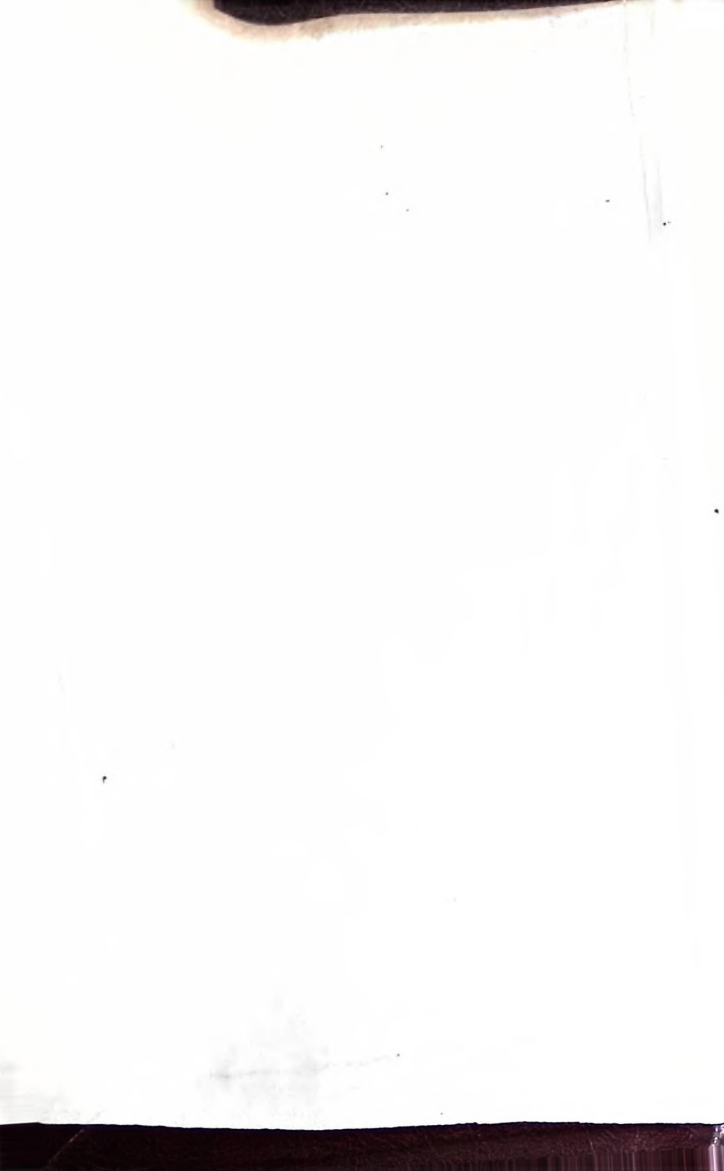


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THOUSAND YEARS OF WEST AFRICAN HISTORY

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A Thousand Years of  
**WEST AFRICAN HISTORY**

A Handbook for Teachers and Students

EDITED BY

J. F. ADE. AJAYI

and

IAN ESPIE

*With a Foreword by K. O. DIKE, M.A., PH.D., formerly Vice-Chancellor, University of  
Ibadan*

IBADAN UNIVERSITY PRESS  
AND NELSON

431  
Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd.  
Lincoln Way Windmill Road Sunbury-on-Thames  
Middlesex TW16 7HP  
P.O. Box 73146 Nairobi

Thomas Nelson (Nigeria) Ltd.  
8 Ilupeju Bypass PMB 1303 Ikeja Lagos

Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd.  
19-39 Jeffcott St West Melbourne Victoria 3003

Thomas Nelson and Sons (Canada) Ltd.  
81 Curlew Drive Don Mills Ontario

© University of Ibadan 1965

First published 1965

Reprinted 1967, 1971, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979

ISBN 0 17 511260 6

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Printed in Hong Kong

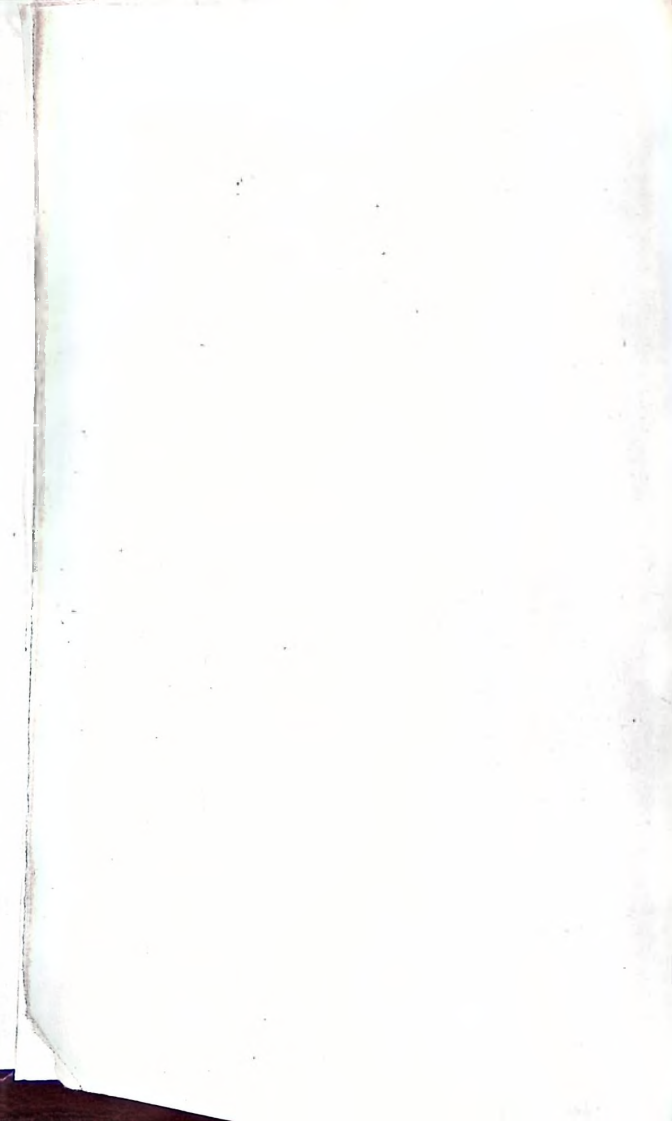
# Contents

List of Figures	vii
Foreword by K. O. Dike, M.A., Ph.D.	ix
Introduction	xi
Introduction to Second Edition	xiii
1. History in West African Secondary Schools by <i>Ian Espie</i>	1
2. The Approach through Archaeology to early West African history by <i>Thurstan Shaw</i>	23
3. The Peoples of West Africa around A.D. 1000 by <i>C. C. Ifemesia</i>	39
4. Empires of the Western Sudan: Ghana, Mali, Songhai by <i>Bolanle Awe</i>	55
5. States of the Central Sudan: (i) Kanem-Bornu; (ii) the Hausa States by <i>C. C. Ifemesia</i>	72
6. Islam in West Africa A.D. 1000-1800 by <i>J. O. Hunwick</i>	113
7. The Peoples of Senegambia by <i>Florence Mahoney and H. O. Idowu</i>	132
8. Peoples of the Windward Coast A.D. 1000-1800 by <i>Christopher Fyfe</i>	149
9. Asante and Fante A.D. 1000-1800 by <i>A. Adu Boahen</i>	165
10. Peoples of Southern Nigeria by <i>A. A. B. Aderibigbe</i>	191
11. Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence by <i>T. N. Tamuno</i>	206
12. Portuguese and Dutch in West Africa before 1800 by <i>A. F. C. Ryder</i>	217
13. West African Trade, A.D. 1000-1800 by <i>Christopher Fyfe</i>	238
14. West African States at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century by <i>J. F. Ade. Ajayi</i>	253
15. The Nineteenth Century Jihāds by <i>J. O. Hunwick</i>	267
A Note on Samori Touré by <i>C. C. Ifemesia</i>	283

16. Bornu under the Shehus by <i>C. C. Ifemesia</i>	289
17. Benin, Niger Delta, Ibo and Ibibio Peoples in the Nineteenth Century by <i>J. C. Anene</i>	299
18. Dahomey and Yoruba in the Nineteenth Century by <i>J. A. Akinjogbin</i>	314
19. Sierra Leone and Liberia in the Nineteenth Century by <i>H. R. Lynch</i>	332
20. Asante, Fante and the British, 1800-1880 by <i>A. Adu Boahen</i>	346
21. The Growth of European Influence in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century by <i>J. E. Flint</i>	364
22. The Colonial Phase in British West Africa	
(i) Political Developments by <i>W. E. F. Ward</i>	385
(ii) Economic and Social Developments by <i>C. C. Wrigley</i>	403
(iii) A Reassessment of the Historiography of the Period by <i>A. E. Afigbo</i>	419
23. The Colonial Phase in French West Africa by <i>J. A. Ballard</i>	
(i) Political Developments	431
(ii) Economic and Social Developments	442
24. Nationalist Movements in West Africa	
(i) Commonwealth Countries by <i>K. W. J. Post</i>	456
(ii) The French Territories by <i>J. A. Ballard</i>	466
25. Trends and Tasks in the Independent States of West Africa by <i>J. O'Connell</i>	480
Topics for Further Study	
Bibliography	498
Notes on the Contributors	501
Index	512
End papers: West Africa: Ethnic and Linguistic Groups	517

## List of Figures

1. Section through deposits in a cave	25
2. Relations between North Africa and the Sudan, during the fifth and eighteenth centuries	47
3. Areas of power of the states of the Western Sudan in the eleventh century	51
4. Areas of power of Sudanese states in the middle of the fourteenth century	62
5. Areas of power of Sudanese states in the sixteenth century	66
6. The Gold Coast in 1629	168
7. The Gold Coast in 1729	169
8. The Gold Coast in 1750	170
9. Fante states and neighbouring Akan states	181
10. Nigerian states in the eighteenth century	192
11. Peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence	207
12. The West India Company's empire in the South Atlantic, 1643	229
13. West African trade before 1800	238
14. States of the Guinea forest and savannah, and Segu and Kaarta, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries	254
15. Benin, the Niger delta, and Ibo and Ibibio peoples in the nineteenth century	300
16. Western Yorubaland in the eighteenth century	315
17. The Gold Coast in 1807	350
18. West Africa: Political	473
19. West Africa: Economic	488
20. West Africa: Communications	495



## Foreword

Since the end of the Second World War, we have made significant progress in our universities and institutions of higher learning towards a new appraisal of the African past. This development has been dominated by two main ideas. The first is the rejection of the old view which made history synonymous with the study of written documents only and which took the absence of written documents to mean the absence of events worthy of historical study. From this has resulted the reinstatement of non-written sources, particularly oral traditions of African peoples, as valid material for historical research. The second is the insistence that African history must be the history of African peoples and not merely the activities of their invaders from Europe and Asia. From this too it follows that, even in studies of the European contact with Africa where European archival material remains the major source, there should be a focus on the role played by Africans themselves in the great events that have shaped their continent.

These new ideas about African history are to be found in a growing body of monographs and articles in learned journals scattered all over the world. For this reason, while these ideas have gained currency in the universities where these journals are studied, they have not yet penetrated to the schools and training colleges. This is another way of saying that we have made progress in formulating new ideas and new methods of studying African history, but the work of synthesising this history and incorporating it in our general education has only just begun. I believe that this book makes a significant contribution towards this end.

The book is intended primarily as a guide or handbook for teachers who are beginning to teach new school syllabuses which are designed to reflect the new developments in African history. It consists largely of papers delivered at a Workshop held in the

University of Ibadan for selected groups of teachers from all four Commonwealth countries in West Africa. But in spite of this limited objective, in spite of the inevitable gaps and other characteristics of a book written by many hands, I am sure that a wide range of readers will find it a very useful book on West African history. I found it most interesting as an attempt to synthesise a thousand years of West African history in a single volume and to bring this within reach of the school teachers. I hope that the publication of the book will go a long way to encourage the proper teaching of West African history in schools.

All of us who have worked in African universities are conscious of the many obligations to the society outside our walls. We are particularly sensitive to the needs of our schools from which we derive our students. It is therefore my pleasure that the University of Ibadan has been associated in this way with yet another venture to forge links between the schools and the universities and to ensure that the knowledge accumulated in the universities reaches the wider audience outside.

K. ONWUKA DIKE

*Ibadan, July 1965*

## Introduction

In the last ten years or so, the study of African history has made much progress, especially in focusing attention on the history of African peoples as distinct from the activities of their invaders. Nevertheless, most of this development has so far been limited to the universities and is to be found only in journals, monographs and other learned publications. In the syllabuses and textbooks of schools, European history and the activities of Europeans have remained the dominant themes for too long. To improve this situation, the West African Examinations Council recently approved new syllabuses devised by its professional committees and, as a result, for the first time, the systematic study of West African history since A.D. 1,000, or African history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is now available for the school certificate examination.

To launch these new syllabuses properly in the schools, the West African Examinations Council requested the Institute of Education and the Department of History of the University of Ibadan to arrange a Workshop on the teaching of African history in schools. The Carnegie Corporation of New York gave a generous grant to finance the Workshop. Ministries of Education in all four Commonwealth countries in West Africa co-operated from the beginning in the selection of experienced history teachers, headmasters and inspectors of schools who were to attend the Workshop at Ibadan and then organise regional follow-up workshops. Scholars were invited to present papers at the Ibadan Workshop in March 1965 primarily from the host university, with the addition of a number from other universities in Africa and Britain who could make themselves available to participate in person at the Workshop. In the course of their meetings, the steering committee of the Workshop decided not only that the papers should be published, but that everything should be done to publish them as soon as possible.

These circumstances go a long way towards explaining the character and style of this handbook (and its companion volume, *African History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, edited by

Professors J. C. Anene and G. N. Brown). It was planned within a set programme for a specific purpose. There are gaps, omissions and other limitations which could have been rectified if speed had not been so vital a factor in the production. Nevertheless, we hope that as it stands the book will commend itself to several groups of readers. First, to teachers who face the new syllabuses with as yet too few appropriate textbooks for themselves or their pupils; secondly, to undergraduates beginning the study of African history, many of whom need a framework within which their more detailed and specialised studies may fit; and thirdly, to the growing number of people both in Africa and elsewhere who have become aware that the history of Africa is a new and exciting field to study.

We owe thanks to many people. We have already mentioned the Carnegie Corporation and the different Ministries of Education. In addition, we must thank the Ibadan University Press and Thomas Nelson & Sons for agreeing to expedite publication of the book, and Miss Anne Godden, their representative, for her unflagging energy and enthusiasm. To Miss Cynthia Adams, of the United States Peace Corps, we owe a very great deal both for her help towards preparing this material for the press and for her earlier sustained efforts to ensure the success of the Workshop. To Professor John Fage and Edward Arnold Ltd. we owe thanks for their gracious permission to use several of the maps from his *Atlas of African History*. Miss Elsy Leusinger kindly allowed us to use the Bambara antelope mask on the cover of the book. The maps on the endpapers, which are based on Murdock, *Africa: its Peoples and their Culture History*, and Greenberg, *Languages of Africa*, were prepared by Miss Elizabeth Dunstan and her colleagues in the Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages of this University, for which we thank them very sincerely.

We conclude by thanking last those to whom our debt is greatest, our colleagues and fellow contributors who co-operated most willingly in meeting our requests and without whom this book would not have been possible.

J. F. ADE. AJAYI  
IAN ESPIE

University of Ibadan  
May 1965.

## Introduction to Second Edition

In preparing this edition we have attempted to make good those errors and omissions of the first edition which were primarily caused by the speed of its production. In addition, the opportunity has been taken to amend certain chapters, both factually, in the light of more recent knowledge, and from the point of view of emphasis. Chapter 7, 'The Peoples of the Senegambia', has been entirely rewritten.

We are grateful to those contributors who checked and revised their chapters despite other commitments and we trust that this new edition will continue to be of value to teachers and students of West African history.

J. F. ADE. AJAYI

IAN ESPIE

*August 1968*



# I History in West African Secondary Schools

IAN ESPIE

HISTORY is a difficult subject to teach successfully. This is true of any period of history, in any country, at any educational level. It is particularly true of West African history at the present time in West Africa, both because of the present stage of development of African historical studies and because of the educational explosion which is affecting these developing countries.

The serious and systematic study of African history is not more than twenty years old; it coincides with the period following the Second World War and has been, in part, a product of the positive side of the aftermath of war, as were the strong nationalist movements, a growing cultural awareness and an increasing demand for more widespread educational provision at all levels. The study of African history is, therefore, in its pioneering phase, the frontiers of study are being pushed in novel and challenging directions and have involved scholars in many disciplines, such as archaeology, ethnology, sociology, linguistics, botany and serology. The documentation and analysis of oral traditions is another new and fruitful field of enquiry and the historiographically more conventional documents from Arabic sources are proving a very rich mine of material. For the historian in his study, all this is exciting and challenging; for the teacher in his classroom, the excitement and challenge are there, but so also are the problems of presentation, shortage of textbooks, bewilderment in the face of a vast new body of historical material to be mastered, pressure from students and society for examination success, as well as the host of more general educational problems in countries where secondary education has expanded at a phenomenal rate.

In Nigeria, for example, between 1959 and 1963 in secondary education alone, the number of schools soared from 718 to 1,245, and the number of students rose from 92,480 to 157,807 (Federal Ministry of Education, Statistics of Education, 1963). This rapid expansion, particularly of secondary education, lies at the heart of

the development plans of the countries of West Africa, and must continue, despite the strain on the finances of these countries. Accordingly the teacher of history cannot, in most cases, expect generous textbook provision, specialised history rooms and well-endowed libraries full of books. He must assume that what he needs for success as a history teacher will be found to a great extent within himself, in his mastery of the material, his pedagogical skills, his understanding of the forces which activate his students and his ability to channel these in fruitful directions.

We shall develop this chapter by exploring first some of the problems and possibilities of history as a school subject and then consider the implications of these with reference to West African history.

#### TEACHING FOR UNDERSTANDING

We began by saying that history is a difficult subject to teach successfully, but no teaching is easy, and it is the special difficulties of *history* that we must consider. The stuff of history is largely the behaviour of adults—their purposes, glories, successes and failures, kindnesses and cruelties; it is a story of heroism, war and death, of subtle manoeuvring among wise, foolish and often ruthless men and women; the quest for and exercise of power are recurrent themes, as is the long and complex tale of man's attempt to conquer his environment; man's beliefs and the lengths he has been prepared to go to advance or defend them are also a major strand.

The content is so rich, varied and often subtle that only a selection of it can be taught or even known by the teacher. Before we consider the implications of the word 'selection', it is important to stress that much of the material of history is outside the range of experience and understanding of the adolescent student. This is very easy to state and equally easy to forget. Because our students, frequently respectful and docile (if not listless and slumberous), will sit listening to us teachers for long periods of time, we should not be deceived; nor should we accept as proof of success their ability to give back to us orally or on paper our words of wisdom, even in their exact phraseology; nor even, though this may appear heresy, can we accept success in the school certificate examination as proof that we have taught our students within the range of their experience and understanding.

The teacher of history should, therefore, have several considerations continually in mind. The almost limitless capacity of our industrious students to memorise material can be, and often is, disastrous unless it is intelligently and discriminatingly used by the teacher. Depending too much on the ability of students to memorise textbook materials or notes is a feature of bad history teaching. The good history teacher should be consistently teaching for understanding, with all that this implies. To do less is to waste our own and our students' time since memory is frail and fickle unless it rests on understanding.

