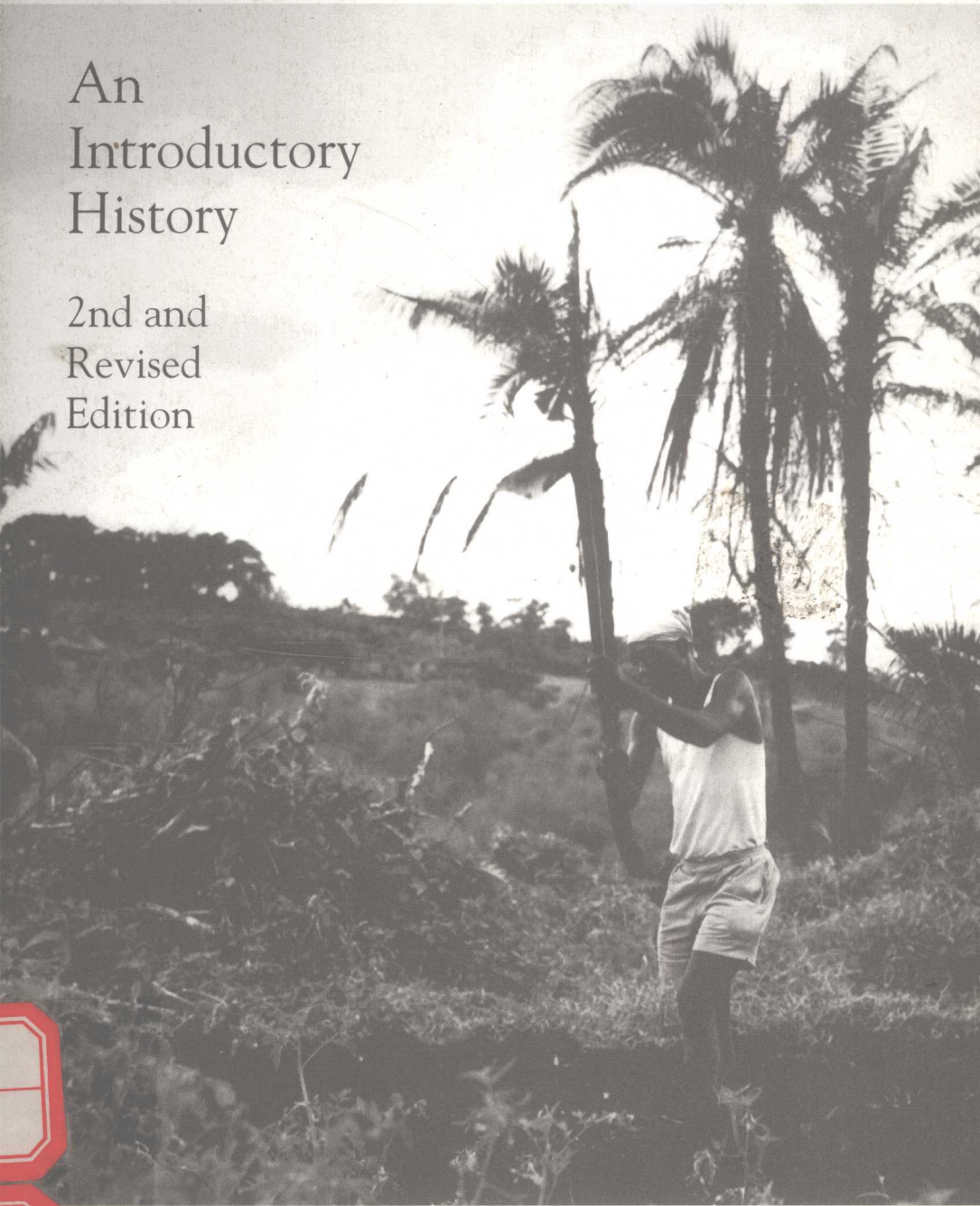


EAST AFRICA

An
Introductory
History

2nd and
Revised
Edition



Robert M. Maxon

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2nd and Revised Edition

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Preface

East Africa has a long and rich history which extends back, by most accounts, to the origins of man. This volume offers a history of the region from the Stone Age to the 1980s. Although the modern nations East Africa comprises—Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda—did not exist in their present shape before the twentieth century, this work examines their history country by country. With the exception of the first three chapters, therefore, separate accounts are given of developments within the three mainland territories and, during the colonial period, within the offshore islands of Zanzibar and Pemba.

