There has recently been an upsurge of interest in the history of the Atlantic slave trade, its rise, mode of operation, and abolition. The present volume both derives from and testifies to the present interest.

The Atlantic slave trade was one of the dozen or so great streams of long-distance and even intercontinental migration which have swept the world in modern times, though it was almost certainly not the largest, most swiftly flowing or most immediately consequential. The involuntary nature of the Atlantic migration of Black Africans distinguishes this movement from other great modern migrations, but only partly. For it may be asserted that no *Volkerwanderung* is wholly voluntary, and that this slave migration differed only in degree of involuntariness from modern large-scale migrations of ‘free’ persons. In longer perspective, the Atlantic slave trade was only one of numberless migrations in history which have been (from the point of view of the individuals transferred, though not necessarily from the point of view of their societies) wholly involuntary. But what distinguishes the Atlantic slave trade from other great migrations in which the involuntary element was predominant, for instance, from its contextual neighbours, the Saharan, the Nile, and the East African slave trades, and what finally gives the Atlantic slave trade its peculiar interest for modern scholars, is that it occurred in historical circumstances which led to its being recorded, in fair detail, both in its operation and its abolition, in documentation extant and available today. Thus, the Atlantic slave trade is studied in our day and age, though from many different angles of interest, basically as the longest and largest
migration in human history which was both wholly involuntary and sufficiently recorded.

History being what the historians can make of the records, the historiography of the Atlantic slave trade is necessarily related to the uncovering of records. Recent and important advances in understanding have sprung largely from the realisation that more records were available than earlier generations of historians knew, or cared to use, or were capable of handling. Hence the latest international symposium on the Atlantic slave trade begins with a chapter whose earliest sections are entitled ‘Une histoire qui reste à écrire’ and ‘Une histoire qu’il est possible d’écrire’ (‘A history yet to be written’ and ‘A history which can be written’). The present volume attempts to show that a sound understanding of the Atlantic slave trade, as of any phenomenon in the past, depends on a sufficiency of records and their systematic and objective exploitation.

Since historians are themselves enmeshed in the historical process, the new upsurge of interest in the Atlantic slave trade has of course also derived from changing global power-dispositions. Much as in earlier centuries, it has seemed good to some writers and historians to present the history of the Atlantic slave trade as an exemplum for value-judgements intended to supply emotive drive to contemporary popular expressions of power shift. The present volume tends to ignore this second source of interest, and its vocabulary. It does so advisedly, in the conviction that the ‘clinical’ approach to the human past is of more lasting value than the ‘passionate’.

The purpose of the present volume is to draw attention to recent study of the Atlantic slave trade in its most active full century, the eighteenth century, the period in which Britain and above all the port of Liverpool began to play an increasingly major role in the trade, and to recent study of the ending of Liverpool’s slave trade by the British abolition of 1806–7. A definitive picture of any aspect of these subjects is only just beginning to emerge. Indeed, the most striking advances in understanding which have been wrung from a more systematic study of the records, for instance, by the application of strict quantitative analysis, have to some extent merely served to point out the inadequacy of earlier understanding. More so perhaps than in most other fields of history, the general reader who is
Introduction

anxious to gain an objective assessment of what is and can be
known about the Atlantic slave trade, in relation to Black Africa
on the one hand and to Liverpool and Britain on the other, is
most strongly recommended to treat earlier writings as little
more than documentation of contemporary opinions and partial
information. And instead he is urged to concentrate on a hand-
ful of works written within the last decade, especially David B.
Davis’ *The problem of slavery in western culture* (1966), Philip
D. Curtin’s *The Atlantic slave trade: a census* (1969), A. G.
Hopkins’ *Economic history of West Africa* (1973), Roger Anstey’s
*The Atlantic slave trade and British abolition* (1975) and the
recent symposium (partly in English) on *La traite des noirs par
l’Atlantique* (1975). These works, while they build on earlier
research and provide useful guides to it, also indicate, explicitly
or implicitly, areas in which research is not only needed (too often
a pious ploy of the historian) but can actually be performed on
records known to exist. Some of this research is under way, and
the essays in the present volume provide a sample of current
research, at various levels of inquiry. If the essays are modest in
general conclusions, as befits interim reports, nevertheless they
show very clearly the directions in which research is proceeding,
and they make it clear that many of the general conclusions
accepted in the past are no longer tenable. They do not add up
to a history of the Liverpool slave trade and British abolition,
yet taken together with the works cited above, whose information
they attempt not to repeat, they provide a moderately com-
prehensive guide to the present state of knowledge.