If we accept that understanding is the key to success certain consequences follow. Perhaps the first is *selection* of material. All history involves selection without which 'it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing'. The historian may be interested in all the facts he discovers about a subject but he attaches much more importance to some than to others and uses them selectively. If he merely listed all he had found, he would be a chronicler or perhaps an antiquary, not an historian.

But selection involves and implies purpose. Selection of what, for what? This is the heart of the matter. In our answers to the questions 'What material should we select and for what purposes?' lie the reasons for teaching history in schools. It is sad, but I fear true, that the questions are too seldom asked. When they are, the answers are legion and have been so, throughout the ages, wherever history has been taught. We may admire the confidence of the historian Charles Rollin, an eighteenth century Principal of the University of Paris, who wrote 'History when well taught is a school of morals for all men. It describes vice, it unmask[s] false virtue, it exposes errors and prejudices; it dissipates the enchantment of riches and of all that vain pomp which dazzles man; it shows by a thousand examples more persuasive than all arguments that there is nothing great and laudable except honour and uprightness.' It is clear what kinds of historical material the writer of this passage would choose, and for what purpose. At the present time, however, few teachers are happy about using history as a morality pageant, although such a purpose has had a long history, particularly in times when good ethical and moral behaviour were seen as the direct result of carrying out the injunctions of revealed religion. We can appreciate the view of the nineteenth century German who wrote, 'No branch of public

affairs must be entrusted to men who do not appreciate the history of their country.' This sentiment is one which many in West Africa would probably applaud today, although a word of caution is perhaps in order at this point. The results in most nineteenth century European countries of the distorted acceptance of such views tended to be vainglorious, chauvinistic interpretations of national history. A sharply contrasting view is expressed by the great German, Hegel: 'What experience and history teach is this—that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it', and by the English poet, Coleridge: 'If men could learn from history, what lessons it might teach us! But passion and party blind our eyes and the light which experience gives is a lantern on the stern, which shines only on the waves behind us!'

It rests with the teacher to think out why he is teaching history at all, and thereafter to use his cardinal purpose and subsidiary purposes as principles governing the selection of material. In West Africa today the syllabus is so frequently spoken and thought of either as an inspired document or as a ball and chain clamped to the teacher's ankle, that we shall do well to remember that it is a guide to the teacher—neither more, nor less. 'Covering the syllabus' can too easily become the beginning and the end of the teacher's concept of his task. Intelligent study of the syllabus, however, should lead to selection of material, stress on certain of its aspects, assessment of the time available and required for various topics—all of this subordinate to the teacher's awareness of the long term values of his subject as well as of the responsiveness and capacities of his students.

#### THE LEARNING PROCESS

The teacher must, however, be guided by other principles in his selection. An important one springs from the psychology of learning. The teacher needs to be aware of his students as adolescents in process of development towards maturity possessed of a limited range of experience of life to which he can, and should, appeal wherever possible. He ought to be aware of the various situations he can contrive which contribute to and accelerate learning, since it is the *learning* (which results from the teaching) which matters. Among those factors contributing to successful history learning is the teacher's awareness of the various strands

which exist in a classroom and school and which also exist in his historical material: such things as authority, elements of democracy and attitudes towards them, ambition and the pressures it can cause, patterns of social organisation, rights and duties. All these elements exist in the school, in society outside, and in the content of history. The awareness of the student of all these elements is intensified if they are naturally brought into his work by the teacher. This quality of social awareness is a vital element in successful history teaching. Indeed, it may be that the inculcation and development of social awareness—of change and its causes, of societies in the past and how they operated, of human behaviour, its variety and explanation—is one of our main aims in history teaching. History is certainly the most social of the studies most commonly found in school curricula throughout the world.

The psychology of learning is however a matter which requires fuller consideration. Consciousness of it should permeate all that we do in the classroom. And yet in West Africa there are particular problems since the organised study of the psychology of our adolescents is in an early stage and we are, as yet, obliged to be guided both by a wide range of studies conducted in other different cultural situations, and by our personal knowledge of these young people gained from sustained contact in the school situation and beyond. The learning process is a subtle and complex one. Educational theorists have written, for instance, of 'learning by doing' and, on reflection, we see that the basis of much traditional indigenous education in Africa was of this kind. The value of this method has never been challenged, but 'doing' is a word which offers a wide range of possibilities in the classroom. It can mean activity—making things such as time-charts or models, writing and acting plays all based on historical materials, conducting debates and discussions based on adequate reading by the students. There is too little of this kind of activity in our classrooms at present.

But *thought* is also activity, though less visibly so, and for much of his time the history teacher is concerned to provoke, promote and guide thought. Learning is essentially a thought process in a subject such as history, and the activities suggested earlier are to be utilised as ways of promoting thought and interest. We are concerned in our classrooms to provide the atmosphere and the framework, to create systematically the conditions, in which thoughtful learning will occur. We can perhaps accomplish this by

offering variety in our procedures and expectations; and by sometimes throwing the onus on our students to work out for themselves carefully selected problems, working either individually or in groups. The fuller working out of these ideas is to be found in methodology texts. Here we must be content to draw attention to their existence and to explore further some of the implications of these approaches.

#### THE ART OF QUESTIONING

The art of questioning is a basic skill which the teacher of history must acquire and polish. If he does, his classroom is likely to be a centre of thoughtful activity. Many beginning teachers, however, believe that, since the students do not know the history to be learned, they should be told, hence the situation, so often found, of the teacher as preacher or lecturer. But lecturing, at any level, has increasingly come under fire as a device for promoting learning. (The cautionary joke that it is a method whereby the contents of the teacher's note-book are transferred to the student's note-book without passing through the heads of either, perhaps bears repeating.) Formal lecturing has certainly no place in our schools below the Sixth Form level and perhaps not even there.

Systematic questioning is one of our commonest devices for involving the students in learning. There are many types of questions but perhaps the most fruitful is the problem-posing one. In this we are drawing on the knowledge and understanding of our students which is derived either from previous learning in or out of school, and asking them to confront situations faced by individuals and peoples in history. The degree of difficulty of the problems will naturally vary according to the level of the teaching. In the upper school a type of dialogue is likely to develop in which the teacher leads the questioning. The students may well, and indeed should, reach a point where *their* questioning will involve the teacher's own teaching. In a social context, such as that of West Africa, where respect for seniority is widespread, such questioning may be construed as implying disrespect. Once it is seen, however, as part of the process whereby the beginnings of a critical faculty are being developed, such a construction ceases to be a worry and the only teacher who need fear a group of students who have critical, questioning minds is one who is seriously under-prepared or who has acquired the notion that to be a teacher is to

be omniscient. The teacher who has earned his students' respect for what he *does* know can well use occasionally discovered gaps in his knowledge as a positive aid to fostering the learning process in his students, if he obliges the questioner to seek answers himself from books, or agrees to consult the appropriate authorities if they are not easily available to his students.

#### THE LANGUAGE AND VOCABULARY OF HISTORY

A further aspect of the learning process concerns the fact that thought is expressed in language and, in Commonwealth West Africa, not in the mother-tongue but in a second language, at the secondary school level and beyond. English is not one of the world's easiest languages to learn. It has, in addition, one of the richest vocabularies of the major world tongues. Of these facts, all teachers in West Africa must take account. But the history teacher has to recognise that there is a vocabulary of history which his students must acquire and that, as history is a literary study, they must gain facility both in reading and in expressing themselves orally and in writing. The problems of learning a second language in the upper school are outside the province of this chapter, but the teacher of history who is aware of them will do a better job in his classroom in his encouragement of both oral and written expression.

With the vocabulary of history we come to grips with a matter which is too easily ignored. History takes place in time, and concepts of time, with their associated vocabulary, must be learned. Our students should be aware that time is a man-made thing, that the calendar in widest use in the world is Egyptian, Roman and Christian in its origins, and that Muslims and Hebrews have different methods of calculation. What is more important is that they should grasp the common vocabulary of time; decades, generations, centuries, the millennia of prehistory (and geology and astronomy perhaps). Still greater vocabulary difficulties lie in the use historians make of common words—civilisation, jurisdiction, progress, revolutionary movement, nationalism, economic, political, social, dynastic, traditional, constitutional—to express particular abstractions which require explanation and understanding. One danger of the propensity towards memorisation referred to earlier, is that such terms are repeated without but precision of meaning. In students still

acquiring a second language, this can lead to a high degree of tolerance of ambiguity. In writing history and in its teaching the use of metaphor can add to the confusion. The girl who read that Wolsey aimed at the papacy and informed her teacher that Wolsey shot the Pope deserves some of our sympathy.

As history teachers, therefore, we should be sensitive to misunderstanding and ambiguities at various levels and of different kinds all arising from language; new words, new concepts and ideas, old words in different usages, metaphorical expressions leading to misunderstanding. One further aspect of language and vocabulary difficulties must suffice. It arises from the fact that choice of vocabulary can be very emotive in writing and teaching history. Depending on the commentator, a group can be seen as 'bloodthirsty terrorists' or 'valiant freedom-fighters', 'intrepid pioneers' or 'ignorant interlopers', 'obstructionist reactionaries' or 'traditional authorities'. The vocabulary we use to describe, for instance, the actions and reactions of Africans and Europeans over the past several centuries will be a factor in creating our students' outlook, and the more they respect us the greater the effect we shall have. This is not to recommend a bloodless, lifeless style of English but to remind us that we can arouse emotion by our choice of vocabulary and accordingly that we should choose our words with forethought and intention.

#### VISUAL MATERIALS

History is not simply descriptions and accounts in *words* about the past. It concerns the movements of peoples and individuals who looked, thought and acted differently from ourselves in many respects. We are, therefore, as teachers anxious to evoke the past visually as far as possible. At times we are limited to verbal description but where possible we should use maps, charts, diagrams, drawings, pictures, post-cards, photographs, film-strips, films, models and artifacts, and visit sites of buildings, old ruins, excavations, harbours, creeks, rivers—anything which sensibly and significantly brings to our students a greater awareness of the variety of man's activity in the past in West Africa or elsewhere.

Two things matter in this connection; first, that what the students are examining is worthy of their attention and, second, that they in fact see what you, the teacher, regard as significant. This may, at first, appear very obvious but the ability to read a

map, photograph, excavation or diagram is an acquired skill. Our students' eyes have to be trained to this exercise as they have been to reading print. The ability to appreciate perspective, light and shade, stratigraphic evidence, a geographical configuration or a diagrammatic abstraction is a technical accomplishment of use to our students of history and clearly also of wide educational value.

#### THE LOWER SCHOOL.

Much of what has been written above has had as its focus the later years in secondary school, especially the two-year course of study leading to the school certificate examinations. Since the majority of students of history in West Africa will shortly be studying either continental African or West African history during these years, it is important to consider what should precede this in the first three-year cycle of study. Intelligent articulation of these two phases of learning is very desirable. It is also desirable that teachers should continue to keep their present freedom to develop suitably thought-out courses in these earlier years when the students are less mature, more inclined to see life in fairly bold and uncomplicated terms, responsive to dramatic narrative and vigorous personification of the characters of the past.

Before we can discuss what history should be taught in the lower school we are obliged to clarify our aims. There might be general agreement that we wish to illustrate how very various have been the ways in which men and women have lived and worked and believed in different places in the past, that we wish to present historically memorable personalities and that in all this we should constantly seek to involve our students as active participants in discoveries about the past. If the above were to be accepted as appropriate aims, then various types of content and approach could follow. The choice of content could be world-wide, no one period of time need be concentrated on. There need be no *continuous* chronological approach throughout the three years since time-charts and other devices could be used to fix the sequent relationships between the different places and peoples considered. A 'line of development' approach could be introduced at times to show that over long periods mankind has changed and improved his control of his environment: tools, transport, and communication, or housing, being possible topics.<sup>1</sup> Although Africa has not been mentioned specifically there is nothing in this formulation to

discourage material from the African past being drawn upon. Implicit in the above, however, is the idea that the things that draw all men together are greater than those that keep them apart and therefore that the search for appropriate content would be world-wide and should include material from Africa.

Different conclusions would probably result if we were to state our presuppositions as follows: these are African children, who will live out their lives in Africa in the latter half of the twentieth century in countries which are seeking to build nations with modern economies as well as new syntheses of values; since history is the most socially oriented of our school studies the aims and content of our history in the lower school should reflect these facts. (This is a cogent argument provided we remember that we are considering adolescents, not adults, and that 'inert ideas'<sup>2</sup> can easily result from trying to fill their minds prematurely with ideas of the adult world.) A wider expression of this argument, by no means new in the history of education, is that the school should constantly be aware of the society outside and should reflect this awareness in its curriculum. Since the West African secondary school, for well-known historical reasons, did not spring naturally from the society but was a graft from an outside source, the curriculum and its reform are currently the subject of a great debate in the press, learned journals, Unesco and elsewhere, often expressed in such phrases as 'the need to Africanise the curriculum'. Such pressures have particular implications for the history teacher. He can put forward a good case for several options throughout the school, any one of which would be appropriate to West Africa. One such is for the study of local or regional and national history in the lower school leading to the study of world history in the higher classes. A case can also be made for a selective world history content followed by African (or West African) history in the upper school. A third possibility might be to take Africa as a focal point throughout the school with an emphasis on West Africa for school certificate study.

There is, however, a fourth approach to the above problem of developing a socially aware African curriculum. It is one which the history teacher may regard initially somewhat unfavourably. This is the 'Social Studies' approach which has been in widespread use in American schools and in more limited use in Britain. It has come under growing criticism but is, in my view, intrinsically

sound and potentially well-suited to the needs of West African schools. The reasons for the criticism and the unpopularity of the social studies approach elsewhere have been the subject of much controversy but the main faults seem to have been lack of clarity of purpose and lack of sympathy on the part of teachers trained in the existing school subjects (usually history and geography). In America, particularly, concern with method at the expense of significant content has been excessive. The difficulties, therefore, have arisen from implementing the approach, not from the approach itself. If it were adopted in our West African schools it could take the form of coherently thought-out West African (and African) Studies suitably geared to the young adolescent.

To expand this idea we should argue as follows: our present societies in West Africa are products of the past, as are all the individuals, groups and institutions in them. They can only become intelligible if they are understood historically. But we are also concerned to see and understand how they function in the present, consequently their *history* is not our central preoccupation but rather their *present* forms of operation. Accordingly we must look at the nature of the family, occupations, political arrangements, the legal framework, habits and customs, religious patterns, and cultural activities against the background of both the history and geography of the area. This can be done in the form of questions to which answers should be sought in the classroom: how are our families organised and how has this come about; what kinds of work do people do, what is involved, how are they paid; how are we governed, who are our rulers, how have we come to have these arrangements; what are laws, why do we have them and how are they enforced; what habits and customs do we have that are similar to and different from those of other people in West Africa or beyond and why are they so; what religious beliefs are held around us, how do they differ, and how are they expressed; how do our people express themselves in dress, celebrations, sculpture, dancing and music? This is a skeletal list of questions and the possibilities inherent in such an approach are extensive.

The development of a course of studies based on this approach over three years could be contrastive, bringing in other areas of Africa and the world, and could be of increasing depth as the children's capacities increase. I began this section by saying that the history teacher might initially react unfavourably since this is

not straightforward history, chronologically ordered. This approach makes great demands on the teacher. But it is full of possibilities for development, for generating an awareness of the present and of its relationship to the past and, in my experience, evokes lively and sustained interest.

This must conclude the consideration of history in the lower school. The account of the possibilities of a social studies approach was given in some detail since it is at present uncommon in West Africa<sup>3</sup>. However, as was said earlier, whatever decisions are reached about the aims and content of lower school history, they should be systematic, related to the rest of the school curriculum and articulated both with what has preceded and is to follow. We now turn accordingly to a consideration of the two-year school certificate course of study in West African history which is the major concern of this book.

#### WEST AFRICAN HISTORY

The period of history included in this book is almost one thousand years long; the number of countries by present political boundaries is fifteen, all independent states except Portuguese Guinea; the total area is about two million square miles (over three times the combined area of France and the United Kingdom); there are hundreds of distinct languages and ethnic groups and considerable variation in climate, physical features and vegetation. When placed alongside the teaching time available (approximately 140 hours in class, plus study time<sup>4</sup>), these elementary facts illustrate the need for selection of material from the outset in our teaching of West African history. To this we must add that the availability of material for study is uneven both for the period and for the areas under review. The sources begin as a trickle, grow to a stream and, by the end of our period, are a torrent. In the process their character has also undergone change. Textbooks are beginning to trickle from the presses written in accordance with the present interpretation of West African history and within a few years there should be a steady flow. Given these conditions how is the teacher to go about his job?

The sources of history in West Africa make a sensible start to its study. The student should be made aware of the variety and character of sources available and some of the difficulties in using them. It follows that the basic skills of the archaeologist should be

discussed, including how he finds, treats and interprets his material. The anonymity of almost all the people whom archaeology reveals is a distinctive feature of this material; the fact that they are 'unconscious' sources is also important since what we find are the accidental survivals of everyday life and activity. These and other points are fully dealt with in the following chapter. In time, as teachers become familiar with the contributions made by such studies as ethnology, ethno-botany, linguistics, anthropology, sociology, radio-carbon dating techniques, they should regard it as desirable to acquaint their students with the fact that textbook statements about the movements of peoples, dietary changes, traditions of origin, are quite likely to be supported by evidence derived from these diverse disciplines.

At this stage, however, two other main types of sources apart from archaeology ought to be introduced, those deriving from oral traditions and those from written records. In the study of African history, the use which is being made of oral tradition is remarkable and students can be led through a brief account of what such source material involves, e.g. problems of chronology, lists of rulers, gaps in folk memory, correlation with related traditions in adjacent areas; all of this contributing to their understanding of how we know about the past. In the same context, the written materials from which the scholars and textbook writers derive their historical interpretations ought to be indicated. In West Africa in our period these are mostly in Arabic, English, French, or other European languages. We spoke earlier of 'unconscious' history in referring to archaeological material, we now can speak of 'conscious' history in dealing with written documentation though, of course, not all written documents were written to influence contemporaries or posterity. 'Oral documentation', to use the French term for oral tradition, falls in between the two broad categories of 'conscious' and 'unconscious' source material.

Any teacher, by taking a little trouble, can elaborate this introduction to the sources of West African history, giving examples of various types of sources. By sensible selection of items he can show how bias, prejudice, ignorance, even a desire to mislead, have affected the writers of accounts which the historian scrutinises in the process of reconstructing the past. It is always important to do this as an explanation of how history comes to be written but, at present in our schools, it is doubly important since (largely

because of scarcity of money) students have tended to grow up treating *one* textbook as a near-inspired volume containing the history of a period in the authorised version, and being sceptical or openly disbelieving when a teacher corrects an author's error or suggests an alternative interpretation to that offered in print. In time it is possible that a history teacher will be able to select several textbooks as alternatives for his class thereby pressing home the point that interpretations and emphases can, and do, differ within any given historical period.

