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Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore  
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## Medieval Africa, 1250–1800

This is a radically revised and updated edition of *The African Middle Ages 1400–1800* (first published in 1981), a companion volume to the authors' well-known *Africa since 1800* (now in its fourth edition). Although this volume follows the overall plan of the original, the story now begins 150 years earlier, and takes into account the wealth of supportive literature in African historical studies over the last twenty years. The earlier starting date has enabled the authors to look at the entire continent from a more distinctly African viewpoint. By about 1250 AD African societies were greatly expanding their political and economic scope. Islam was spreading south across the Sahara from Mediterranean Africa, and down the Indian Ocean coast. *Medieval Africa* continues into the period of European contacts from the fourteenth century onwards, with much, but not exclusive, emphasis on the growth of the trans-Saharan, Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trade. The book stresses the strengths, while not overlooking the weaknesses, of African societies as the eighteenth century drew to a close. This volume will be an essential introduction to African history for students, as well as for the general reader. It is illustrated with a wealth of maps.

ROLAND OLIVER is Professor Emeritus of African History at the University of London, and member of the British Academy. He has published widely on African history, including *A Short History of Africa* (1962, translated into 14 languages, 6 revised editions), *The African Experience* (1990, revised 1999) and *In the Realms of Gold* (1997).

ANTHONY ATMORE has taught African history in both the UK and Africa. He is the co-author of the companion to this volume, *Africa since 1800* (with Roland Oliver, 4 editions since 1967).

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ANTHONY ATMORE



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## Preface

This book has emerged in response to an invitation by Cambridge University Press to prepare a Revised Edition of *The African Middle Ages 1400–1800* published by them in 1981. We felt that after so long an interval the degree of revision needed to be radical and that this might be best achieved by setting an earlier starting date for the work as a whole. On the one hand this would enable us to look at the entire continent from a more distinctively African viewpoint, free from the bias inevitably imparted by the reliance from the outset on European written sources. On the other hand it would ensure that each of our regional chapters, the strongest no less than the weakest, would have to be redesigned to accommodate the new angle of approach. For the rest, we have divided our treatment of Mediterranean Africa into three chapters rather than two, and we have added a completely new chapter on the least known region of the continent, which is that lying at its geographical centre to the north of the Congo basin. Thus, while we have reused many passages from the earlier work, so much of the writing is new that we feel it right to give it a different title.

Like its predecessor, *Medieval Africa, 1250–1800* should be seen as a companion volume to our earlier book, *Africa since 1800*, now in its Fourth Revised Edition and still in wide demand. We hope that, in its new form, it may serve to encourage more teachers and students to explore the pre-modern history of Africa, which has so much of real interest to teach us about how small societies faced the challenges of very diverse, and often hostile, environments and yet managed to interact sufficiently to create significant areas of common speech and culture, to share ideas and technological innovations, and to meet the outside world with confidence at most times earlier than the mid-nineteenth century.

