with the newer creations of the colonial partition. Meanwhile, wars of secession from the states created in this way began with Katanga, the south-eastern province of the old Belgian Congo, immediately upon its independence as Zaire. They continued with the Biafran war in Nigeria from 1967 to 1970, and in the southern followed by the south-western Sudan from the 1960s onwards. Where Eritrea finally achieved its independence in 1993, the southern Sudan had to wait until 2011. But these have been the exceptions. Artificial as they may once have been, the boundaries created by the original partition have remained largely unchanged as arenas for the conflicts which have multiplied in the course of the many attempts to gain power and monopolise the rewards of central government, and which have at one time or another afflicted the majority of African states. On a scale from rigged elections to military coups to murder, massacre and civil war, these have escalated in some cases to the point at which central government has either become an enemy of the people, or has ceased to function. In the 1970s and 80s, Uganda under Milton Obote and Idi Amin was only the most notorious example of a struggle for power which likewise consumed Ethiopia and Chad, laying waste a country which had been among the most developed of the British colonies. In the 1990s, the atrocities of guerrilla warfare in Algeria were eclipsed by those of rival warlords in Liberia and Sierra Leone, still more by genocidal massacre in Rwanda and Burundi. In the 2000s, the overspill of the Rwandan conflict into the Democratic Republic of Congo was only the latest and most widespread of such disasters. But while neighbouring states have frequently been drawn into such conflicts, wars between them, at least, have mainly been confined to the Horn, to Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia. Energies have for the most part been consumed internally.

These ethnic politics, which all too often still go under the name of tribalism, following the tribal classification of the population by colonial rulers, owe a great deal to the distinctions made between those designated as tribes by the rulers in question for their political and administrative purposes, not only in the most glaring case of the Tutsi and Hutu in Rwanda/Burundi, but in the case of Arabs and Berbers in French North Africa. But since the handover of responsibility by those rulers to their erstwhile subjects, the managerial style of their regimes has been replaced throughout the continent by a presidential type of government based on the electoral principle which is now standard throughout the world for the legitimation of any government, however undemocratic. That remains true in Africa despite the use of the ballot box for purposes other than Western democracy, and despite its frequent interruption by military intervention and resort to violence. The pattern established at the outset in Tunisia and Ghana was of one-party regimes which claimed that nation-building required unity, and that unity was in the African tradition of consensus, but which under presidents like Bourguiba and Nkrumah became increasingly dictatorial and repressive. The pattern has been repeated in such multiparty systems as those of Zimbabwe, and in the long list of countries where the soldiers have been

temporarily or permanently in power, from Algeria, Libya and Egypt to the Sudan and Ethiopia, from Ghana and Nigeria to the Central African Republic, and from Uganda to the Congo. The key to success has been patronage, the sharing out of the spoils of office among constituents in the form of wealth as well as power; corruption has been widespread, notoriously in the party politics of Nigeria, where it was taken to extremes by the military head of state General Abacha. His accumulation of a personal fortune at the expense of the state in the 1990s may have been second only to that of Mobutu in Zaire over a period of more than thirty years from the 1960s to the 1990s. The fact remains that in most countries, for much or most of the time, presidential rule has not only fulfilled the purposes of government in however rudimentary a fashion. It has remained linked to the electoral process. However this has been manipulated, it has remained the basic formula of government and by extension, the necessary means for the resolution of conflict. That has been seen most recently in the vote of the southern Sudan for independence, but most significantly in the case of South Africa, where the image of the voter on the cover of the *Short History* in 1962 has become the picture of a smiling Nelson Mandela casting his vote in 1994 on the cover of the fifth edition of Oliver and Atmore's *Africa since 1800*.

That event was certainly a landmark in the contemporary history of the continent. But as Leonard Thompson concludes in his *A History of South Africa*, while it may have pacified a country on the brink of civil war, it could only have been the beginning of its reconstruction. In the twenty-first century, the underlying problem of population growth has been exposed in South Africa by the impossibility of meeting the demand for welfare, and the resort to self-help in an informal economy from which to make a living. Its symptoms of rural and urban impoverishment in the continent at large have combined with the devastating effects of warfare, famine and disease to leave Africa in general with the image of a continent in need of international rescue, economic and humanitarian as well as political. But how this rescue is to be effected through trade, debt relief, foreign aid and military intervention, preferably by African forces under UN auspices, has given rise to an acrimonious dispute over the responsibility of the international community for creating the problem in the first place. The problem of debt has been laid at the door of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the problem of agriculture attributed to an insistence on free trade by the World Trade Organisation, and foreign aid itself doubly denounced as conditional upon unacceptable obligations and as no substitute for African government action. The culprits identified by Nugent are on the one hand the economists, on the other hand the humanitarians, both proposing universal remedies to save the continent from the incompetence of the African state, without regard to history or circumstance. The insistence of the currently fashionable liberal economists upon so-called structural adjustment programmes to reduce public expenditure and promote free trade has simply worked to undermine the independence of the political kingdom which was the goal of the 1950s; Africa, he says, has been newly invaded by the

acronyms that stand for the multitude of international agencies which may be doing more harm than good.

Such attribution of blame for the perversion of independence into dependence is not in fact new, going back beyond 1965, when Nkrumah published his *Neo-Colonialism: the last stage of imperialism* in the same year that Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* appeared in English, following its first publication in French in 1961. The argument in their case was both simpler and grander, that the old and new imperial powers had turned from direct to indirect rule of the continent through the ruling elites of the newly-independent states as a means of continuing their exploitation of its resources; the elites themselves had continued to act as in the days of the slave trade, as middlemen on their behalf. Guy Arnold's *Africa, a Modern History*, an immensely detailed and documented history of the period from 1960 to 2005 by an author long involved in African affairs, turns these denunciations into the story of a continent without influence or power, its resources picked over by those that have, a far cry from John Gunther's Africa on the march. The problem is with the plethora of states created by partition, the solution the realisation of Nkrumah's Pan-African ideal of a single political kingdom for the continent as a whole, able to dictate its terms. But for this purpose, ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States; SADC, the Southern African Development Community; and the OAU, the Organisation of African Unity transformed into the AU, the African Union, have so far fallen far short of what is required if more than fifty states are to speak with one voice. Both Nugent and Arnold agree that the New Partnership for African Development, or NEPAD, proposed in 2001 by the two most powerful African states to the south of the Sahara, South Africa and Nigeria, was promising in principle as an undertaking by the states of the African Union to insist upon good democratic government as a condition of international aid. But equally they agree that in practice it has been doubtfully effective, notably in the Congo, a conclusion that has only partially been overtaken by events. In 2011, eventual success in Southern Sudan was balanced against the French-assisted effort in Ivory Coast to force President Gbagbo to accept electoral defeat. North of the Sahara, in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, the ending of dictatorship by popular uprisings has indeed been followed by the popular election of more representative governments. Such a positive outcome may augur well for the efficacy of the African Union, but Arnold, for one, remains to be convinced. In his latest book, *The New Scramble for Africa*, he finds that China has now joined in the competition for Africa's resources. Hope may lie with the relative independence of South Africa and Nigeria, the two richest and hence most powerful states on the continent today. But the renaissance of Africa envisaged in the middle of the last century remains in the future.