Earlier in this chapter we have stressed teaching for understanding, but this phrase has further implications since the level or depth of understanding of our students is not uniform either over the years, or within a group at any one time. It is variable also according to the topic being studied and only exceptionally, at sixth form or undergraduate level, is a student likely to appreciate all the implications and complexities of understanding which are in the mind of his teacher. What, then, should the teacher of this school certificate history strive for? I would argue that the teacher ought to seek two broad kinds of understanding by his students. The first is of the immediate facts he is reading or hearing, e.g. that a ruler probably came to power at a certain date, ruled long, was killed by enemies in a certain year; that during his reign taxes were levied harshly, the army was increased, the frontiers were expanded by conquest; that rebellions were severely crushed in years  $x$  and  $y$ . Each of these facts represents in a sense a unique event concerning one man, one territory, and one period of time. Such learning is the day-to-day stuff of classroom history work and will probably always be so. However, such events are also categories or types of occurrence which the student of history will encounter in different settings and combinations elsewhere in his study of West African history. Accordingly, the second broad kind of understanding is of the fact that rulers everywhere face similar problems—the need to maintain themselves in power, control an army, levy taxes, watch developments in neighbouring areas—and therefore the student gradually acquires an understanding of categories, classes of inter-relationships of events, which are meaningful in historical study. It is this second kind of understanding that should *outlast* the detailed factual knowledge of a particular historical topic and which offers one of the main justifications for the study of history in

the upper forms of our secondary schools and, indeed, in our universities.

If we consider the contents of this book on West African history, it is clear that certain categories or types of human activity recur throughout our period of one thousand years.

(1) *The migration of peoples* About the reasons for their movement we may know much—the fortunes of war, famine, pestilence—or little, because of traditions of origin shrouded in heavy mist and perhaps unlikely to be penetrated, or because evidence is not yet to hand from linguistic and archaeological studies.

(2) *Trade* This can be small scale, local or petty trading to satisfy the needs of relatively self-sufficient groups; or long-distance, export trade in scarce commodities across the Sahara and beyond, elaborately organised and very lucrative; or sea-borne activities involving Africans and Europeans which were, over centuries, to expand, diversify and lead to substantial changes in West African societies.

(3) *Religion* Here we should consider the encounter between the complex, traditional, indigenous belief patterns of West African peoples, and, first Islam and then Christianity—each with universalist claims based on an inspired book. The interplay among these three sets of religious beliefs has been a recurrent theme of the past thousand years in West Africa and is today an important issue affecting political, social and ethical behaviour.

(4) *Politico-social organisation* This is a fourth strand—clan and ethnic groups, kingdoms, empires and republics—which contains much of the central material for historical study and is rich in problems. We often cannot know *why* different groups organised themselves in such varied ways but we can look for the place in each where authority lay, the sanctions imposed for contravening it, the relationship between civil and military power, and so on. In dealing with this material we can call on the present to help us elucidate the past, since we have still in our midst in many places the structure of traditional political organisation even though the locus of power may have moved elsewhere. It is important, too, that our students should see consistently that West African peoples evolved for themselves, distinctively and often ingeniously, stable forms of government adapted to their temperament, environment and the needs of the time.

(5) *Warfare* During our period, warfare varied immensely and is a further thread which is enlightening when understood. Military strategy and tactics were different according to location, technology and purpose. The availability of the horse, gunpowder, large bodies of men, was as important as able generals in the reaching of military decisions. The siting, shape and architecture of towns were in some areas dictated largely by military concerns.

(6) *Inter-group relationships* This is a useful phrase to embrace all the types of encounter between different West African peoples and between them and non-African peoples—again a rich vein throughout this book. Differences of language, customs and religion are only three of the many recurrent elements in the story which the teacher has in mind while he talks of war and conquest, slave-raiding, peaceful or aggressive European penetration. Our very human attachment to, and belief in, the value of the particular society in which we were nurtured, coupled with the equally human ignorance and insensitivity to most others, are the sources from which very many of the problems of inter-group relationships spring. The teacher should seldom have difficulty in drawing this understanding from his students.

Towards the end of our period we encounter more constantly a battery of abstract terms ending in '-ism' or '-tion'; colonialism, nationalism, socialism, centralisation, integration and many more. As we have said earlier in this chapter, they are categories, a linguistic shorthand for particular patterns of human activity and as such our students ought to understand them. Particularly in the twentieth century, when the history of West African peoples or states becomes interwoven with the study of politics and economics, the viewpoint and vocabulary of the commentator change to some extent and the teacher has to recognise and cope with the change. In Chapter 24 will be found further consideration of these problems. Since the re-emergence of the peoples of West Africa as independent states after the period of colonialism is such an important element in the long account of the area from A.D. 1000, we must, as teachers, grapple with the conceptual and content problems posed by the study of what is sometimes called contemporary history. To stop at an earlier date, as is done in the study of British or European history here and elsewhere, would be simpler and more comfortable for the teacher; in view of the

importance of very recent events in the history of West Africa it would be an evasion of responsibility.

We have, in this last section, surveyed some of the important categories of historical material which recur in the history of West Africa. Many, of course, will be encountered in a study of other parts of the world but this is simply to illustrate again that the types of problems with which historians deal are not often bounded by one continent. The argument, simply restated, is that our obligation to our students is to teach with two levels of understanding in mind, thereby developing our students' awareness both of the particular histories of West African peoples and states, and of significant categories of human behaviour in the past seen in a West African setting.

#### TASKS, TECHNIQUES AND TEXTBOOKS

It is broadly true to say that there are no specialised skills called for in the teaching of history. Any good, thoughtful teacher who has a sound knowledge of history and a clear grasp of why he is teaching it at a particular level in school ought to be reasonably successful, provided he brings to bear the full battery of his pedagogical skills. There are, however, certain tasks and techniques which are particularly relevant to his job.

Two such tasks are the development of time-concepts and of the ability to make intelligent notes. Both should be begun at the latest in the first year of secondary schools and preferably earlier. Although we are concerned here mainly with the fourth and fifth years, the earlier foundations of both historical time-awareness and note-making ability must be touched upon. The most useful device for time-sense development is the time-chart, both that made by teacher and class in co-operation for the wall of the room, and individual ones in students' note-books. The underlying psychological assumption for time-lines or charts is that we see, or can be conditioned to see, time passing in our 'mind's eye'—either horizontally or vertically, or on the analogy of a watch, circularly. In discussing this problem with Nigerian post-graduate students, I found that a majority saw time going horizontally from left to right, a minority vertically from bottom to top or, in one case, from top to bottom; in almost all cases influenced probably by the time-charts they had encountered during their schooling. Perhaps, since general English language usage associates 'upwards' with

gress and 'downwards' with regress, the most natural arrangement is the horizontal line running from left to right. For regular rooms use the horizontal line can be extended considerably in books by joining together two or more open double sheets of note-book at the end of the book, to allow the use of a large scale and consequently more detail. Beginning from short spans, such as the twelve-year-old's life, a simple chart can be made showing significant events in a time and sequence relationship.

Over several years the systematic use of time-charts can result in their becoming more and more complex and sophisticated. For example, by the fourth year we ought to be able to begin working out multiple lines, using symbols where appropriate, to cover various aspects of human activity over the thousand years of West African history. Types of human activity can be classified as political, religious, economic, social, legal, cultural, military, and can be arranged downwards on the left-hand side of a chart with a calibrated time-scale along the top of the sheets left to right covering A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1800. The facts of the reading and teaching can be filled in throughout the year in words and illustrations as a regular feature of class work. What has been said could apply either to a master-chart for the room or to individual charts which the students should be encouraged to make as full as possible since it is they who benefit. Troubles may arise over whether particular events are political or economic. Decisions should be taken after discussion but such discussion is itself important and makes students realise that historians have classified past human activity into broad categories somewhat arbitrarily. One has only to think of Usman dan Fodio in this connection.

The period A.D. 1000 to A.D. 1800 was suggested above since in the course of the nineteenth century we run into the problems of national boundaries as they now are, leading in the twentieth century to separate national histories, though with certain common features. The short answer to this set of problems is a multiplicity of time-charts on different scales, covering different periods and areas. The use of symbols saves space and avoids cluttering up the chart with too much printing and writing. The Cross for Christianity, the Crescent for Islam, crossed spears for battles are obvious symbols, but ingenious teachers and students can produce many more. For the master-chart particularly, colour can help to draw

out distinctions and differences. It is perhaps necessary to stress that attention paid to this matter of time-charts is not time wasted. These individual and classroom charts are excellent for fixing sequences and precise dates, for revision of material in outline, for revealing unexpected correlations; all of which are directly beneficial to the students.

Historical maps and sketches should also be used extensively, and are easy to make bold and clear for the classroom using the cheap felt pens now available. Since the students will need many note-book maps of West Africa they can save time by making and keeping in stiff paper or cardboard an outline of the coast from, say, Ceuta to the Cross river, so that they can run a pencil along all or part of it each time they want a fresh map in their books. The blackboard is certainly the most accessible visual aid but for sketch-maps required several times, or with different classes, maps on stiff paper are much more labour saving to the teacher.

The ability to make intelligent notes is one of the hallmarks of an educated man or woman. Such an ability is usually the result of good teaching. Training should begin with short and varied exercises in lower school English, history, geography and science classes, and develop until by the fifth year a student should be able to summarise his reading intelligently and put written flesh on the skeleton headings which his teacher writes on the blackboard in stages during many lessons. Said like this it sounds easy but is not, particularly in a second language. It requires constant effort, continual supervision and, initially, at least, rather firm classroom management, since many students may develop slipshod habits of trying to write down verbatim a teacher's teaching; the result frequently being divided attention and nonsense half-sentences. This is one skill which the various teachers involved should discuss and plan in co-operation since it seriously affects the total performance of students in a school in most subjects.

However, there is also the need to remember that diagrammatic representation of certain kinds of material is a form of note-making. This technique is likely to be particularly effective in demonstrating the inter-related parts of a complex institution which is, by its nature, static or slow changing. An example is the organisation of any Sudanic empire showing the ruler, his court officials, military and financial arrangements, subordinate officials and/or rulers—in boxes or circles with lines and arrows showing relationships.

one realises that this technique has applications; in modern times the organisation, national or federal governments can be And such diagrams as well as being a variety of advantages over them for this kind of material. *He who thinks visually as well as verbally, he can offer more in his classroom techniques.*

few textbooks available which cover our sufficient detail, embodying current writing relevantly and well illustrated. The few that and publishers are at present engaged in more, so that within two years or so the contemporary history should be in a better position than elsewhere in the world, since modern date information will be available. But what these textbooks is another matter. We have need to develop in our students a critical will apply to the material of their textbooks.

exercise a similar critical apparatus at a more choice of books for his school. He will presume good detail, a modern interpretation of the period, and sensitivity to language difficulties as well as relevant maps and illustrations. There should also be a full table of contents since a textbook, as a technical instrument for use, is like a man without fingers if it lacks an

of his teacher's ability to become increasingly independent in his studies. Exercises to develop this skill should be begun in the lower school. One simple method is for the teacher to prepare a list of questions of detailed factual knowledge, answers also using the index. In time, students become very skillful at this and it is a kind of game as well, since accuracy with speed are the two goals. (One should add, in passing, that comparable skill with an adequate dictionary is very important. It is perhaps the English teacher's job but someone should begin it early in the secondary school.)

The textbook can be used in various ways but a common, indeed traditional, instruction is to 'read the next chapter'. Even

as adults, many of us read chapters more critically and carefully if we are looking for certain threads, or for pieces of evidence—in other words if our reading is directed by what we are seeking. Our students react similarly, and reading with a set of purposes presented by the teacher is likely to produce more useful results than a general awareness of the content of partly remembered paragraphs. The use of a textbook is, however, a large topic and we leave it here with two further observations. The teacher can and should teach without a textbook for days or even weeks, when he is developing a theme from his own knowledge and interests. Need we add, that, by contrast, the occasional teacher whose total idea of his task is to read a textbook or have it read by his students in turn around the class until it is thoroughly mastered, may (though this is extremely doubtful) have proved himself a successful English language teacher but is a world away from being a teacher of history.

In the course of this chapter we have considered some of the reasons why any history can prove difficult to teach successfully, and particularly what problems face the teacher of West African history at present. We have argued for thoughtful articulation of the history taught at different levels in school and stressed, throughout, the importance of developing understanding at progressive levels of difficulty. Concern for the longer-term values of history in school underlay the section in which the idea was advanced of historical events as unique, and falling into categories, at one and the same time. To some readers many of these ideas may be well-known or seem obvious. In others they may provoke irritated disagreement. If the irritation is to a degree which, like sand in the oyster, produces a pearl, or which provokes a dialectical antithesis and a fresh synthesis, then a useful purpose will have been served. Few accounts of this type of topic induce complete agreement and this chapter is likely to be no exception. At the heart of the matter lies the fact that teaching is a very personal pursuit in which all the qualities of an individual come into action. There is no one formula for success in the search for an effective style of teaching history. The ideas put forward above, based as they are on one teacher's experience, are offered as a contribution to that continuing enquiry which is the original meaning of the word *historia*.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See M. C. V. Jeffreys, *History in Schools*, Pitman.
- <sup>2</sup> See A. N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education*, Benn.
- <sup>3</sup> One further reason for advocating a study of present West African societies in the lower school is that, unless something is done, many children will grow up with little understanding of their communities. The impact, particularly in urban areas, of modernisation, the mass media, technical change, the fragmentation of families is immense, and much of value in traditional ways of life may be lost irretrievably.
- <sup>4</sup> This estimate is based on an allocation of three periods of forty minutes per week over two school years of thirty-five weeks actual teaching time.

## 2 The Approach through Archaeology to early West African History

THURSTAN SHAW

STRICTLY speaking, history is the account of what happened in the past made up from the writings of people who lived at or soon after the period being described. In a wider sense, history is the story of what happened at any time in the past, whether anyone wrote down anything about it or not.

Now in all parts of the world, human beings have lived and loved, worked and fought, sought food and shelter, made tools and weapons, and had children and brought them up, before they knew the art of writing. Therefore there was no one to write down their history, or the story of how they lived or obtained their livelihood or travelled about. Yet we are all interested in our ancestors and wish to know what sort of people they were and what were their achievements. This story of our preliterate forebears is immensely important, too, in the story of the emergence of Man from prehuman ancestors in the course of evolution, and this in turn contributes considerably to the understanding of modern man.

If no one wrote anything down about the ancient people, how can we know anything about them? There is a limit to the accuracy and time-depth of even the most carefully-preserved oral traditions; and in some cases even these are entirely absent. Will not anything we say about these times, then, be pure speculation? At one time this was the case—and all sorts of conjectures and theories, myths and legends, were told concerning man's pre-literate period, including those contained in parts of the Old Testament of the Bible. Some of these guesses may have been 'inspired guesses' and not far from the truth, but they remain guesses as far as their factual content is concerned, even if, as in the case of the Bible, some of them were made the vehicles for what can still be regarded as spiritual truths.

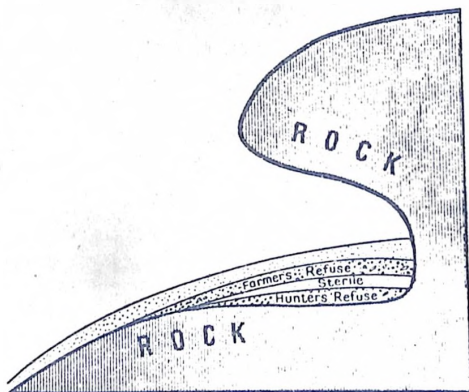
However, in the course of the last hundred years or so there has been developed the science of archaeology, which is able to discover large parts of the story of man's unwritten past by studying the material objects he has left behind him. Of course it cannot be pretended that scientific archaeology can give as complete an account of a period of the past as can a written history, but it can reconstruct large parts of the story with far greater accuracy than mere speculation. The work of archaeological research is continuing, so that gaps are continually being filled and greater accuracy being achieved.

An archaeologist works rather like a detective who collects his data from a large number of different clues and then, putting them all together, reasons out certain deductions and conclusions from them, e.g. 'the murderer must have been a left-handed man'. The archaeologist works in just the same kind of way, using both common-sense observation and a whole battery of scientific laboratory techniques. Just as the detective may not be able to name the murderer but is able to narrow down the hunt to left-handed men, so archaeology may be unable to name a king or a chief or a people in the past but it can nevertheless give a lot of information about them: how they were dressed, how they got their food, how they made things, what sort of homes they lived in, how they buried their dead, what sort of trade or warfare they engaged in, and how long ago they lived.

#### STRATIFICATION

One of the most important pieces of archaeological evidence derives from the *position in the ground* in which objects are found. It is obvious that if there has been no subsequent disturbance of the ground, something found *deeper* than a second thing must have got there or been put there *before* the second thing, perhaps a very long time before. This is the same principle as is used in geology, that of *stratification*, namely that the deeper layers are older than the upper layers (except in certain well-defined circumstances). We can, for instance, imagine a band of hunters living in a cave or under a rock-shelter. It is here that the game they have hunted is cooked and eaten and the refuse thrown away, as with the fruit, nuts and roots which they may also have collected; here that tools and weapons are made and waste materials left; here that common objects of everyday use are dropped and lost. In this way material

accumulates in and around the cave, and embedded in it are some of the domestic articles characteristic of this hunting people. Then perhaps the climate changes slightly (as we know has happened several times in the past) as a result of which the game moves away, the hunters follow, and the cave is left unoccupied. No longer is anything of human manufacture dropped in the cave, but dust and leaves blow in, pieces of stone fall off the roof, and so a 'sterile' layer containing no 'artifacts' (anything made by man) is formed above the layer of the hunters' refuse. After a long time, perhaps a thousand years, a different set of people come along and use the cave as a ready-made habitation. These people practise agriculture and have completely different tools and weapons, pots and pans, clothes and ornaments from those of the previous hunters. Nevertheless, from living in the cave, these people lay down a layer of earth which contains *their* characteristic artifacts, in just the same way as the hunters had done. Later on these agriculturalists learnt to build houses, so they abandoned their cave, and a sterile layer again started forming over their remains. Thus if we dig a trench through the cave deposits, the section through them would be something like this:



If we dig and find a section like this, it does not require great powers of deduction to interpret the evidence as showing that the

hunting people first occupied the cave, that then there was a gap of no occupation, followed by the advent of quite different farming people.

#### EXCAVATION

It sometimes happens that in their excavations, say of a richly-furnished royal tomb, archaeologists find rare and precious objects or works of art of great beauty, but this is not what they are primarily looking for. Excavation is not a treasure-hunt, even if 'treasures' may be discovered in this way incidentally. What scientific archaeologists are seeking to obtain in their excavations is knowledge, information and data which will enable them to fill out the picture of the past more accurately. For this, a certain mark in the soil or a piece of charcoal may be more important than a ceremonial gold dagger. This is why, in their digging, archaeologists go so slowly and carefully, looking at every little piece of soil for evidence, measuring accurately the position of things found, keeping a photographic record, drawing plans, submitting many of their finds to laboratory experts for specialist reports very much in the manner of the police detective trying to reconstruct a crime. One of the most important specialist services used by the archaeologist and which helps him to date his deposits is that of radiocarbon analysis. This is a method whereby the proportion of the radioactive isotope of carbon (C 14) to ordinary carbon (C 12) is measured in such a way as to indicate the approximate age of the sample analysed. Any organic material can furnish a sample for radiocarbon dating, but charcoal is the best and commonest.

