

Notes and News

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African Studies Association of the U.K.: Symposium on Islam in Northern Africa, 14 September 1971

THIS symposium, organized by Professor P. M. Holt of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, from whom further information can be obtained, comprised two sessions on various aspects of (1) the history of Islamicization and (2) modernization. Six papers were presented and discussed at each of the sessions, in which about 100 scholars participated.

Association of Africanists in Germany: Third Annual Conference (see also Africa, xli, April 1971, p. 157)

THE third annual conference of the Association of Africanists in Germany (Vereinigung von Afrikanisten in Deutschland, VAD) was held from 17 to 20 July 1971 at the new anthropological institute of the Steyer Mission, St. Augustin, near Bonn. Some fifty Africanists from the Federal Republic, European countries, and Africa presented papers and discussed the subject of 'Ethnic Minorities and National Integration'. The subject chosen reflects the association's endeavour to break down the traditional barriers between the various Africanist disciplines and to promote studies that have a direct link with present-day Africa and relevance for future development. The association hopes that by co-operating with foreign, and particularly African, scholars their members will be able to further African studies. The association's annual meetings and general assemblies are open to guests and the reports of the annual general meeting will later be made available in book form.

As in former years, representatives of various Africanist disciplines took part in the discussion. Some dealt with the topic from a theoretical point of view, using empirical data only to confirm their theories, others provided descriptions and explanations of the situation of certain minorities in Africa. According to Manfred Hinz of the University of Mainz, the reasons for present-day frictions and strife are not to be sought in cultural, linguistic, or religious differences between the various ethnic groups in any nation, but rather in economic differences which force smaller groups within the African national communities to maintain or to improve their social positions and to take counter-measures against other groups oppressing them. He cited the case of Indians in East Africa. Bernd Zimmermann (Munich University) claimed that the term 'minority' was of little help in understanding or explaining the African situation: on the one hand there is often no majority which forms a sharp and well-definable contrast with a minority, on the other hand the term is too inaccurate since it has also been used to denote conflicts between different ethnic groups as tribalistic; friction between different ethnic groups in African national states is caused rather by economic difficulties and by administrative repression than by ethnic differences. Wilhelm Möhlig (University of Cologne) confirmed this view in his paper on the language situation in East Africa, especially in Tanzania and Kenya. His recent field research had shown that the elevation of the Swahili language to the level of a national language had not so far caused any discrimination or minority problems and the linguistic diversity in Africa, which forced the national states to agree on a common language, had not led to the kind of conflicts feared earlier.