V

For the present, Africa remains unable to escape from the clutches of a predatory outside world. Despairing as Arnold's analysis may be, it reflects the

bleak vision of contemporary history that has affected the study of African history as a whole since it came of age at the beginning of the period. As Robin Law wryly remarks in conclusion to his *Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, the responsibility for the current woes of the continent may lie, not with the slave trade, but with the remedy of free trade peddled by the abolitionists. Nugent, indeed, sees the whole programme of international assistance as a repetition in the post-colonial world of the original argument in favour of the colonial conquest, that it was designed to save the continent from itself. Ellis' proposal to work backwards from the problems of the present elevates such thinking into an approach to the African past, of which Iliffe's choice of population history is a case in point. In all such ways, the study of African history has grown out of the contemporary story, not in isolation, but as a component of the 'interesting times' in which it has been undertaken since its launch in the first flush of independence.



30

Approaching African History

I

The problem of contemporary history is nothing new, although it brings into focus the dependence of history upon the historian and the dependence of the historian upon history. The dependence of history upon the historian is of the nature of historical knowledge, the only way in which the past exists beyond those of its remains that have survived. In the case of African history, the gaining of that knowledge has been the great challenge of the time. The arrival of African history after the Second World War as a subject for research and teaching at university level was the culmination of the long and very gradual approach to the idea of Africa itself, of a continent with a recognisable content, and with a history beyond the activities of outsiders which could be recovered from sources beyond the written evidence. Since then, the approach to that history has proceeded in the literature surveyed in this book from all its different angles, all governed by the conviction expressed by Iliffe at the outset of his *Africans* that this is an important story with an important place in the history of the world, worth the effort of a lifetime's study to see the shape of the elephant, to pursue the original metaphor. The instrument has been the methodology of historical scholarship, in which the effort to piece the story together from the evidence of the sources is governed by the need for interpretation to understand what it was that they are evidence for. But since the past is in principle a foreign country, the historian, like the social anthropologist who studies other societies in the present, is of necessity an outside observer governed by the ideas of his age. Not only, therefore, has scholarship allowed for different explanations in accordance with different hypotheses, it has equally turned to evaluation in accordance with current criteria of good and bad, right and wrong. The choice of African history as a subject is itself a value judgment, of its worth as well as its possibility; it is part of the post-colonial consensus that aims to place the continent on a footing of equality with the rest of the world. The evaluations of the past which have followed from that choice have gone on to raise the

issues and generate the controversies so far described in relation to the events themselves. While the slave trade may stand condemned along with racism, the one is held responsible for the colonisation of the Americas, and the other reappears in the Black interpretation of history. About colonialism, historians remain in many more than two minds, as consideration of its legacy enters the field of contemporary history and becomes subject to Hobsbawm's rueful reflection on its habitual failure to read the course of events.

Already in 1968, in his Introduction to *Emerging Themes*, Ranger felt that historians were in danger of lagging behind political scientists and sociologists in coming to terms with current events and appreciating their significance for the past. The answer of Ellis, that historians should regard the past in the light of the present, waited until 2002. Whether or not they should, historians have indeed done so since the publication of the *Short History* in 1962, over a period in which the approach to African history as a whole has developed a history of its own as the evidence mounts up, the controversies evolve, and Africa itself moves past the landmarks of the past fifty years. In Iliffe's case it was fortuitous that he could end a work first published in 1995 with arguably the most important single event in that history to date, the transition to Black majority rule in South Africa in 1994. In the sense of the final overthrow of colonial rule and White supremacy, it crowned the resurgence of Africa that was celebrated in the 1950s and early 1960s, after the various revolutionary movements had combined with regime changes in Europe and international pressure to force Portugal out of Guinea-Bissau, Angola and Mozambique and Spain out of the Spanish Sahara in 1974–5, the White Rhodesians from power in the new Zimbabwe in 1980, and South Africa out of Namibia in 1990. For Iliffe, it was a victory for numbers, for a population whose growth had made Apartheid impossible to sustain. It was at the same time the moment when South Africa re-entered the mainstream of African history, having been cut out from the time of the discovery of gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886 by industrialisation and the presence of an indigenous White population, which took racial separation to impossible extremes. To what extent South Africa was indeed cut out is a judgment which depends upon a definition of the mainstream; but as the subject of a separate treatment in a separate, final chapter of *Africans*, the theme of South African exceptionalism was not only apparent in Hailey's *African Survey*, but was a feature of the approach to African history prior to 1990, when the transition was first agreed. Symbolised by that image on the cover of the fifth edition of Oliver and Atmore's *Africa since 1800*, of a smiling Nelson Mandela finally casting his vote, what Leonard Thompson in *A History of South Africa* calls a wondrous break with the past was doubly significant. At the same time that it was hailed as a major step towards the unification of the continent, it closed off the avenue to that unification which opened in the literature with Fanon's call for violent popular revolution to solve all the problems of colonialism and neo-colonialism. In *The Africans: a triple heritage*, Ali Mazrui forecast in 1986 that Apartheid could and would be overthrown only by an armed struggle which would not only free the Black population

of South Africa, but propel the country into leadership of the continent on the basis of its industrial wealth. The falsification of that prophecy has cast doubt on the other; the problems of the new South Africa listed by Thompson in conclusion to his history threaten to bring the country into Iliffe's mainstream on a level with all the rest. However that may be, by removing the question mark over the fate of Apartheid, the peaceful transition to majority rule was important in yet another respect. In bringing to a belated end the movement for African liberation, it rounded off the project of the Cambridge and UNESCO *Histories* in the spirit in which they were conceived.