Inevitably there is a large element of chance in what survives to the present from among the objects made and used by the peoples of the past. If a people disposed of their dead by exposing them in trees or just throwing them into the bush we might have no idea of their physical form, whereas we might have a very good idea of this if they practised embalming and mummifying. If a people lived exclusively in tents we might have very little idea of their homes, whereas we might obtain a good idea of this if they built stone houses. Different climatic and soil conditions, too, affect the extent to which objects are preserved or destroyed. Objects of stone and pottery are almost indestructible, but objects of wood, leather, bone, basketry and textiles require specially

favourable conditions for their preservation. Of metals, gold is almost indestructible, iron often rusts away to an unrecognisable lump, while copper, bronze and brass may or may not be well-preserved. Much of the skill of the archaeologist consists in conserving the fragmentary remains of badly-preserved objects, and digging in such a way that they are not damaged.

The first discovery of an archaeological find or of an archaeological site is very commonly made accidentally by an ordinary person and not by an archaeologist at all; in digging a well or the foundations of a house, in building a road or a railway, in mining operations or in farming. Anywhere where the ground is being dug into there is the chance of an archaeological find. Whenever one is made, it is important that the person digging should stop and not dig around to see how much more he can find, but report it to an archaeologist, so that with his special techniques he can extract the maximum amount of *information* from the find. If it is impossible to wait for the arrival of an archaeologist, careful notes should be made of the depth and position in which objects are found, and if possible photographs of the spot should be taken.

#### ARCHAEOLOGY IN WEST AFRICA

In most of West Africa there are few written records before A.D. 1000, and in many areas there are none until a later date than this. What story, then, is archaeology able to tell of West Africa before A.D. 1000? Regrettably, at the moment, the picture is very imperfect, and has many gaps in it, because it must be remembered that archaeological research in West Africa has only been going on for a comparatively short time, on a limited scale, and it has been very unevenly distributed.

It is now generally accepted that all the modern races of the world today belong to a single biological species, to which is given the name *Homo sapiens* ('thinking man'), and that in the course of evolution, *Homo sapiens* emerged from more ape-like forms. It is not believed that Man evolved from apes or monkeys but that apes and men have a common ancestry. This evolution appears to have taken place in Africa—at least most of the evidence for it so far comes from eastern and southern Africa. The point in time when this divergence began is over ten million years ago, and seems to have been connected with a drying out of the climate, which compelled forest-dwelling creatures to take partly to the more open

country between the forest galleries which survived along the water-courses. About two million years ago there appear to have been two varieties of early hominids living in eastern and southern Africa. They had taken to an upright gait instead of one on all fours, and had bigger brains and smaller snouts than apes; their hands were free to use tools. These developments represented important steps along the path of evolution towards true Man, and it is interesting that the area where their fossil remains have been found has recently been extended outside East and South Africa to the West African area, by the finding of the facial portion of the skull of an *Australopithecine*, or 'southern ape' in the Republic of Chad. One variety of these early ape-men had very crude stone tools, sometimes just a pebble with a few chips knocked off it to make a sharp cutting edge, and they appear to have diversified their food from the mainly vegetarian diet of the forest by taking to eating meat as well. It is inevitable that the earliest and crudest stone tools made should only be slight improvements upon naturally-broken pieces of rock, and so they may be hard to recognise. Nevertheless, characteristic 'pebble-tools' have been found in a number of places in West Africa, but it is difficult to be sure whether any of them really belong to this very early period, since it is a form of stone tool which had a long history and survived into later periods.

#### THE USE OF STONE

The form of 'ape-men' intermediate between the *Australopithecines* and *Homo sapiens* is called by the scientists *Pithecanthropus* ('ape-man') or *Homo erectus* ('upright man'), but most of the fossil examples known come from Asia, although some interesting recent finds from Morocco appear to belong to this group. One of the difficulties of archaeology in West Africa south of the Sahara is that situations suitable for the preservation of bone do not seem to occur so frequently as in other parts of Africa. *Pithecanthropus* had a larger brain than *Australopithecus* and more nearly resembled *Homo sapiens*, although still not having as big a brain as he has.

All this period of time belongs to the Earlier Stone Age, and as time went on artifacts made of chipped stone acquired regular and recognisable shapes and forms. Most distinctive are those known as 'Acheulean'—named after the type-site in France, according to the archaeological practice of naming a culture after the place

where it was first discovered. The commonest and most distinctive implements of the Acheulean culture are the 'handaxe'—a flattish piece of stone 4-10 ins. long, trimmed to give either an oval outline with a cutting edge most of the way round or else to give a blade-like point—and the 'cleaver', which is a similar piece of stone trimmed to give a straight cutting or chopping edge across the top. Acheulean man seems to have lived over the greater part of Africa but to have kept outside the wetter, forested zones, except perhaps in some cases in drier periods. Acheulean material is common over the Sahara area north of 15° North latitude, it being remembered that the Sahara was much less arid than it is today and that it supported considerable vegetation. Acheulean man also occupied the Jos plateau in Nigeria and penetrated into the Ghana area through Togo.

During the Stone Age there were changes in the climate which affected the whole earth. At times the North Polar ice-sheet spread far down into Europe, Asia and America, and during the height of these glacial stages so much of the world's water was locked up in the form of ice that sea levels were lower over the whole world—sometimes making land-bridges for the movement of men and animals across places which are now covered by the sea. In tropical latitudes there were 'pluvial' periods of increased rainfall, which made lake levels rise, in place of glacial periods, but not necessarily at exactly the same times. It is possible to see evidence of these changes in the geological record of the earth's surface, and the finding of the handiwork of different kinds of Stone Age peoples in terraces of gravel or old lake-beds helps to date the different stages in relation to these climatic changes.

Succeeding the Earlier Stone Age is the culture known as the 'Sangoan' (named after Sango Bay in Uganda) and which appears to be the product of people living in a wooded environment in a rather drier period; the Sangoans probably had the use of fire and their tools included heavy pick-like forms perhaps adapted for grubbing up roots. We are now dealing with the period of about 40,000 years ago. So the slow development goes on, on into the Middle Stone Age, with improved stone-working techniques and probably the introduction of the throwing spear, tipped with well-chipped stone points. Points appear with tangs, small projections to assist with fitting the point into the shaft, and projecting shoulders are left on the point to make rudimentary barbs; it is

possible that this form of point indicates the introduction of the bow. These earliest kinds of tanged points have been found in North Africa, the Sahara and the Congo; a few specimens are claimed from Ghana.

Further improvements in hafting techniques were later made, with the result that the stone implements become very small in size, since, as arrow-points and barbs and perhaps composite knives, they were slotted into shafts in which grooves were cut with tiny chisel-like tools. These very small implements are often called 'microliths' ('small stones'). Microlithic industries have been found in a number of places in West Africa, and several rock-shelter sites which have produced them have been excavated in Ghana and Nigeria. A different form of the same general 'family' of microlithic industries, but with its relationships pointing more to the northward, is known in Senegal. The earliest of these microlithic industries has been dated as beginning about 10,000 years ago. In Sudan and Kenya the later stages of these microlith-using people seem to have had the use of pottery.

Probably rather more than 10,000 years ago, in the hill country flanking the northern side of the 'Fertile Crescent' in parts of modern Iran, northern Iraq, Anatolia and the Syria/Jordan area, some of the hunting and gathering peoples of the time seem to have begun using for food the grains of certain wild grasses, which, after suitable grinding and preparation, were found to be good to eat. Later, some of the grass seeds were kept and planted near a living place, instead of people simply going out and foraging among the wild products. So the domestication of cereals began and the practice of agriculture was invented. The domestication of animals was an associated process, perhaps as a result of wild animals hanging round the now more permanent human settlements to obtain scraps or to try to eat crops or stubble. Such 'lures' were seen to be an easier way of hunting, and from this developed a realisation that the best way to ensure a meat supply was not immediately to kill all your captured animals but to let them breed in captivity. The first domesticated animal seems to have been the sheep, followed by goat and pig, and then cattle. The dog came after, at first probably for food rather than as a hunting companion. All this revolutionised the human way of life, making possible a greater permanence of settlement in one place, an accumulation of food resources, and with these an increase of

leisure time, the beginning of specialisation of jobs, and the release of some members of the community from the task of food production. This revolution in the human way of life is sometimes referred to as the 'Neolithic' (New Stone Age) Revolution, for it came in the last part of the Stone Age. In many cases, stone axes were now made, not simply by chipping, but by rubbing, grinding and polishing them to shape and to obtain a sharp cutting edge; this method made possible the use of tougher kinds of rocks which were less likely to chip or shatter in use.

The area of the present Sahara desert was much less arid ten thousand to five thousand years ago than at present, and supported a Mediterranean type of vegetation. In the later part of this period there lived in it a large population of peoples with a 'neolithic' type of equipment, which included pottery and ground stone axes; they were probably largely pastoralists, although the great number and variety of beautifully flaked stone arrowheads as well as bone harpoons found, suggest that hunting and fishing also played an important part in the economy. Finds of the different regional variants of this 'Sahara Neolithic' are mostly confined to the north of 15° North latitude, but an interesting discovery of material of this kind has recently been made in northern Ghana, indicating that at least one group of these people migrated a long way to the south of their previous habitat, probably when the latter became too dry to support their former way of life there. The progressive desiccation of the Sahara must have had an important effect on folk movements during the second and third millennia B.C., and these must have had repercussions in West Africa.

Ground stone axes are found throughout the whole of West Africa including the forest area—in fact in far greater numbers than in eastern and southern Africa. They are often believed by the present inhabitants to be thunderbolts hurled by the god of thunder or a sky-god, and as such to have magical properties. Until recently, comparatively few ground stone axes had been found in satisfactory archaeological conditions, but some of the latest investigations show that these ground stone axes may be associated with the later stages of microlithic industries. There seems to have been a rather different version in caves and rock-shelters in Guinea, where the microlithic element is much less prominent and instead there are heavier cutting and scraping

tools; in the more forested areas near Conakry and in Sierra Leone and S.E. Guinea, microliths appear to be entirely absent.

From the third millennium B.C. onwards, desiccation set in throughout the Sahara, progressively forcing out the Late Stone Age peoples and turning it, if not into a complete barrier to human passage, nevertheless into an increasingly effective filter. This was unfortunate for sub-Saharan Africa because, combined with the Sudd swamps of the upper Nile, it largely cut the rest of Africa off from the important developments which were taking place in Egypt, the Middle East and Western Pakistan. It is ironical too, that the very effectiveness and self-sufficiency of ancient Egyptian civilisation, served further to bar the rest of Africa from the developments which took place in south-west Asia. These developments constituted a second revolution in the human way of living, growing out of and made possible by the accumulated results of the first, or 'neolithic', revolution. This second revolution has been called the 'urban revolution', because, as a result of accumulations of wealth, an assured food supply and an increasing division of labour, people were able to live together in larger and larger numbers and the first permanent cities appear. This process both fostered and was assisted by the discovery and development of metallurgy (at first copper, then its alloy with tin, bronze), as well as the art of writing, which is necessary before the scale of social and political organisation can advance beyond a certain point. It was in this phase of development also that the wheel was invented.

Now it has been claimed in the past by one school of thought that all human inventions stemmed from a single source and that they spread out from this source to the rest of the world by a process of diffusion. These 'diffusionists' claimed that nothing was ever invented twice. Another school of thought claimed that every human group passed through certain set stages in a process of cultural evolution, as a result of which many different groups followed a natural and logical course, each step of progress leading on to the discovery of the next, even if at different times. The holders of this view were called the 'evolutionists'. It was possible for these two opposing theories to hold the field at the same time because of lack of evidence to settle the argument. It can now be seen that the truth lies somewhere between the two, with diffusion playing the major role. There has been more than one independent

invention of some things, for example agriculture in the Old World and the New, but the number of such instances is limited. If, therefore, for geographical or historical reasons, an area becomes cut off from fertilising contact with other parts of the world where discoveries and inventions are taking place, it may lag behind and some time may elapse before that area catches up with the new developments. Because of the barrier of the Atlantic Ocean, America had to wait more than five thousand years to receive the benefits of some of the inventions made in the Old World, just as the Old also had to wait a long time to receive the benefit of many useful crops domesticated in the New.

This kind of isolation, then, is the reason why there was no Copper or Bronze Age in Africa outside the brilliant civilisation of Ancient Egypt, why there was no writing until the advent of the Arabic script, why there was no wheel until the nineteenth century in many places—not because of any inferiority of inventiveness on the part of the peoples living in sub-Saharan Africa, but because they were cut off at the critical moment, by a geographical and climatological accident, from the centres from which these ideas were diffusing to most of Europe and Asia. Wheels were known in Britain two thousand years ago only because contact was established with the Mediterranean world which had them; no one in Britain ever invented a wheel.

#### THE USE OF IRON

So it comes about that the next most important development in West Africa was the coming of iron. Iron has considerable advantages over copper or bronze as a metal for tools and weapons, although its metallurgy is quite different and, in some ways, more difficult. Iron is harder and tougher than bronze but, above all, it is much cheaper and more easily available, because iron ores in one form or another are widespread; they are very common in West Africa, whereas copper occurs rarely, at widely separated spots and in small quantities. The art of smelting iron was discovered in Asia Minor, to the south of the Black Sea, in the area of the ancient Hittite Empire, during the second millennium B.C., and the Hittites may have intentionally kept the secret to themselves for some time. Ultimately, however, it spread to the Assyrians, and it was the superiority of their iron weapons that largely accounted for their conquest of the Bronze Age civilisation of Egypt, where iron did

not come into common use until about 600 B.C., much later than farther north and east. Nubia was established as the African kingdom of Kush, with strong connections with Egypt and the Mediterranean world, from the fifth century B.C. to the third century A.D., and was a great centre of iron manufacture, as the piles of iron slag at Meroë testify. It seems that this was the diffusion centre from which a knowledge of iron-working spread into most of Africa. It is also possible that iron-working may have been introduced into West Africa from the North African city of Carthage, which iron-using Phoenicians established in the ninth century B.C. It seems likely that Carthaginian traders and their intermediaries succeeded in tapping the gold resources of West Africa, and it is possible that as a result of this contact, a knowledge of iron-working may have been diffused in the opposite direction.

At any rate there is evidence for a knowledge of iron in West Africa by the third century B.C., and perhaps earlier, in the Nok culture, named after the village of that name in Northern Nigeria. The distinctive feature of this culture is the production of terracotta (baked clay) figures and figurines of a distinctive artistic style and of great beauty. Human heads are the commonest, probably broken off from complete statues, but animals, such as monkeys and elephants, also occur. The human figures vary from two-thirds life size to complete diminutive figures not more than 4 ins. high. They were probably cult objects placed in shrines in connection with the worship of ancestors or certain deities. The majority have been found in alluvial deposits being worked for tin, in which are also found iron objects and the pipes for carrying the forced draught from bellows into iron-smelting furnaces. Stone axes and microliths are also found in these deposits, so the time represented may be the period of transition and overlap of the use of stone and iron; or the stone implements may be older material also washed into the deposits by the flooding rivers. Finds of the Nok culture are known from a wide arc of country west, south-west and south of the Jos plateau.

It seems that a knowledge of iron-working spread fairly rapidly over some parts of Africa, much more slowly to others, and not at all in some cases. It is believed that it reached Central Africa early in the first millennium A.D., but when Europeans first came to the most southerly part of the continent they found Bushmen

and Hottentot people there who had no iron and were still using stone and bone tools and weapons.

It is very likely that the change from food-gathering to food-production in Africa south of the Sahara was associated with the spread of iron. Unfortunately we do not as yet know as much about the beginnings of agriculture in Africa as we should like. As elsewhere, doubtless the change was a gradual one, and food production, while making possible more permanent settlement and ultimate urbanisation, does not preclude the continued practice of hunting and of gathering wild products, as in many food-producing African societies today. One anthropologist has claimed an independent invention of agriculture, as long ago perhaps as the fifth millennium B.C., in the upper Niger area; however, the evidence is largely botanical and the botanists are not agreed. There is a claim for a West African domestication of one kind of rice and it does seem likely that yams were indigenously cultivated, although we do not know whether this was before or after the introduction from Asia of the banana and the Asian yam some two thousand years ago. Maize, cassava and sweet potatoes were only introduced to Africa after the discovery of America. The evidence on this question of the beginnings of agriculture in Africa is not strictly archaeological, but comes from anthropology, botany and linguistics. There is linguistic evidence to suggest that the Bantu-speaking peoples had a centre of dispersal in the area south and east of the middle Benue River, and it is possible that this great movement of African peoples—still going on at the time of the advent of Europeans in the nineteenth century—was associated with a population increase resulting from food production and a much more efficient mastery of the environment through the use of iron tools and weapons.

#### WEST AFRICA

The great medieval empires of the Western Sudan—Ghana, Mali and Songhai—are mostly known through written Arabic sources, but undoubtedly in time archaeological techniques will throw more light upon them. Excavations have been carried out at Kumbi Saleh, believed to be one of the capitals of ancient Ghana, but more work needs to be done in this area. There are interesting circles of dressed standing stones in the middle Gambia valley, which a recent archaeological expedition has investigated.

As a result of this they are thought to belong to the period A.D. 1300-1600.

To the south of Lake Chad there are traditions of a race of 'giants', referred to as the 'So' or 'Sao', who preceded the Kanuri inhabitants and who were non-Muslims. Enormous pots, probably originally used for grain or water-storage, but also used for burials, are known from these people. Their mounds and occupation sites have been excavated, revealing a fascinating array of modelled clay objects and a number cast in bronze. The excavator recognises three Sao periods, beginning in the eleventh century A.D. More recently another research worker has made a large excavation in a mound in this area nearly 40 ft. high, in which a series of radiocarbon dates indicates occupation from the sixth century B.C. up to the eighteenth century A.D. The earlier part of the occupation belonged to the Stone Age, with ground stone axes and beautiful projectile points and other implements of bone, while the use of iron appears to come in at about the beginning of our era.

The mention of the Sao bronzes introduces an interesting archaeological problem. There seems to be an ancient tradition of casting objects in bronze by the lost-wax method which is widespread in West Africa. It has many regional variants in the forest belt from the Ivory Coast to Cameroon, but also, in addition to the bronzes from the Lake Chad area just mentioned, bronze objects apparently of some antiquity have been found in mounds in the middle Niger area. The lost-wax method of casting has a high antiquity in the Middle East and Ancient Egypt, and is the method whereby a model of the desired object is first made in wax or latex and then invested with clay, but leaving a rod of wax reaching the outside. When the whole object is heated in a fire, the wax runs out of the baked clay, leaving inside a space into which molten metal is poured through the hole left in the clay where the projecting rod of wax was. When the metal has cooled and solidified, the clay is broken off to reveal the object desired modelled in bronze.

Until recently it was believed that the oldest bronzes in West Africa were the naturalistic heads from Ife, since there is a Benin tradition dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century telling of a bronzesmith being sent from Ife to teach the art in Benin. Accordingly the earliest Ife work is placed in the eleventh century A.D. In spite of some intensive archaeological work at Ife, there is as yet no

direct archaeological evidence on the dating, and some estimates place these works of art from Ife at an earlier date. However, the ornate bronzes discovered at Igbo-Ukwa, in eastern Nigeria, have now been dated to the ninth century A.D. It seems most likely that the introduction of this craft into West Africa followed the greater opening up of the trans-Saharan trade routes by the Arabs. We speak of 'bronzes', but many of these objects are not alloys of copper with tin; some have more lead in them, some are brass and some are almost pure copper. Work to determine their composition is at present going on and may ultimately throw some light on their origins.

