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Edited by John E. Flint

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THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF AFRICA

General Editors: J. D. FAGE and ROLAND OLIVER

Volume 5
from c. 1790 to c. 1870

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CONTENTS

<i>Maps</i>	<i>page</i> xi
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
Introduction by JOHN E. FLINT, <i>Professor of History, Dalhousie University</i>	1
1 Egypt and the Nile valley by P. M. HOLT, <i>Professor of the History of the Near and Middle East, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London</i>	13
Egypt and the Nile valley in the late eighteenth century	13
The French occupation and the period of anarchy, 1798–1805	15
The rule of Muḥammad ‘Alī, 1805–48	22
The reigns of ‘Abbās I and Sa‘id, 1848–62	33
The reign of Ismā‘il, 1863–79	39
2 Ethiopia and the Horn by SVEN RUBENSON, <i>Professor of History, Addis Ababa University</i>	51
Ethnic, religious and political divisions, c. 1800	51
The closing decades of the <i>Zamana Mesafent</i>	57
The reign of Tewodros	71
The interregnum of 1868–71	81
Galla states and coastal sultanates, 1820–75	83
The conflict with Egypt	89

CONTENTS

3	The Maghrib	99
	by DOUGLAS JOHNSON, <i>Professor of French History, University College, University of London</i>	
	Political, social and economic conditions before 1830	99
	The initial French occupation of Algiers, 1830–4	104
	Reaction of the Algerian population, French conquest to 1848	107
	French administration, 1848–70	113
	The revolt of 1871	117
	Tunisia 1830–70	120
	Morocco 1830–73	122
	Tripoli 1830–70	123
4	The nineteenth-century jihads in West Africa	125
	by M. HISKETT, <i>Lecturer in Hausa Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London</i>	
	The Islamic world in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries	125
	Early endeavours towards Islamic reform in the western Sudan	128
	The jihad in Hausaland	131
	The ideological, social and political background to the jihad	135
	The campaigns of the jihad	140
	Relations between the jihadists and al-Kanami of Bornu	142
	The theology and law of the Fulani reformers	144
	The results of the Fulani reform movement in Hausaland	149
	The jihad of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abi Bakr b. Sa‘id in Masina	151
	The jihad of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar b. Sa‘id b. ‘Uthmān al-Fūtī al-Tijānī	155
	The pilgrimage of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar	155
	The jihad of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar	157
	The theology of al-Ḥājj ‘Umar	161
	‘Umar’s relations with the French	164
	Conclusions	165

CONTENTS

5	Freed slave colonies in West Africa	170
	by CHRISTOPHER FYFE, <i>Reader in History, University of Edinburgh</i>	
	The founding of the Sierra Leone colony	171
	The suppression of the slave trade	179
	Sierra Leone and the liberated Africans	181
	The Gambia	184
	Trade in vegetable produce	185
	Social change and the Creole diaspora	186
	Liberia	189
	Libreville	197
	Conclusion	199
6	West Africa in the anti-slave trade era	200
	by J. F. ADE AJAYI, <i>Vice-Chancellor, University of Lagos</i> and B. O. OLORUNTIMOHIN, <i>Professor of History, University of Ife</i>	
	The Islamic advance	202
	European coastal enclaves	205
	Attack on the slave trade	207
	Legitimate trade and domestic slavery	210
	The missionary impact	215
	Imperial expansion and abolition	217
	Conclusion	221
7	The forest and the savanna of Central Africa	222
	by DAVID BIRMINGHAM, <i>Lecturer in the History of Africa, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London</i>	
	Regional divisions	222
	The Lunda empire	223
	South-western Angola	230
	South-central Angola	232
	The Lozi	233
	The Ovimbundu kingdoms	235
	The Chokwe	236
	Northern Angola and Luanda	238
	Southern Central Africa	241
	The Luba empire	249
	Northern Central Africa	254
	Conclusions	267