II

Born in the 1960s out of the optimism of independence and published some twenty years later in the 1980s, both of these major enterprises were intended to proclaim the existence of African history as a subject, and to substantiate that proclamation with a lengthy and scholarly account of the African past. Covering the whole of the continent the whole of the time, they placed it fairly and squarely in the history of the world, to be admired and studied, as Iliffe says, for its contribution to the history of humanity. Their publication was itself an achievement that marked the arrival of African history some thirty years after its inception in the aftermath of the Second World War, one that can in turn be admired as something of a watershed in the history of the subject, putting on record the impressive results of those first formative years together with the controversies that had shaped them, and which were already being overtaken by new concerns. In line with the general purpose of the Cambridge *Histories*, the aim of *The Cambridge History of Africa* was to produce a comprehensive narrative history of the continent, setting out the facts as far as they could be established on the basis of the evidence ranging from radio-carbon dating to archival records. In keeping with the nature of that evidence, not only archaeology but archaeologists themselves were called on to write the whole of the first and much of the second volume, down to the beginning of the last millennium. When the historians themselves took over for the history of those last thousand years, their approach was basically regional, a reflection of the real differences between east and west and north and south, but also of the way in which the historians themselves were by and large regional specialists: in the 1970s, these numbered some eight or nine at the School of Oriental and African Studies, for example. The task of integration, which prior to the nineteenth century had defeated Hrbek in his attempt at the periodisation of African history, was left to editors like Oliver and Fage whose own entry into the subject had been equally regional. It had, moreover, been sub-Saharan, to that part of the continent with which the growing volume of the periodical literature was primarily concerned – not only the *Journal of African History*, but the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, David Henige's *History in Africa*, a publication concerned with the methodology of African histori-

ography, and many others. While this reflected the primary inspiration of the subject in the march to independence south of the Sahara, it required not only considerable thought but also an appeal to historians of the Ancient, Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds to integrate North Africa and Egypt into the Cambridge scheme. The whole was nevertheless greater than the sum of its parts. So too was the UNESCO *General History of Africa*, whose still grander purpose was forcefully stated in its preface by Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow, the Director-General of UNESCO. Aiming to build the Africa of the future on the awareness of its past, it had no difficulty in including North Africa and Egypt in the much greater number of regional chapters from a wider catchment of contributors. With such a spread, the two *Histories* complement each other, though they may not always see eye to eye. In the problematic aftermath of independence, it was impossible for them not to draw up the balance-sheet of the inheritance from the colonial and pre-colonial past in the light of the present.

As touched on by Roland Oliver in his *In the Realms of Gold*, the problems of that aftermath directly affected the development of historical studies. The enthusiasm for those studies in Africa itself was optimistically noted in the 1960s by Ranger in his Introduction to *Emerging Themes*, when he commented on the establishment of Historical Associations and the enlistment of students in the search for archaeological sites and the collection of oral information. But while for example the Institut Français de l'Afrique Noire at Dakar and the British Institute in East Africa continued to flourish, and the commitment of newly-independent states to universal education up to university level remained in place, by the 1970s many of the universities of Africa, old and new, found themselves starved of the funds required to create and maintain a library for teaching and research as well as to pay their academic staff, quite apart from the violence that virtually closed down Makerere University in Uganda. For political as well as economic reasons, the number of expatriate staff who had been so important to their development in the 1950s and 1960s dwindled along with the opportunity to study abroad which had created the first generation of African academic historians. As a result, the enterprise of African history was faltering on the continent even as M'Bow was affirming its necessity for the future, and the Cambridge and UNESCO *Histories* were setting out its achievements. As far as fieldwork was concerned, the collection of oral traditions and oral information by student speakers of the many different languages south of the Sahara, together with the searching out of private collections of papers, certainly continued. From the very beginning, the recording of traditions and recollections had been seized upon as a priority, partly as a matter of urgency, before their memory was lost with the speakers, partly because such memories were deemed to be authentically African, the distinctive African alternative to the written record. But not only did the attempts of non-Africans to conduct this kind of fieldwork come under increasing suspicion of political activity, and were increasingly refused permission. In so many places it became too dangerous to try, while in Algeria, for example, the memories of the revolutionary past were themselves deemed to be too dangerous to bring up. As a

source of a possibly alternative history to the national version they were best ignored. The call to bring them to light in the interests of truth and indeed reconciliation, made by Donal Cruise O'Brien and Robert Mandouze in their contributions to *Le Retentissement de la révolution algérienne* in 1985, went unheeded at the conference where they were given in 1984, the thirtieth anniversary of the outbreak of the war.

Political implications apart, the question of oral tradition and oral testimony as a source for African history goes to the issue at the heart of the historiography of the years leading up to the publication of the Cambridge and UNESCO volumes, namely the continuity or discontinuity of the African present from the African past. In other words, were the undoubted changes brought about by colonialism changes of substance or only of form, innovations to be adopted and adapted to African needs – a question which was in turn inseparable from whether they had been changes for the better or the worse. In 1968 the issue was addressed by Ranger in his editorial introduction to *Emerging Themes*, in which he contrasted the argument over collaboration versus resistance in the making of the movements for independence with that of Jacob Ajayi in his contribution to the same volume, 'The continuity of African institutions under colonialism'. Observing that the colonial period had been a brief episode in a long story, Ajayi saw the response of the African to the innovations which it introduced as governed by what he called the politics of survival through adaptation of the old to the new, and eventually of the new to the old. His thesis, with appropriate examples, was accepted by Lonsdale in his own contribution to *Emerging Themes*, and in 1972 was fully developed by Elbaki Hermassi in *Leadership and National Development in North Africa*, in which he argued that the character of the independent states of the Maghrib could only be understood in terms of their pre-colonial roots. Like Hobsbawm, Hermassi has fallen victim to the course of events, which have falsified his predictions of the political future of Morocco and Algeria. His thesis was nevertheless important as an attack upon the previously fashionable theory of modernisation, the transformation of so-called traditional societies and economies into replicas of modern Europe and America, which was presumed to have been set in motion by colonialism. The development required by the theory to move these societies forward, out of their existing state of underdevelopment, involved a break with the past which Hermassi considered impossible. The alternative was different ways for different societies to different outcomes, to be facilitated through the agency of the one modern institution created at independence by the takeover of government from colonial rulers, the nation state.

Hermassi was dealing with the states of North Africa, and by extension Egypt, which unlike the states to the south of the Sahara had a long precolonial history of statehood within their modern boundaries, and was properly cautious in his optimism. South of the Sahara, a greater optimism regarding the adaptation of African ways of life to changing circumstances is apparent in the insistence of Hopkins, writing at the same time as Hermassi in his *Economic History of West Africa*, upon the historical adaptability of Africans to the opportunities of the market rather than their conformity to the custom

of traditional society, and in his conclusion that their skills and energies were the continent's greatest assets. By 1987, however, such optimism had turned into the pessimism expressed by Ralph Austen in his *African Economic History*, in which he argued that the response to market opportunity had depended upon the structure of societies based on traditional forms of agriculture and craft. The result of trade within the continent and overseas had been growth without the development of this domestic economy into new forms of production, so that far from making an independent contribution to the world economy, Africa had been relegated to its margins, where it had become increasingly dependent upon its supplies and demands. In the post-colonial world, the skills and energies admired by Hopkins had gone into the creation of an informal or black economy of survival. Meanwhile the prototype of Hermassi's nation state, the political kingdom originally demanded by Nkrumah as the prerequisite of African entry into the prosperity of the modern world, had been put into the same context by Nkrumah himself. The denunciation in his *Neo-Colonialism: the last stage of imperialism* of the way in which the colonial powers had withdrawn from empire the better to retain control through the African elites they had left in charge, was important for its emphasis upon the colonial rather than the pre-colonial past. Whether or not the elites in question were themselves examples of Ajayi's African adaptability, the implication was that of Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*, the need for a more revolutionary break with the legacy of the colonialism than had so far been accomplished. They differed in so far as Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism envisaged a specifically African way forward, while such a break was Fanon's prescription for the liberation of the colonised to embrace the kind of modernisation called in question by Hermassi. In 1972, however, seven years after *Neo-Colonialism* and *The Wretched of the Earth* but at the same time as Hermassi's *Leadership and National Development* and Hopkins' *Economic History*, all were put into the perspective of Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, that the continent's natural development, political, social and economic, had been skewed by the slave trade and colonialism to leave it in a position of permanent dependence on outside forces. This second line of attack upon modernisation theory anticipated the findings of Austen and ultimately those of Nugent and Arnold in their contemporary histories, that independence had done little or nothing to solve the global problems of the continent.

