

CORRESPONDENCE

Please note an editor's error in the 1977 *Review of Books*, on p. 2, lines 32-33, in the review by Elizabeth Widenmann of Hans Panofsky's *A Bibliography of Africana*. Rather than "... the African section of the Library of Congress; and Libraries Committee office in Nairobi...", the passage should read "... The African Section of the Library of Congress, and the Library of Congress' Office in Nairobi..."

We have received the following letter to the editor (Oct., 1977):

Dear Sir,

The slight made on Rhodesian archivists, historians and archaeologists on the part of M.E. Page ("The Recent Political History of South Central Africa," *ASA Review of Books*, 1977, p. 155 ff.) cannot be allowed to go unchallenged. According to Page, white Rhodesians are reluctant, for racial reasons, to recognize the African origins of Zimbabwe. Their skepticism has allegedly turned into unwillingness even to consider such a proposition. "Officially," the writer continues, "professional archivists and historians working for the Rhodesian government are not permitted to express the view that Great Zimbabwe was built by Africans."

I have before me the official *Guide to the Historic and Pre-Historic Monuments of Rhodesia* (Bulawayo, Historical Monuments Commission, 1972), printed by the government for popular consumption. The *Guide* states right in the beginning "Many fanciful theories have been expounded as to their origin [of the Zimbabwe ruins], and the people who built them. With modern techniques, it has been possible to obtain accurate data, but the actual people or tribe responsible for the building is still unknown. All archaeologists agree that the whole complex is of African origin."

My own book, *A History of Southern Rhodesia*... (London, Chatto and Windus, 1964), written while I was a government archivist in Rhodesia, never questioned the African origins of Rhodesia. I was never subjected to any official censure and I would certainly not have continued in my employment had I been subjected to such interference.

Page cites P.S. Garlake, an archaeologist who having left Rhodesia, claimed that the Rhodesian government aimed at suppressing historical evidence. Unfortunately, for Garlake's claim to academic martyrdom, his article "Dating the Ruins" was in fact included in a popular guide published under official Rhodesian auspices (*Guide to Zimbabwe Ruins*..., Bulawayo, Commission for the Preservation of Natural and Historical Monuments, 1972 reprint, p. 40-52). This *Guide*, of course, also concludes (p. 54) that "Extensive excavation started by D. Maciver in 1902 and carried on at intervals ever since has failed to produce any evidence for anything but an African origin for the whole complex of ruins."

The Zimbabwe complex is of African origin. But its historical and archaeological re-evaluation mainly derives from European scholarship. This scholarship seeped into popular African consciousness through official guidebooks, popular articles, and text books. No historian should be surprised by this. It recalls the popularization of Gods by German romantics during the nineteenth century, or the

popularization of Highland kilts, tartans and other Highland accoutrements among Scottish Lowlanders by Scottish romantics in the nineteenth century. It is the historian's job to understand such cults and their origins—not to take them at their face value.

Sincerely,
L.H. Gann
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Reply to comments by Professor Lewis Gann:

In his own defense, Professor Gann misses the central point: Zimbabwe's origins, in Rhodesia, must remain a "mystery." Following the reference to African origins which Gann cites, the official *Guide* to the ruins continues (in a passage Gann fails to mention) by saying, to each visitor, "Your theories are your own whether they support the Queen of Sheba, Habbakuk, the Persians, or simply an indigenous people . . . Perhaps some of you may believe in the findings of the professional investigator." (p. 56)

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