The book falls into two roughly equal parts. The first seven chapters deal with the pre-colonial history of East Africa, stretching from earliest times to the 1890s. Because of (among other things) a lack of written sources for most of the interior before the nineteenth century, the dates used for dividing the early chapters are necessarily arbitrary. Chapter 3 focuses exclusively on the coast and Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the interior; this approach is in line with most East African historiography, which sees the coast and the interior as having little common experience prior to the nineteenth century.

These initial chapters focus on the movement of peoples and the development of the political, economic, and social systems that came to characterize them. A major thrust of the volume is to describe how the region's major social formations, often termed "tribes" or ethnic groups, came to occupy the positions they did by the 1890s. This is a story of migration and movement of peoples and their interaction with other groups. As sketched out here, East African social formations come to reflect considerable diversity in language, culture, and economic systems. The same diversity characterizes the region's political formations. Some parts of East Africa experienced the development of centralized states ruled by monarchs. Historians have more information about these states, and relatively greater detail is provided here about their historical development than that of political formations ruled by chiefs and by councils of elders.

Beginning in the nineteenth century, East Africa experienced increasing external influences which world culminate with the European "scramble" for the region. Most important was the commercial penetration of this part of the continent by Europe. As the nineteenth century wore on, European capitalism sought sources of raw materials and

markets there. These increasing trade relations, together with humanitarian motives, opened the door for the takeover of East Africa by Britain and Germany, as detailed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Chapters 8-11 constitute the second half of the book. The first three of these detail the imposition and functioning of colonial rule beginning in the 1890s. Though relatively brief, the colonial interlude has left a tremendous legacy. Patterns of political authoritarianism and economic dependency were set which have not been decisively altered by the East African states' achievement of independence.

Chapter 11 examines the history of the independent East African states from the 1960s to the 1990s.

In dealing with pre-colonial history in Chapters 4 and 5, the term Tanzania is used to refer to the mainland area of that nation. In Chapter 8 the term German East Africa reflects the fact that this nation fell under German rule from the 1890s to the end of World War I. In Chapters 9 and 10, the term Tanganyika is used since this was the name the British gave the territory when they took control. At the risk of confusion these different terms have been adopted to reflect the terminology in use at the time.

The spelling of place names and the names of peoples and languages is in accordance with current usage. For most ethnic groups, the prefix has been dropped for the sake of convenience and clarity (e.g., Ganda rather than Baganda). The classification and spelling of linguistic terms follows, for the most part, the lead of C. Ehret, D. Nurse, and G. Philipson. Spellings of ethnic names do not always match the linguistic terminology. Charts are provided in Chapters 2 and 4 to assist the reader in recognizing the relationships between various language groupings.

This narrative of East Africa's past could not have been completed without the assistance of many more individuals than can be briefly recognized here. Thanks must particularly go to John Indakwa of the University of Houston who helped convince me to undertake the project; also to E. A. Atieno Odhiambo of Nairobi University and W. R. Ochieng of Kenyatta College for sharing ideas and materials during the writing of the initial draft. John Rowe of Northwestern University and Cynthia Brantley of the University of California at Davis read the manuscript and their comments were of the greatest assistance in giving it its final shape. Maps for the volume were prepared by Ken Martis and Alison Hanham of West Virginia University. The late Robert Munn, first director of the West Virginia University Press, deserves special thanks for his encouragement and assistance.

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Chapter 1

East African Geography

THE PORTION OF THE CONTINENT known as East Africa comprises the present countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania (the mainland plus the islands of Zanzibar and Pemba). This region is extremely varied in its topography, climate, and vegetation. It includes the humid coastal fringe and the snow capped peaks of Kilimanjaro and Kenya, the lush green shores of Lake Victoria and the arid northeast of Kenya, the imposing escarpments associated with the Rift Valley, and the seemingly endless sweep of the Serengeti plain. Straddling the equator, East Africa is made up of an area of almost 679,000 square miles. Its "natural" boundaries are the balmy shore of the Indian Ocean on the east, the Ruvuma River on the south, and the majestic western Rift Valley and its series of highlands on the west. The generally drier northern frontier of the region lacks a clear natural boundary.