Inveighing against post-colonial dependence on the outside world, Nkrumah and Fanon were nevertheless still fighting the battles of independence, in which the accent was not on the politics of survival but upon those of opposition to the old colonial order in the making of the new nation. So too were the historians. For Ranger in *Emerging Themes*, the explanation of how that opposition developed into nationalism was still the central subject of the history of the period, whether its roots lay with Oliver in acceptance and collaboration with colonial government or with Ranger himself in resistance to its imposition and demands. The argument survived down to the publication of the relevant volumes of the Cambridge and UNESCO *Histories*. In his Introduction to Volume 7 of the Cambridge

History, covering the period from 1905 to 1940, its editor A.D. (Andrew) Roberts pointed up the growth of concern with social history, with Ajayi's politics of survival at every level from the family upwards, leaving the question of political opposition to the end. The relevant discussion by A.E. Afigbo in Volume VII of the UNESCO *History*, on the other hand, begins with Ajayi's thesis of continuity, but proceeds to concentrate on the formation of those elites and organisations which mounted the opposition to colonial rule. This is in keeping with the general tenor of both the final volumes, covering the century of colonialism and independence from 1880 to c.1980, in which the editors, Adu Boahen and Ali Mazrui, take stock of the issue. In this respect, Boahen's volume VII is a key text, not only for its emphasis on the virtues of African resistance in contrast to the vices of European colonialism, but for its review by Roland Oliver under the heading of 'Initiatives and resistance', in which he argued that the merit of the European occupation was to bring into existence that educated African elite which took over the states created by the partition. The irony in this case is that Boahen was himself a distinguished member of that elite, together with his colleague Ali Mazrui and all his contributors, and their dilemma is apparent in his final estimate of the impact and significance of colonialism. The harsh verdict of exploitation and oppression is qualified by the list of political and economic structures and infrastructures with which the continent was endowed, the education that accompanied them and from which he had himself benefited, and the social mobility that followed. In the light of the problems of independence, however, these were at best mixed blessings. Arguing that Africa was indeed set by colonialism on a different course from what it would otherwise have taken, Boahen pointed to the formation of just such an elite separated from the people by its education, one which had been joined within the framework of the European-style state by equally detached party politicians and professional soldiers in unscrupulous pursuit of power and wealth. Sympathetic to the contention of Hopkins in *An Economic History of West Africa*, that colonialism only served to accelerate an economic development already under way, and aware of the opinion of Ajayi, that the colonial period was a brief episode that did not break the continuity of African life, Boahen was nevertheless hopeful that the African leaders in question would learn the lesson of good government from a historical appreciation of colonialism, its achievements and its failings – the contribution of historical studies to the future of the continent as envisaged by M'Bow.

IV

Such faith in the future, expressed against all the present odds, has continued to buoy up the study of African history. But the predicament of Adu Boahen as both a historian and a member of that Western-educated elite, one who in 1992 stood for the Presidency of Ghana, is that of Hobsbawm as a historian who has experienced the present, but whose story of the past has been overtaken by the course of events in the future. While the Cambridge and

UNESCO *Histories* were going to press, moreover, the relativity of the historian to his subject had been taken to very different extremes from a very different direction under the different labels of postmodernism and more particularly Orientalism. This took its name from *Orientalism*, the title of the book published by Edward Said in 1978, in which, as subsequently in his *Culture and Imperialism*, Western imperialism was denounced as the product of a pervasive desire for power over the Other, the non-Western world. Its ambition to control and dominate extended to the subjection of other cultures to the kind of scientific scrutiny that had been practised by Napoleon's savants in the *Description de l'Égypte*, and which had resulted in their reduction to specimens in the pigeonholes of Western knowledge. The corollary was the invalidity of that knowledge as a projection of Western stereotypes and formulations. Still more fundamental, following the approach of the French historian and philosopher Foucault, was the denial of the possibility of any true knowledge of any other culture by any other culture, all of which were placed on an equal footing as equally valid on their own terms. So radical an approach can be and has been criticised both historically and epistemologically, in terms, that is, of its theory of knowledge. In terms of history, the Orientalist image of a single, unchanging European mentality takes no account of the diversity of European thought, characterised by radical oppositions, both political and intellectual, not least as regards imperialism. Nor does it allow for its evolution over time, while as for the other cultures of the world, it raises the difficulty of identifying, defining and describing them as equally self-contained and blinkered, placing them, in fact, within a new matrix of its own, Western, devising. In terms of knowledge, not only does it place myth on the same footing as verifiable knowledge, and vice-versa. Written as it is within the Western intellectual tradition whose procedures it condemns, it is self-contradictory: it cannot claim for itself the objectivity whose possibility it otherwise denies. Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. Such relativism has nevertheless flourished in literary criticism under the name of postmodernism and 'the literary turn', which holds that language itself traps the speaker in its web of meaning. It has certainly challenged historians to think again about their subject, not least in Africa, where the controversy is reviewed in the Introduction to *The First Ethiopians* by Van Wyk Smith, professor of English turned historian of the European idea of Africa.

Orientalism has resonated in Africa firstly because Said's thesis had its roots in his reading of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, his novel of atrocity in the Congo, and secondly because it has supplied a theoretical explanation for the ineradicable cultural conflict between the coloniser and the colonised postulated by the Tunisian author Albert Memmi in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, and taken up by Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* as the condition for popular revolution. Its underlying relativism has meanwhile provided an existential value for Nkrumah's concept of a Pan-African culture beyond its instrumental value for Abraham in *The Mind of Africa* as the necessary means to the renaissance of the continent. But thirty years after Abraham, Appiah's *In My Father's House* describes a struggle on the part of African

