WEST AFRICA

European travel and exploratory expeditions to West Africa began in the age of discovery (1400–1600). The Portuguese dominated initial explorations with first voyages that took place during the reign of Henry the Navigator (1419–1460). Although the first voyages were part of an effort to reach other destinations, the discovery of gold in 1444 and 1445 led the Portuguese to establish more permanent trade ties with African rulers. Over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, other European countries became interested in opportunities for trade in West Africa. These initiatory European travels to West Africa were confined to the coast. The absence of readily navigable rivers, the efforts of African rulers and middlemen to circumvent European efforts to gain access to the interior, and tropical diseases, all encumbered any European attempts to explore the interior. But perhaps most important, the discovery of more lucrative venues for trade and exploitation in Asia and the Americas dampened European interests in the West African interior. Accounts from these earliest travels are few, and though they increased European knowledge of the coast, they contained no reports of ventures into the interior. An exception is the Portuguese party that reached the kingdom of Benin at the end of the fifteenth century.

The relative dearth in literature of travel and exploration to West Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries changed drastically in the following centuries. In the meantime, Europeans turned to scholars of classical antiquity and to Arab sources for information about the African interior. The Greek Herodotus had gathered information about the African interior when he visited North Africa (Libya and Egypt) in the middle of the fifth century BCE. Other European sources were *Historia Naturalis* written by Pliny the Elder (c. 23–79) and *Geography* by Claudius Ptolemaeus (c. 87–150), though Ptolemy and Pliny the Elder wrote from secondhand information. Apart from writers of the classical antiquity, the works of Arab geographers such as Sherif al-Idrīsī (c. 1099–1154) and al-Bakrī (d. 1094) represented the other source of information about the West African interior. Together, these sources cannot be characterized as travel literature. European readers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were also aware that the accounts were not entirely reliable, but they represented the scant body of accessible knowledge. All in all, these accounts preserved West Africa in a blend of specific geographical knowledge about cities that testified to wealth and civilization as well as a realm of curiosities. The scarcity of reliable accounts spurred interest in what became the great geographical mysteries of the African interior: the source and termination of the River Niger and the Niger flowed west to empty into the Atlantic Ocean.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, organized European expeditions in West Africa concentrated on the Senegal and Gambia rivers. Both rivers afforded some limited entry into the interior but difficulties with the different peoples along both rivers, along with with war and rivalries between European nations, hampered British efforts on the Gambia and French endeavors on the Senegal. Travelers published numerous accounts, but these are largely based on brief excursions and remain cursory in their encounters with West Africa. Narratives from this period include John Ogilby’s *Africa. Being an Accurate Description*, published in 1670, Richard Jobson’s *The Golden Trade or a Discovery of the River Gambia and the Golden Trade of the Aethiopians*, published in 1623, and William Bosman’s *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, published in 1704. Bosman spent 14 years as a trader on the Gold Coast. Apart from the long-term residents, some commercial agents who made voyages to West Africa also published. Jean Barbot, for example, visited various parts of West Africa in 1678 and 1679 and 1681 and 1682. His *Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea and of Ethiopia Inferior*, published posthumously in 1732, is a mixture of original firsthand observation and derived information. Several other publications from this period are amalgamations from sources about travel in West Africa. In 1668 the Dutchman Olfert Dapper published *Naukeurige beschrijvinge der Afrikaensche gewesten*, and French Dominican priest Père Jean-Baptiste Labat published *Nouvelle Relation de l’Afrique Occidentale* in 1728. Neither Dapper nor Labat traveled in West Africa but made use the works of other travelers. Works published by the mid-eighteenth century already had the corpus of themes that would, in differing configurations, dominate West African travel narratives to the close of the nineteenth century. The travelogues provided accounts of the peoples, fauna, and flora on the coast. Accounts also devoted great space to opportunities for commerce and the adventures of travelers. Reports on the slave trade, in particular, grew in volume and came to dominate nineteenth-century narratives.

There was a decisive shift in patterns of travel to West Africa in the last decades of the eighteenth cen-
tury. Instead of cursory travels and explorations on the coast, different parties organized travels and expeditions with specific goals. Expeditions employed two approaches into West Africa. The northern course started out in Egypt (Cairo) or Libya (Tripoli via Fezzan) and went across the Sahara desert. The southern route was by sea from a European port to West Africa and then overland through the coastal areas into the African heartland. The greatest objectives were to resolve the mystery about the Niger and to acquire firsthand European accounts of the legendary wealth of West African cities such as Timbuktu. Behind these objectives lay, ultimately, commercial interests that provided crucial impetus for the great age of exploration in West Africa. A major event in the history of West African explorations was the foundation of the Association for Promoting the Discovery of the Interior Parts of Africa (African Association). Founded in London in 1788 to promote travel and exploration in West Africa, the activities of the association ensured British domination of the age of exploration at the turn of the eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century. Between 1790 and 1830 travelers and explorers resolved the major geographical puzzles about West Africa.