Topography

Most of East Africa consists of a series of plateaus or plateau-like surfaces of diverse shapes and heights. These plateaus, ranging in height from about 1,200 feet above sea level to more than 10,000 feet, have been formed as a result of various processes including continental uplift, faulting, volcanic activity, and erosion. The fact that most of East Africa is clearly marked off as a highland region has an important impact on climate and vegetation patterns.

Perhaps the most effective way to gain acquaintance with East Africa's topography is to begin an imaginary sweep of the eye over the region beginning at the coast. East Africa lacks an extensive coastal plain. The plain is especially narrow from the Tana River delta in Kenya to the

south of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. To the north and south of this, the coastal plain widens somewhat.

West of the coastal plain, the plateau begins, rising gradually and imperceptibly to an elevation of about 3,000 feet above sea level. This eastern plateau is one of the lowest in the region. It is narrowest immediately to the west of Tanga on the northern Tanzanian coast, but it widens to the north and south. To the north it includes much of northern Kenya, and to the south of Morogoro it widens to include the valleys of the Great Ruaha and Kilombero rivers.

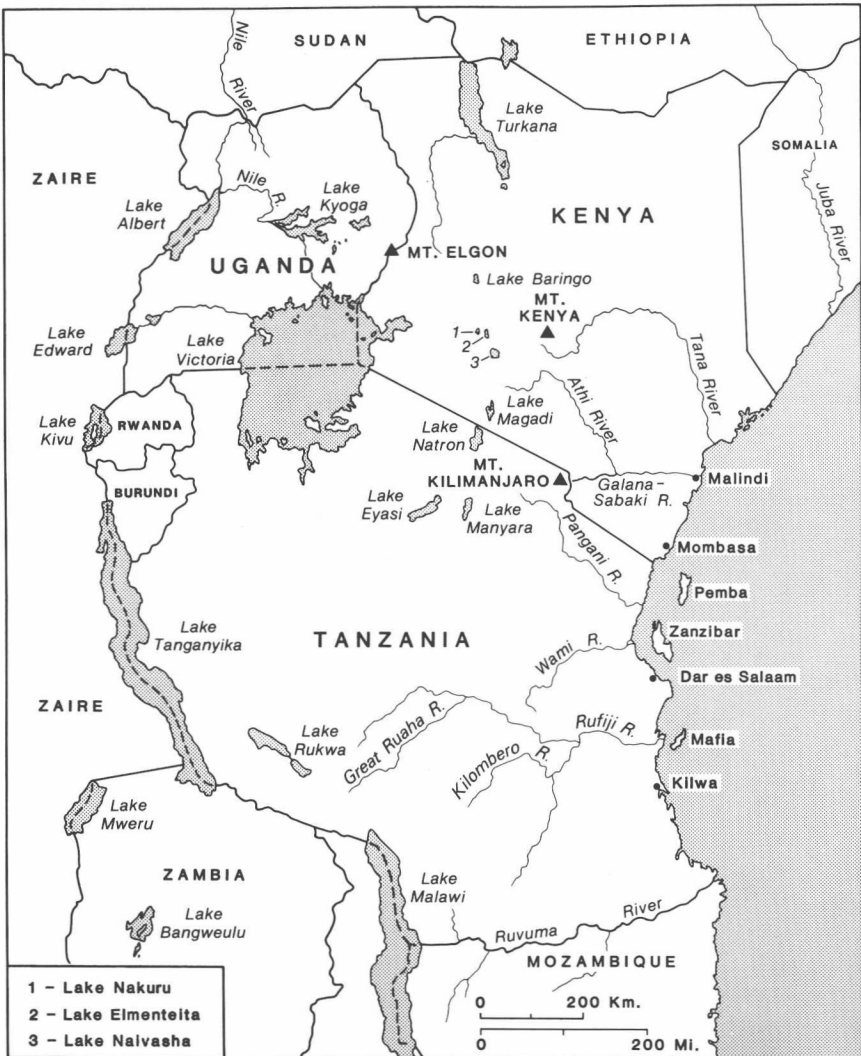
Moving further into the interior, we encounter the central plateau which differs only slightly from that further east. This plateau includes much of the interior of Uganda and Tanzania as well as Lake Victoria. It ranges in elevation from 3,000 to 4,500 feet above sea level, but is slightly higher in some places. Toward northern Uganda the plateau gradually decreases in height.