writers and artists to escape from the dominance of European norms into intellectual and artistic independence, only to find that postmodernism has dissolved the concept of an African alternative into a multiplicity of cultural identities of theoretically equal value. For the historian the challenge has been, not just to look in the normal way for the assumptions of the written sources in the context of the culture to which they belong, but to counter the charge of subscribing to a project whose undertaking in accordance with the European norms of European historiography might render worthless the whole of the enterprise of African history as celebrated by M'Bow, whether as a contribution to knowledge or to the future of Africa. The nerve it has touched is the historian's awareness of himself as a creature of his or her own time and place, conditioned by its ideas. In particular it is the awareness of Adu Boahen and of Appiah himself of belonging to a Western-educated elite engaged in a Western discourse on the subject of a non-Western population from which it is in some measure detached. The answer as given by the Congolese historian Valentine Mudimbe, in an introductory chapter to Middleton and Miller's *New Encyclopedia of Africa* which deals specifically with Foucault's stress upon the equality of cultures, lies in the independent value of the historiographical method, irrespective of its European origins, as a tool for the investigation and understanding of a past that lives only in its remains. In the case of Africa, the result is a body of knowledge sufficiently objective to counter the charge of total subjectivity and total invalidity, whether on the part of the historian or the sources. Racism, for example, may fairly be dismissed not only scientifically but historically, as untrue to what we now know and think about the African past. Not only, therefore, has the project of the Cambridge and UNESCO *Histories* survived. In the years since their publication it has continued to expand, partly as a result of the injection of Orientalism and postmodernism into the debate, where the emphasis on culture has helped to extend the range of inquiry to topics outside the scope of the initial drive to recover the African past from oblivion, and to take it beyond its accomplishment in their volumes.

One important outcome of the postmodernist argument as described by Appiah has been the work of Appiah himself. *Africana. The Encyclopedia of African and African American Experience*, edited by K. A. Appiah and H. L. Gates Jr, which in its second edition of 2005 runs to five volumes, is the fruit of the conclusion of *In My Father's House*, that African culture is by now too eclectic an assemblage of equally valid elements to be described in Abraham's terms as a single paradigm. Pan-Africanism, the idea of a Black African nationalism which was formulated in America by W. E. B. DuBois and translated by Nkrumah into the political project of African unity, should accordingly be recast as a brother-and-sisterhood of all peoples of African descent on both sides of the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. In spelling out this proposition in print, *Africana* is both more and less than an encyclopaedia of the continent, nor is it an encyclopaedia of history as such. It is nevertheless doubly historical, not only for the historical content of its entries, but as a historical statement of an approach to the subject of Africa at the time of writing. In the case of *Africana*, the notion of cultural creativity on which it

is based puts the encyclopaedia in line of descent from the adaptability of Africans in Ajayi's politics of survival, through Thornton's celebration of African initiative in *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World*, to a general acceptance by historians of the continuity of African life underlying the disruptions of the past and the present, and the development of a wider repertoire of emerging themes than the list in Ranger's collection.

V

In the familiar field of political history, Ajayi's theme of political continuity has passed from his politics of survival into their outcome in the politics of government. In *The State in Africa*, significantly subtitled *The politics of the belly*, Jean-François Bayart contradicts Boahen's view that the alien nature of the colonial state has encouraged the irresponsible use of its powers by those who have taken it over. Along with Nugent, he argues that the same skills and energies that in the days of the slave trade made the fortunes of the rulers and merchants who controlled the trade of Africa with the outside world, have been employed by their modern successors to the same effect. Obtained in much the same way as before, their new wealth has been used in traditional fashion to dispense their patronage – a long-standing practice of state formation that has resumed within the shell of modern government. This particularly unflattering view of the continuity of African history is a sour comment on *The Power of African Cultures*, in which Toyin Falola takes the reassertion of customary ways as the broad subject of his vision of the future. While denouncing with Boahen the abuses of the present, his essay elaborates the theses of Ajayi and Appiah to envisage a successful adaptation of tradition to modernity, inspired by a common cultural consciousness of a common African identity shared with those of African descent in the Americas and Europe.

Taking up the theme of cultural diversity, such a return to the topic of Pan-Africanism by this the most prolific of African historians is in keeping with the continual branching of historical studies into social and cultural history, to which Falola and Jennings refer in their Introduction to *Sources and Methods in African History: spoken, written, unearthed*. Embracing writing and written records, oral tradition and oral information, together with material culture both archaeological and modern, the articles in the collection bring up to date the discussion of the approach to the African past, to the extent of including a section on the Americas more or less under Thornton's title of 'Africa and the Atlantic World'. What is clear is that the more the different ways into the subject combine to compose the history of the continent, the greater the variety they expose. The variety is captured in the title of Karin Barber's *Africa's Hidden Histories: everyday literacy and the making of the self*, a collection of individual diaries and writings that give something of Berque's flavour of life at the time. Concern with the recovery of that flavour, with the experience of individuals and communities as they themselves perceived it, is in contrast to whatever shape or direction in their lives becomes

apparent only in retrospect. It has produced for example Landeg White's *Magomero. Portrait of an African village*, which takes the story of its villagers in southern Nyasaland from the arrival of David Livingstone in 1859 down to the author's second visit in 1985, reconstructed from a combination of written records with oral information. The possible range of such an investigation is exemplified in Falola and Jennings' collection. Where Berque in *French North Africa* used the press as a major source for his vignettes of the 1930s, Laada Flici took popular songs as the starting-point for his evocation of life in Algiers at the beginning of the Algerian war in *Sous les terraces d'antan*. Court records have proved invaluable for the purpose: where Kristin Mann uses them in Falola and Jennings' *Sources and Methods* for nineteenth-century Lagos, Jean-Paul Charnay used them in *La vie musulmane en Algérie* for the high colonial period in the country. Their long survival north of the Sahara has enabled Naphtali Lewis to write his *Life in Egypt under Roman Rule*, and David Powers to write his *Law, Society and Culture in the Maghrib, 1300–1500*, while the discarded papers of the Jewish community in mediæval Cairo: documents, letters and literature, gave S. D. F. Goitein his description of life in *A Mediterranean Society*.

In *Magomero*, White likewise turned to the written as well as oral testimonies to the revolt of the Christian preacher John Chilembwe against the plantation labour system in 1915, and to the songs which either celebrated or lamented such events and changes over the years. In doing so, he touched not only upon the theme of religion but also upon the experience of the women of the village. Elsewhere these run together. *Magomero* is an example of the way in which women's or gender history, as represented by Andrea Cornwall's edition of *Readings in Gender in Africa*, has grown in importance not only as the study of the contribution of women to the general history of the continent and its colonisation, but as the study of women's lives, activities and experience for their own sake. While it has emerged as a separate theme, however, women's history runs not only into the economic and social history of men and women but into that of religion, the bundle of beliefs and practices to which people feel in some way committed – native African, Islamic and Christian, or a mixture of all three. Quite apart from such practices as female circumcision and the segregation of women in Islam, social anthropology has long taken note of women's involvement with the spirit world: Douglas and Kaberry's *Man in Africa*, for example, described the central role of the *Bori* cult in the life of Hausa women, and women as diviners in Uganda. By the year 2000, the subject merited a chapter in Levtzion and Pouwels' *History of Islam in Africa*. The history of religion itself, however, has presented its own problems. At the same time as *Man in Africa* appeared, Ranger in *Emerging Themes* was noting the absence of historical studies of African religion and the limited nature of accounts of the spread of Islam and Christianity, while religion in general is missing from Collins' list in his updated volumes of *Problems*. As if to confirm Ranger's complaint, Isichei in her *History of African Societies to 1870* describes the beliefs of each society but only as an introduction to their history, while her more recent *The Religious Traditions of Africa: a History* is scarcely that for the African tradi-

