



Approaching African History

Michael Brett

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Africa is a huge continent, as large as the more habitable areas of Europe and Asia put together. It has a history immensely long, yet the study of that history as an academic discipline in its own right is little more than fifty years old. Since then the subject has grown enormously, but the question of what this history is and how it has been approached still needs to be asked, not least to answer the question of why should we study it.

This book takes as its subject the last 10,000 years of African history, and traces the way in which human society on the continent has evolved from communities of hunters and gatherers to the complex populations of today. Approaching that history through its various dimensions: archaeological, ethnographic, written, scriptural, European and contemporary, it looks at how the history of such a vast region over such a length of time has been conceived and presented, and how it is to be investigated. The problem itself is historical, and an integral part of the history with which it is concerned, beginning with the changing awareness over the centuries of what Africa might be. Michael Brett thus traces the history of Africa not only on the ground, but also in the mind, in order to make his own historical contribution to the debate.

Michael Brett is Emeritus Reader in the History of North Africa at SOAS.

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