Significantly higher in elevation than the interior plateaus are the highland regions found in central Kenya, northern and southern Tanzania, and southwestern Uganda. These features, many formed as a result of volcanic activity, are clearly identifiable as they rise as high as 19,000 feet above sea level at the peak of Mount Kilimanjaro. The most extensive highlands are those of central Kenya. They are actually chopped in two by the eastern branch of the Rift Valley, leaving the Aberdare range to the east and the Mau to the west.

The eastern branch of the Rift Valley is perhaps the most distinguishable topographical feature of the entire region. The Rift Valley was formed as a result of subsidence between opposing parallel cliffs produced by an earth fracture. Characterized by remarkable variations in elevation within a few hundred miles, it stretches as a broad trough through central Kenya at a width of between twenty and forty miles. The valley floor rises from an elevation of 1,200 feet above sea level at Lake Turkana in the north to approximately 6,000 feet at Nakuru in central Kenya, only to fall under 2,000 feet near the Kenya-Tanzania border.

As one moves to the west of the region, the western branch of the Rift Valley, extending from Lake Malawi up through Lake Tanganyika to Lake Albert presents a striking picture. The valley is very deep; Lake Tanganyika is the second deepest lake in the world. The adjacent Ruwenzori mountains in Uganda form the most substantial range in all of East Africa.

The floors of both the eastern and western Rift Valleys are dotted by several extinct volcanoes and many lakes. The eastern rift is studded with saline lakes which are quite shallow. Among these are Lakes Turkana, Baringo, Nakuru, Elementeita, Naivasha, Magadi, Natron, and Eyasi. The western Rift Valley is occupied by fewer but more imposing



Map 1. Main Physical Features of East Africa.

lakes. Among these are Lakes Tanganyika, Albert, Kivu, and Edward.

Lake Victoria, the second largest fresh water body in the world, lies within a depression between the two branches of the Rift Valley. The lake is extremely broad, stretching as far as the eye can see. Lake Victoria seems to have been formed by earth movements which blocked an old drainage system to the west. Most lands adjacent to the lake receive more than adequate rainfall, and the area surrounding Lake Victoria, in contrast to the lake regions of the eastern Rift Valley, have historically been quite heavily populated. The area lying between Lake Victoria and Lakes Tanganyika, Kivu, Edward, and Albert to the west and Lake Kyoga to the north is often referred as the great lakes or interlacustrine region.

Lake Victoria forms one of the sources of Africa's longest river, the Nile. Winding its way north, the Nile passes through Lakes Kyoga and Albert before leaving East Africa. Most of East Africa's other major rivers flow east into the Indian Ocean. These include the Ruvuma, Rufiji, Wami, Pangani, Galana-Sabakai, and the Tana. All have well developed alluvial sections of seasonally swampy ground. The Rufiji, Wami, and Tana have large deltas in their lower courses, and the complexity of these channels has limited their use as avenues of communication. Some rivers are intersected by waterfalls and rapids as a result of the rising plateau to the west of the coast, and the estuaries of other rivers are blocked by sand bars. These factors have limited the utility of the eastward flowing rivers as highways leading from the coast to the interior.

Climate

Just as with topography and relief, the climate of East Africa is characterized by wide variations. Undoubtedly the climatic factor of greatest significance is rainfall. Rainfall patterns in East Africa tend to be uneven. Some areas, for example the coast and the great lakes region, receive plentiful rainfall, but others, such as the northeast of Kenya, receive relatively little moisture from the skies. Variations are experienced from year to year in the amount of rain and in the time that it falls. Nearly two-thirds of the region suffers an annual drought of six months or more. Less than 15 percent of Kenya, for example, receives a reliable 30 inches of rainfall per year. This means that much of the land cannot be effectively used for agriculture.

A major factor in bringing rainfall to East Africa are the so called South-East Trade Winds, or South-East Monsoon. These moisture-laden winds blow over the Indian Ocean and reach East Africa from a southeasterly direction beginning in April. The winds blow steadily, reaching peak force in July. From November to March, the main winds affecting East Africa are the North-East Trade Winds, or North-East

Monsoon. These blow from the northeast and normally consist of masses of dry air.