tion. In the early 1970s, Ranger and Kimambo's contributors to *The Historical Study of African Religion* endeavoured to demonstrate the possibility of recovering its various histories from oral tradition and dateable events, but the general absence of sources for the evolution over time of the unwritten beliefs and practices of native African religions has only partially been overcome for the precolonial period, for example by McCaskie and Law in their studies of Asante and Oyo. There is more scope where, as in Kongo, there is a written record of Christian involvement to act as a thread, and no problem in the case of the literate religions of Ancient Egypt and Islam as well as Christianity. The greater difficulty, which applies all such beliefs and creeds, has been to explain their historical significance.

For that purpose, the relativity that validates all cultures and civilisations ceases to be an epistemological dead end, and becomes the only way for the historian as a historian to deal objectively with the mutually exclusive convictions of religion, whether animist, Muslim or Christian, and the enormous variety they exhibit; as Ibn Battuta discovered in Mali, there are as many Islams as Muslims. Apart from knowing what is actually believed and tracing its development, the only proper course for the historian is to explain as far as possible why the beliefs in question are held, and observe how believers have acted in consequence. The danger is to lose sight of the power of the beliefs themselves, irrespective of their truth. As a factor in African history, as in the title of Oliver's first book, *The Missionary Factor in East Africa*, the workings of religion tend to be explained in political, social and economic terms. Of the Fatimid revolution in North Africa in the tenth century, Wansbrough quite correctly remarked that its success depended not on its theology but on the character of the tribal society to which it appealed. But as Ibn Khaldun said, if the call to holy war could not have succeeded without that character, without the appeal in the name of Islam there would have been no revolution. This conundrum of the chicken and the egg is the crux of the historian's problem.

It applies for example to the grand narrative of religion, of whatever kind, as a form of resistance to colonialism in Boahen's volume of the UNESCO *History*, for which the figure of John Chilembwe described in *Magomero* is always cited as an example. The history of Islam, for example in Hiskett's *The Course of Islam in Africa* and Levtzion and Pouwels' *The History of Islam in Africa*, has meanwhile become a history of Islamisation versus Africanisation, in which the faith is continually advancing across the continent and continually moving towards the establishment of some standard version of the religion as a creed, a way of life and an ideology, even while it has blended into traditional beliefs and practices north as well as south of the Sahara. Hiskett's conclusion to *The Development of Islam in West Africa*, that its advance has been a triumph for the power of literate ideas, sums up a history of conflict between these divergent trends, expressed by Ibn Battuta in Mali, and summarised by Levtzion and Pouwels in their Introduction to *The History of Islam in Africa*. In this history, written for the most part by non-Muslim Western authors, the faith, as Ranger remarked, has tended to become the independent and dominant factor which it is for the faithful themselves.

Meanwhile the history of Christianity, as written in this case from within the faith by Western or Western-educated Christians, argues a similar divergence but takes the opposite view of the outcome. In Roberts' volume of the Cambridge *History*, the Christianity introduced by missionaries into sub-Saharan Africa is described by Richard Gray not only as divided into a multiplicity of churches, but as divisive in the formation of a Western-educated elite apart from the great majority who have adapted it to old beliefs and ways to find a new certainty in the midst of flux; the emphasis is on the entry of native African concepts of the spirit world into the Christian world of the spirit. The two general histories of Christianity in Africa, Adrian Hastings' *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950*, and Sundkler and Stead, *A History of the Church in Africa*, both celebrate this Africanisation of the faith. In contrast to the perceived trend of Islamisation towards the unification of belief and practice, this growing diversity is seen as fundamental to the Christianisation of half of Africa in accordance with some divine purpose.

VI

However methodologically sound their descriptions of the consequences of belief may be, such an explanation of its root cause is, historically speaking, unacceptable. Any other explanation, on the other hand, risks explaining away the beliefs in question in terms that the believer would not recognise. It is not a case of Orientalism or of running into some postmodernist cul-de-sac, but of putting into some wider context beliefs and practices of evident historical and ideological importance. In the context of the rapidly changing environment for the spread of Christianity evoked by Richard Gray in volume 7 of the Cambridge *History*, the problem is summed up in the subtitle of Peter Geschiere's review article, 'Gruesome rumours: the reality question and writing history', in which he considered stories of vampires and a sense of bewitchment as responses to afflictions of unknown origin, such as colonial policies. In that environment, religion has featured not only in the colonial scenario of collaboration and resistance, but has run on into the post-colonial world as a major factor in social and political organisation and conflict. In Richard Rathbone's *Have you heard the message of my fathers?*, the conflict in the Gold Coast was personal for the two individuals who on the one hand rejected Christianity to become a chief, and on the other rejected a chieftainship to remain Christian. Such crises of conscience in Islam as well as Christianity have promoted the adoption of religious identities for political as well as social purposes, entering into conflict with the state in North Africa and Egypt; between peoples and communities in Nigeria, the Sudan and Ivory Coast; and leading to murderous extremes in the case of the Islamists in Algeria in the 1990s, the millenarian Muslim preacher Maitatsine in northern Nigeria in the 1980s, and the apocalyptic Christian Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda. Such conflicts may have escaped from their economic, social and political backgrounds, but the reality question remains, coming down in the end to the

material issues of economic and social history.

Over the years since Iliffe saw South Africa rejoin the mainstream of African history, economic history has, in the forthright opinion of Hopkins in the *Journal of African History* in 2009, been neglected since Austen's *African Economic History* in 1987. South Africa has remained the special case it was for Iliffe in Feinstein's *An Economic History of South Africa*, 2005, but despite the concern of contemporary history with the economic plight of the continent, the author of *An Economic History of West Africa* in 1973 regretted that economic history as such had suffered from the cultural turn of postmodernism away from such material concerns as the causes of poverty. Poverty on the other hand, equally neglected since Iliffe's *The African Poor* in the same year as Austen's work, was provoking what he hoped would be a new economic history of the continent to answer the old question of its fall into the poverty trap. *The African Poor* itself was a social history which nevertheless came to the conclusion of *Africans*, that in a continent where land had been abundant and labour scarce, the reverse was now true, with work as well as land in short supply for a mushrooming population. The most obvious demographic aspect of this reversal, however, the growth of cities, received no particular attention as a topic in its own right. But the fact, as Bill Freund points out in *The African City*, that the majority of the population of some countries was urban by the year 2000, and is set to be so throughout the continent in the near future, has over the past twenty years turned the topic of urbanisation into a major theme of African history.

