

The dictionary is clearly a useful and convenient companion to any study of South African History. It would be even more useful if it included a brief survey of South African historiography over the last few decades and one would hope the publisher and authors would consider this possibility in a further edition.

Geoff. Allen.

RAU.

Berlin as colonial centre of Afrikapolitik

U van der Heyden and J. Zeller, (editors), *Kolonialmetropole Berlin – Eine Spurensuche*. Berlin Edition in der Quintessenz Verlags-GmbH, Berlin, 2002.

ISBN 3-8148-0092-3

Hardcover, 320 pp., illus.

Contents: *Vorwort der Herausgeber/ Frühe Kolonisationsversuche in Westafrika/ In der Zentrale der "Weltmacht"/ Lobbyisten für die "Schutzgebiete"/ Überseewirtschaft/ Kolonialdeutsche Wissenschaften/ Inszenierungen/ Koloniale Kultur/ Afrikanische Migranten in der Reichs(kolonial)hauptstadt/ Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien/ Spurensuche in Berliner Museen/ Anmerkungen/ Die Autoren/ Bildnachweis.*

Price: € 24.80

The current interest in "colonial" matters – often without clear definition – still identifies itself in this country by a handful of tired *clichés*. Pertinent words and phrases are (in)visibly highlighted and thereby set apart from others, as though by habit, and can be used to build up politically correct, if historically dubious, accounts of past (in)justices framed with seemingly heartfelt indignation.

Professional historians and other scientists, who write also for the lay readership, are usually aware of crossing frontiers of credibility. Their readers, however, are not often as well informed, or frank, and may willingly embrace what they view as self-evident fact, rather than not-so-evident fantasy.

Recently the remains of Saartjie Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus" (d. 1815), were interred in the Eastern Cape during a thoughtfully managed ceremony. Memorials, whether contemporaneous or anachronous, are part of the very human awareness of (im)mortality, and modern history records a continuous

cycle of such ex/inhumations. Grave robbers once were severely punished for their nocturnal researches undertaken in the lamplight of learning. By the 19th century this shadowed process had evolved into legitimate inquiry through scientific institutions in Western capitals such as Paris, Amsterdam, London, New York and, not surprisingly, Berlin.

The two editors of the present collection of essays, which includes some of their own, have put together an appraisal of the *Hauptstadt* of not only Germany but also its few though not inconsiderable colonies. As the figural centre of a commercial, spiritual and cultural empire, Berlin may not have had the developed overseas practice of other major centres, but its devotion to knowledge and expansion was similarly evident. While the study of historic capital cities as *foci* of exploration/exploitation is not new, such a perspective is useful in the present case of Berlin, a city itself destroyed, buried, exhumed and re-created within fifty years.

The last two pictures in this fascinating book, one richly illustrated throughout, show facets of some Afro-German connections. The first depicts soldiers in 1907 packing a crate with immaculate skulls – like so many ostrich eggs – to be shipped from *Südwest-Afrika* to the *Pathologische Institut zu Berlin* for study. The objects had previously belonged to Herero's who had died in combat, or on the gallows, during the 1904-07 war. (It should be pointed out that one of the book's editors, Zeller, had been born in Swakopmund in 1948, and he has a particular interest in that once German region.)

In the second image, taken in the “African Quarter” of Berlin, is seen a descendent, digital camera in hand, of an East African sultan. The young man was on a quest for more information concerning his great-grandfather's skull, a relic that represents to many in East Africa the staunch resistance to their own earlier depressed status as German colonials. During his inquiries the visitor uncovered rather more than he had anticipated, perhaps more than some museum personnel would care to admit.

The present collection of pointedly post-modern historians' views of colonial Berlin's past throws light on less familiar portions of Germany's complex heritage. It might be considered by the publisher to translate this thorough book, the better to inform those South Africans who wish to (re)examine some of our own skeletal remains.

Karl Koperski

Vaal Triangle Technikon

Vanderbijlpark