The alternation of these wind systems has had an important influence on travel in the Indian Ocean for many centuries. The North-East Monsoon winds facilitated travel from Arabia, the Persian Gulf, and India to the East African coast in small sailing ships (dhows). The South-East Monsoon winds, on the other hand, provided a relatively easy means of returning to those northern regions.

Within East Africa several rainfall patterns may be noted. For simplicity's sake, they may be grouped into two major types. The first is characterized by two periods of heavy rainfall, usually termed rainy seasons, separated from one another by times of very little rainfall, or dry seasons. In central Kenya north of Nairobi, for example, rainfall is normally concentrated in the March to May period and again in the months of October to December. A similar pattern is experienced in the lands around Lake Victoria and for a considerable portion of the East African coast. Such a pattern supports two growing seasons.

The second type has only a single wet and a single dry season. For much of Tanzania, rain falls in the period November to March while the rest of the year is relatively dry. Northern Uganda, however, experiences its main dry period during these months. An exception to these two major types may be seen in most of northern Kenya, which receives little rainfall at all in most years.

Inland water bodies and relief have a significant influence on the amount of rainfall received in various parts of East Africa. Highland areas are among the best watered in the region. This is particularly the case in the lands surrounding the highest peaks, Mounts Elgon, Kenya, and Kilimanjaro. The considerable surface area of Lake Victoria also has a positive effect on rainfall patterns. The areas near the lake shore are among the best watered in East Africa.

It must be emphasized, however, that the overall rainfall picture for East Africa is normally not good. In addition to the general scarcity of precipitation over the region as a whole, rainfall reliability is generally not satisfactory in terms of total amount and time of arrival. Furthermore, the torrential character of the rains, normally concentrated in only a part of the day, tends to make for high loss of water through run-off. The generally high evaporation rate in East Africa further reduces the value of rainfall for farming in some areas.

Temperature is another important element of East Africa's climate. Mean annual maximum and minimum temperatures are closely connected to altitude. Temperatures at the coast are generally sultry and humidity is high. Mombasa's mean annual temperature, for example, is 26.3° C with little variation throughout the year. The mean diurnal

range in temperature at the coast is also quite small. As one moves inland to the plateau, on the other hand, mean annual temperature drops, humidity is greatly reduced, and the diurnal range is greater. Nairobi's mean annual temperature is 19.1°C , and higher elevations experience even lower temperatures. There, even on the equator, a temperate environment prevails.

Vegetation and Soil

Climate has a major impact on the vegetation of East Africa, and the vegetation of the region parallels the rainfall patterns. Vegetation types vary over a wide range from arid deserts to steamy rainforests and from the coastal swamps to temperate mountain peaks.

Areas of forest vegetation are relatively small in extent in East Africa in recent times if the term forest is understood as a closed stand of high trees which form a dense canopy inhibiting grass growth. Such forests, associated with heavy rainfall, may be found in some mountainous regions, particularly in Kenya, and in wetter lowland areas. Many contain evergreen trees, but a number of semi-deciduous trees also typify these regions. Tropical rainforest is absent from East Africa today except for a few remnant stands; though such heavy vegetation may have existed in the past, some 2,000 years of agricultural pursuits have led to the clearing of forest.

A more extensive vegetation type in East Africa is woodland, which consists of trees associated with a ground vegetation of grasses mixed with shrubby plants. Miombo woodlands are one of the largest vegetation types in East Africa; these correspond closely to those parts of the region which experience a single rainy season and a long dry season such as much of southwest and southeast Tanzania.

Another major vegetation type is savannah, a term used to refer to an area of tall grass mixed with trees and shrubs. Where not grazed, the grass cover normally reaches height in excess of thirty inches. The major East African type of savannah is typified by small trees associated with grasslands. This type of mixed vegetation characterizes much of Uganda, portions of western Kenya, and northwestern Tanzania. Some of these savannah regions show clear evidence of having been derived from an original forest cover as a result of human occupation.

Considerable portions of East Africa are covered by what may be termed a bushland and thicket type of vegetation. These areas are covered by small bushy trees together with lesser bushes and shrubs. The most extensive bushlands occupy semi-arid regions, and the vegetation is often thorny trees. This type of vegetation is found in northern Kenya and a smaller portion of northeastern Uganda. It forms a broad belt