Mungo Park was the first great success of the African Association. Park traveled in West Africa between May 1795 and December 1797 (and again in 1805) and established conclusively that the Niger flowed eastward. At about the same time as Park’s first travels, the German Frederick Horneman set out to travel into West Africa from Cairo. Horneman crossed the Sahara and traveled as far as Bornu but died of dysentery. In March 1822 Major Dixon Denham, Walter Oudney, and Hugh Clapperton set from Tripoli. The party traveled down to Bornu in modern Nigeria. Denham traveled extensively through Bornu and visited Lake Chad, while Clapperton went as far west as Sokoto in present-day northern Nigeria. Walter Oudney did not survive the expedition.

Attention remained with the Niger throughout the period between 1820 and 1850 as explorers sought to determine its course and termination. In 1825 Clapperton returned to West Africa as head of a new exploring party. Clapperton’s second journey was the first in a series of expeditions that explored what came to be
called the Niger valley. In 1830 Richard Lander, who had accompanied Clapperton in 1825, returned to the Niger valley with his brother, John. Both men navigated the Niger and determined that it ran into the Atlantic at the Bight of Benin. Between 1832 and 1852, three major British expeditions went up the Niger. Richard Lander and Macgregor Laird led a trade expedition in 1832. Captain H.D. Trotter led another expedition in 1841. Both expeditions were ill fated and ended with high mortality. However, a third British expedition under the leadership of William Balfour Baikie in 1852 was accomplished without loss of lives.

Apart from the explorations in the Niger valley there was great activity in other West African theaters of travel. The city of Timbuktu continued to attract travelers. In 1826 Gordon Laing set out from Tripoli and reached Timbuktu in August, but was killed on his return journey to Tripoli. It was not until 1828 that a European, the Frenchman René Caillé, would successfully visit Timbuktu and return alive to recount his travels. From Mungo Park to René Caillé, travelers and explorers who participated in the major explorations published accounts of their feats in which adventure, hardship, and illness feature as the dominant tropes. The high mortality rate and tropical illnesses among European travelers, that had always been associated with West African travel featured most prominently in narratives devoted to Niger explorations. In later years, they feature prominently in the narratives of European and American travelers, such as missionaries and traders, who reside in West Africa.

With the great mysteries of West Africa resolved there was, again, a change in the motives and types of travel. From the mid-nineteenth century European travel in West Africa came more openly under the banner of commercial and imperial interests, although these were often coupled with humanitarian endeavors. In the north, the regions around Lake Chad and the Sokoto caliphate (which included territories in modern Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Cameroon) became scenes of travel. Several notable German travelers explored these regions between 1850 and 1885. In 1850 the Germans Heinrich Barth and Adolf Overweg set out from Tripoli with a British expedition under the command of James Richardson. Richardson and Overweg died in the course of subsequent travels, but Barth traveled through modern Nigeria and Chad, visited Timbuktu, and returned to Tripoli in 1855. At about the same time, Eduard Vogel visited Lake Chad and Adamawa. In 1862 Moritz von Beuermann visited Bornu, and Gerhard Rohls traveled in the caliphate in 1865 and 1867. Eduard Flegel traveled there between 1882 and 1884, and in 1885, he led an expedition of the Afrikanische Gesellschaft in Deutschland (African Society in Germany, founded in 1873) to northern West Africa. Barth’s accounts of his travels, along with Paul Staudinger’s accounts of the second Flegel expedition, remain some of the most exhaustive European sources on the nineteenth-century Sokoto caliphate.

Along the coast the nineteenth century was a period of transition. The work of the African Colonization Society in the United States and the establishment of the colonies of Liberia (1822) and Maryland (1834) instituted travel between the United States and West Africa. The abolition of the slave trade in England in 1807 and subsequent British blockade along the coast also induced changes in previous cultures of travel: humanitarian endeavors to abolish the slave trade emerged as a major theme in travel narratives. Naval officers, administrators and other government agents, and missionaries became a distinct group of travelers. Missionary societies published the journals of missionaries in the field in West Africa regularly. A great number of accounts of naval travel linked to the blockade also emerged. Travelers poured into the interior as they visited the kingdoms of Ashanti, Dahomey, the Yoruba states, regions of the Niger Delta and Oil Rivers and the Cameroons. John Duncan traveled through Dahomey and other parts of the coast in 1845 and 1846. Frederick E. Forbes also visited Dahomey in 1849 and 1850. Richard Burton, British consul at Fernando Po (1861–1864), published five books about his travels in West Africa. Mary Kingsley traveled in areas of modern Nigeria, Cameroon, and Gabon between 1893 and 1895. For African-American travelers, Liberia became an important destination. Travel narratives published after the 1850s foreground fewer themes of adventure and exploration. As travelers sought to provide overviews of different regions, their narratives became increasingly ethnographic. The histories of different peoples also emerged as a popular theme. Of particular interest were encounters with the different forms of fetish and the perceived horrors of West Africa, such as human sacrifice and cannibalism. In fact, accounts of fetish remain an evergreen in contemporary travel writing.