This is a good illustration of how much archaeological research is still waiting to be done in West Africa, to fill the many gaps in our knowledge. It will take much long and patient work to fill in these gaps and to obtain sufficient pieces of the jig-saw puzzle to achieve a reasonably complete picture, and it will require adequately supported research in *all* the countries of West Africa.

Archaeology is also beginning to give assistance to historians, by means of excavation and other archaeological methods, in the 'protohistoric' period after A.D. 1000, when written records in West Africa begin but are sometimes inadequate. Work of this kind has been done in the middle Niger area of Mali, in northern and southern Ghana, in Nigeria and in the Republic of Chad.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PRACTICAL WORK

1 Try to show the class at least one example of a genuine archaeological object: a piece of worked stone, a piece of iron-slag, an old piece of pottery or a piece of pottery that has been dug up.

2 Get hold of some quartz (as close-grained as possible), or chert, or flint, or similar stone and try hitting it near its edges with another stone suitable for use as a hammer-stone to try to strike off flakes and make sharp cutting edges, as was done in the Stone Age when metal was not known.

3 Walk through a town or village looking at all that can be seen, inside and outside buildings, to answer the question: 'What would survive, and what state would it be in, if the place was abandoned today and vegetation and the weather allowed to do their work unhindered for a thousand years before an archaeologist of the future came to investigate it?'

4 To show the principle of stratification: prepare a number of samples of soils of different colours and consistencies—small lumps of angular rock, red earth, sand, charcoal, brown earth, small pebbles. Put a suitable quantity of one into a transparent container to form a layer—(a small glass or plastic aquarium is best, failing this a wide-mouthed bottle will do); then put in another layer of a contrasting soil—and then similarly all the other samples.

Which layer is 'oldest' (put in first)? Which 'most recent' (put in last)? Half the class could see it done, half be made to deduce the answers from only seeing the results in the container.

5 A 'mock excavation' can be carried out in the school grounds. One section of the class to dig a pit, cook a meal in it on an open hearth, leave the blackened hearth-stones, etc. in place, break one of the pots used and leave it there, scatter refuse from the meal about the hearth, including at least one labelled tin; fill in the pit. Next day, or next week, the other section of the class to excavate the pit, using only trowels or small hoes gently, and sieving the material. What do their finds indicate? (1) Some people lit a fire and did some cooking. (2) They broke their cooking pot. (3) They were eating x, y and z (deductions from refuse). (4) How long ago was this? (Deductions from state of remains.) (5) Possible reasons for abandonment of cooking place. (6) Who were the people? etc., etc. A brief report of deductions made should be written and presented to the other section of the class, who can check their accuracy. Any unjustified inferences? Any justifiable ones not spotted? Any ambiguous ones? (This approach will highlight the often uncertain nature of archaeological evidence unless it is confirmed from more than one site; e.g. what sort of people consumed the contents of the tin, Africans or Europeans?)

### 3 The Peoples of West Africa Around A.D. 1000

C. C. IFEMESIA

#### INTRODUCTION

THE area covered by this brief survey extends from Senegal in the west to Cameroon in the east. It embraces graded types of climate and vegetation, from the dense tropical forest of the south, through the open woodland and grassland (savannah) in the middle to the dry and arid scrubland bordering on the Sahara desert in the north. It must be emphasised that there is no sharp dividing line between one geographical zone and the next. In the north, for instance, nothing marks the end of desert and the beginning of scrubland; the same is true with respect to the savannah and rain forest in the south. From the point of view of human activity, these natural zones have never presented impenetrable barriers to movement and settlement down the centuries. Thus, although it constitutes a distinct zone which has posed difficulties of communication between its northern and southern fringes, the Sahara has always been something of a sea of social and economic intercourse. A close study of the early life of the peoples of the zones to the south also shows that there has always been a good deal of contact and communication between them through the ages.

The choice of the year A.D. 1000 as the starting-point of our study is, as you might surmise, rather arbitrary. The truth is that we have to start from somewhere, in any event; particularly from a point of time about which we can obtain some evidence from both written and unwritten sources. But human societies as they existed at any period in the past were the end-products of historical processes dating from times of still greater antiquity. In the same way the events and developments of any period in the past would form prototypes of processes of much later times. Hence, for understanding the conditions in which the peoples of West Africa lived around A.D. 1000 we shall have a brief—in fact a very brief—look at some of the things that had happened earlier and, on

occasions, we shall also take a brief glance at later developments.

Tiny fragments of charcoal, accompanied by Old Stone Age tools, recovered from tin-workings near Jos on the Nigerian plateau, suggest, when submitted to scientific methods of dating, an age of 'greater than 39,000 years'. Whether Negroes or Negroid peoples were living in West Africa—and in the Sahara too—at that time is not known, but it is believed that they existed in the area around 5000 B.C. Rock paintings and engravings recently discovered by Henri Lhote, a French archaeologist, indicate that Negroes, presumably from West Africa and its neighbourhood, had been living as far north as the Tassili plateau in the Sahara before 3000 B.C. Farther north, a close study of some 800 human skulls existing before the same date suggests that the ancestors of West Africans of today played an important role in building the civilisation of ancient Egypt. Subsequently, the progressive desiccation of the Sahara considerably reduced the frequency of human passage between south and north; hence the different development of the two areas. Yet contact was not totally impeded: trading, warfare and migration continued.

#### SIMILARITY AND DIVERSITY

South of the Sahara, in West Africa, migration and settlement of peoples also proceeded. Here there were no mountain ranges or inhospitable deserts to interfere seriously with these processes, rather the land was wide, the inhabitants were fewer than they are today and would naturally move about whether in search of food, or because of war or natural disasters, or for some other reasons. The intermingling of the peoples of West Africa in these early times is clearly attested by the fact that they are predominantly of the same racial type. They have also retained elements of early common cultural traditions. Although the matter has not yet been systematically studied, there is a wide under-layer of similarity in the symbols and rituals, the myths and folktales of West African peoples. Some progress has recently been made, however, in the study of West African languages; and languages are integral parts and vehicles of expression of the cultures of all peoples. Thanks largely to the work of linguists like Westermann and Greenberg, it is already becoming clear that, except in the north-east between the Niger and the Chad, nearly all the languages of West Africa belong to one single great group now referred to as the Niger-

Congo family. This suggests that West African languages were, in early times, derived from one ancestral speech; that the forest and savannah regions formed one large cultural zone; and that the majority of the peoples of this zone perhaps even originated from one common stock.

The findings of linguists have also recently received some measure of support from those of archaeology; the study which, as we have seen, has shed some light on our knowledge of the ancient links between West Africa and the regions to the north. In 1931, during the process of tin-mining, a couple of human heads were recovered at Nok, a village of the Jaba people of southern Zaria Province in Northern Nigeria. The heads were made of coarse clay mixed with fragments of local quartz and silicates. More specimens have since been recovered, including polished stone axes, furnace waste, perforated quartz beads, and a life-size terra-cotta head. Scientific methods of dating have suggested 900 B.C. as the most probable period around which these specimens were produced. But the most recent find—a pestle—from a late Nok level has also been scientifically dated even nearer to the time of the present discussion—around A.D. 875.

We do not really know for certain which people made the fine Nok terra-cotta heads, but these figures are one of the manifestations of complex, settled societies, namely, highly developed art forms. Similarly, there is evidence that the makers of the figurines were agricultural peoples. The extraordinary flat hoes discovered in the area indicate an agricultural economy not very different from that practised today by the Ham people and their neighbours of the Northern Nigerian plateau. Moreover the Nok people kept cattle, and had some knowledge of iron-working and probably of iron-smelting also, although the numerous stone implements so far recovered would suggest that stone must still have been the normal material for tools and weapons. Knowledge of iron-working was common in the savannah of West Africa in the last few centuries before the Christian era, from about 300 B.C. By A.D. 100 this knowledge had extended south to the forest fringes, including the area in which the Nok artifacts have been recovered. In this area iron tools and weapons appeared earlier than iron-mining.

Furthermore the Nok people liked ornaments, as witness the smooth stone and tin ornaments (including beads, earlobes and lip plugs) discovered in the region. As a matter of fact the hair

style on a head recovered in mid-1954 resembles that of the present-day Kachicheri and Numana, groups of people living about thirty miles east of Nok. Taken with the evidence relating to agricultural economy, all this suggests that physically, economically and culturally the plateau-dwellers of present-day Northern Nigeria are parallel to the Nok people of old. More important still for our present purposes, it has been discovered that the sculptures of Ife and Benin are strikingly similar to those of Nok in subject matter, as well as in the postures of the figures and their proportions. Comparisons in detail have also been made of the Nok artifacts and Ibo and Ibibio masks of Nigeria, recent Baluba carvings of the Congo and the Dan masks of the Ivory Coast. Thus, through the help of archaeology, as of linguistics, we are gradually learning more and more about the peoples of West Africa towards the end of the first millennium of our era, about the elements of similarity in their diverse cultures, and about the cultural traits which they have passed on, through their more immediate successors, to the people of our own day.

The point made about the underlying similarity of much of West African culture in early times must not be regarded as in any way glossing over its striking diversity. There was, for instance, an equally early and important cultural differentiation between the savannah and forest zones of West Africa; and if most of the languages of the entire area had a common origin they subsequently diverged. Thus today, whereas the Mande languages are spoken in a large part of the savannah region, the Kwa languages prevail in the forest belt. And even within each geographical zone clear linguistic differences are in evidence. To cite one example: Ewe, Akan and Ga in modern Ghana, and Yoruba, Nupe and Ibo in modern Nigeria belong to the Kwa group of languages, but speakers of these Ghanaian and Nigerian languages do not at all understand one another, although frontier populations are frequently bilingual. Similarly, in the realm of state-building, we find that although the ancient Tekrur, Ghana, Mali and Songhai empires of the savannah had their later parallels in the Mossi, Nupe, Igala and Jukun kingdoms of the middle zone and the Asante, Dahomey, Yoruba and Benin kingdoms of the forest, each set of state systems was distinctively adapted and elaborated to suit its particular environment.

## THE FOREST ZONE

In the indigenous patterns of subsistence, moreover, we find contrasts between the forest and grassland peoples during the period under consideration. Before contact with Europeans introduced such food crops as maize and cassava, the forest peoples were predominantly cultivators depending on root crops (like yams and cocoyams), fruit (especially bananas) and legumes. They also cultivated kola trees and obtained palm products from their forest environment. In one particular area in the west, an area stretching from the Gambia to western Liberia, both swamp and upland rice was grown as a staple crop. None of the early Europeans reported that it had been recently introduced, in fact it had long been an important riverain crop on the middle Niger from where it reached the forest peoples to the south and south-west. In addition to cultivation, the forest peoples kept domestic livestock such as humpless cattle, goats, pigs and poultry; and hunting and trapping were prominent in the traditional economy. Their fabrics were mainly screw-pine and raffia matting and bark-cloth. There were, as already indicated, centres of iron-smelting, and especially in parts of the transition zone between forest and savannah, iron-smithing was also fairly generally practised. Besides indigenous architecture (including the subsidiary skills of masonry and carpentry), sculpture, in the media of clay, bronze, brass, ivory and wood, was undertaken in places. These arts and crafts served utilitarian, religious and aesthetic ends, producing private and public buildings, household utensils, stools, gongs, statues, masks, ornaments, etc.

Before the organisation of the centralised state systems already mentioned, the old patterns of social and political organisation were generally small in scale and rooted in kinship and other ties. A lineage system, which might be patrilineal or matrilineal, enabled kinsmen of one line of descent to maintain solidarity for internal organisation and for dealings with the kinsmen of other lineages. In some places this lineage principle was extended to embrace a number of local groups conceived and organised as a kindred body. In other places, particularly where the people lived in comparatively large settlements, the concept and practice of kinship reached the level of a village organisation. But scarcely anywhere were large politically centralised states

of people and their cattle; and wild cattle are known to have ranged North Africa from Morocco to Egypt. Possibly the domestication of different breeds of cattle was achieved independently in both Asia and Africa. Be that as it may, cattle were used in the Western and Central Sudan from an early date. They provided, besides portorage, large supplies of meat and dairy products; they furnished the hides and skins from which was manufactured the 'morocco' leather for which Kano—the future emporium and entrepôt of the Central Sudan which we begin to hear of by now (A.D. 999)—was to become famous. Other arts and crafts undertaken by the savannah men included construction with sun-dried bricks of buildings decorated with vaults and arches; weaving of cotton on narrow and broad looms; lost-wax casting in bronze and brass; and delicate, ornamental work in silver and gold.

With the products of these crafts and other activities trade was carried on with the forest regions to the south and with North Africa beyond the desert. Across the Sudan and southwards to the forest fringes the donkey and the bullock (besides human beings) were the principal carriers of trade goods to and from the countries of the Bure, Lobi, Asante, Yoruba, Nupe, Igala and Jukun. In the north, with the introduction of the camel, caravan trade grew apace and commercial towns flourished. Long before the beginning of the Christian era there were three major trade routes between the southern and northern shores of the desert. In the west a highway ran from Morocco through Adar to the middle Senegal and upper Niger; in the centre, from Tripoli through Ghadames and Ghat to Gao in the middle Niger; and in the east, from Tripoli through Murzuq and Bilma to N'jimi in Kanem. The conductors of this trade were mainly Berbers: nomadic, fair-skinned people who inhabited North Africa and the oases of the desert from Mauritania to Ahaggar as far south as the Sudan. They established settlements in commercial centres of the Sudan where they exchanged the manufactured goods of the Mediterranean lands—silks, beads, mirrors, swords and (as literacy spread) paper—and dates and salt of the Sahara, for the commodities of the West African savannah and forest—gold, grain, gum, hides and skins, ostrich feathers, ivory, kola nuts and slaves.

In the sphere of social and political organisation, we also find that the evolution of ruling aristocracies, political centralisation and administrative government pre-dated the advent of Islam in



the savannah zone. However, some peoples of the area, like their neighbours to the south, enjoyed a high degree of autonomy in their small local communities each of which organised social relations within itself and between it and other communities. At the same time there were peoples, like the Tekrur, the Mandingo and the Bambara in the west, the Dja, the Songhai and the Mossi in the centre, and the Hausa and the Kanuri in the east, who were organised, or were being organised, into more or less centralised states.

Such a state usually arose when the leader of a local group or of immigrant warriors gained control over a number of uncentralised village communities and formed a kingdom. But generally the pre-existing social and political structure of the village was not seriously tampered with, and each lineage retained its role and status in the village as cultivators, fishermen, craftsmen, traders, etc. So also did kingship and succession among the ruling clan adopt the lineage system in course of time. Moreover, with the spreading influence of the royal family cult, the leader gradually acquired semi-divine authority over the kingdom. Manifestly the open character of the country and the possession of horses also helped the ruling group and their men to expand the kingdom territorially. But of course the kingdom had no territorial boundaries at any one time; rather, it had *frontiers* of indeterminate widths separating it from neighbouring states and peoples yet unsubdued. However, with the expansion of the empire responsibilities increased, so the king assigned specific duties to his advisers (councillors) and appointed representatives from his own family or from those who had served him well, particularly in war, to maintain the ritual link with and perform political functions in outlying districts. Gradually an elaborate etiquette was developed, demanding respect for the ruler and his court and presaging a clear differentiation of classes in the community. Lastly, tribute and taxes were collected to maintain the central organs of government and its agents.

When at length Islam was introduced, nearly all North Sudan states, except the Mossi (of whom we shall hear more presently), adopted it as the royal cult. By so doing they strengthened their commercial links with North Africa, paved the way for the introduction of new elements of material culture, and made possible the intellectual development which naturally followed the intro-

duction and spread of literacy, and for which parts of the Sudan were to become famous in centuries to come. In the meantime, however, the adoption of Islam had little effect on the basic life of the people and did not mean cultural unity in the empire. In most cases Islam simply took its place as the cult of the ruling family parallel to the cults of other lineages, and any attempt to impose it upon the rest of the kingdom was resisted. The king nevertheless acquired from Islam new elements which further elaborated court ceremonial and pageantry and further emphasised his authority to his subjects.

#### THE MOSSI

As we have just said, one important people, the Mossi, were little affected by the advent and progress of Islam in the Sudan in the period before and after A.D. 1000. The two Mossi kingdoms of Wagadugu (founded c. 1050) and Yatenga (founded c. 1170) covered roughly the basin of the upper Volta in the centre of the Niger Bend north of modern Ghana. The Mossi not only resisted Islam but blocked its extension to the south and east. Their strength largely derived from a centralised administrative system and political unity.

At the head of the Mossi social and political structure was a sacred king who was the leader of a conquering aristocracy, the Nakomse, and was in close communion with his ancestors. He was assisted by ministers, the Naba, who either served at court or took charge of outlying territories. The state had a strong system of public security. This was important since there were practically no physical barriers to deter aggressors. Hence the warriors had a duty to maintain not only internal security but also external defence: and accordingly they successfully checked the armies of Mali, Songhai and Arma.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, unlike other states which adopted Islam, the Mossi had no direct links with North Africa; and they strictly controlled the activities of immigrants, whether they were Dyula traders, Hausa artisans or Fulani herdsmen. As a matter of fact the last-named were placed in the charge of a minister of state, the Yar-naba.

The Mossi kingdoms have shown remarkable stability and persistence down the centuries. Even in the nineteenth century, when the Fulani states of Gwandu and Masina rose to the east and west, the jihād leaders did not touch Mossi territory. The

Mossi are today being ruled by the old dynasties which still survive.

Other chapters in this handbook will consider in some detail most of the important states and peoples of West Africa besides the Mossi. These include ancient Ghana, Mali and Songhai; the Wolof, Mandingo, Temne and Soso; the Asante and Fante; the Nupe, Igala and Jukun; and the Yoruba, Bini and Igbo. We shall not therefore deal with these states and peoples here, but instead will say something about the state of Tekrur, an important western Sudanese kingdom around A.D. 1000; and about the Fulani, a remarkable people who originally derived from this state but eventually spread to nearly all parts of the Western and Central Sudan and even south to the forest fringes.

#### TEKRUR

Tekrur was the most important kingdom on both banks of the Senegal up to the beginning of our period. Its peoples were the ancestors of the modern Tukulor. The date of the foundation of the kingdom is not certain, but it was probably in existence at the beginning of the Christian era. The first dynasty of Tekrur which tradition recalls is known as Dya'ogo, a dynasty which was founded about A.D. 850 and continued till the tenth century. At one time Tekrur was so famous that it gave its name to the whole of the Sudan. The Dya'ogo dynasty was the first Negro family to accept Islam, so that amongst Arab writers Bilad al-Tekrur came to mean 'the land of the Black Muslims'.