CONTENTS

8 East Africa: the expansion of commerce	270
by A. C. UNOMAH, <i>Lecturer in History, University of Ibadan</i> and J. B. WEBSTER, <i>Professor of History, Dalhousie University</i>	
Muslim settlements on the coast	270
Sayyid Sa'Id	273
Swahili–Arab trade routes: inland penetration and its effects	276
Expansion of African trading activity	284
The interlacustrine area	289
Agricultural changes	296
Social changes and the slave trade	298
The political impact of the coastmen	306
9 The Nguni outburst	319
by J. D. OMER-COOPER, <i>Professor of History, University of Otago</i>	
The African peoples of South Africa, c. 1800	319
The beginning of state building	321
The Nguni kingdoms	322
Shaka and the Zulu nation	326
Consequences in Natal	335
Consequences on the high veld	338
Moshoeshe and the Sotho	339
The Kololo	341
The Ndebele kingdom	343
Shoshangane and the Gaza kingdom	349
Nguni states in the far north	350
Conclusions	350
10 Colonial South Africa and its frontiers	353
by J. D. OMER-COOPER	
White expansion and the British occupations	353
The Great Trek	367
The Boers in Natal	370
British Natal	373
British forward moves: Kaffraria and Transorangia	375
Balkanization of the white communities	382
The Transvaal	386
Basutoland and its annexation, 1865–71	390
Diamond discoveries and the end of an era	392

CONTENTS

11	Tradition and change in Madagascar, 1790–1870	393
	by HUBERT DESCHAMPS, <i>formerly Professor of African History in the University of Paris</i> , translated by YVONNE BRET	
	Malagasy social and political structure	393
	European involvement	397
	Nampoina and Radama I: the beginnings of unity	399
	Ranavalona I: a return to tradition	407
	Reforms under Rainilaiarivony	412
	Foreign and missionary influences	416
12	Africans overseas, 1790–1870	418
	by JOHN E. FLINT and I. GEISS, <i>Professor of African History, University of Bremen</i>	
	The erosion of slavery	418
	Africans in Asia and Europe	421
	Africans in South America	422
	Africans in the Caribbean	430
	Africans in the United States of America	440
13	Changing European attitudes to Africa	458
	by ROBIN HALLETT, <i>Senior Lecturer in History, University of Cape Town</i>	
	The European presence in Africa	458
	Curiosity, scholarship and romance	468
	Theories of race and culture: ‘the Negro’s place in nature’	472
	Reactions to Islam	482
	The ‘neglected estate’: European attitudes to the natural resources of Africa	485
	‘Civilizing missions’	488
	Strategic considerations: the imperial view of Africa	492
	<i>Bibliographical essays</i>	497
	<i>Bibliography</i>	539
	<i>Index</i>	581

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[More information](#)

MAPS

1	Egypt and the Nile valley	<i>page</i> 12
2	Ethiopia and the Horn in the early nineteenth century	52–3
3	Ethiopia in the <i>Zamana Mesafent</i>	59
4	Galla kingdoms	84
5	The Ethio-Egyptian conflict	90–1
6	The Maghrib	100
7	West Africa c. 1865	127
8	West Africa in the nineteenth century	172–3
9	Central Africa	224–5
10	East Africa	281
11	Bunyoro and her neighbours: late eighteenth to mid-nineteenth centuries	293
12	Approximate directions of main movements in the <i>Mfecane</i> in southern Africa	320
13	Colonial South Africa and its frontiers	354
14	Madagascar in the eighteenth century	395
15	Merina expansion	401

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

In the English-speaking world, the Cambridge histories have since the beginning of the century set the pattern for multi-volume works of history, with chapters written by experts on a particular topic, and unified by the guiding hand of volume editors of senior standing. *The Cambridge Modern History*, planned by Lord Acton, appeared in sixteen volumes between 1902 and 1912. It was followed by *The Cambridge Ancient History*, *The Cambridge Medieval History*, *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, and Cambridge Histories of India, of Poland, and of the British Empire. The original *Modern History* has now been replaced by *The New Cambridge Modern History* in twelve volumes, and *The Cambridge Economic History of Europe* is now being completed. Other Cambridge Histories recently undertaken include a history of Islam, of Arabic literature, of the Bible treated as a central document of and influence on Western civilization, and of Iran and China.

