

Jan G. Platvoet 1977, 'Recent Studies on Religions in Africa' [three book reviews], in *Numen* 44, 1: 100-103

JACOB K. OLUPONA & SULAYMAN S. NYANG (Eds.), *Religious Plurality in Africa; Essays in Honour of John S. Mbiti*. Berlin & New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1993, XXII + 455 pp., bibliography, indices, frontispiece, hard cover, ISBN 3-11-012220-0, DM 228, (= Religion and Society, 32)

DAVID M. ANDERSON & DOUGLAS H. JOHNSON (Eds.), *Revealing Prophets: Prophecy in Eastern African History*. London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; Kampala: Fountain Publishers; Athens (Ohio): Ohio University Press, 1995, x + 310 pp., maps, bibliography, index; cloth, ISBN 0-85255-718-3, £35,00; paper, ISBN 0-85255-717-5, £12,95; (= Eastern African Studies)

HOLGER BERNT HANSEN & MICHAEL TWADDLE (Eds.), *Religion & Politics in East Africa: The Period since Independence*. London: James Currey; Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers; Kampala: Fountain Publishers; Athens (Ohio): Ohio University Press, 1995, x + 278 pp., map, index; cloth, ISBN 0-85255-385-4, £35,00; paper, ISBN 0-85255-384-6, £12,95; (= Eastern African Studies)

The sub-title of *Religious plurality in Africa* indicates the contents of the book much more accurately than its main title. This beautifully produced book is a collection of essays in honour of John Mbiti, pioneer in the theological study of African traditional religions for the purpose of developing an African theology. Its 21 articles deal mainly with the study of African traditional religions by Christian theologians, African theology, Christianity in Africa, or are responses to Mbiti's work. The main title is substantiated by only four articles: Nyang's on Islamic revivalism in West Africa (231-272), von Sicard's on Christian-Muslim relations in Africa (273-283), Oosthuizen's on Indian religions in Africa (285-310), and Werblowsky's on Judaism in Africa (311-316).

The book is, therefore, mainly of interest to African Christian theologians. Most of them, however, will have little chance of reading it, for it is so exorbitantly expensive that no university library in the weak currency nations of Africa will be able to buy it, let alone a university lecturer or student. To other scholars of the religions of Africa, however, this book is of limited interest only, with the exception of David Westerlund's methodological analysis of the study of African traditional religions by 'outsiders' and 'insiders' (43-66), the contributions of Nyang and Oosthuizen, and the bio-bibliography of Mbiti (1-9, 397-415).

*Revealing prophets* is a collection of eleven essays in historical anthropology which examine the shifting shapes of prophecy and prophets in traditional societies in Sudan, Central African Republic, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania. Ten deal with the fluid nature of prophecy in pre-colonial and colonial times, and the eleventh one studies it in colonial and post-colonial times. They examine it for three closely related purposes.

The first is the historical nature of prophecy in Africa: with the lapse of time and its concomitant social, political and other changes, the practice, perception and explanation of prophecy by believers may alter significantly. The present may not only forge new perceptions and validations of past prophets and their prophecies, to serve as precepts for the future. But it may also create prophets in the past where that past had none, or alter the institution `prophecy' itself fundamentally.

The second purpose is to correct the confusion in the terminology of anthropologists by paying close attention to the variation in the `internal' (or *emic*) definition processes, past and present, of `prophet' and `prophecy' in these parts of Africa, and to their relations to the definitions by the believers of a whole range of closely related categories, such as seers, diviners, spirit mediums, oracles, healers, etc. The editors point to a root cause of the imprecision of the concepts `prophet' and `prophecy': they acquired contradictory meanings in their long history of shifting shapes from the pre- to post-exilic Jewish societies, in the Greek and Hellenistic ones, and in early Christianity and early Islam.

The third purpose is `to move away from the oversimplified [Weberian, JP] notion that connects prophets only with crises' (24-25). This book is of interest, therefore, not only to students of the history of the religions of Africa, but also to students of the history of the complex and confusing concepts which we use in the description and comparison of religions and religious phenomena. It is, however, deplored that this collection has no contributions by scholars posted in African universities. Is Africa still merely object, and not subject, of the study of religions?

*Religion & politics in East Africa* is a collective volume on the political role of Christianity and Islam, in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Sudan since 1960. Part I deals with `the challenge of Islam'. François Constantin studies the attempts to develop Muslim national organisations in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya in the post-colonial era, by Muslims to serve the interests of their religion, and by these states to control the Muslims as a political constituency (19-31). Rex O'Fahey analyses the restoration of the *sharia* in war-torn Sudan (32-44). And Omari H. Kokole studies the role of `the Nubians', descendants of the Muslim mercenaries in Turkish-Egyptian and British colonial armies, as one of Idi Amin's power bases between 1971 and 1979 (45-55).

Part II is devoted to Uganda. Heike Behrend first describes the millenarian revolutionary Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena among the Acholi which raised an armed revolt against Museveni between 1986 and 1989 (59-71). Keith Ward (72-105), John Mary Waliggo (106-119) and Ronald Kassimir (120-140) analyze the political role of the two great `folk' churches of Uganda, the Anglican and the Roman Catholic churches, since independence in 1962.

In Part III, the roles of the Christian churches and of the Muslim community as surrogate political opposition parties in the one-party state of Kenya after Kenyatta's death in

1978, when Daniel Arap Moi came to power, are analyzed by David Throup (143-176), G.P. Benson (177-199), and Donald Cruise O'Brien (200-219).

Part IV has again a regional scope: A.B.K. Kasoki examines the strained relationships between Christians and Muslims in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in colonial and post-colonial times, each being involved in not only the competition between two missionary religions, but also between the two distinct cultural, political, economical, and racial systems with which they were inextricably allied. Kasoki also examines the measure of success each had in imposing its imprint upon those societies (223-246). Marie-Louise Pirouet examines the role the Christian mainline churches in the defence of human rights in Kenya and Uganda since independence (247-259). And finally, Martin Doornbos analyses the internal contradictions in these churches in their dual roles as missionary and developmental organisations (260-270). As is apparent from this summary, this book is of interest to several categories of students of religions in East Africa.

The 'Eastern African Studies' series has two important virtues. One is that its volumes may be bought at an affordable price in rich nations with strong currencies. But more importantly, they are published by a consortium of British, American, and East African publishers, and may, hopefully, be bought at affordable prices also in the nations with weak currencies and a severe book famine.