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H. L. Wesseling. *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880-1914.* Westport and London: Praeger, 1996. xvi + 446 pp. $45.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-275-95138-2; $145.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-275-95137-5.

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The history of the European partition of Africa is a story that has been told many times. H. L. Wesseling's *Divide and Rule: The Partition of Africa, 1880-1914* offers a general account of this period from the conventional perspective of the European powers involved. It is a solid synthesis of imperial historiography presented in a narrative, textbook format. African specialists will immediately question the need for such an approach, and Wesseling does little to appease this impulse. He admits that, in his presentation, Africa "appears mainly as an object," and, moreover, that "the important decisions were ultimately taken by European politicians" (pp. 3, 4). Imperial historians will likewise question Wesseling's emphasis on "people and their motives" (p. 6) and his omission of long-term developments such as capitalism and technology. They will also find that Wesseling has little new to say about the partition. That being said, *Divide and Rule* is nonetheless the best general overview of the African partition available and is highly recommended to anyone with an interest in the subject.

The strength of Wesseling's book lies in its organization and accessibility. The author structures the book geographically into seven parts (Egypt, Congo, East Africa, West Africa, Sudan, South Africa, and Morocco), a strategy which manages to provide at once a sense of the overall chronology as well as robust regional histories. This is no small feat. A reader interested in the partition of South Africa will find a lucid presentation of that long and complicated story, yet will also come away with an understanding of the region's relation to the continental partition. This is all the more exceptional when one considers that the author is synthesizing sources not just from Britain, France, and Germany, but also Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Italy. Wesseling makes the narrative accessible by alternating between major events and unfailingly colorful biographies of the actors involved, all the while refusing to simplify a complex subject. For instance, he portrays the key British figure of Lord Salisbury as a Machiavellian pessimist whose interest in Africa was "purely academic" (p. 156), yet this is the same man who was willing to risk war with France over the pestilent lands of the upper Nile. This fundamental ambivalence and irony was not just central to the character of Salisbury, but to the whole project of British imperialism in Africa. Through the lives of men (there are no women in this story), Wesseling introduces the reader not just to the events themselves but to their larger and frequently complicated meanings for the partition.

Divide and Rule is everything that Thomas Pakenham's award-winning *The Scramble for Africa* (1991) is supposed to be but was not. Unlike Pakenham, Wesseling is highly reliable in his characterizations of people and events. Pakenham presents King Leopold II as the motor behind the Scramble, and the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 as the Scramble's decisive event. Wesseling disabuses the reader of both of these long-standing views, which Pakenham supports despite thorough scholarly refutation. The major difference between the two authors is just that–Pakenham's utter indifference to the academic literature borders on contempt, whereas Wesseling offers a judicious synthesis of the (quite massive) relevant literature. More surprisingly, Wesseling's work is much more readable than *The Scramble for Africa*. Pakenham heaps anecdote upon anecdote in a novelistic style that is more tedious than entertaining, frequently failing to convey the larger picture of the partition. Wesseling offers clear and concise portraits of people and events and helpfully cross-references them with other chapters. It is ironic that Wesseling's textbook should be so much more enjoyable to read than Pakenham's bestseller.

We should not let Wesseling off the hook entirely for his imperial perspective, however. First, it is a perspective of a specific and somewhat dated type. *Divide and Rule* is very much in the spirit of Robinson and Gallagher's *Africa and the Victorians*. Both works share the

analytical concerns of the "official mind" and its engrossment in strategic diplomacy as well as the role of crises on the periphery. Although Wesseling avoids the narrowly strategic excesses of Robinson and Gallagher (e.g., the partition of Egypt is entitled "The Eastern Question" and not "The Suez Crisis"), the machinations of European rivalries, "men on the spot," and frontier turbulence provide the logic for the events discussed. The answers for why Britain occupied Egypt in 1882 are to be found in the cabinets of Gladstone and Gambetta rather than in Cairo, Alexandria, or the City of London. Wesseling eschews the complications that any consideration of European ideology, special interests, and popular opinion would bring to his straightforward narrative, thus neutralizing many of the works he cites in his helpful bibliography. Africans are hardly discussed at all, except for obvious dramatic personae such as Arabi Pasha, Samori, and Menelik II. John Hargreaves' call in 1960 to connect European partition with developments in Africa has fallen upon deaf ears once again.

Some niggling comments remain. A few key dates are misprinted, and the maps are somewhat disappointing, given the cartographic nature of the subject. In their rush to make the book available, Praeger gives an approving blurb on the reverse cover by the distinguished historian of Africa, "Vansina Jan." Yet neither this nor the more serious objections raised above negate what Wesseling has accomplished. *Divide and Rule* is an excellent summary of the accomplishments of an earlier imperial historiography. It is readable and reliable in the extreme. Future general accounts, however, will not be able to stand without a serious consideration of the long-term historical forces in both Europe and Africa.

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