In one sense, of course, it always has been, not least in archaeology. Connah's view of the city in *African Civilizations* as both the material evidence for the growth of complex society and the instrument of its development is shared not only by fellow archaeologists but by the historians who rely upon their findings to extend the evidence of writing for the evolution of such societies. Writing in turn has served a similar dual purpose as evidence for and agent of the growth of the city as the hub of civilisation. For Lewis Mumford in *The City in History*, that has been the city's historic role, as it was deliberately for the Romans with their six hundred cities in North Africa, and consciously for Ibn Khaldun with his celebration of Cairo as the greatest city in the world. With the familiar purpose of explaining the present as the outcome of the past for the sake of the future, Mumford's account of the development of the city as a place of settlement in response to a growing number of needs, from the economic to the political and religious, avoids something of Connah's problem of finding a meaningful definition of the city to cover all his examples. Freund, who is likewise looking to an urban future both for Africa and African history, likewise has no problem with listing a variety of indigenous types of urban settlement for a variety of purposes, before considering the cities of Ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome and Islam on the continent, and proceeding to the evolution of the modern varieties. For this he can draw on a huge range of social studies of the city in the twentieth century, as well as on the cultural studies of postmodernism for urbanism, the experience of living in a city. But those that are specifically historical are for the most part recent, and Anderson and

Rathbone's collection, *Africa's Urban Past*, which makes the claim for its history as a subject of study in its own right, came out only in 2000. In piecing that history together from the survey of a secondary literature that deals with the African city either in particular places at particular times, or as part of a wider story, Freund may claim to have written his own *Short History* as the first overview of a new subject.

In so doing he has provided a forward-looking conclusion to Iliffe's theme of population, although whether urbanisation on its present scale can count as a form of colonisation is debatable. At the same time he is contributing to the current growth of urban studies, whose arrival as a subject in its own right was announced by the publication in 2010 of *The Encyclopedia of Urban Studies*. The measure of the distance travelled since Mumford's work in 1961, which concentrated almost entirely on the history of the European and North American city, lies in its coverage of the rest of the world, where Africa takes its place in a global process that has turned over half of the world's population into town-dwellers. As Peter Smith implied in his review of the *Encyclopedia* for the *Times Literary Supplement*, a subject which comprehends so much of human life may well provide the framework for the social sciences of the future. Its choice by Freund certainly responds to Ellis' suggestion that the concerns of the present should govern the approach to the past. Having written in consequence a history of adaptability, like Ajayi and Hopkins before him Freund is guardedly optimistic about the future. Meanwhile, as far as the present is concerned, *The African City* provides the kind of approach to contemporary history that Smith envisages for urban studies in general. In pointing to the physical separation of rich from poor in cities like Cairo and Durban, he turns Boahen's division of elites from masses into a concrete reality. His account of South Africa's cities stops short of concluding with the demise of Apartheid as a consequence of urban revolt. But in describing the way in which the Apartheid state lost control of the burgeoning urban population, he illustrates some of the major consequences of the population explosion on the continent: the failure of the state inherited from the colonial past to meet the growing demands of its citizens for welfare; their retreat into alternative forms of government; and their advance into confrontation with each other and with the authorities, all developments which centre on the city, from Cape Town to Cairo and Tunis to Abidjan and Lagos.

VII

Such narratives as Freund's underpin, if they do not undermine, the political history recounted by Nugent, with its focus on the state. Nugent does indeed apologise for the omission of such social history, but does find room for popular and youth culture under the heading of urbanisation, where it belongs in a dimension extending through the arts from music and film across to sport. 'Africa at play' is a chapter in Ali Mazrui's *The Africans*, and is entitled to a history in its own right as an aspect of the global phenomenon

of sport which has swept the world over the last hundred years, and which has introduced a wholly new element into the life of Africa, important psychologically as well as economically, socially and politically. The importance of investigating its following along with the audiences for music, film, theatre and literature is touched on by Stephen Salm in his description of the subculture of dance in Accra in Falola and Jennings' *Sources and Methods*. Salm himself has contributed articles on music and popular culture to Kevin Shillington's *Encyclopedia of African History*, where the entries on such subjects are comparatively brief. They are much more extensive in the five volumes of Middleton and Miller's *New Encyclopedia of Africa*.

Published in 2008, the *New Encyclopedia* is not specifically historical, and those in search of the kind of readily referenced historical information provided in Shillington's *Encyclopedia* will find it hard to use. Like *Africana* and encyclopaedias in general, however, it is historical in its own right, in this case as a snapshot of Africa at the beginning of the twenty-first century. As such it belongs within the tradition of encyclopaedias whose contemporary accounts of contemporary knowledge go on to become part of the history of knowledge itself, so that in the extreme case of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, it becomes possible to trace through its various editions the general evolution of knowledge and perception from the end of the eighteenth century to the present day, not least as regards Africa. In this case, the *New Encyclopedia* is new because it is already a revision of the editors' original *Encyclopedia of Africa South of the Sahara*, an enlargement which concedes Oliver's case for the inclusion of northern Africa under the title of his review, 'Why Africa is one'. As a comprehensive representation of Africa in the mind of today, it completes the project adumbrated in *An African Survey* and initiated by the Penguin African Library, in which the *Short History* made the case for the historical dimension of the continent. Its own historical coverage begins with its three introductory essays, of which the first, by Ali Mazrui, 'The idea of Africa in social and political thought', is a manifesto for Pan-Africanism to counter the cultural hegemony of the West. But in arguing for an African personality, it resumes his thesis in *The Africans: a triple heritage* – the indigenous, the Muslim and the European. Such a tripartite conception of African history is adopted by Jan Vansina in his own introductory essay to the *New Encyclopedia*, 'Africa: the past in the present', in which the elements are animism, monotheism and secularism. In that of Valentine Mudimbe, it becomes a series of consecutive approaches to the continent: the non-racial approach of the Ancient Egyptians and Greeks; the racial approach of the Western Europeans; and now, the approach of Foucault, laying stress upon the equality of cultures. Such schematics apart, it is the historical scholarship upon which Mudimbe insists that underlies the entries and brings the *New Encyclopedia* up to date.

For how long? Just as the account of African history in the Cambridge and UNESCO volumes was necessarily provisional, as a snapshot of African studies at the beginning of the third millennium the *Encyclopedia* is doomed to go out of date, as its roughly seven hundred contributors, who include most of the well-known historians of the continent in Africa, Europe and

North America, are replaced by a subsequent generation. Meanwhile Africa itself will have moved on, as the population growth that means that the continent is unable to feed itself continues, while after the interlude of European immigration into Africa in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the previous exodus of Africans has resumed. Their emigration as economic migrants may not have taken the place of slaves as the continent's main export, but is nevertheless an ironic outcome of the food-producing revolution that first enabled the population to expand. In present circumstances, Oliver's 'realms of gold' may not seem the most appropriate epithet for the study of African history. Its continued growth has certainly not made the fortunes of its students, despite the emigration of so many of them, like Appiah and Falola, to the United States, which has in some measure offset the difficulties of working in Africa itself. But their continual attraction to the subject is evidence in itself of the way in which Africa itself has grown, not simply in terms of population and society but in the mind. If development on the ground is problematic, it is all the more important that such evolution should continue. The arrival of African history is not only a major feature of that evolution; its pursuit is a major contribution to its future. On that score, the title of Oliver's autobiography as a historian of Africa may stand for the success of the subject he has done so much to create.