* * *

When John Newton noted in his sea journal for 10 February
1750 that ‘the punt and canoe made each two trips from Liver-
pool . . . Will Grey of Liverpool sent me off a woman slave with
a young child, but I refused her, being very long breasted’, the
locality he was referring to was not on the River Mersey but on
the River St Paul in that section of the Guinea coast which is
now Liberia. ‘Black Liverpool’, as this beach village was often
known to English slave captains, was not the only Liverpool in
West Africa, for there was another to the north, on Rio Pongas
(in modern Guinée). Both were slaving centres. Captain Newton,
later the Evangelical clergyman, co-writer of the Olney Hymns,
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and abolitionist, had in fact sailed from white Liverpool; and there, a few years later, as he wrote in a letter of 1754, he 'had the pleasure of returning thanks in all the churches, for an African voyage performed without any disaster or the loss of a single man'. A generation later, an African trader at Calabar (in what is now Nigeria) kept a diary in pidgin English; and the entry for 7 March 1785 reads—'About 6 a.m. in Aqua landing with fine morning so I go down for landing. After 10 o'clock wee go chop for Egbo Young house Liverpool Hall and after 12 clock we see new ships mate come. And come to tell us his [ship] will not come heer, did go Camrown. So Duke say, berry well, may go way plase.' That is, the African diarist and his black colleagues met for a meal, and to receive a message from a passing slave ship, at the abode of one of them which bore the name 'Liverpool Hall'. On 25 December of the same year the Calabar traders gave a Christmas dinner (the diarist calls it a New Year dinner) to Captains Fairweather and Potter, the former certainly from Liverpool, the latter probably so.

These extracts serve to illustrate the close and involved contact between Liverpool and the western coasts of Black Africa during the later and most flourishing period of the Atlantic slave trade. While this contact is an oft-mentioned item in Africanist scholarship, and in the cultural and political mythology of developing Black Africa, it has in the present century been made somewhat light of in Liverpool. The 125 volumes of local history Transactions contain only a handful of papers referring to the slave trade; and the best history of Liverpool, written in 1957 by the then Public Librarian and commended by the Lord Mayor, though it contains four chapters on the inconsequential pre-1700 history, can muster only two paragraphs on African trade, the second concluding thus: 'In the long run, the triangular operation based on Liverpool was to bring benefits, not least to the transplanted slaves, whose descendants have subsequently achieved in the New World standards of education and civilisation far ahead of their compatriots whom they left behind.' Without adopting such a Panglossian stance, it is possible to believe that those who blame white Europe for Black Africa's backwardness ('How Europe underdeveloped Africa' is the title of one work), and specify Liverpool's responsibility during the period of the slave trade, over-simplify and exag-
gerate. In relation to this debate on Third World history, the present volume contains material which contributes to the perennial discussion of the size of slave trade profits and their contribution to British industrialisation.\textsuperscript{10}

As one contributor suggests, it is likely that Liverpool was more important for the slave trade than the slave trade was for Liverpool. There were certainly reasons other than shame or callousness why modern Liverpool has forgotten the slave trade. Only a limited proportion of Liverpool commerce engaged in the African trade even at its peak, and some contemporaries must have regarded it as mainly a service necessary for the development of the generally more important American connection. Further, a large part of the present-day population of Merseyside derives not from the eighteenth-century population but from the massive immigration after 1807, especially from Ireland; and naturally the griefs of Africa come a poor third locally to the griefs of urban adjustment and the griefs of Ireland. Finally, the physical expansion and redevelopment of the town and port in the nineteenth century means that there is little monumental reminder of the slave trade period. Exceptionally the Bluecoat School still stands: it was built by Bryan Blewell and other merchants with slave trading interests, and the historian of the port unkindly concludes—'they were so often mean that we should remember the occasion when they were generous'.\textsuperscript{11}

