THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY
OF AFRICA

General Editors: J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver

Volume 7

from 1905 to 1940
THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF AFRICA

1 From the earliest times to c. 500 B.C.  
edited by J. Desmond Clark

2 From c. 500 B.C. to A.D. 1050  
edited by J. D. Fage

3 From c. 1050 to c. 1600  
edited by Roland Oliver

4 From c. 1600 to c. 1790  
edited by Richard Gray

5 From c. 1790 to c. 1870  
edited by John Flint

6 From 1870 to 1905  
edited by Roland Oliver and G. N. Sanderson

7 From 1905 to 1940  
edited by A. D. Roberts

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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 The original Modern History has now been replaced by The New Cambridge Modern History in fourteen volumes. The Cambridge Economic History of Europe and The Cambridge Economic History of India are complete. 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 civilisation, and of Iran, China and Latin America.

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
PREFACE

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 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. Therefore when, in 1967, the general editors presented their scheme to the Press and notes were prepared for contributors, only four volumes – covering the periods 500 B.C. to A.D. 1050, A.D. 1050 to 1600, 1600–1790, and 1790–1870 – had been planned in any detail, and these were published as volumes 2–5 of the History between 1975 and 1978.

So far as the prehistoric period was concerned, the general editors were clear from the outset that the proper course was to entrust the planning as well as the actual editing of what was necessary entirely to a scholar who was fully experienced in the archaeology of the African continent. In due course, in 1982, Volume 1, ‘From the earliest times to c. 500 B.C.’, appeared under the distinguished editorship of Professor J. Desmond Clark. As for the colonial period, it was evident by the early 1970s that this was being rapidly brought to its close, so that it became possible to plan to complete the History in three further volumes. The first, Volume 6, is designed to cover the European partition of the
continent, and the setting up of the colonial structures between c. 1870 and c. 1905; the second, Volume 7, is devoted to the ‘classical’ colonial period running from c. 1905 to c. 1940; while the focus of the third, Volume 8, is on the period of rapid change which led from about the time of the Second World War to the ending of formal control from Europe with the dramatic final collapse of the Portuguese empire in 1975.

When they started their work, the general editors quickly came to the conclusion that the most practical plan for completing the History within a reasonable period of time was likely to be the simplest and most straightforward. 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 someone 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 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 this basic plan was devised nearly twenty years 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 specialised, 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. To some extent, indeed, it has been possible to adjust the shape of the last three volumes in this direction. Secondly, the sheer volume of new research that has been published since many contributors accepted their commissions has often led them to undertake very substantial revisions in their
PREFACE

work as it progressed from draft to draft, thus protracting the length of time originally envisaged for the preparation of these volumes.

However, histories are meant to be read, and not to be commented on and analysed by their general editors, and we therefore present to the reader this further volume of our enterprise.

March 1985

J. D. FAGE

ROLAND OLIVER
A NOTE ON MONEY VALUES

The years between 1905 and 1940 witnessed great fluctuations in the value of the chief currencies used in Africa: the pound sterling, the French franc, the Belgian franc, the Italian lira and the Portuguese escudo. It is essential to bear this in mind when considering references in this volume to money values.

Fig. 1 compares some relevant fluctuations in wholesale prices. Official British and French wholesale price indices indicate the following changes in the purchasing power of the pound sterling and the French franc, expressed as a percentage of purchasing power in 1914:

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The main disruption was caused by the First World War. In both countries, prices rose steeply up to 1920. By 1922 British prices had fallen sharply and continued to fall, more slowly, until 1933, when they began to rise again. These movements are reflected in evidence from African countries within the sterling area. Movements in the prices of imports in the Gold Coast correspond closely to movements in wholesale prices in Egypt and South Africa. (Indices of consumer prices are available for the latter two countries and show a more moderate degree of inflation.) The French franc was more volatile. Wartime and post-war inflation was steeper than in Britain, and though prices briefly subsided after 1920 they rose to new peaks in the late 1920s; they then began to fall, but the Popular Front government initiated a new inflationary phase. After 1923 the French franc was worth less than a third, and usually less than a fifth, of the pre-war franc.
A NOTE ON MONEY VALUES

Unfortunately, the earliest available price indices from French Africa (for Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco and Madagascar) date only from 1938–9. The Belgian franc moved broadly in line with the French franc; in 1927–31 the Belgian franc was worth one-seventh of its 1914 value in terms of wholesale prices. (This pattern was reflected in similar, but still more pronounced, trends in import prices in the Belgian Congo.) A similar pattern is apparent for Italy, where in terms of wholesale prices the lira throughout the 1920s was worth less than a quarter of its 1914 value; by 1933 it had risen to one-third but by 1937 had fallen again to a quarter.

The value of the Portuguese escudo, introduced in 1910, changed dramatically in our period. In terms of the pound sterling, it was by 1924 worth only about 3½ per cent of its original value. A cost-of-living index for Luanda, Angola, suggests that in terms of its purchasing power there in 1914 the escudo was worth only 1½ per cent by 1920 and a mere 2½ per cent by 1924. By 1930 it was worth about 4 per cent and remained at around this value for the rest of the decade.

In the decade ending in 1914 the pound sterling was usually worth about 25 French or Belgian francs or Italian lire, 20 German marks and 5 US dollars. Before the pound was decimalised in 1971, it comprised twenty shillings, and there were twelve pennies in a shilling; thus fractions of the pound are cited in this volume in the form 3s. 4d.

Sources for Note and Fig. 1:
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editor gratefully acknowledges the work of Mrs Marion Johnson in compiling the index, and of Mr Reginald Piggott in preparing final versions of the maps.