

OBITUARIES

Professor W. M. Macmillan

We announce with regret the death of Professor W. M. Macmillan, an Honorary Member of the Association, in October 1974. An obituary will appear in the next issue.

An autobiography, 'My South African Years' has just been published in Cape Town by David Philip, and will shortly be published in this country by Rex Collings.

Professor Max Gluckman

We announce with regret the death on 13th April 1975 in Jerusalem of Professor Max Gluckman of the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester. An obituary will appear in the next issue.

COOPERATIVE MULTI-VOLUME HISTORIES OF AFRICA

By J. D. Fage

The UNESCO project for a General History of Africa has been around for some time now. It was launched in 1964 by a resolution of the General Conference of UNESCO, and was essentially a consequence of the accession to the United Nations and to UNESCO of the large number of new African states which secured their independence in the early 1960s. These felt, rightly, that Africa had too long been 'the dark continent' of world history, and that it was high time that the history of its peoples and cultures was placed on the same level of public record as that of the other continents.

The first positive step taken by UNESCO was to call a 'meeting of experts' at Abidjan in 1966. This seems to have taken the line that the first thing to be done if the history of Africa were to be written on a major scale was to provide support for research into it. In particular steps were taken to support the collection and preservation in Africa of basic historical sources, oral traditions as well as manuscripts, and to ensure the publication of at least the more important of these sources and of guides to them. With this in view, UNESCO went on to sponsor (and indeed is still sponsoring) a number of other international colloquia at a variety of African venues to consider more specialised or more local problems, such as the preservation of oral traditions, the history of particular regions of Africa, the deciphering of the ancient Meriote script, or the historical interrelationship between the East African coastlands and other Indian Ocean territories.

In one sense, there was nothing particularly novel in all this. For example, regular four-yearly Pan-African Congresses on Prehistory have been held at various African centres ever since Dr. Louis Leaky had organised the first at Nairobi in 1947. The first international gathering to deal specifically with history as well as archaeology in Africa that is known to the present writer was that held on the initiative of Dr. (now Professor) Roland Oliver at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London in 1953. This was followed by two more conferences, also in London, in 1957 and 1961. The series was then discontinued, essentially because the meetings were attracting so many papers and participants that it was becoming impossible to continue with meaningful seminar-type discussions of the kind envisaged. It had however served as the launching pad for the *Journal of African History*, published by the Cambridge University Press from 1960 onwards, as a forum for the publication of articles on all aspects of African history and of iron-age archaeology (and this has since been followed by a number of other general journals of African history with international circulations).

This growing activity (as also the institution of an African section in the long-established international Congress of Orientalists, which in 1962 gave birth to the International Congress of Africanists—in both of which history has played a major part) derived essentially from the fact that, in the late 1940s, African began to emerge from the colonial cocoon in which it had been bound since the later nineteenth century. The western world began at last to consider the economic and political needs of African peoples in the modern world, and so to give some attention to what Africans had once done for and by themselves. It was about this time that African history began to make a tentative appearance alongside the older-established concept of imperial or colonial history in universities in Europe and America. More importantly, from 1948 onwards, the colonial powers began to set up universities in their African colonies, and almost all of these gave a high priority to the teaching of history and so, almost inevitably, to research into the history of the continent in which they were situated.

Thus when UNESCO became interested in African history, there was already a considerable corpus of professional historians devoted to its study. Many European, quite a few American, and even some Asian scholars had been attracted to launch the history departments in African universities, and by the mid-1960s these were returning to the universities in their own lands, leaving the departments in Africa to be staffed