Nevertheless it is possible to trace connections between the Atlantic slave trade and modern Liverpool. Legislation of the 1790s required British slave ships to carry a surgeon, and the training of such surgeons was undertaken in Liverpool: it has been argued that this established a tradition of medical teaching, and possibly of interest in tropical medicine, which led eventually to the establishment of the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (and therefore in turn to Sir Ronald Ross’ experiments in mosquito control in West Africa, conducted on behalf of the School).\textsuperscript{12} It does not seem to be the case that any part of the small community of persons of African extraction established in Liverpool today is descended from ancestors who arrived on Merseyside before 1807; and it is not even clear that a tradition of black settlement goes back to the eighteenth century. However, in the 1780s there were living in Liverpool as temporary
residents some 80 or so black children, sons and daughters of African merchants and slavers, who had been sent by their parents to Britain for primary education.\textsuperscript{13} Though a continuous tradition of African education on Merseyside cannot be claimed, since only in the present century did African students begin to come to Liverpool’s higher colleges and university, a tradition of the use of local facilities by visiting West African intellectuals has been maintained. In the nineteenth century this mainly took the form of the early generations of ‘modernised’ West Africans entrusting their books and pamphlets to Liverpool firms to print and publish. At the turn of the century, E. W. Blyden, ‘the Father of West African nationalism’, whose patron and friend was Sir Alfred Jones, the Liverpool shipowner, not only published in the town but on his regular visits was to be found addressing local societies and attending as guest of honour the launching of ships for the Africa trade.

Jones, Blyden, and their mutual acquaintance Mary Kingsley, shared views about the cultural evolution of Black Africa which led to their criticising current British government policy. But more radical was the anti-imperialism of the Merseyside writer, Gomer Williams, whose pages on the Liverpool slave trade in his 1897 volume were intended as a contribution to that movement of protest against imperial advance in Africa which was to produce Lloyd George’s pro-Boer stance and J. A. Hobson’s *Imperialism* (1903). With the aid of misleading statistics Williams argued that Britain had exploited Africa in the past, by making immense profits out of the slave trade.\textsuperscript{14} But perhaps Williams’ most lasting contribution to the history of the trade was his inclusion in his book of a handful of letters (the originals since lost) written to Liverpool in the 1790s by the African traders of the same Calabar which sited ‘Liverpool Hall’. And this brings us back to the essential past link between Liverpool and Black Africa, the commercial one. Based in some part on the experience and goodwill of contacts in the eighteenth century, and on the capital generated, Liverpool’s produce trade with West Africa grew rapidly in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, creating such business enterprises as Elder Dempster, John Holt, and Lever Brothers. West African produce assisted the industrial growth of Merseyside, and has left its monument on the map in Port Sunlight. The connection with Blyden and
Gomer Williams carries the tenuous cultural link between Liverpool and Black Africa forward into the anti-colonial 1970s: whether the more substantial commercial link will survive Third World cultural revolution remains to be seen.

* * *

Study of the Liverpool slave trade has been revolutionised in the last few years by four separate historiographical developments: first, the systematic academic study of African history, leading to a careful and evidenced assessment of long-term economic and social change in West Africa during the period of the Atlantic slave trade; secondly, the detailed examination by economic historians of the business organisation of the British slave trade, in the context of what is known about other British trades and industries in the same period; thirdly, renewed and wider inquiry into changes in social and moral values in Europe and Britain in the period 1700–1850, involving perspectives which induce questioning of the simplistic assumptions of the past regarding moral motivation and economic self-interest; and finally, through the growth of local history, a more cautious and detailed investigation of the economic, social and political structures of eighteenth-century Liverpool. All four developments are represented in the essays that follow.

