examine the adaptation of Irish tradition with reference to some of the sociological phenomena such as international and internal migration, the rejection of the inheritance of the family farm, and the gradual conversion—by purchase—of some rural villages into summer cottage conurbations for "quaint"-seeking, middle-class urbanites.

Publishers Gordon and Breach have performed an important service to both Ireland and Irish anthropological studies, and they are to be congratulated for releasing this volume and the interesting series (the Library of Anthropology) of which it is a part. They might also be slapped on the wrist for certain aspects of the book's production—notably the ghastly and greasy linoleum-like material which constitutes the book's cover (perhaps it is meant to be read in the bath?), and the unnecessary publication of Shanklin's fieldwork interview schedule as an appendix.

The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800-1500

Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985. vii + 133 pp. $11.95 (paper), $20.00 (cloth)

Reviewer: Carol M. Eastman
University of Washington

Cutting through what the authors see as a web of commonly held misperceptions about the history of Swahili language and society, this valuable little book questions the tendency to accept Swahili oral traditions which point to Arabic origins without analyzing the function and meaning which such traditions have for Swahili people. Nurse and Spear argue that the Swahili are an African people "born of that continent and raised on it," whose historical development involved a dynamic synthesis of African and Arabian ideas in the context of African culture-history. Their revision of Swahili history sets 800 A.D. as the time of origin of the Swahili. They then trace the subsequent rise of Swahili language and culture, and assert that the Swahili are "less a people than a historical phenomenon" (p. 96).

Eminently readable in five short chapters (98 pages), this book examines the African background of Swahili society, the emergence of Swahili-speaking peoples, early Swahili society (800-1100 A.D.), and the rise of Swahili town states. Four appendices geared to comparative linguists seek to establish dialect/language subgroupings. Swahili/Elwana is distinguished from Comorian/Mijikenda/Pokomo; Northern and Southern Swahili dialects are distinguished from each other; the Northern and Southern dialects are internally distinguished; and a final appendix examines features which (Northern) Swahili dialects and Comorian share in the process of forming the sub-group *Sabaki*. The authors locate the homeland of *Sabaki* (an offshoot of Proto-Bantu) on the Tana River, whence Proto-Swahili and Comorian speakers are seen to diverge, later shifting to the northern and southern coastal areas of East Africa when they adopted a maritime lifestyle.

The Swahili may be seen as a "textbook" example of the utility of the comparative method and linguistic reconstruction for language and culture history. Swahili and its dialects are seen to have arisen amidst a continuous development of local

pottery style and building techniques, coinciding with the earliest settlements at Shanga in the north and Kilwa in the south. A vast array of scholarship is woven into this gripping tale. The long-standing "problem" of identifying the Shirazi, who figure prominently in Swahili oral traditions, is solved. The 18th and 19th centuries are fixed as *the* period when most Arabic (Omani) influence entered Swahili. Islam's influence is downplayed, and may *not* have been as great at first as has generally been thought. Details of the Shirazi and Mahdali dynasties in Kilwa demonstrate how *waungwana* family rule gave way to an eventual monarchical form of government, which made claims to foreign origin in the interest of establishing its legitimacy. Islam only gained a foothold in response to a need for more universal beliefs once village world views had become "too parochial" (p. 95).

The easy style and general level of readership at which this book is aimed may lead a casual reader to feel that its points are well-established in the scholarly literature. However, one needs to be reminded that some claims which are made in this "revision" of Swahili history may be controversial. It must also be made clear that, in separate scholarly writings leading to this collaboration, the authors have presented plausible bases for the assertions which are made here. To have dotted each "i" and crossed every "t" in this general account of their version of Swahili history would have been counterproductive.

Along with the authors, we are guided through years of ethnography, history, documentation and oral traditions to "discover" that the earliest period of Swahili history spanned the 9th to 12th centuries, when Swahili speakers who were skilled in fishing, farming and ironworking moved down the coast of eastern and southern Africa to found small villages. These villages formed the basis of Swahili society and culture which lasted from the 12th century to the Portuguese period and included Arab trade influences. The strength of this small book lies in its assertion of a non-Arab origin of Swahili language and society based on linguistic, historic, archaeological and ethnographic evidence. It will clearly have an impact on interdisciplinary approaches to East Africa's culture history. Furthermore, the conceptual framework which this book exemplifies should prove useful to scholars of sociocultural and linguistic history, as well as to historical sociolinguists.

Social Adaptation to Food Stress: A Prehistoric Southwestern Example
Paul E. Minnis
Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1985. x + 239 pp. $20.00 (cloth), $8.00 (paper)

Reviewer: Gloria Levitas
Queens College of the City University of New York

Although many theorists have implicated food shortages in culture change, testing theories about the effects of food stress on the behaviour of people in non-stratified prehistoric societies has proven difficult for a number of reasons. Direct skeletal evidence of nutritional status is rare; many human responses to food shortages are brief or leave few material traces; contemporary data from non-stratified groups is contaminated by colonialism and modernization. Finally, there have been few attempts to develop archaeologically testable models.