Islam was introduced into Tekrur in the reign of one War-jabi, son of Rabis, who thereafter promulgated Islamic law in his dominion and successfully enforced it on his subjects. Thus before 'Abdullāh ibn Yasin started the jihād of the Al-Murābitūn (Almoravids) in 1042, Islam had already spread among the Tekrur. As a matter of fact Ibn Yasin, for fear of the kingdom of Ghana, allied with the Sinhaja warriors of Tekrur. In 1056-7 Lebi, the son of War-jabi, aided Yahya ibn 'Umar, the companion of Ibn Yasin, in a war against the Goddala north of Tekrur; but the allies were so beaten at the crucial battle of Tebferilla that the Murābitūn left Goddala alone ever after.

Writing later in A.D. 1154 Al-Idrisi describes the (unnamed) ruler of Tekrur as 'an independent sovereign, possessing slaves and troops, and renowned for his resolution, firmness and sense of

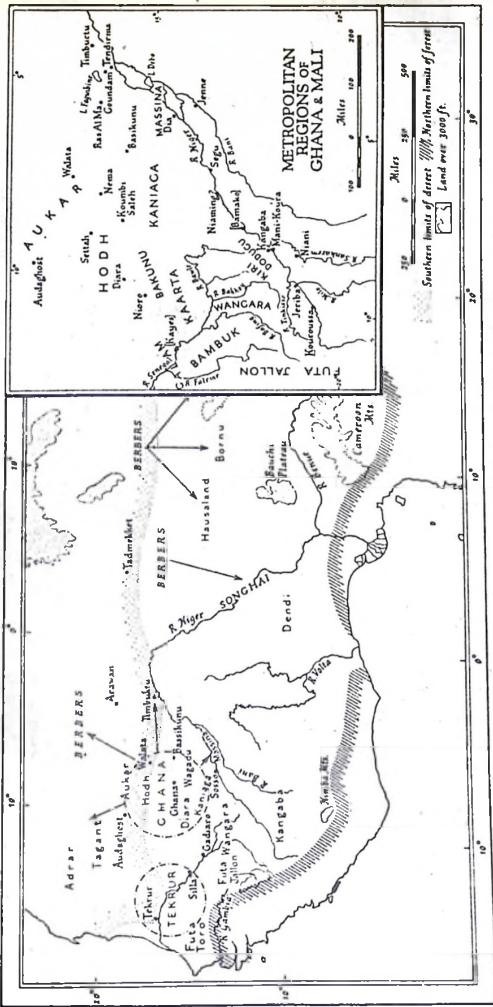


Fig. 3 Areas of power of the states of the Western Sudan in the eleventh century.

justice. His country is secure, peaceful, and tranquil'. The capital town of the same name, Tekrur, had an extensive commerce and was frequented by merchants from the Magrib bringing wool, copper and beads and carrying away gold and slaves. The people themselves kept camels and goats, and ate millet, fish and milk products. This latter point should not be surprising since to Tekrur also belonged the Fulani who have always been famous as pastoralists. In point of fact the Tekrur were divided into two categories: the sedentaries who lived in villages a few of which were on the southern bank of the river, and the nomads who roamed the country and most of whose ranges were on the northern bank.

Not much further is known about Tekrur. Tradition has it that around A.D. 980 the Dya'ogo were overthrown by the Manna, a branch of the ruling clan of the adjoining state of Dyara; but Tekrur at length became a virtually autonomous dependency of that Soninke kingdom.

#### THE FULANI

The Fulani, whose early home was in Tekrur and its neighbourhood, are a people about whose origins and activities in West Africa there has been a great deal of controversy. But in consequence of ethnographic, linguistic, serological and other evidence which has recently come to light, a large measure of agreement has now been achieved about the antecedents of these people. Actually there is no great mystery about the origins of the Fulani who even now are known in Senegal as Tukulor (Tekrur). Briefly what apparently happened was this. For centuries the autochthonous Negro Fulani inhabitants of the middle Senegal valley were infiltrated by pastoral Berbers from the region immediately to the north. As there was not enough room for grazing in the well-watered land along the river many Berber groups also passed on to the savannah country on the Ferlo plateau (Futa Toro) to the south and west. The whole area then formed, over a long period of time, 'a kind of gentle Berber-trap'. Geographically the Berbers were isolated from their kinsmen to the north, and politically they were subject to the Tukulor state. Economically a close symbiotic relationship developed: the pastoralists found excellent conditions for grazing their cattle, while the sedentaries in their dual economy replaced their humpless cattle with the humped zebu breed from the north. Culturally, as time went on,

the Berbers intermarried with the dominant Negro population and adopted its language. From all these developments there emerged the two types of Fulani which were to survive down to our own day: a predominantly Negroid cross among the sedentaries in the Senegal valley, and a predominantly Caucasoid cross among the pastoralists of Futa Toro.

The working relationships and the racial types evolved in the Senegal basin and Futa Toro were subsequently projected on to a wider plane and on a larger scale over nearly all the Western and Central Sudan. Not long after our period, from the twelfth century on, the pastoral Fulani began to spread southwards and eastwards as a result of increased population and prosperity. The subsequent peaceful expansion of the Fulani from the Senegal to the Cameroon, a distance of some 3,000 miles, argues the comparative stability among the states and peoples of West Africa in the following centuries.<sup>3</sup> Since they filled an apparently unoccupied place in the economic life of the host countries the advent of the Fulani caused no alarm, rather they were generally welcomed. They exchanged their milk and butter for the agricultural products of the peasants, tended the livestock of their hosts, and fertilised their fields by grazing cattle on them after harvest.

Accordingly, too, the Caucasoid pastoral Fulani were often accompanied in their migrations by their Negroid sedentary kinsmen. These latter were generally better educated as individuals, more sophisticated as politicians and more fanatical as Muslims than the former. So that when the pastoralists did meet with local opposition to their encroachments the sedentaries provided the requisite political and military leadership for resistance. And when the sedentaries on their part felt so strongly about the prevailing social and religious conditions that they declared a *jihād* (holy war) the pastoralists provided the rank and file of the fighting forces. In the final analysis, at all events, if militarily and politically the Fulani sometimes became conquerors and rulers of their former hosts, racially and culturally they often lost their identity among the conquered and ruled.

From the foregoing brief analysis, it is hoped, the remarkable role of the Fulani in the history of West Africa after A.D. 1000 should be less difficult to understand. It should become clear moreover that, except for the stimulation of further inquiry, apparently no useful purpose has been served by the century-old

propagation of the 'Hamitic' hypothesis respecting the Fulani; the hypothesis which has striven to derive the origins of these people from places and peoples outside West Africa. Long before and since the first historical documents on the area were written over a thousand years ago the Fulani, like the majority of their immediate and distant neighbours, were an established feature of West Africa, part of its ecology, its sociology and its history.

## NOTES

1 The historical term which refers to the savannah country stretching from the lower Senegal to the middle Niger and from the middle Niger to Lake Chad.

2 Arma (literally 'sharpshooter') was the name given to the descendants of the troops of the Sultan of Morocco who conquered Songhai in 1591.

3 Today the Fulani are to be found in nine major concentrations: (from west to east) in the Senegal basin, Futa Toro, Futa Jallon, Kita, Masina, Liptako, Sokoto, Bauchi and Adamawa.

## 4 Empires of the Western Sudan: Ghana, Mali, Songhai

BOLANLE AWE

THE grassland region south of the Sahara and north of the forest zone is one of the best documented areas in West Africa before the nineteenth century. This region, which was known to the Arabs as *Bilad as-Sudan* or the land of the blacks, witnessed in medieval times the emergence of four notable empires—Ghana, Mali, Songhai and Kanem-Bornu—in the west and central parts of it.

The sources for the history of these empires fall into two main categories. Within each empire there was usually a class of professional historians whose business was to act as its collective memory and hand down from generation to generation the oral traditions of the people; their main preoccupation was with ancestor biographies and traditions of origin of the state, particularly before the introduction of Islam. The other type of evidence is written and was usually recorded in Arabic. In earlier times this was done by the Arab geographers and historians such as Al-Masudi, Al-Bakrī, Ibn Battūta and Ibn Khaldūn; there are also from the sixteenth century some works written by Muslim scholars who were indigenous inhabitants of the Sudan such as 'Abd Al-Rahmān Al-Sa'di who wrote *Tarikh as-Sudan* and Mahmūd Kati who wrote *Tarikh al-Fettach*. These Muslim writers, including the indigenous ones, wrote on the Sudan in general and were mainly concerned with the history of the Islamic world, of which the Sudan was a part. Thus, to get a balanced view of the history of the empires, a synthesis of the two sources is imperative.

A glance at both sources of history reveals that these states of the Sudan had certain common characteristics. They were all products of the Iron Age (starting from perhaps about 300 B.C.) but their origin is not very clear and has in fact given rise to a great deal of controversy. A white ancestry for them is often postulated either through the Berbers of the desert or from farther north. In the case of the Songhai empire, an immigrant from the north did succeed in defeating the old dynasty and establishing a new one.

Moreover, some of the written Islamic traditions have tried to establish some link between the more famous Muslim rulers of the Sudan and the Middle East. Archaeological investigation has shown, however, that Negroes had occupied the Sudan area almost from time immemorial; the geographical nature of the Sudan is also such as to encourage the constant ingress and egress of the people of the Sudan, and in the process a great deal of inter-marriage with the 'white peoples' must have taken place. Nor is the attempt to find an Arab ancestry for Muslim rulers peculiar to the Sudan alone; this is as typical of Muslim states in West Africa as of the Muslim-influenced coastal towns of East Africa. It is not unlikely, however, that native initiative in these empires had often been stimulated by immigrant incursion.

Whatever the external stimulus, the fact that these empires were all centred in the grassland zone, an area which afforded great opportunities for human movement and cultural elaboration, meant that there was a great deal of diffusion within the Sudan itself. Even though these empires were operating in different geographical areas, starting with Ghana to the west and Songhai in the east, the economic and social conditions were similar; their material culture showed the same common characteristics; the thatched or straw roofs and round mud walls were typical of their architecture. Occupations were also similar; most of the inhabitants were either pastoralists or cultivators; with this sound economic basis in agriculture and animal husbandry went the development of urban trade.

This trade was of two types: within the Sudan itself there was a great deal of commercial intercourse; but of greater significance for the history of the Sudan and the development of these empires was the trans-Saharan trade<sup>1</sup> because they were placed geographically in an area where they could most benefit from it; they were the nearest both to the forest region and to North Africa; they therefore performed for these two areas the duty of middlemen by providing a convenient meeting ground for the exchange of goods. There were four main trade routes spanning the western and central Sudan: for the western Sudan there were two main routes both starting from Sijilmasa, in the oasis of Tafilet; the more westerly of these two routes was from Sijilmasa to Taghaza, Awdaghast and the empire of Ghana; the other route took a more easterly direction from Sijilmasa to Tuat, Gao and Timbuktu.

The remaining two routes were designed to tap the trade of the central Sudan; one went from Tunisia via Ghadames, Ghat, Agades to Hausaland and the other was from Tripoli via Fezzan to Bornu.

At the termini of these trade routes there developed in the Sudan many prosperous commercial centres such as Walata, Gao and Timbuktu. It therefore became increasingly important for each empire in the course of its imperial expansion to aim at bringing under its control these important trading centres; for it was by gaining control of these towns that the empires could reap fully the advantages of the trans-Saharan trade. With this desire to incorporate these trading towns within the empire also went the attempt to control the sources of the more important items of trade; the source of gold from the forest region was a closely guarded secret and each empire at the height of its power ensured that this was under its control. The claim to the salt mines of Taghaza and the copper mines of Takedda was often a source of conflict between the empires of the Sudan and the North African states which derived a good income from the sale of these commodities.

To emphasise this economic aspect of the trans-Saharan trade is not to underestimate the other implications of the contact thus engendered between North Africa and the Sudan. With trade came new ideas, particularly Islamic ideas. The centres of trade also became centres for the propagation of Islamic religion.<sup>2</sup> Nor was the influence of Islam confined to the spread of Muslim religion and civilisation alone. In the development of better administrative practices, Islam also played a part: although administration in the Sudan was an evolution from indigenous systems of government, nevertheless, Muslim scholars, jurists, and administrators, bringing with them the most modern ideas of government from the Muslim world, greatly helped in the field of administration; they acted as interpreters, scribes and treasurers to most of the rulers of these empires.

In the political sphere, however, Islam conferred on the Sudan doubtful advantages. Whilst the medieval Islamic idea of a powerful executive fitted in with the traditional idea of monarchy, the spread of Islam and the greater responsibility being thrust on its intelligentsia tended to undermine the power of the monarchy. The mystical and spiritual power of the monarchy in the Sudan was based on traditional religious practices and the cult of the

ancestors. Islam with its new doctrine which rejected these traditional practices served to weaken the hold of the ruler on his subjects. Moreover its urban orientation, which left out most of the peasants and rural folk, only served to emphasise the divisive influences in the country.

Within each empire, however, there were more powerful forces making for division and the weakening of the imperial bonds. A most important source of weakness was to be found in the nature of the empires themselves; they were not homogeneous entities nor did they have any well-defined boundaries; they incorporated within their borders various ethnic groups of people at various stages of development and civilisation, and who were generally not centrally orientated to the heart of the empire. The process of imperial growth was often the extension by force under an able military leader of the imperium of a particular ethnic group over the rest of the surrounding country. Administration itself was on two levels, one dealing with the particular ethnic group and the other with the empire as a whole; only the first was effective, and indeed imperial expansion was often so rapid as to outstrip the administrative system. Ability to keep these diverse groups together therefore depended largely on the military resources of the empire and none of these empires really provided a solution to this problem; with the increasing prosperity of the empire there was often a tendency to neglect the army which was anyhow usually an *ad hoc* levy.

Any sign of weakness at the centre in such a situation was often therefore a signal for the revolt of the dependencies and the disintegration of the empire into its component parts. The major source of weakness at the centre was the inability of these empires to devise a satisfactory system of succession to the throne. There was no fixed law of succession and in most cases the death of a ruler was often a signal for intrigues and succession disputes in which the strongest man emerged as ruler. Continued failure to get a strong ruler meant that the struggle for power continued with consequent instability within the empire.

In addition to these two internal sources of weakness was the one constant threat to the empire from outside; this threat was personified in the nomadic peoples such as the Tuaregs who lived on the northern frontier of the empires. These were nomadic groups who were unaccustomed to and unwilling to settle down

under regular governmental control; attempts to subjugate them often failed and they carried on a continuous struggle of raids against the empires of the Sudan; they often took advantage of any signs of weakness within the empire to sack its northern frontier.

It was these debilitating factors which made for the short periods of ascendancy enjoyed by each empire; they should not, however, obscure the fact that these empires were the foci of great economic and cultural developments whose significance extended beyond the confines of the Sudan to West Africa as a whole. Since most of the products for sale in Africa came from the forest region, commercial links were established between the Sudan and forest regions; important towns such as Jenne were placed in strategic areas where they could serve as collecting centres for the products of the forest region which, even after the advent of the Europeans to the coast, found in the Sudan and the trans-Saharan trade the most useful outlet for their goods. Nearer the forest region, dispersed communities from the Sudan such as the Mandingo and the Soninke established new centres of trade such as Begho in the north of present-day Ghana, which served not only as commercial centres but a means of radiating Muslim culture.

#### GHANA

The earliest of these empires was the Soninke state of Ghana. Its origins are shrouded in obscurity but it was in existence by the beginning of the eighth century and was at the height of its power by the tenth century. With the Soninke territory of Awkar serving as a nucleus, it had by the tenth century embraced a large territory in the western Sudan; indeed its boundaries were said to be the Niger to the east, and Senegal and Baule to the south and west respectively. It was a pagan state though it had a large Muslim element, but not much is known about the empire before its conquest in 1076 by the Muslim Almoravids. Al-Bakrī working from earlier sources, was able to give a detailed picture of the empire in 1068 and he bore witness to a highly advanced civilisation politically and materially.

Government and authority was centred on the king and his court. His capital was divided into two sections separated by about six miles; he resided in one whilst the other town was reserved for the Muslim traders who frequented his empire. In the part of the town where he resided, he maintained an elaborate court with a

panoply of ceremonials and rituals to bolster up his authority; at the same time he was in control of the religious rituals of the state and was regarded as endowed with divine power. Apart from reinforcing his authority by these traditional devices he was quick to take advantage of new modes of government. He had Muslim interpreters, and most of his ministers and treasurers were Muslim.<sup>3</sup>

It was, however, the trade of Ghana that captured the imagination of Muslim writers on Ghana. Ghana controlled the gold-bearing region drained by the upper Senegal and Falémé, a place which was reputed to be about eighteen days' journey from the capital itself. Diplomatic relations were established and imperial conquest undertaken with a view to increasing the volume of trade between the empire and North Africa. Because of the strategic position of Awdaghost on the trans-Saharan trade route, the emperor of Ghana tried to maintain very friendly relations with that town which was then under the jurisdiction of the desert Berber tribes. Finally in 992, Ghana succeeded in capturing this town. Thereafter, Ghana was in control of the southern section of the western trans-Saharan trade route.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of its economic prosperity, however, Ghana's ascendancy in the western Sudan came to an end before the close of the eleventh century. The occasion for the collapse of the empire was the attack on it by an Islamic missionary movement, the Almoravids. In the eleventh century, this new religious movement was born among those same desert Berbers who were formerly the overlords of Awdaghost; the Almoravids preached strict asceticism and the practice of the true and pure worship of Islam. Ghana's persistent paganism was a reproach to their religious zeal whilst its prosperity aroused their cupidity; nor could they forget the fact that Ghana had by the capture of Awdaghost deprived them of one of their main sources of livelihood. Their desire to attack Ghana and recover control of the southern section of the trans-Saharan trade route was borne out by the fact that they captured Sijilmasa, the northern terminus of this trade route, in 1061. Their first target was Awdaghost which was captured in 1055, by 'Abdullāh ibn Yasin, one of the leaders of their movement.

The attack on Awdaghost brought into the open the tensions within the empire; unwilling tributaries now took advantage of the central government's discomfiture to rebel; Anbara, a country

which was about six days' journey west of Ghana, was the first to rebel; so also did the Susu of Kaniaga to the south. In its weakened state, Ghana was therefore unable to put up an effective resistance against the Almoravids who captured Ghana itself in 1076. Many of the Soninke were massacred or forced to accept Islam. This small remnant did recover their independence after the collapse of the Almoravid movement and their new settlement witnessed some economic revival. Ghana's newly won independence was, however, short-lived; one of its former tributaries, the Susu of Kaniaga, under their ruler, Sumaguru Kante, succeeded in conquering it in 1203. With the conquest, the economic importance of Ghana as regards the trans-Saharan trade came to an end. The merchants who had made the empire what it was moved their headquarters to Walata in 1224 and later founded the town of Jenne farther south around 1250.

Ghana itself was recaptured from the Susu by their Mandingo neighbours under their energetic ruler, Sundiata, in 1240 and it thereafter became part of what came to be known as the Mali empire. The eventual collapse of Ghana led to the dispersal of the Soninke to surrounding areas extending as far as the Niger itself; they formed the bulk of the itinerant Dyula traders who were responsible for the spread of Islam in many areas of the Western Sudan.