VIII

In the present state of knowledge, what might then be the equally provisional conclusions of this survey of human activity on the continent over the past ten thousand years, according to the sources and the literature which have so recently combined to tell the tale? How this combination came about is a history in its own right of the way in which the idea of Africa has gradually been formulated over the centuries to become the subject of historical enquiry. Turning from the idea to the sources to the findings, what shape of the elephant have they made out? Of its outline we can say that as the sources divide into written and unwritten, they distinguish between prehistory and history as traditionally understood; but that as they combine to produce a record of events, they introduce a chronological division between the Holocene Wet and the Holocene Dry with the formation of the Sahara about five thousand years ago, and thereafter a division into Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern, one which corresponds to Hrbek's spatial division of the continent between contact and non-contact zones. This tripartite periodisation is echoed in the introductory essays to the *New Encyclopedia*, where the indigenous, the Islamic and the Western are variously singled out as the principal elements of the story. The character which their authors propose is that of a dialectical opposition between the native and the foreign, resulting in an ongoing synthesis which by its nature can never be finalised: a triangular progression that zigzags its way through time. The dialectic is not that of classical Marxism, which Hrbek considered inapplicable to such a non-European society, although Lovejoy comes close to proposing a slave mode

of production as an outcome of the Atlantic trade. Nor is it yet the dialectic of Fanon's neo-Marxism, although the scheme of resistance to imperialism leading to independence has the merit, for the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, of having been formulated by the actors as well as by the historians. But it runs from the archaeological approach of Connah through to the cultural approach of Appiah, as the tale of an African society continually coming to terms with external influences and forces.

By contrast, the necessity for Iliffe has been the need of that society to come to terms with Africa itself, that especially hostile region of the world whose colonisation by a growing number of people is the principal theme of his history. His perception of a unique population history at the heart of the African past would seem to be justified by the present population explosion. Its argument is certainly backed up by Hopkins in his economic history of West Africa, in which the constraints of the natural environment determined the character of the domestic or pre-modern economy, conditioning both its internal development and its response to external demand. His characterisation of the indigenous economy of a particular region to the south of the Sahara is generally applicable, and not only to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. Stretching across the desert to the stateless societies of North Africa which have made the same kind of living under the umbrella of the assorted empires erected over them, such an economy in such a land goes far to explain the historical difference between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, and why Africa, in Oliver's phrase, is one. But this inclusion of the Sahara with the lands to the south leaves out of account the formation of the desert as a hugely significant factor in African history. This return to desiccation after a period of some five thousand years put an end to the far more favourable environment that had coincided with the turn to herding and farming in what is now the arid zone of northern Africa and the Middle East, and with it the continuum of movement and settlement across this vast area in the Holocene Wet. Had the climate not changed in this way, the outcome would surely have been very different. As it was, the formation of the Sahara resulted in the remoteness of Africa from Europe and Asia over the past five thousand years, allowing the internal evolution of African society while spinning out across the millennia the growth of contact with the outside world.

That in turn has determined the approach to African history, itself a foreign concept whose formulation so late in the day is a consequence of that remoteness. It has arrived at the end of a slow transition from awareness on the part of the Classical world of a largely unknown, hot and forbidding region to the south, through the partial acquaintance of the Islamic world with the lands beyond the desert, to increasing European knowledge of the whole of the land mass under the name of Africa, only completed when most of the rest of the world had been explored. Starting from mainly external sources and the activities of outsiders on this continent, the subsequent attempt of its historians to perfect that knowledge with the recovery of its past has led of itself to the dialectical interplay of the internal versus the external as the increasingly dominant motif of a history culminating in a

clinch between the two. Such an approach to such an outcome distinguishes the history of Africa from that of Europe, whose historical development over the past millennium has been self-generated out of whatever original combination of internal factors and external influences there may have been, and from that of Asia, which may be a geographical but is only secondarily a historical unit after China, India, and the Middle East. It likewise distinguishes it from the history of the Americas and Australia, where the foreign element has largely taken over from the indigenous: the contrast is clear from the hope of the French in Algeria that the native population would simply vanish away like the Indians in the United States. The only qualification is that the subcontinent of India might claim a similarly dialectical history of successive invasions and conquests. Meanwhile in Africa itself, the preoccupation of Lord Hailey's *African Survey* with the need of colonial government south of the Sahara for information about the land and its peoples has passed into history as a tendency to regard sub-Saharan Africa in practice and sometimes in principle as the unit of study to the exclusion of the north, where the concept of Africa began in the Ancient world of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. But it is the southward progression of that concept which has led to the perception of the continent as a whole, and of its history as the source of its identity. With all its emerging themes, the writing of that history may indeed serve M'Bow's purpose of building the future on the knowledge of the past, and Hobsbawm's purpose of answering, impartially, the important questions of the present. But the history which it has revealed cannot escape from the long-term consequences of a climatic change which has, in the end, determined its shape. And if the dire consequences of global warming which are predicted for Africa turn out to be true, a second major climate change may well determine the future of a population that continues to grow and grow, its high birthrate bucking the limitation of family size in the rest of the world. A currently fashionable conclusion, maybe, but a moral for our time.



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Africa is a huge continent, as large as the more habitable areas of Europe and Asia put together. It has a history immensely long, yet the study of that history as an academic discipline in its own right is little more than fifty years old. Since then the subject has grown enormously, but the question of what this history is and how it has been approached still needs to be asked, not least to answer the question of why should we study it.

This book takes as its subject the last 10,000 years of African history, and traces the way in which human society on the continent has evolved from communities of hunters and gatherers to the complex populations of today. Approaching that history through its various dimensions: archaeological, ethnographic, written, scriptural, European and contemporary, it looks at how the history of such a vast region over such a length of time has been conceived and presented, and how it is to be investigated. The problem itself is historical, and an integral part of the history with which it is concerned, beginning with the changing awareness over the centuries of what Africa might be. Michael Brett thus traces the history of Africa not only on the ground, but also in the mind, in order to make his own historical contribution to the debate.

Michael Brett is Emeritus Reader in the History of North Africa at SOAS, London

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 JAMES CURREY

an imprint of Boydell & Brewer Ltd
PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF (GB) and
668 Mt Hope Ave, Rochester NY 14620-2731 (US)
www.boydellandbrewer.com
www.jamescurrey.com

ISBN 978-1-84701-063-6