It was during the later 1950s that the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press first began to explore the possibility of embarking on a Cambridge History of Africa. But they were then advised that the time was not yet ripe. The serious appraisal of the past of Africa by historians and archaeologists had hardly been undertaken before 1948, the year when universities first began to appear in increasing numbers in the vast reach of the African continent south of the Sahara and north of the Limpopo, and the time too when universities outside Africa first began to take some notice of its history. It was impressed upon the Syndics that the most urgent need of such a young, but also very rapidly advancing branch of historical studies, was a journal of international standing through which the results of ongoing research might be disseminated. In 1960, therefore, the Cambridge University Press launched *The Journal of African History*, which gradually demonstrated the amount of work being undertaken to establish the past of Africa as an integrated whole rather than – as it had usually been viewed before – as the story of a series of incursions into the continent by peoples coming from outside, from the Mediterranean basin, the Near East or western Europe. This movement will of course continue and develop further, but the increasing facilities available for its publication soon began to demonstrate a need to assess both what had been done, and

PREFACE

what still needed to be done, in the light of some general historical perspective for the continent.

The Syndics therefore returned to their original charge, and in 1966 the founding editors of *The Journal of African History* accepted a commission to become the general editors of a *Cambridge History of Africa*. They found it a daunting task to draw up a plan for a co-operative work covering a history which was in active process of exploration by scholars of many nations, scattered over a fair part of the globe, and of many disciplines – linguists, anthropologists, geographers and botanists, for example, as well as historians and archaeologists.

It was thought that the greatest problems were likely to arise with the earliest and latest periods: the earliest, because so much would depend on the results of long-term archaeological investigation, and the latest, because of the rapid changes in historical perspective that were occurring as a consequence of the ending of colonial rule in Africa. Initially, therefore, only five volumes were planned, of which the first, Africa before c. 500 BC, based entirely upon archaeological sources (and edited by an archaeologist), would be the last to appear, while of the others – dealing with the periods of approximately 500 BC to AD 1050, 1050–1600, 1600–1790, and 1790–1870 – it was expected that they would appear in an order inverse to their chronology. In the event, Professor Flint's volume 5 was overtaken by Professor Gray's volume 4, but there is every likelihood that volumes 3, 2 and 1 will appear in that order. The General Editors decreed that only after these volumes were well under way would an attempt be made to plan for the period after c. 1875. Nine years later, it can be said that three further volumes have been planned, and that it is hoped that these will appear at regular intervals following the publication of volume 1.

When they started their work, the general editors quickly came to the conclusion that the most practicable plan for getting out the first five volumes within a reasonable period of time was likely to be the simplest and most straightforward. The direction of each volume was therefore entrusted to a volume editor who, in addition to having made a substantial contribution to the understanding of the period in question, was a man with whom the general editors were in close touch. Within a volume, the aim was to keep the number of contributors to a minimum. Each of them was asked to essay a broad survey of a particular area or theme with which he was familiar for the whole of the period covered by the volume. In this survey, his purpose should be to take account not only of all relevant research done, or still in progress, but also of

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the gaps in knowledge. These he should try to fill by new thinking of his own, whether based on new work on the available sources or on interpolations from congruent research.

It should be remembered that the plan for these first five volumes was drawn up nearly a decade ago, when little or no research had been done on many important topics, and before many of today's younger scholars – not least those who now fill posts in the departments of history and archaeology in the universities and research institutes in Africa itself – had made their own deep penetrations into such areas of ignorance. Two things follow from this. If the general editors had drawn up their plan in the 1970s rather than the 1960s, the shape might well have been very different, perhaps with a larger number of more specialized, shorter chapters, each centred on a smaller area, period or theme, to the understanding of which the contributor would have made his own individual contribution. Indeed, the last three volumes seem likely to be composed more on such lines. Secondly, the sheer volume of new research that has been published since the contributors for the first five volumes accepted their commissions has often led them to undertake very substantial revisions in their work as it progressed from draft to draft, thus protracting the length of time originally envisaged for the preparation of these volumes.

But histories are meant to be read, and not simply to be continually rewritten and modified by their authors and editors. Volume 5 of *The Cambridge History of Africa* now joins volume 4 for public use and appraisal, together with the promise that six further volumes will follow at more or less regular intervals.

J. D. FAGE
ROLAND OLIVER

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