The partitioning of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1884 ushered in formal colonialism in most parts of West Africa. Travelers wrote of a West Africa leaving behind past customs and moving into a modern age. Joseph Reading captures this concept in his title: A Voyage along the Western Coast: or, Newest Africa, a Description of Newest Africa, or, the Africa of Today and the Immediate Future, published in 1901. Administrators (or members of their families) and other people in the employment of colonial governments wrote a number of accounts of this period. Margery Perham, for example, wrote her West African Passage based on her experience when she visited Nigeria in 1931 to study colonial administration. Michel Defos-
sez’s Kabakourou is a narrative of his travels as a geologist for the French colonial government in the 1950s. An exception to this trend is Graham Greene’s journey to Liberia in 1935, recorded in Journey without Maps, in which Greene deals less with the political progress of African nations. Instead, West Africa is a backdrop for his venture into the jungle and away from civilization. Other travelers were more interested in the politics of West African nations. In Richard Wright’s Black Power (1954), Ghana is a nation on the verge of independence and struggling to find a suitable course for the future. About a decade after Wright, a delegation from the Chinese-African People’s Friendship Association visited eight West African countries. In Glimpses of West Africa, Feng Chih-Tan’s narrative of the Chinese visit, the author writes of West Africa’s passage “from dark night to glorious dawn.” Both accounts of political travel foreshadow the emergence of postcolonial political concerns and issues in contemporary travel narratives about West Africa.

In the near half-century after Wright, the emergence of independent nations has effected changes in travel writing about West Africa. Travelers write, increasingly, with greater self-reflexivity about contemporary West African nations. In recent narratives, travelers seem to be particularly interested in the imbrications of modern West African societies with West Africa’s historical legacies of the slave trade, colonialism, and travels of exploration. While they travel with an acute awareness of the present social, economic, and political problems of West African nations, travelers invariably filter their presence in West Africa through the prism of its past. Thus, in The Atlantic Sound (2000), Caryl Phillips’s encounter with Ghana and Ghanaians is filtered through the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade. In Mark Jenkins’s To Timbuktu: A Journey down the Niger (1997) and Peter Hudson’s Two Rivers: Travels in West Africa on the Trail of Mungo Park (1990), the authors plot and mediate their contemporary travels with the adventures of René Caillé and Mungo Park.

Not all travelers plot out the routes of nineteenth-century adventures. Some find adventure by traveling in novel ways: Neil Peart cycles in The Masked Rider (1996), Peter Chilson recounts the pleasures of road travel in Riding the Demon (1999), and Christina Dodwell flies a microlight in Travels with Pegasus (1989). Others find adventure in spite of themselves as innocently undertaken travel turns into a string of escapades. In these humoresque compositions, African characters often feature as sidekicks. Time and again, the perceived clash between traditional beliefs and modern ways of life provides narrative tension. In French Lessons in Africa (1993), Peter Biddlecombe recounts, for example, that for a minister’s “first visit to London, as head of his government’s delegation, his servants had packed his boubou, two shirts—and a tent.” It would perhaps be unfair to state that such encounters with absurd and surreal conditions are orchestrated, but travelers certainly play up their escapades when writing their journals. Some writers, Peter Chilson is but one example, write impressively about West Africans as people making the most of sometimes dire situations.

Like most contemporary travel writing, West African travel is written with an eye to a potential readership and the commercial market. Just as nineteenth-century heroic travel replaced eighteenth-century curiosory explorations on the coast, at the start of the twenty-first century humoros escapades with de rigueur evocations of the absurd and the surreal can be said to have replaced the trope of heroic explorations. With humor, contemporary travelers encounter corrupt policemen, bad roads, and precarious political landscapes, contract dysentery and, yet, write about the joie de vivre of the different West African peoples. Not all travel writing falls under this broad sweep, and the ethnographic interest in West African societies has not disappeared. Late twentieth-century writing simply has a greater plurality of genres and interests. Besides, travelers appear to eschew anything remotely resembling a heroic gesture in modern travels. Writers with interests in social issues and the environment write in a frank, direct manner in travel accounts that verge on reportage, but whatever their persuasions, almost all writers document what they see as the ills of West African nations. Robert Kaplan has, perhaps, done this more graphically and with a stronger sense of foreboding than any other. Unlike Kaplan, though, some writers realize that they could only write about the region, or indeed any other, while residing there with a definite function in the society. Thus, in a manner that harks back to earlier reports of residences in West Africa, in Letters from Togo (1991), Susan Blake documents a year as a Fulbright scholar. Similarly, in Village of Waiting (1988), George Packer recounts his experience as a Peace Corp volunteer in Togo in 1982 and 1983. Such travel narratives, bordering on autobiography, offer different insights into West Africa, its peoples and nations. Even more, such narratives borne out of residence balance contemporary accounts that portray travel in West Africa as a string of escapades.