Liverpool became a leading port for the organisation and operation of the Atlantic slave trade in the 1740s; and during the next six decades, up to 1807, large numbers of Liverpool vessels, normally between 40 and 110, visited Africa annually. The first two essays describe some of the historical circumstances within which the Liverpool enterprise developed. Marion Johnson discusses the economic organisation of slave trading on the West African coast, particularly in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, when most of the trading was done on the west and central sections of that coast. Further, she discusses the relationship between the slave trade and the general African economy, a relationship which, in keeping with widely accepted current views, she sees as one whereby the slave trade was closely integrated with long-term and rational trends in the relevant African societies. W. E. Minchinton looks at the period immediately before Liverpool’s supremacy in the British trade. Describing Bristol’s trade with the more southern of the Thirteen
Colonies, he considers many aspects of the economic organisation—for instance, seasonality, voyage duration, and slaves/ship ratios—which are again discussed in later essays in relation to the subsequent Liverpool trade. David Richardson considers the Liverpool trade of the third quarter of the eighteenth century, as exemplified in the activities of, and recorded in the accounts of, William Davenport; and his analysis of the accounts, probably the most detailed evidence on any large sample of the Liverpool trade, is directed towards conclusions about shifting levels of profits. He thus contributes to the resolution of a problem which recent research, not only on the British but on the French and Dutch trades, has brought to the fore: since average slave trade profits in the eighteenth century were not high by the standards of the age, that is, in relation to the returns that could be obtained in many other forms of capital investment, why—and how—did astute business men continue to conduct the trade?15

Three essays, all drawing in part on a single archive source recently discovered, describe aspects of the Liverpool trade at its height. D. P. Lamb provides a detailed statistical analysis of the volume of the Liverpool trade, and of the size of the ships employed; and in an appendix assesses the implications of changes in methods of tonnage calculation. Herbert S. Klein and Stanley L. Engerman consider the mortality of slaves aboard British ships during the 1790s, and see mortality differentials as arising as much from changes in the size of ships, and shifts in the preferred African regions for slaving, as from the effect of legislation; so that they question whether the traditional explanation of differential mortality, degree of ‘overcrowding’, is adequate or even helpful.16 B. K. Drake, dealing with the last period of the Liverpool slave trade, examines those commercial and entrepreneurial problems of a typical slave voyage which arose in Liverpool or on the African coast. He especially examines the regional preferences of Liverpool traders, and the shift first eastwards to the Niger Delta and then on southwards to Angola. Liverpool vessels also traded in produce, and some attention is devoted to this trade whose continuance and growth after abolition has carried the period of intense commercial relations between Liverpool and Black Africa, beginning in the 1740s, forward to the present time. Topics principally dealt with in the
above six essays on the slave trade are listed, for the convenience of the reader, on pp. 10–11.

The remaining essays in the volume deal with the British abolition of the slave trade in 1806–7. Roger Anstey examines the historiography of abolition and considers the significance of some recent works. Seymour Drescher's paper considers and rejects the proposition that abolition represented essentially a response to the imperatives of emergent British industrial capitalism: he denies that 'the end of the slave trade is a tale of triumphant economic supersession'. Instead he contends that abolition meant a triumph of new moral values over immediate economic self-interest, and that this occurred because ideas concerning the non-property status of human beings were extended from application solely in the homeland and to British persons, to application in distant lands and to persons of exotic cultures. In the final essay, Frank Sanderson assesses the activities of those men in Liverpool who supported abolition; and he concludes that their place in history lies somewhere between the blank space implied by the common view that Liverpool solidly supported the slave trade, and the pedestal proposed by historians who have believed that the Liverpool abolitionists were national leaders and local martyrs.

Essayists were encouraged to provide generous bibliographical references and supply information about the less well known archive material. Contemporary official printed material is listed in Mr Lamb's second appendix, which also describes the unprinted lists in the House of Lords Record Office. Mrs Johnson comments on archive material in the Public Record Office (London) and in Holland. Mr Richardson describes the Davies-Davenport papers at the University of Keele Library, and he, as well as Mr Drake and Mr Sanderson, employs material from Liverpool archives. Mr Drake makes extensive use of the Liverpool press. This information about sources supplements that in two recent bibliographies. Peter C. Hogg's *The African slave trade and its suppression* (1973) is geographically very wide-ranging and meticulous in the detail it supplies, but it lacks a close historical introduction and is sometimes deficient in the very detail which the working historian requires. F. E. Sanderson's article, 'Liverpool and the slave trade: a guide to sources' (*THSLC* 124, 1973, pp. 154–76), provides a sound, thorough
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and helpful guide to the more limited topic, not only in relation to printed sources but also to archive material. Unpublished material not cited in these bibliographies includes several valuable theses and dissertations, Mr Richardson's on the Bristol slave trade (Manchester, 1969), and those mentioned in Mr Lamb's and Mr Drake's essays, including their own, which have been produced at Exeter, under Professor W. E. Minchinton, and at Liverpool. Finally an article by Mr Maurice Schofield, a former President of the Historic Society, on the slave enterprises of North-West ports other than Liverpool, which represents many years of research on Mediterranean Passes and other mid-eighteenth-century material in the Public Record Office, was prepared for this volume, but regrettably had to be excluded for reasons of space, and will appear instead in a subsequent issue of the Transactions.  

