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West African Food in the Middle Ages by Tadeusz Lewicki; Marion Johnson

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with related correspondence, which Delcourt has thoughtfully published in his introduction, notes, and appendices, they provide one of the most complete pictures of eighteenth-century African regional politics available for any area of the continent.

Delcourt's editing of this work confirms the reputation for exhaustive use of archival materials, meticulous attention to detail, and accuracy which he established in his *La France et les établissements français au Sénégal entre 1713 et 1763* (Dakar, 1952). He even uses the opportunity to provide fellow scholars with a survey of West African materials in little-used provincial and private libraries and archives. The notes and introduction might have been better balanced had Delcourt been able to complement the archival material with information from the oral traditions of the peoples concerned. He remarks on this himself, apologizing for his inability to visit Senegal for this purpose. This does not explain his neglect of published versions of oral tradition, however. Collaboration with one of the recent scholars who have used oral tradition to probe African perspectives more thoroughly might have produced a more balanced introduction. Doubtless none of the newer school can match Delcourt's archival experience, but the more recent orientation would have elucidated both the African political information in the journal and David's own politics.

Delcourt tends to accept David's view of himself as an aggressive, successful administrator in the grand tradition of colonial entrepreneurs stretching from André Brue through Louis Faidherbe. A less generous picture portrays him as an egotistical, greedy, deceitful, and foolhardy dreamer whose repeated failures only spurred new ambition. It is to Delcourt's credit as an honest historian that, in this case as in so many, he provides the reader with all the information needed to arrive at perceptions different from his own. The journal itself is destined to become a new classic among the early travelogues, and Delcourt's contribution to its publication is a tribute to his own status as an historian.

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WEST AFRICAN FOOD IN THE MIDDLE AGES. By Tadeusz Lewicki and Marion Johnson. New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1974. \$23.50.

Tadeusz Lewicki, professor and director of the Institute of Oriental Philology at the University of Cracow in Poland, has produced a tour de force in this book on West African foodstuffs. The plan of the work, first published in Polish in 1963 and now revised, is unusual. It draws mainly on sources written in Arabic, and is confined primarily to the

period from the tenth to the sixteenth century. To some degree this is disappointing, as Lewicki's obvious breadth of knowledge would no doubt have led him to many valuable insights concerning West African agriculture in the earlier era and in the later period as well, when radical change was brought about by the introduction of new crops from the Americas.

Within its limited ambit, however, Lewicki's book will be immensely useful to scholars in a variety of disciplines. For his information he draws on a long list of Arab geographers and travelers, from the famous (Ibn Battuta, Leo Africanus) to the obscure (Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamdhani, al-Istakhri, Ibn Hauqal, Yaqut, al-Omari, and others). With the exception of Leo Africanus, these sources have suffered from the undeserved neglect of economic historians, no doubt because much of the material is not accessible to those deficient in the Arabic language. Under no such constraints himself, Lewicki has ably utilized his material in reconstructing the cropping patterns and consumption habits of medieval West Africa. The organization of the book is by type of food, with chapters on vegetable foodstuffs, meat and fish, and other foodstuffs. Despite an adequate index and an excellent bibliography, the structure leads to a kaleidoscopic effect, with vast jumps in geography and in periods of time. Perhaps this was inevitable given the topic, but readability tends to suffer as a result.

This is the sort of book which scholars in many related fields will want to keep in their working libraries. The economic historian can find much useful material on the displacement of old crops by new, with significant ramifications for those studying incentives and innovation in agriculture. For the "standard" historian of Africa, the book adds to an appreciation of how the great states of medieval West Africa were supported by a base of agricultural knowledge and effort. For the anthropologist and agronomist as well as the economic historian, there is a wealth of material on specialization in agriculture, with convincing evidence that relatively sophisticated cropping patterns were apparent long before European explorers visited the interior. The discussion of the rather wide variety of foods, adapted to differences in rainfall, soil conditions, and consumer tastes, will be of like interest to specialist and nonspecialist.

The major weaknesses in the book are not the fault of the author nor of Marion Johnson, who is to be congratulated for her part in bringing this book to publication in English. The price is grossly inflated at \$23.50, and the offset printing does no great credit to a fine university press. One fears the extent to which the high price and the relatively unattractive format will cut into the sales of this book, which deserves to be widely read.

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