Taiwo AdeTunji Osinubi

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See also Guinea Coast; Sahel; Timbuktu

WESTERMARCK, EDVARD (1862–1939)

Finnish Philosopher, Sociologist, and Anthropologist

Edvard Alexander Westermarck (Edward Westermarck in English publications) was born into a Swedish-speaking family of official class in Finland. Although well-off, he had a trying youth because of poor health:

I had to abstain from all strenuous exercise . . . since such exertion, especially in the winter’s cold, seldom failed to give an immediate attack of asthma . . . I was compelled to sit indoors gasping for breath in an atmosphere impregnated with turpentine and aniseed . . . And all this lasted, not only through my childhood, but into adolescence as well, and robbed these years of much of that gaiety which results from a healthy open-air life with companions of one’s own age. My mind was turned inwards. (Memories)

Westermarck’s asthmatic disposition was a blessing in disguise, forcing him into reading and reflection, in brief, into a scholar’s way of life. With a Master of Arts and a Rosenberg scholarship in his portfolio, he continued his postgraduate studies in London (1887–1888). Under the cupola in the British Museum he laid the foundations of a successful academic career: “never have I experienced such a feeling of devotion as under the reading-room’s great cupola . . . This is the dwelling of the goddess of thought . . . the storehouse of all the knowledge garnered through the centuries, and by the stroke of a pen one can share in any of its treasures” (Memories).

Having read accounts of the lives of primitive people by travelers, missionaries, and civil servants, published his doctoral thesis, *The Origin of Human Marriage* (1889), and the bestseller, *The History of Human Marriage* (1891), Westermarck felt a need to collect material firsthand, as the ongoing Torres Straits Cambridge Expedition (1898) was doing. He made his first journey to Morocco early in March 1898. He stayed until 1900, moving from Tangier with his Moroccan servant, interpreter, and key informant, Sidi Abdsslam, via Tetuan, Fez, and Mequinez back to Tangier. In Marrakesh, the sultan’s adviser Kaid Maclean saved him from an awkward situation in which all his property except his revolver and nightgown had been stolen. In spite of the hardships, his vivid description of the journey shows a man with a true traveler’s spirit: “The never-ending riding, sometimes for ten or twelve hours a day, the burning sun, the poor food, and the dirty drinking water . . . the innumerable small creatures . . . But what did small discomforts matter in comparison to the indescribable delight of a journey in this land with its wonderful medieval atmosphere?” (Memories).

Westermarck rented a house in Tetuan in November 1899. There he began to write his *Moral Ideas*, and in-between his studies made excursions to the Berber villages in the Rif Mountains, determined to learn the dialects of the local Arabs and Berbers; “anyone who has made it his object to study a foreign nation . . . must learn their language, for not even the very best interpreters can make up for what an investigator loses if he himself is unable to communicate with the natives and to understand what they say” (Memories). He made a habit of going around disguised as a Moor, and he once even attended a wedding ceremony as an uninvited guest.

Westermarck’s second journey, between September 1900 and November 1902, was to become his grand tour. With two horse-loads of books he crossed central Morocco, studying the people and writing his *Moral Ideas*. After six weeks in the village of Brish, he went to Jebel Hbib. Two weeks later he left for the village of Dar Fellaq, and went on to Marrakesh, from where he visited the High Atlas Mountains. In Marrakesh a Berber scribe spent six months instructing him in the language and customs of his tribe.

In August 1901 he arrived at Mogador, working there for a couple of months. Traveling via Casablanca and Salé along the coast, he arrived in Tangier in mid-January 1902. After two months he left for Andjra, Sidi Abdsslam’s native village in the Rif Mountains. He rented a one-room house for six months and erected a tent outside as his study. After the heatwave arrived he moved higher into the cooler mountains.

After 1904 Westermarck spent his years teaching in Finland, and the London School of Economics, and devoted time to anthropological field studies in Morocco. Morocco became his Shangri-La. He returned there almost every year until World War I. Most of his books are dated from his Tusculum outside Tangier, to which he regularly returned to write and for recreation.

In 1905 he spent six months in Mazagan. When *The Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas* appeared in 1906, reviewers expressed their admiration for his