



**Les incertitudes du colonialisme: Jean Carol a Madagascar**

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*A Social History of Ethiopia*. By RICHARD PANKHURST. Addis Ababa: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University; Kings Ripton, England: ELM Publications, 1990. Pp. xii + 371. £14.95, paperback.

This book does not meet the standards of scholarship normally expected of books by reviewers in this *Journal*. It is a compilation, culled primarily from foreign sources, and organized by 'scissors-and-paste'. It embodies no hypothesis and suggests no new directions for scholarship. It ignores over two decades of contribution to Ethiopianist research and ought not to have been published.

It is disappointing that the good name of Addis Ababa University appears as an imprimatur to this work, which, presumably, drew on its personnel and financial resources. It is particularly unacceptable that a work bearing this title should, in 1990, be based essentially on European sources. To be sure there are passing nods to the Ethiopian chronicles and to marginalia pertaining to land transfers, but the typical use of indigenous documents is anecdotal within a framework derived relentlessly from external observers and an agenda set by antiquarian concerns.

Those who had hoped that the book's title indicated a new departure in subject matter and methodology on the part of the author will be disappointed. *A Social History* stands in direct line with a long list of compendia running back to Pankhurst's *Introduction to the Economic History of Ethiopia* (London, 1961). Large gobbets of material from such favored sources as James Bruce, Mansfield Parkyns and Walter Plowden, occasionally re-arranged, are carried forward from Pankhurst's earlier works ostensibly dedicated to the economy (*Economic History of Ethiopia 1800-1935* [Addis Ababa, 1960]) and towns (*History of Ethiopian Towns from the Mid-Nineteenth Century to 1935* [Stuttgart, 1985]), here to inform us about 'society'. Favored hobby horses like currency and firearms are ridden again but continue to reach no destination.

This is *bad* history. It abdicates criticism. While it claims to eschew judgment, it trades in European prejudice and half-insight, and does nothing to resolve the contradictions contained within and between the sources on which it draws. Thirty years of scholarship should add up to more than this. Serious debates are underway. There is a desperate need both within Ethiopia and the world outside it for informed contributions to an understanding of the country's past. Better to say nothing than so ostentatiously to refuse to join the debate or to offer guidance.

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*Les incertitudes du colonialisme: Jean Carol à Madagascar*. Edited by YVAN-GEORGES PAILLARD. Paris: Editions L'Harmattan, 1990. Pp. 237. 130 FF.

The republication of old works on Africa is generally to be welcomed, but this is perhaps not the best choice of classics on nineteenth-century Madagascar. Jean Carol was the pen-name of Gabriel Laffaille, a man of letters who became the private secretary to Hippolyte Laroche, the first resident-general of Madagascar after the island's invasion by French troops in 1895. Laffaille was one of several of Laroche's intimates swept aside after the arrival of General Gallieni in September 1896. His book *Au pays rouge (Chez les Hova)* was compiled from a series of newspaper articles he wrote on Madagascar in 1897.

Yvan-Georges Paillard, an expert on the early history of the French colonization of Madagascar at the University of Provence, has edited Laffaille/Carol's original text with erudition and sensitivity. He appears to see the main interest of the work in its expression of a more discerning attitude towards the colonization of Africa than was usual in writers of the period. Hence the title of the new edition, 'The Uncertainties of Colonialism'. But Laffaille/Carol's observations on French

colonialism in Madagascar, while pertinent, are hardly of such importance as to claim that he is a major figure of French anti-colonialism who has been unjustly forgotten. Besides, as Paillard points out, he was not against colonialism as such, only the manner in which it was carried out. Like many of Laroche's staff, he resented the ruthlessness with which Gallieni and the military men carried out their task in the Great Red Island.

Laffaille/Carol's original book has never been an important source of first-hand information for students of Malagasy anthropology or history, unlike some works by foreign travellers, missionaries and administrators. His main first-hand observations concern court life in the last days of the Merina monarchy, and he is an important witness to the intrigues which preceded Queen Ranaivalona's de-thronement. But these occupy rather few pages of a book mostly concerned with late nineteenth-century reflections on society.

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*Bismarck, Europe and Africa: The Berlin Africa Conference, 1884-1885, and the Onset of Partition.* Edited by STIG FORSTER, WOLFGANG MOMMSEN and RONALD ROBINSON. London: Oxford University Press, for the German Historical Institute, 1988. Pp. xviii + 569. £55.

This weighty volume is the product of a conference held to mark the centenary of the Berlin Conference of 1884-5. The book contains thirty chapters divided into four main parts: European interests in Africa; the origins of the conference; the issues at the conference; and African reactions to imperial invasion. In addition, Ronald Robinson contributes a substantial introductory chapter, while Wesseling and Uzoigwe make heroic attempts to reach general, though in the event, differing conclusions. As the size of the book suggests, the authors have carried out a successful partition of their own: diplomatic, economic, ideological and legal aspects of the Conference are covered, as are the national interests of Germany, Britain, France, Belgium, Portugal and the United States.

Since the standard work on the Berlin Conference remains S. E. Crowe's study, published in 1942, the editors had good reason to suppose that the centenary ought not to pass without serious scholarly review. Moreover, as the second half of the title suggests, a number of contributors follow scents which take them beyond the Conference itself and into the antecedents and consequences of partition. If one result is a loss of focus on the main subject, another is the presence of studies which must be referred to in future by specialists on the scramble for Africa. Not surprisingly, the contributors differ on the question of the exact significance of the Conference, but there is general agreement (the main exception being Uzoigwe) that it did not cause partition and that Crowe was broadly correct in minimizing its influence. It is worth noting, too, that these studies lend little support to the view that Britain's power was failing in the 1880s: her main interests, including Egypt, remained untouched, and the principle of free trade was accepted. One of the refreshing qualities of this volume, however, is that it sees the problem from international as well as from national perspectives. This is particularly appropriate, given that one of the chief aims of the Conference was to co-ordinate access to Africa. There is no space here to consider individual contributions, which vary in length and depth, but a good number are substantial and original essays: historians of late nineteenth-century imperialism are advised to consult this volume and make their own selections.

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