#### MALI

From the ruins of the Ghana empire, there rose the Mandingo empire of Mali. Two important personalities dominated the history of this empire, Sundiata (1230-55) and Mansa Musa (1312-37). A great deal of the development can be attributed to them, but the various interpretations given to events in their reigns and their achievements represent the dichotomy which becomes pronounced in the evidence for the history of the Sudan particularly after the adoption of Islam as an imperial cult. The tendency was for the *'ulama* to gloss over the achievements of those rulers who appeared hostile to Islam whilst lauding to the skies those who openly professed Islam. In the context of the Mali empire, Sundiata, whom the traditional historians regarded as the founder of the empire, has been given little regard by the *'ulama* who hailed Mansa Musa, a more devout Muslim, as the architect of the empire.



Whatever the contributions of these two men, Mali, like Ghana, started from small beginnings among the Mandinka living on the upper reaches of the Niger and the Senegal; the Mandinka were organised in small villages or Dugu with rulers called Dugutigi; it was these small villages which coalesced into the state of Kangaba by the end of the twelfth century. Sundiata was from one of these villages and he succeeded in defeating the neighbouring Susu state of Kaniaga, and finally capturing Ghana itself in 1240. He established a new capital at Niani and thereafter started a career of conquests which was to lead to the emergence of Mali and his own transformation from a Dugutigi to a Mansa or emperor. By the time of his death in 1255, Mali had embraced an extensive country including the former dependencies of Ghana and some territories to the east; it controlled the sources of most of the important articles of trade such as the salt mines of Taghaza, the copper mines of Takedda and the gold mines to the south. He also brought under Mali domination such important trading towns as Walata, Jenne and Gao.

His work of imperial expansion was carried on by his successor Mansa Uli (1255-70) and under him Mali came under stronger Muslim influence. Thereafter the ruling dynasty appears to have become degenerate; there were troubles in court and a consequent increase in the power of court officials; Mansa Khalifa (1274-5) was deposed and a creature of the court officials Abū Bakr (1275-85) was put on the throne. On his death, one of the court officials, a freed slave of the royal family, Sakura, secured control over the kingdom and succeeded in restoring some order and even expanding the empire.

The usurpation of Sakura emphasised the laxity of the ruling family, but in 1312 a new man whose fame was to extend beyond the confines of the Sudan and North Africa and spread even to Europe, Mansa Musa, a member of the royal family, emerged as the ruler of the Mali empire. He was a devout Muslim and therefore a great favourite of the *'ulama* who attributed to his reign the period of greatest prosperity for the empire. It was certainly a period of great economic prosperity and increased Islamisation, but even so it was a reign which bears comparison with that of Sundiata whose achievements were lightly dismissed by the *'ulama*. Recent evidence has shown that a great many of the important conquests, such as Timbuktu, Jenne and Gao, attributed

to Mansa Musa were undertaken by Sundiata and some of his successors, and that Mansa Musa was only building on the achievements of others.

In the field of administration too, Mansa Musa's contribution has often been attributed to his attachment to Islam. There is no doubt that it was under Mansa Musa that Islam received its greatest boost, and that his pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324 gave a new fillip to the religion; it served to advertise the wealth of Mali and to attract to the state more traders and Muslim scholars who contributed to the economic and cultural development of the country. He also took the initiative in developing close relations with the Muslim world in other ways; for instance, he established diplomatic relations with the Merinid Sultan of Fez in North Africa. It is, however, important to note that as far as developments in the administration of the country were concerned, these could not, in spite of the employment of Muslim advisers, be attributed to the Islamic impact. The administration of Mali, like those of the other empires of the Sudan, went back to a more remote period than that of the introduction of Islam; indeed many of the administrative devices under Mansa Musa had been foreshadowed by Sundiata and his successors.

As if to emphasise the importance of Mansa Musa's contributions in other directions, it has often been the tendency in some quarters to dismiss the Mali empire as of little significance after the death of Mansa Musa. It is true that the old weaknesses within the empire reappeared; the rulers were once more creatures of court officials and the dynastic problem, the inability to settle the succession to the throne, again cropped up; but it was not all a picture of decline. When Ibn Battūta went to Mali during the reign of Mansa Sulaiman (1341-60), he bore witness to the good government and administration of the country and its continued economic development. But with the end of the fourteenth century, Mali's period of greatness was over. The Mossi, pagan neighbours of Mali to the south, attacked the empire and sacked Timbuktu, c. 1400; soon after this Walata and the recaptured Timbuktu fell to the Tuaregs and the Berbers; in 1468, Sunni 'Ali of Songhai captured Jenne.

It is, however, important to note that these inroads affected only the eastern frontier of Mali and the western part was still intact. Moreover, even in the sixteenth century, the ruler of Mali

was still being mentioned as one of the four great sultans of the Sudan and North Africa. The end of the importance of Mali as a force in the Sudan only came in the seventeenth century with the rise among the Mandinka of the Bambara succession states of Kaarta and Segu.

#### SONGHAI

The tradition of origin of this state attributes its beginning to the coming together of two main groups—the agriculturists and the fisherfolk—to the Dendi region, in the south-eastern part of the Songhai empire. The presence of the fisherfolk who became the most important element in this new settlement gave rise to a social system which was closely tied up with the cult of the river and the worship of a river divinity. On an economic plane, the alliance of the agriculturists and the fisherfolk gave rise to the urban centre of Kukia which became a trading and meeting place for them and their neighbours. By the seventh century, an organised kingdom was also developing around this town.

This century, however, witnessed the influx of another group of immigrants from the north, possibly Christian Berbers from North Africa fleeing from Muslim persecution. They succeeded in imposing their sovereignty over the indigenous peoples and established the Za or Dia dynasty which incorporated into its religious system a strong element of the riverain cult. In the ninth century, the Dia dynasty moved its seat from Kukia to Gao, a more prominent trading centre on the trans-Saharan trade route. By the beginning of the eleventh century the dynasty, which was now more exposed to Islamic influences, was converted to Islam.

So important was the trade from Gao that it aroused the cupidity of the empire of Mali and by the thirteenth century it was under Mali domination. But by the end of the fourteenth century, Songhai had freed itself from Mali domination and under the old dynasty, now renamed Sunni, began to expand its frontiers at the expense of Mali in the fifteenth century. Most of this expansion took place under Sunni 'Alī (1464–92); in a series of campaigns, he succeeded in bringing within the Songhai empire most of the important trading towns of the Sudan. In addition to Timbuktu, he succeeded in conquering the virtually impregnable town of Jenne and the surrounding internal delta of the Niger between 1471 and 1476. At the same time, he tried to protect his borders

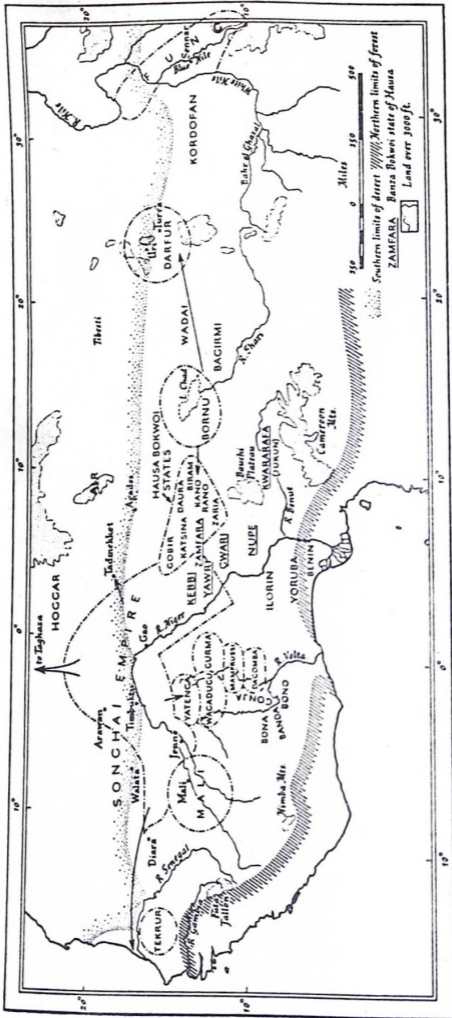


Fig. 5 Areas of power of Sudanese states in the sixteenth century.

from hostile external forces by organising expeditions against the Mossi to the south, the Bariba to the south-east, and the Fulani and the wild tribes of the Hombori mountains.

The success of his campaigns was due not only to his energetic leadership but also to his able organisation of his forces; he placed in strategic regions, as overseers, his officials, such as the Tondi Farma who was in charge of the Hombori mountains, and the Hikoy, the officer in charge of the fleet, who helped to maintain the Niger as an effective artery of the empire.

Even though both the *'ulama* and the traditional historians have conceded his contribution in the founding of the empire, yet the *'ulama* often described him as 'a tyrant, evil and oppressive'. Like Sundiata, he was charged with not being a true Muslim and for his persecution of the Muslims in Timbuktu. Sunni's attitude to Muslims was an indication of the dilemma in which rulers in the Sudan were placed as regards the new religion. Islam had made much progress in the Songhai empire by the time of the accession of Sunni 'Alī, but he still looked to the traditional religions for the basis of his power and influence among his people, and therefore regarded this trend towards Islam as a threat to his power. It is not surprising therefore that he dealt harshly with the Muslims in Timbuktu who seemed to be conspiring against his regime with his hostile Tuareg neighbours. His persecution of the Muslims in this particular instance did not mean an attitude of general hostility to Islam; he was himself a practising Muslim and employed Muslim scholars in his service.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of his attachment to the pagan cult, Islam did triumph as the imperial cult in the empire. On his death, one of his former soldiers, Muhammad Towri, a man with definite Muslim tendencies, was able to oust his son and establish himself at the head of a new dynasty—the Askia dynasty. If Sunni 'Alī was comparable to Sundiata, Askia Muhammad Towri was comparable to Mansa Musa; indeed his reputation in the Sudan was far greater than that of Mansa Musa, though he was not as well known in Europe.

Like Mansa Musa, he was a devout Muslim and under him Islamic influence became a factor to be reckoned with in Songhai history. He tried to establish the Islamic law code in the Sudan and therefore devoted a great deal of his time to the training of a class of Muslim judges who would be able to interpret the law. He maintained close connections with notable scholars from North

Africa such as his friend Muhammad al-Maghili; at the same time he patronised Muslim scholars within the empire and elevated the Muslim intelligentsia into a feudal class by granting them lands; as a result of all this patronage, Timbuktu emerged as a centre of Islamic learning by the sixteenth century.

Although the *'ulama* tended to attribute his success (like Mansa Musa's) to Islam, it is doubtful whether his Islamising policy went beyond the patronage of the Muslim intelligentsia. Except for an unsuccessful campaign against the Mossi, he never went on jihād against his pagan neighbours; his expeditions were for the most part undertaken for political and economic reasons, a good example being the campaign against the Tuaregs of Agades; by the conquest of these Tuaregs, his north-eastern border was secured, and by his capture of Agades he also gained control of an important centre of the trans-Saharan trade. His famous administration, too, was to a large extent rooted in past administrative practices. Working within this context he started the departmentalisation of government into administrative, fiscal and military units. He divided the empire into provinces under his loyal servants and relatives; for example Timbuktu was under the Kan Fari: Dendi region was under the Dendi Firma. At the lower level he maintained the old system of administration under Faris or chiefs who were often local men.

In spite of his achievements, in 1528 Muhammad Towri was eventually deposed by his sons who had shared power with him. After this, the story of the Songhai empire is one of rapid political disintegration. Again, as in the other empires, the main reason was the absence of a fixed law of succession to the throne. The period 1528-91 was therefore marked by intrigues, plots and civil wars which occurred with every succession. Within sixty years, there were eight Askias and one of them, Daud, reigned for more than thirty years.

It was in these disturbed conditions that Songhai was confronted with an external invader in the form of the Moroccans in 1591. The Moors, through the western trans-Saharan route, had had a long connection with the Sudan and were aware of its riches; moreover the control of the salt mines of Taghaza had since the 1540s been a source of dispute between them and the Songhai empire. Therefore in 1591, a pretext was not wanting for sending an expedition against the empire. Unfortunately Songhai was not

prepared for the expedition and so could not put up a firm resistance; moreover the Moors had the advantage of superior weapons such as firearms and cannons with which the Songhai empire was unfamiliar; the continuous internal squabbles had also weakened the army. A crushing defeat was therefore inflicted on Songhai at the battle of Tondibi and the Moors gradually took control of the western part of the empire making Timbuktu their headquarters. Many Moorish soldiers settled in this part of the Sudan and their descendants now constitute a distinct social group known as the Arma. At the same time there was the development of government through Moorish Pashas who owed allegiance to Morocco and were assisted by financial and military officials. The south-eastern part of the Dendi region was left to the old inhabitants of the empire.

#### CONCLUSION

It has often been asserted in some quarters that the collapse of the Songhai empire was synonymous with the beginning of chaos in the Sudan. It is true that after the collapse of Songhai, no other imperial structure of comparable size or importance emerged in the western Sudan until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Within the area of its jurisdiction the Moorish Pashalic was not able to exert much influence. There was a continuous struggle for power between the Pashas and their military and financial officials and, because of the distance, Morocco was not able to exercise much effective control. The internal disturbances within the Pashalic gave the traditional enemies of the Sudan an opportunity to dismember the Moorish state. By 1737, the Tuaregs had gained control of the Niger bend and they captured Gao and Timbuktu in 1770 and 1787 respectively. Indeed before this period, many of the old dependencies of the empire had thrown off their allegiance and declared their independence. In the Dendi region, too, the picture was also one of disintegration into small insignificant states.

On the cultural level, Islam had declined in influence and no longer enjoyed a privileged position as the imperial cult; instead, Muslim preachers and scholars had to practise their religion under pagan rulers; the cultural flowering which had accompanied Islam therefore declined and the great centres of Islamic civilisation paled into insignificance.

On the economic level also, there was a decline; the trans-Saharan trade was no longer what it used to be and caravans which frequented the Sudan were few and far between; articles of trade had also changed from harmless goods like gold and ivory to human flesh.

It would, however, be wrong to see in the decline of the Songhai empire only the beginning of regressive tendencies. Politically there was some development; the central Mande region of the Old Mali empire threw up energetic military leaders who helped to found the two important pagan states of Segou and Kaarta. Their emergence represented the development of a new type of state whose core was formed by a standing army; the military power thus made available helped the state to achieve large territorial expansion of its authority. Moreover, individual divisions of the army were distributed throughout the empire to perform police functions within the state with the assistance of a Niger flotilla.

Economically new horizons were opened to the Sudan; although the sale in slaves was itself not commendable, yet the slave trade led to the extension of trade relations with the Mediterranean world and Europe and this in turn gave rise to an increased importation of European goods.

On the cultural and religious level, the importance of Islam and Islamic civilisation in the Sudan must not be overstressed. It is important to point out that Islam was essentially an urban religion confined largely to the trading cities of the Western Sudan, and that the majority of the rural population was unaffected by it. It was not completely wiped out after the collapse of Songhai; Muslims were still allowed to practise their religion under pagan rulers. Anyhow, there was for the whole of the Sudan in general the compensating factor that whilst Muslim culture declined in the western Sudan, it gradually took root in the central Sudan. But it is essential to note that it was only with the jihāds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that extensive Islamisation of the Sudan can be said to have begun.

## NOTES

- 1 For more detail see Chapter 13 on West African trade.
- 2 See Chapter 6 on Islam in West Africa.
- 3 See also Chapter 6 on Islam in West Africa.
- 4 See also Chapter 13 on West African trade.
- 5 But see Chapter 6 on Islam in West Africa for another view of Islam in Songhai.
- 6 See Chapter 14 on West African states at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

## 5 States of the Central Sudan

### C. C. IFEMESIA

#### (i) *Kanem-Bornu*

KANEM is in what is now the northern part of the Chad Republic, but the empire of Kanem—or Bornu as it came to be called from the thirteenth century onwards—covered a wide region around Lake Chad and at one time stretched north as far as Fezzan. The area of the empire has, however, never been defined in precise geographical terms. Bornu today consists of a flat sandy plain of orchard bush drained by two main rivers, the Yobe and the Yedseram. The physical features of the area have facilitated the movement of men and animals in all directions down the centuries; consequently the region has for long been one of the great crossroads of African culture and history.

The people of Bornu call themselves Kanuri and speak a language of the same name. But among many Northern Nigerians the Kanuri and their language are known as Beri-Beri, although the Kanuri themselves would use this term only when they are away from home. They are also sometimes called Kanembu.

The early inhabitants of the greater part of Kanem-Bornu are said to have been the So (Sao), a very energetic and powerful people. French archaeologists and writers claim that So groups have survived as the Kotoko, Buduma, Musgu, Gamergu, Bolewa and others of the Chad basin, and a So element has been detected in the Hausa language. Kanuri traditions speak of the So as 'giants' with whom they fought for many years and whom they eventually conquered after suffering many vicissitudes. But stories of these 'giants' are not limited to the Kanuri; they can be heard all over the Chad area and northwards in the Sahara as far as the region around Bilma. The word 'So' itself originates from the Magrib and since the first writers of Kanuri history spoke Arabic and knew its script it is not surprising that this North African word for the indigenous peoples of the Sudan should be handed down to the present day. Thus the So were probably not any one group of people but, as has recently been suggested, a 'linguistic category' or 'a civilisation'.

At all events, if physically and militarily the So were not 'giants', politically and culturally they did great things. They built walled towns; they developed divine kingship, an elaborate hierarchical political organisation and complicated burial procedures; they elevated women to positions of influence in government—ideas and practices later inherited by the Kanuri, among whom, for instance, the influence of the Magira (Queen Mother) and Magara (the king's official 'elder sister') was very great. In the realm of art the So fashioned animals and toys in clay and executed effigies of revered ancestors and culture heroes in bronze. On the whole the mode of life and world-view of the So, like those of many successor-peoples of the central Sudan, was a 'synthesis of the African east and the African west'.

However, although the So fought with the Kanuri for centuries they could not hold their own in the end because they were organised in small town groups which the stronger Kanuri power could deal with piecemeal. Subsequently, though we continue to hear of So exploits and Kanuri counter-measures down to the sixteenth century A.D., many of the So groups were gradually—and at length completely—absorbed by the Kanuri.

The Kanuri themselves were not originally a homogeneous people but one of a number of groups which included the Tebu (or Teda), Berber, Kawkaw and others. Among these were the Zaghawa, a half-sedentary, cattle-owning people, nomadised. The Zaghawa are of little importance today and exist under that name only in northern Wadai. Between the seventh and ninth centuries A.D., however, the territory over which they ranged was vast. They were encountered by traders passing through the central Sudan and acted as guides to travellers. According to H. R. Palmer, a British administrative officer in Northern Nigeria during the early decades of this century, one tradition has it that the Maghumi, a clan or lineage among the Zaghawa, came to Kanem about A.D. 700–800. The Maghumi, a camel-owning people, subsequently moulded the existing Zaghawa, Kanuri and other units into the kingdom of Kanem. But the Kanuri language and culture ultimately became predominant in this fusion.

The first king of Kanem is said to have been Saif (Sef), and though tradition has derived him from Mecca it is possible that he was a product of the development we have just described. Ahmad ibn Fartuwa, the chief imām and chronicler of one of the greatest

of the Bornu kings (Idris Alooma, 1580-1617), clearly asserts that Saif came to N'jimi, the early capital of Kanem east of the Chad (the site of which has not yet been conclusively located). Saif founded the Saifawa dynasty of Kanem-Bornu, a line of kings believed to be one of the longest in the world (c. A.D. 800-1846). It has often been argued, with no substantiating data, that the dominant group that founded this dynasty and the Kanuri kingdom came from outside the country. We need not enter into this debate here. But suffice it to say that racially and culturally the Maghumi of the Zaghawa, like the Fulani centuries after, were before long assimilated by the peoples over whom they ruled.

