simple accuracy, for instance in giving names and bibliographic citations correctly or checking that the references in an index match the pages concerned. All of us make misprints and other slips; but we should have enough pride in our work to publish a list of errata later. (44) Better still - though this may be an unrealistic idea in most cases - it would be nice to be able to publish a second edition, setting right these elementary slips and making further improvements (see, e.g., BAL 1963; HODGKIN 1960). (45)

5. THE EDITORS

One question remains: who should edit? From my lists it will be seen that about 200 scholars from 15 countries have been involved to a greater or lesser extent in such work since 1960. The majority of editors have been part-timers, who have also written historical studies of their own, often related to the documents they have edited. Editorial skill is seldom acquired overnight, and the danger of a dilettantist approach to editing is all the greater where the editor concerned lacks experience; on the other hand, part-time editors may have the advantage of being better equipped to see their material in a wider perspective and to appreciate what readers require of an edition. Some editors have been anthropologists, literary specialists, naval officers, businessmen and diplomats; and in several cases these have done a better job than many "professional" historians.

Equally significant, however, is the large number of historians of Africa who have not edited or analysed any source - several thousands, one assumes. Many, indeed, categorically refuse to contemplate the idea. Most striking, perhaps, is the limited number of contributions by North American and African historians - smaller, for instance, than the number for Italy or Belgium. (To speak of national "schools" of editing, though, would be misleading: most scholars develop their own individual approach as a result of their temperament and training or in response to the task before them.)

At the risk of horrifying editors and non-editors alike, I suggest that every historian of Africa who works partly with written sources should in his or her own interests attempt to prepare at least one edition, however short. Editing is not simply a useful chore, like listing the contents of an archive: it provides the close attention to a text that is otherwise so elusive. It can also offer an entirely different perspective on how written sources come into existence and what they signify (especially if it involves translation).

44. It is easier to do this if one publishes one's edition as a series of articles (see List A; HAIR (ARG) No.8 p.60 and No.11 pp.63-4) or in several volumes, published at different times (see List A; FISHER & FISHER 1972-86 Vol.1,2: 510-12).

45. I particularly admire those veteran editors who return to a text they published forty years earlier and re-edit it; see List A: HERMAN & KIRBY 1970 (the text was originally published by Herman in 1936-7) and WATERHOUSE 1979 (first published by the same man in 1932!).

-18-
The result, almost inevitably, is a more cautious and down-to-earth approach to African history than we have grown accustomed to in recent years.

There are strong arguments in favour of team editing; some partnerships have produced impressive results (e.g. Thilmans & Moraes, Becker & Martin, Cordeur & Saunders, Teixeira da Mota & Hair, Fisher & Fisher, Forbes & Rourke, Heintze & Mendes, Beckingham & Huntingford), as have some larger teams (see, for example, List A: BRUNSCHWIG 1966, COQUERY-VIDROVITCH 1969, EVANS ET AL. 1969). Team editing is certainly desirable when dealing with texts which cover a wide geographical area or contain material belonging to several disciplines (zoological, anthropological, linguistic, cartographic...). But my own experience is that unless there is a rigid division of labour, those who believe that joint undertakings can lighten the burden may well be under an illusion. No two scholars, if they approach their task conscientiously, will translate a given sentence in the same way; nor are they likely to agree on what should be in the footnotes. Too many cooks may easily spoil the broth.

6. CONCLUSION

As I have acknowledged above, my lists remain very incomplete and rather arbitrary. Nevertheless, they do show the enormous qualitative differences there have been in the editing of written sources for African history. In my own area of specialisation, West Africa, there are half a dozen scholars whose work I find it a pleasure to read, comparable with the pleasure given by a skilled cook’s masterpiece; and I would urge anyone who contemplates preparing an edition to look at their work before embarking. (46) On the other hand, I can think of a multitude of instances where the chance to produce a really scholarly edition or commentary has been at least partly missed. Only a handful of the editions I have listed are likely to prove adequate for long: the majority have clearly failed to anticipate the demands which future generations will pose. (47) Some would argue that almost any new edition is better than none, (48) and that lengthy footnotes and detailed indexes provide no more than icing on the cake. In my view, however, such things are more than a pleasant luxury. The progress of African historiography will depend to a large extent on how often we pause to chew on the value of the written sources we so happily gulp down.

46. These include Bovill, Delcourt, Fisher, Hair, Teixeira da Mota and the two Senegal partnerships (Thilmans-Moraes, Becker-Martin).

47. Even the skilled annotation provided at the beginning of this century by scholars such as Ravenstein and Naber is now largely out of date with regard to Africanist information, although in other respects it has stood the test of time fairly well.

48. This appears to be the attitude of many reviewers, who give potential readers only the barest information on the sort of editorial apparatus offered in a new edition.

-19-