

emerging city. This is, therefore, also a study in social history, investigating the growth of a domestic category of architects and artisans.

Immaculately researched and presented – with no fewer than 133 illustrations – this book is essential reading for historians of Madagascar and a significant addition to the field of urban history.

STEPHEN ELLIS
Afrika Studiecentrum, Leiden

JOHN EDWARD PHILIPS (ed.), *Writing African History*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press (hb £45.00 – ISBN: 1 58046 164 6). 2005, 552 pp.

In 1854 the Royal Geographical Society of London published a set of instructive articles in their *Journal* collectively titled 'Hints to Travellers'. In the introduction, readers were warned that 'a few general remarks of an elementary nature would be superfluous to an individual of moderate attainments, while it could not possibly impart the necessary qualifications to one who had not other knowledge or experience of the subject'. Indeed all collections which intend to provide an overview of disciplinary methods should bear the same caveat. *Writing African History* is no exception. Compiling an impressive set of topics, Philips intends to help historians of Africa understand the types of sources available to them. These range from the fractured gleanings of archaeology and historical linguistics to the nebulous evidence of oral history; in between lie the varied findings of biology, anthropology, art history and 'traditional' research performed through reading written records. Historians regularly employ multiple strategies in their craft, though few would regularly use all those surveyed here.

Philips addresses the question 'What is African History?' in the first chapter (and the conclusion). His initial answer is apophthegmatic: 'History is not (necessarily) written by the winners'; 'History is not lies agreed on'; 'History is not bunk'; 'History is not just twenty-twenty hindsight' (pp. 26–8). It is unclear what the target is here. Philips is careful to distinguish between the events of the past and historiography, but at times this important distinction is overlooked in statements such as 'History involves development over time. The interest in change almost defines history' (p. 40). Events occur over time and our understanding of them changes with each generation, but which of these is 'history'? Although Philips wants to uncover the practice of 'African history', he is indeed discussing the universal issues of historiography, regardless of geographical limitation. And this is where we encounter difficulties. Throughout his writing here, he emphasizes that the essence of history is the identification of causes for historical change. Many historians will find difficulty with imposing this limitation on their practice. Historiography in its most fundamental sense is the exposition of the past and thus may or may not include the identification of causes for change. Indeed, many may find that the identification of past causes will never be free of presentist assumptions and thus deny causality as an essential theme in historiography. Jordanova's excellent study *History in Practice*, which is not cited here, avoids setting such essentials while providing a comprehensive overview of History and what historians do.

That said, some of the authors in this volume, especially in the second section on 'Sources of Data', prepare readers well for dealing with the problems and pitfalls of particular historical sources. Cooper's and Henige's chapters on oral sources are excellent introductions to further methodological studies in an area that historians of Africa can certainly claim to know best. The

chapters on physical anthropology and archaeology are similarly useful primers. Historians should at least know a little about how these disciplines make their knowledge. Hunwick discusses the possibilities that Arabic sources offer, while not underestimating the difficulties of access and linguistic challenges. Certainly much could be gained – and errors fixed – in our understandings of West African history through the consultation of Arabic texts lying untouched across Africa. The appendix he provides, which lists the contents of collections in Zanzibar, Khartoum, Timbuktu and Nigeria, is especially tantalizing. The chapters looking at European sources, colonial and mission documents and botanical ‘data’ are only fleeting glances at the types of evidence one may work with and not especially useful otherwise. Section three, titled ‘Perspectives on History’, contains nine chapters that look at particular issues in the history of Africa including social, art, economic and local histories; memory; gendered approaches and diaspora issues. Many of the difficulties of particular sources for the first sections are echoed here in further context. But again, these issues apply to all historical practice and thus are not specifically ‘African’ problems.

Overall, this collection will have varied appeal. It functions better as a reference volume where particular chapters are consulted than as a survey text for a course in historical methods or a general guide for researchers.

LAWRENCE DRITSAS
University of Edinburgh

TOYIN FALOLA (ed.), *Africa, Volume V: contemporary Africa*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press (pb \$50.00 – 0 89089 203 2). 2003, xxxiv + 962 pp.

This book is the fifth and last volume of an immense history of Africa. After the other two multi-volume histories, *The Cambridge History of Africa* and *The UNESCO General History of Africa* – the first sometimes considered ‘Eurocentric’ and the second, more ‘Afro-centric’ – the first question is where to place Falola’s collection? The answer may well be that it sits in the middle. The authors are all African but teach, except for two, in Western institutions. This reveals a desire on the part of Falola to describe a political, economic, social and cultural situation from an African viewpoint, but through analytical tools honed in the West.

Contemporary Africa offers an in-depth analysis of the fifty years of African independence, from 1960 until the end of the Cold War and the advent of the era of globalization. The task of editing works of this scope and size is never easy. The editor has successfully brought together many interdisciplinary strands. Not only have many aspects of internal and international politics been given attention, but space has also been given to the economic organization of independent Africa, as well as to the social and cultural interplay. The volume brings together experts in subjects ranging from politics and economics to history, sociology, musicology, cinematography and literature. Contributors seem to be divided between those in the ‘old’ camp and the ‘new’ camp. The contributors in the ‘old’ camp (including Nwauwa, Adejumo, Wariboko and Olowu) still think in terms of classical political issues, such as class struggle, poverty, power and progress. In this regard, they look to the duties of Africans (leaders and citizens) rather than to their rights, to overcome historical injustices. The contributors in the ‘new’ camp (including Mbaku, Adekunle, Vaughan and Otiso) prefer to concentrate on problems of sustainability, disease (such as the AIDS pandemic), and disrespect for human rights, while adopting

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