Acknowledgements

The present volume derives from a small seminar on 'Liverpool, the slave trade, and abolition', held in the School of History, University of Liverpool, in May 1974. The seminar was organised by Frank Sanderson and attended by most of the scholars who have contributed essays to the present volume. We wish to thank Mr Sanderson for his initiative; and the officers of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire for inviting us to transform the informal discussions at the seminar into a volume of essays for the Society's Occasional series. On behalf of the contributors we would like to express indebtedness for assistance rendered by library and archive staff in various libraries, but particularly in Liverpool public libraries and University library. On behalf of the Society as well as ourselves, we thank the contributors for their cooperation, tolerance and punctuality. Finally, we wish to thank the Society's editors, who have given us regular advice and guidance over a period of many months. Without their willingness to undertake additional labours the appearance of this volume would have been impossible.

Principal topics covered in slave trade essays (chapters 2–7)

(Essays are cited by the first letter of the author's name). Liverpool became the major British port in the trade, succeeding London and Bristol (M,L): the volume of the trade during parts of the eighteenth century (M,L) was affected by wars (R,L). Like Bristol merchants before them (M), Liverpool merchants financed and organised slave voyages (R,D): financing was done partly by direct investment, partly by arranging credit (R,D). Insurance (R) and management (R) had also to be arranged; and trade goods acceptable to Africans procured (J,R,D). Though ships were
of varying size, the average increased over time (M,L); and some vessels performed several voyages (R,M). To some extent there was a season for departure from Liverpool (M,D), a season for being on the African coast (D), and a season for arriving at North American ports (M). Average durations of the whole triangular voyage (M,KE,D), of the voyage to Africa and the voyage on to America (KE), also of stay in Africa (KE,D) and in America (M), have been calculated for samples of vessels at different periods. On the African coast, Liverpool slave merchants had strong regional preferences which resulted in geographical shifts (R,L,KE,D). They traded with African merchants, using various forms of exchange and methods of trading (J), including some granting of credit (J,D); and pricing mechanisms were complex (D). They traded for produce as well as slaves (D); and they paid dues demanded by African polities (J,D). Turn-around times influenced regional preferences and were perhaps determined by African circumstances (D). Factors in slave mortality aboard ship included regional provenance and the male/female and adult/child ratios (M,KE). The slaves were sold in various ports of the West Indies (KE) or North American mainland (M), where some of the crew of slave ships deserted (M) and where return cargoes were procured (M,D). But proceeds returned to Britain mainly in the form of bills of exchange (M,R); thus providing one of the many complications involved in calculating profits (R). Finally, the legislation of the 1790s regulating slaves/ship ratios, though apparently complied with (L), may have had little real effect because it codified existing practice (KE).

NOTES

1 Limiting ourselves to recent centuries, the migration northward of Chinese to Manchuria and Japanese to Hokkaido, the migration eastward of Russians to central Asia and Siberia, the migration westward of west and central Europeans to both Americas, have each most probably more than matched (in volume or intensity, or both) the scale of the Atlantic migration of Black Africans. And the ‘Black Diaspora’, though by virtue of its earlier start now surpassing in numbers the similar modern dispersals from India and China, is of course much smaller than the ‘White Diaspora’ from Europe.

2 Consider, for instance, in the recent past the migrations of Jews from Russia and Germany, the migrations of Irish, Sicilians, Armenians, Uganda Asians and West Indians, fn more distant times, how voluntary was the migration of Angles and Saxons to England, the migration of Arabians to Egypt and North Africa, and the migration of Bantu-speaking Black Africans to southern Black Africa?

