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[Documents From The African Past Robert O. Collins](#)

historiography of the Sudan would have been far greater if he had written a memoir about his service in the Sudan from that deep well of his long experience rather than attempt to interpret current Sudanese history through the glasses of his imperial past.

ROBERT O. COLLINS

ANTHONY SILLERY: *Founding a protectorate: history of Bechuanaland, 1885-1895*. (Studies in African History, Anthropology, and Ethnology, III.) 267 pp., map. The Hague, etc.: Mouton and Co., 1965. Guilders 28.

Three themes run through this new book by an author who is already an authority on Bechuanaland. The first is external: the role of the territory in the partition of Africa. The significance of the area—the road to the north, thinly wedged between the Kalahari and the Transvaal—is well known, and Dr. Sillery adds little that will change the standard accounts of the strategy of the scramble. Indeed at points he seems strangely unaware of the suggestions of previous scholars, as for example on p. 97 where he offers no explanation for the change in policy of Sir Hercules Robinson, which was discussed at some length in *Africa and the Victorians*. His thorough search of the Colonial Office papers—in particular the internal minutes and memoranda—has, however, enabled him to throw a powerful sidelight on the character and methods of Cecil Rhodes, and his account of the discovery by the Colonial Office that Rhodes and his associates were ‘ruthless, crooked and powerful to corrupt’ should not be overlooked by any future biographer or student of Rhodes’s influence. Together with this discussion of partition tactics, the book describes in detail the transition from a protectorate, which in 1885 was designed merely to exclude external rivals, to an administration which gradually assumed extensive powers of intervention in domestic disputes. Here, Dr. Sillery argues, Sir Henry Loch’s unauthorized proclamation of 1891 created the prototype of a new form of protectorate and gave Bechuanaland ‘a special place in imperial history’.

Behind these two themes lies the question of the role of the Tswana chiefs in these developments. Kgama, chief of the Bamangwato, was probably the most renowned African of this time, and his acceptance of the Protectorate in 1885, his support of the administration, and his visit to London to frustrate the Chartered Company are here once more recounted. Unfortunately, however,

this theme remains for the most part subservient to the others: the springs of Tswana foreign policy remain elusive, the opinions of the chiefs are not always clearly distinguished from those of their missionary coadjutors, and the pressures of inter-tribal rivalries are described mainly as they impinge on the administration and are interpreted through official eyes. Kgama, in particular, remains an enigma, and one finds it difficult to accept that this despot, who with ruthless vigour had seized a chieftaincy and imposed a régime of Victorian austerity on his people, could meekly be ‘determined as always to be on a proper footing with the Protecting power’. His calculations of his own interests and those of his people were, one feels, far more flexible and subtle than this, and one is left hoping that other scholars will follow Dr. Sillery’s footsteps and investigate this aspect of the story in depth.

RICHARD GRAY

C. W. NEWBURY (ed.): *A mission to Gelele, king of Dahome, by Sir Richard Burton*. (Travellers and Explorers.) ix, 372 pp. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966. 50s.

Richard Burton’s account of the kingdom of Dahomey, as a work of ‘pre-scientific’ anthropology, stands alone in the nineteenth-century literature of African travel. Burton’s linguistic brilliance, tireless curiosity, and powers of exact observation enabled him in his *Mission to Gelele* to make what Dr. Newbury rightly calls ‘a unique contribution to our knowledge of a West African kingdom’. Here was an obvious choice for early inclusion in this useful new series of ‘Travellers and Explorers’.

Nobody is better qualified than Dr. Newbury to edit this masterpiece, and yet one wonders if he has made the best use of his opportunity. His long and well-documented introduction is admirable in placing Burton’s mission in the wider context of British policy in West Africa, but when he turns to the African side of the story his touch is sometimes less sure. It seems to the reviewer that he greatly over-stresses the inflexibility of Dahoman policy and the irrational element in its motivation. His failure clearly to bring out the very real suzerainty exercised by Oyo over the whole region in the eighteenth century obscures the reader’s understanding of the very fluid ‘international situation’ created by the collapse of that power in the second decade of the nineteenth century. The Fon and the Egba, both former tributaries of Oyo, were drawn into a conflict which both interpreted



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