

ARE AFRICANIST PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE IN AFRICA ? (1)

David PHILLIPSON, University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3DZ. UK.

In 1987 we were able to visit five countries in East and South-Central Africa. Almost everywhere there are major problems with the availability of publications - not only those issued in Europe or North America, but those from other African countries too. The effect on the training and work of African scholars is tragic. Foreign books are either priced out of the market by exchange-rate inequalities, or are simply not available at all because of foreign-exchange shortages. A book that costs a scholar in England 2% of his month's salary can cost his African counterpart more than 25% - if he can obtain it at all. University and Museum libraries are similarly hit and must of necessity be highly selective in their acquisitions of both books and journals. UNESCO book coupons, theoretically negotiable everywhere, seem in practice to make virtually no impact on the problem.

It would be wrong to belittle the growing number of excellent locally produced publications, although few of these, as yet, are specialist archaeological works. The economics of scale, however, ensure that local publications are mostly intended for use in schools, rather than at a more advanced level. Yet here, again, marketing of books between African countries is subject to the impediments noted above, and export to hard-currency countries outside that continent has very rarely been organized on an efficient scale. As in other fields our francophone colleagues have found ways of reducing these problems.

It is Africa that is now *in tres partes divisa* : the francophone economic/cultural bloc, the increasingly isolated and self-contained southern African zone, and 'the rest' where the ubiquitous problems here discussed are particularly difficult.

These problems must be faced by us all. It is becoming increasingly difficult for scholars based in African countries to keep abreast of current developments in their discipline. Africanist research published outside the continent may remain virtually unknown in Africa - even within the country to which it primarily relates. What can be done ?

Firstly, steps can be taken to ensure adequate publicity for the availability of publications. We are happy to play our part in this by expanding the 'Publications Received' section of the Review, but we shall continue to rely upon information sent to us by authors, editors and publishers. Secondly, authors and editors can encourage their publishers to make copies of Africanist literature available in Africa at reasonable prices through local outlets. We may invite African governments to play their part by making available the minute amounts of foreign exchange needed to facilitate such schemes. Thirdly, we urge our colleagues who maintain direct contact with African nations from an overseas base to remember the needs of African institutions and scholars in their distribution of offprints and complimentary copies of publications : there is no more fitting way in which intellectual debts can be repaid. Lastly, we can offer active support and help to those organizations, such as UNESCO and the British Council, which are able on occasion to make gifts of publications to libraries in Africa.

The exchange of information, in a clear, accessible and economically viable form, is a pre-requisite for the continued florescence of African archaeological studies. As the discipline develops, with more and widely scattered practitioners many of whom are not exclusively involved with African archaeology, it is necessary to keep this problem constantly in mind. The measures suggested above will alleviate the difficulties to some extent, but will require the active co-operation of all Africanist archaeologists, wherever they are based.

(1) [Note des éd.] Ce texte a été d'abord publié sous forme d'éditorial dans African Archaeological Review, vol. 6, 1988, pp. 1-2. Nous remercions Mr. D. Phillipson et les presses universitaires de l'Université de Cambridge, éditeur de la revue, pour leur autorisation de reproduire ce texte.