

*Madagascar Rediscovered.* By MERVYN BROWN. London: Damien Tunnacliffe, 1978. Pp. x + 310. £7.95.

The Victorians were very interested in Madagascar. They were attracted mainly by the apparent success of British missionaries working in the kingdom of Imerina. British scholars, most of them connected with the London Missionary Society, wrote extensively on every aspect of the island and its history.

Since Madagascar's annexation by France in 1895, the English-speaking world has largely ignored this rich historical heritage. Mervyn Brown, a diplomat by profession, has set out to help rectify this neglect. In many respects he continues the best Victorian tradition of amateur scholarship, with its attendant merits and a few of its weaknesses. His purpose, he writes, is to rediscover the history of Madagascar 'mainly but by no means exclusively through British eyes.' This he attempts to do in a series of chapters which are accurate and highly readable, but which do not really amount to a history of Madagascar. Half the book is devoted to the history of Imerina from about 1650 to 1895. There are also chapters on the geography of Madagascar; on the European pirates who once infested the island's coasts; and on the Robinson Crusoe-like adventures of Robert Drury. Each of these chapters makes very good reading. Their inclusion, though, leaves little space for discussion of the history of Madagascar outside Imerina.

The book inevitably invites comparison with Hubert Deschamps' *Histoire de Madagascar*. Unlike Professor Deschamps, Mr Brown succumbs to the temptation to tell the story of those peoples and periods which are served by rich source-material. He is therefore unable to challenge Deschamps as the author of the best general history of the subject, at least for those who are able to read French. On the other hand, Mr Brown has some notable successes in summarizing complex arguments. His account of the rise of the Merina kingdom, for example, is admirably clear.

The book has very few mistakes apart from the usual quota of printing errors. It is a pity that the author's bibliography does not include any of the extensive literature in Malagasy, especially as we are told in the foreword that he speaks the language well. Specialists will find nothing new in the book, although the chapters on the church and the British missionaries constitute the best single account of that subject. The book is aimed at a wide readership, which it deserves.

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### HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TIDES IN EAST AFRICA

*Clan Leaders and Colonial Chiefs in Lango: The Political History of an East African Stateless Society, c. 1800-1939.* By JOHN TOSH. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978. Pp. xvi + 293. £11.50.

Dr Tosh's work on Lango will already be well known to readers of this journal. This book is a revised version of his doctoral thesis for the University of London, approved in 1973. It is a piece of exceptionally careful research and elegant writing. Tosh fortunately worked in Lango in 1969, before events which must have been as disastrous for historical memories and traditions as for everything else in the area. From oral and written sources he has produced what is probably the best account yet available of a stateless people's response to European conquest. The five-year interval before publication have made history-writing about stateless peoples slightly less original than it was in 1973, but the book's great strength is to see the Langi as forming not merely a stateless society but a particular *kind* of stateless society. Not only does this permit greater precision of analysis, but it opens very interesting lines of comparison with the experience of other stateless peoples during the same period. One must hope that Tosh will undertake a full-scale comparison of this kind.