3 Pieter Emmer, Jean Mettas and Jean-Claude Nardin (eds.), La traite des noires par l’Atlantique: nouvelles approches, special number of Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer 62 (1975), pp. 1–390. This volume, which includes papers given at the Sixth international economic history conference, held at Copenhagen in 1974, unfortunately did not appear in time to be seen by our contributors. Since the majority of the papers are in English, and represent important statements on the present state of research in the wider field, we introduce frequent references to the volume in this introduction.
Not least because the former approach, being less easily tempted to judge the past by contemporary and therefore fickle criteria of historical relevance and moral appropriateness, is less inhibiting to the historian's most worthy passion, that for truth. The terms 'clinical' and 'passionate' are borrowed from the introduction by W. E. Minchinton and P. C. Emmer to La traite des noirs, op. cit., which contrasts Eric Williams' Capitalism and slavery (1944), and P. D. Curtin's The Atlantic slave trade: a census (1969), 'the one passionate, the other clinical'. Note however that 'clinical' is itself a slightly loaded term, since it implies the existence of a malfunction, disorder, or abnormal condition — unless it be accepted that abnormality is la condition humaine.

Curtin's work has proved extremely stimulating to historians, as witness the many references to it in La traite des noirs, op. cit. Essentially a critique of earlier estimates of the volume of the trade, the revised estimates it suggests have been most useful in persuading other scholars to search for and analyse unpublished material, to check Curtin's estimates against. While these have sometimes stood up surprisingly well (cf. La traite des noirs, p. 32), the newer calculations are more soundly based. In an essay intended for the present volume but excluded because of lack of space, one of the editors (P.E.H.H.) has repeated a criticism of Curtin's volume first made in a review (Bulletin of Hispanic Studies 68, 1971, pp. 94–5). Despite many warnings on earlier pages that his subsidiary estimates are tentative and probably not exact, Curtin's final table (Table 77) produces a grand total for the whole Atlantic slave trade (of imports to the Americas), by adding up the subsidiary estimates and giving a figure of 9,566,100 — this without even the typographical device of a single (?) to warn the incautious reader. Moreover, on the page opposite Curtin speaks of his study as 'reducing the estimated total export of slaves from about twenty million to about ten million'. But if appropriate margins of error are given to all the subsidiary estimates which involve assumptions of problematical validity, no such grand total can be produced. Hair concludes: 'Curtin's survey, taken together with the modifications suggested by other scholars since 1969, has proved the following. The number of slaves exported from Africa during the whole period of the Atlantic slave trade was almost certainly less than 20M and more than 8M; most probably less than 16M and more than 10M; and perhaps (a tiny and possibly subjective balance of probability in its favour) between 14M and 11M. Hence any view of the operation or effects of the Atlantic slave trade which turns upon the grand total of exports being — within the range 10M to 16M — one figure rather than another, say 10M rather than 15M, needs to be received with great caution.'
trade and economic development] as one in which the conditions generating sustained economic growth permitted the expansion of a profitable slave trade rather than vice-versa', *La traite des noirs*, op. cit., p. 336 (summary of Engerman's 'Comments').


13 *Report of the Lords of the Committee of the Privy Council relating to Trade and Plantations... on the Slave Trade* (1789) ref. J. Matthews.

14 Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool privateers, with an account of the Liverpool slave trade* (Liverpool, 1897), the slave trade section on pp. 463–690. Chapter 6 was significantly entitled 'Emoluments of the traffic – a millionaire's venture'.

15 On profitability in various national slave trades, see the remarks by Minchinton and Emmer in *La traite des noirs*, op. cit., pp. 14–16; and on the larger question of the effect of the slave trade on European national economies, see Engerman's 'Comments', pp. 331–6.

16 Cf. 'Changes in mortality at sea seemed more the product of conditions at the African port towns and along their associated trade routes than the result of weather conditions at sea...', J. C. Miller, 'Legal Portuguese slaving from Angola 1760–1830', *ibid.*, p. 156. A factor in producing differential mortality which is perhaps insufficiently taken into account in current studies is that of the differential reliability of the data. Still, it may well be significant that whereas slave mortality on Liverpool slave ships in the later eighteenth century appears to have been markedly under 10 per cent, that on Dutch ships throughout the century was around 20 per cent, J. Postma, 'The Dutch slave trade: a quantitative assessment', *ibid.*, pp. 232–44, on p. 238.

17 Owing to the illness of one of us at a critical moment, the final form and wording of the introduction have been the work of the second editor, who wishes to exonerate his colleague from responsibility for errors and infelicities therein.