In dealing with the remainder of the history of Kanem-Bornu up to the nineteenth century we shall first trace what is known of the political history of the kingdom during the period and then discuss some aspects of the life of the people that were developed over the centuries; namely, social and political organisation, military organisation and warfare, judicial and economic affairs.

#### THE FIRST BORNU EMPIRE

The political history of Kanem-Bornu up to the nineteenth century falls into two major periods which, for convenience, we shall call the First Kanuri empire (c. 800-c. 1470) and the Second Kanuri empire (c. 1470-1808). During both periods the empire not only organised and maintained social and political relations within itself and with its immediate neighbours but also established and kept up contact with the existing powers and peoples of North Africa and the Middle East.

It is now generally agreed that the rulers of Kanem embraced Islam some time before the end of the eleventh century. The extant king-lists, including that in the Bornu Chronicle, agree that Mai (king) Umme Jilmī, who reigned from 1085-97, died in Egypt on the way to Mecca. Thus it must be that he not only adopted Islam but also embarked on a pilgrimage. This is confirmed by a Bornu *mahram* or letter of privilege<sup>1</sup> given by Umme to one Muhammad ibn Mani who is said to have introduced Islam. It is upon this evidence that the beginning of Islam is at present dated in Kanem-Bornu. With the acceptance of Islam in Kanem the kingdom became the principal focus of Muslim influence in the central Sudan, and the *hāj*j (pilgrimage) the main

channel of communication between this area, the Magrib and the Middle East.

The son and successor of Umme, Dunama I (1097-1150), a very powerful king, is said to have made the pilgrimage thrice with a large retinue. He consequently excited the suspicions of the inhabitants of Egypt and is said to have been drowned by them when embarking at Suez for Mecca on the third journey. As Egypt was at this time in a very turbulent state such an occurrence was not improbable. During the remainder of the century Kanem established friendly relations with the princes of Tunisia. The first half of the thirteenth century was dominated by the figure of Mai Dunama II (1221-59), a very enterprising, restless and warlike prince. The Arab historian Ibn Khaldūn (died A.D. 1406) mentions that around 1257 Kanem continued the tradition of sending an embassy to Tunisia. During this period also a *madrasa* (hostel) was built in Cairo for Kanem pilgrims and resident students, while towards the end of the thirteenth century Fulani Muslim teachers appear to have arrived from Mali.

Kanem achieved remarkable territorial expansion in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Although N'jimi, the capital, continued to be a small place, Dunama I, who had a numerous army of horse and foot, managed to build an empire which became well known in the Islamic world of the twelfth century. The influence of the Magira, the Queen Mother, was then in the ascendant and, according to the Bornu Chronicle, part of the elaborate court ceremonial also dates from this time. As for Dunama II, he is said to have possessed a cavalry 30,000 to 40,000 strong. There might be some exaggeration in this, but it is related that with the help of his sons he conducted a war against the recalcitrant Tebu which lasted for more than seven years. He extended the empire over the whole of Fezzan and secured control of the trade route to Tripoli. In the south, according to Ibn Saïd (writing around 1252-3), Dunama II invaded a well-watered and populous country called Mabina (probably Fumbina, now Adamawa). Here for the first time Ibn Saïd speaks of Bornu (on the south-west side of Lake Chad as far as Dikwa) as part of Kanem. And Ibn Khaldūn speaks of Dunama as the 'King of Kanem and Lord of Bornu'. In the west the kingdom stretched as far as Kanō, and in the east as far as Wadai. With this expansion Kanem-Bornu helped further to disseminate Islam over the Sudan, and the Maliki school of law

was firmly established. The Mai, however, still retained much of his pre-Islamic ceremonial and never showed himself in public, always talking to his people from behind a curtain. But tradition records that he brought upon Bornu a period of troubles because he committed an abomination in opening the sacred *munni* (*mune* or talisman), perhaps the traditional symbol of divine monarchy. He probably pressed Islamisation so fast and so far that he alienated many of his subjects.

For over one hundred years after the reign of Dunama II (i.e. from the mid-thirteenth century to the end of the fourteenth century) one of the most important developments in Kanuri history was the struggle with the So which we touched on earlier. These powerful peoples not only defended themselves against the Kanuri but defeated and killed four of their kings in succession. But it was not only the So menace that made this period perhaps the most unfortunate for the First Kanuri empire. There was also the fight with the Bulala, a struggle which was to lead ultimately to the founding of the Second Kanuri empire. The Bulala are said to have sprung from a rival lineage related to the Saifawa dynasty and founded by a fugitive Kanuri prince variously known in some traditions as Bilal and in others as Jil (Jelil). They established themselves over the people in the district east of Lake Fitri, whence they spread their dominion in every direction. Their fight with the Saifawa and their subjects actually began in the twelfth century and probably originated from a Bulala challenge to the Mai's authority. The struggle would appear to have been intensified in the thirteenth century because, according to tradition, the Bulala, like many of the Mai's subjects, were alienated by the irreligious act of Dunama II in opening the sacred *munni*. Dunama, however, inflicted a severe defeat on them.

But some Kanuri were already moving to the valley of the Komadugu Yobe, west of Lake Chad, and mingling with the So peoples there. During the very important but rather unfortunate reign of Daud (1366-76) the Saifawa were weakened by dynastic and civil wars which he fought with one or more of his sons. At length Daud was driven from the old capital, N'jimi, and finally killed by the Bulala. Subsequently 'Umar ibn Idris (1384-8) was so hard pressed by the Bulala that, with the consent of his *'ulama* (learned men), he entirely gave up Kanem, which was naturally taken over by the Bulala with their headquarters at Gaw.

## FOUNDATION OF THE SECOND KANURI EMPIRE

The founder of the Second Kanuri empire (c. 1470–1808) was 'Alī Ghaji (1472–1504) whose glorious reign in many ways opened a new epoch in the history of Bornu. In order to concentrate his government, he built a large capital, Birni N'gazaragamu, on the south bank of the Komadugu Yobe on the border between present-day Nigeria and Niger. N'gazaragamu remained the capital of the kings of Bornu for three and a half centuries, until its capture and destruction by the Fulani in 1812. 'Alī Ghaji, moreover, reformed the government, making an end of the civil wars which had torn and wasted the kingdom for so long. He restored the equilibrium between the different high officers of state whose excessive power, particularly that of the Kaigama (the commander-in-chief), had been the principal cause of the disturbances. Furthermore, 'Alī Ghaji understood the functions of religion in society. With the advice of his chief imām he set an example for the nobility and others of observance of Islamic practices, particularly with respect to the study of the Qurān and the marrying of only four wives. The royal house also grew wealthy under him.

For the internal security and external defence of his kingdom, 'Alī Ghaji raised the strength of the royal army. He subsequently waged wars on all fronts and it was for this that 'Alī was surnamed 'Al-Ghazi', 'the warrior' or 'conqueror'. In the east he fought with the Bulala who had not yet been subjugated, and in the south he dealt with what seems to have been an invasion by the Kwararafa (Jukun). In the west he exacted tribute from the Hausa states, including Kano, and in the north the monarch extended the Kanuri kingdom into Borku and Tibesti.

'Alī also endeavoured to raise Bornu in the estimation of his neighbours by methods other than warfare and taxation. The Arab traveller, Leo Africanus, emphasises the importance of Bornu in the trans-Saharan trade of this time. Slaves were exported and horses imported; North African merchants visited Bornu. Doubtless because of her fame, which is comparable to that of her western contemporary, Songhai, Bornu is first mentioned in the European maps of Africa prepared by Portuguese cartographers of the late fifteenth century (1487–9).

'Alī Ghaji's reign was followed by a few others which were no

ble. Idris Katakarmabi (1504-26), his worthy son and accomplished the subjection and humiliation of the which contributed immensely to the peace and prosperity. Within one year of his accession Idris invaded Kanem with a strong army and beat the reigning Bulala prince. At last he conquered N'jimi, the old capital, 122 (lunar) years after Mai Daud abandoned it. However Idris had to return again to Kanem to settle a succession dispute, but from that time to the beginning of the nineteenth century Kanem remained a province of Bornu, though never again the seat of government. In the west Idris's prodigious enterprise would appear to have been his attack on Kanta of Kebbi. Muhammad Bello, the son and successor of dan Fodio, writes in his *Infaq al-Maysur* that the Mai marched against Kanta, the governor and afterwards the king of Kebbi, because the latter had 'oppressed the inhabitants of the provinces he had conquered'. Idris attacked Kanta in his capital Surame (the ruins of which are still standing) on the 'Id al-Kabir (the Greater Beiram festival). The Mai was, however, unable to reduce this strong place and was forced to beat a retreat. Kanta immediately collected a large army which severely harassed the Kanuri army and finally fought a battle with the Mai at a place called Onghoor (probably Nguru). Kanta is reported to have won the battle but could not follow up the victory.

In keeping with the traditional foreign policy of Kanuri kings Idris sent an embassy to Tripoli in 1512. But unfortunately we have no further account of the other achievements of his reign because, so we are told, his *faqih* (legal adviser and chronicler) either lost or concealed the material information.

The next king, Muhammad (1526-45), kept Kanem in strict obedience by defeating and killing the Bulala king who came to attack him barely four days after his accession, and thereafter ruled successfully. At home Muhammad would seem to have attempted to build an alternative capital at a place called Lade where he is said to have lived for nineteen years. But we hear no more of this new capital. We do know that in these early days the kings of Bornu, like their counterparts elsewhere in the Sudan, often migrated from place to place, and any temporary encampment would be referred to as the capital during the material period.

## IDRIS ALOOMA: APOGEE OF THE SECOND EMPIRE

The reign of Idris Aloomā (1571-1603) is certainly a most important period in Bornu history. But perhaps too much has been made of the regime because it is the best documented in the period before the nineteenth century. This, however, is not to detract from the merits of Idris Aloomā, an excellent and energetic prince who found in his imām, Ahmad ibn Fartuwa, a trustworthy and able chronicler whose work has outlived the Saifawa dynasty. But even Ahmad's record unfortunately deals with only the first twelve years of Idris's reign, and of the remaining twenty-one we know practically nothing.

Idris apparently ascended the throne after a short interregnum during which the reins of government were held by the Magira, Aicha (Amsa), a very distinguished, forceful and influential woman. Probably it was she who instilled into her son those princely qualities which were to make him famous in after-years. Not long after his accession Idris sent an embassy to Tripoli and through the intercourse which subsequently developed he was able to obtain a good many Turkish musketeers who helped to decide the issue of some of his most serious battles. But Idris was a good tactician and soldier in his own right; he equipped his own troops properly with arms and saw to their efficient training by the Turks. Ahmad also tells us of numerous caravans arriving from the north with a great many Arab horses for sale. Idris understood the use of cavalry, as of camelry, in the wide open plains of Bornu and its neighbourhood.

Idris undertook numerous campaigns of subjugation and empire-building. In the heart of the kingdom he sought to subdue heterogeneous elements, some of which had been allowed by his predecessors to undermine the strength of the empire. By so doing he went a long way towards the unification of Bornu. He turned his attention to the So who, though reduced from their former predominance and power, yet possessed many extensive districts and strongholds in the immediate neighbourhood of the settlements of the Bornu people whom they harassed continually. After a skilful deployment of his forces and the destruction of the crops of the So, Idris besieged and captured their strong town of Damasak. In the same manner Idris led his army against the Tetala (probably identical with the Buduma), a warlike and high-spirited people

settled in the neighbourhood and on the islands of Lake Chad. The Tetala were great spearmen, and it is said, by the imām-historian, that every able-bodied man among them was determined to kill a Muslim. Idris set the Kotoko, the neighbours and opponents of the Tetala, to harass them by continual incursions with their boats. And the Tetala eventually retreated into the swampy recesses of the Chad.

In the west Idris turned against Kano, both province and town. At this date Dala was the strongest of the Kano stockades. This was evidently the village built at the foot of the rocky hill of that name, the place which in the distant future was to form the Arab quarter of Kano city. Not surprisingly, Idris failed to take Dala, but he was able to destroy other Kano stockades, such as Kazra, Kelmasana and Majiya. With the Kanawa thus weakened and humiliated, the Kanuri subsequently conducted predatory expeditions against them and exacted tributes accordingly.

In the north-west Idris undertook three expeditions against the Tuareg, the third, directed against the inhabitants of Air, being the most important. It is at this stage that we hear for the first time of Alooma's vizier (chief minister), Idris ibn Harun, an intelligent warrior who fought gallantly against a numerous host which attacked him and his men at a place called Aghalderen. As was the case with the Tetala, Idris Alooma ordered another people, the Kelwati, to invade continually the territory of the Tuareg until they were forced to sue for peace.

In the north Idris carried out a campaign against the Tebu (Teda) of the province of Borku. He subjugated the whole country, and stayed long in the principal town of Bilma. Idris's occupation of Bilma was a feat of great strategic and economic significance, for it was a main stage on the caravan route to North Africa as well as an important salt-producing centre. For facility of access to these distant and arid regions to the west and north Idris built large boats on the Komadugu Yobe and collected great herds of camels.

In the south Idris turned against a rebellious Marghi prince, Haghaya, whose family he captured, and compelled the prince himself to come to Ngazargama to make his submission. Subsequently Idris intervened in Mandara where the exiled king solicited his assistance against his uncle who had usurped his throne. Idris marched against Karawa, the capital of Mandara,

whose inhabitants, as they have often done ever since, retreated to the summit of the mountain west of the town. It was during his second expedition that Idris was able to force the Mandara people and their ruler to quit their retreat and come to terms with him; thereupon the rightful king was reinstated. Next Idris led his victorious army against the eastern Ngizim people who had been attacking the Fulani in Bornu, and lately had actually attacked all who lay in their path without discrimination. For two years Idris and his vizier laid waste the fields of the Ngizim, ransacked their town, and finally reduced them to obedience. Then Idris proceeded against the western Ngizim, the Binawa people. They had infested all the neighbouring districts of the empire and interrupted communication between Bornu and Fagha, an important trading centre. Idris so terrorised the people around that all, even the Katagum people, were brought to heel.

In the east, in Kanem, Idris appeared five times in the first twelve years of his reign and may have done so frequently in the following years. On his accession Idris had concluded a peace treaty with 'Abdullāh, the ruling prince of Kanem. It is evident from two written copies of the treaty that three places were still in dispute. Here we have one of the rare cases of demarcation of disputed territory of which we have evidence in the history of the Central and Western Sudan before the nineteenth century. Not long after the conclusion of the treaty 'Abdullāh died and was succeeded by his son Muhammad who was shortly afterwards dethroned by his uncle 'Abd el-Jelil. Jelil soon broke off the negotiation and refused allegiance to Idris. In the ensuing struggle Idris's army sustained heavy losses but was ultimately victorious. N'jimi and the country farther east were taken from Kanem, but Idris conferred on Muhammad the crown of Kanem and attached to him a strong party of local dignitaries, chiefly Shuwa Arabs. Idris was forced to return to Kanem again, but this time he was even more successful. By stipulation the whole of Kanem as far as a place called Babaliya was attached to Bornu.

Idris did not spend all his time waging wars, however. His activities and achievements covered other spheres as well. With respect to religion, for instance, he undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca after the campaigns against the Ngizim, perhaps in the ninth year of his reign. In Mecca he built a hostel for Bornu pilgrims. At home, he strove to revive Islam as the state religion

to be practised by all and sundry, alike in times of peace and prosperity and in times of war and adversity. His imām, Ibn Fartuwa, claims that in Idris's time all the notables of Bornu became Muslims.

In the legal and judicial sphere, Idris began to substitute the *Shari'a* (Muslim law) for customary law in certain matters. The trial of cases was transferred from the traditional rulers to the qādīs (Muslim magistrates) who then adjudicated cases and acted as legal advisers to the local leaders.

With regard to civil affairs, Ibn Fartuwa relates that Idris built brick mosques to supersede those of reeds in N'gazaragamu. Maybe we must refer the brick ruins in that town to Idris. But there is doubt about the supposition that Idris introduced the burnt-brick technique into the Sudan, for we learn that the Malinke king, Mansa Musa, brought back from his famous pilgrimage to Mecca a Granada poet and architect, Es-Sahili, who built a mosque of burnt brick at Gao in the first half of the fourteenth century, and so introduced the technique which was also used in building the famous Sankore mosque (university). We might also mention in this connection that Gambaru, a town only three miles east of N'gazaragamu, is said to have been built during the reign of Idris Alooma. A recent archaeological inspection of the site indicates that it is later than N'gazaragamu, although there is the suspicion that it has been repaired and restored at some comparatively recent date. At all events it is said that, when not campaigning, Idris lived in his palace at Gambaru on the banks of the Yobe amidst peaceful parkland.

Notwithstanding Idris's wars the Bornu Chronicle tells us that 'he promoted the prosperity of the country and the wealth of the towns'. The Second Bornu empire reached its apogee during his regime, the energetic reign which secured for the kingdom its greatest territorial extent and its highest prestige in the Central and Western Sudan. This achievement was all the more striking because it coincided with the overthrow of Songhai, the counterpart and rival of Bornu to the west, which was conquered by the Moors in 1591. 'Altogether' writes Barth, 'Idris Alooma appears to have been an excellent prince, uniting in himself the most opposite qualities: warlike energy combined with mildness and intelligence; courage, with circumspection and patience, severance with pious feelings.'

## DECLINE

The Second Kanuri empire, guided by lesser rulers, appears to have continued to prosper for most of the seventeenth century, though towards the end of the century a series of wars and famines caused hardship. At the turn of the eighteenth century the empire still extended over a congeries of kingdoms and principalities of the Chad basin. In the east Kanem and Bagirmi and, in the west, nominally Kano (and probably Katsina) were still its vassals. In the north, although control of the Saharan routes was lost after 1700, the influence of Bornu was still felt as far as Fezzan and beyond. In the south, Jukun power had disintegrated and rulers in the intervening region were paying tribute to Bornu. Within the kingdom itself an important group had arisen: they were the Shuwa Arabs who had joined Idris Alooma after the settlement with Kanem. The eighteenth century was apparently marked by a succession of rather weak rulers more famous for their sedulous piety than for their administrative or military ability. None the less there is the possibility of exaggeration and of attempting to explain the fate of the Kanuri empire in the nineteenth century solely in terms of the decline which occurred in the eighteenth century. Writers are not agreed as to the causes of this decline. Perhaps, as tradition indicates, the Kanuri monarchy and court life had become so elaborate and ritualised that effective leadership was paralysed. The nomadic Tuareg may have harassed the empire in the north and north-west and the vassal states and peoples elsewhere made good their independence. By the opening years of the nineteenth century the Bornu army was noted for its ineffectiveness and inadequacy; and when Mai Ahmad (1793-1810) led an expedition to Mandara most of the army perished. The kingdom of Bornu was declining but it retained its importance as a centre of Islamic culture.

In the early years of the nineteenth century the Fulani conquered Hausaland and began to assail the western frontiers of Bornu. The reigning Mai Ahmad is described by the Bornu Chronicle as 'a learned prince, liberal towards the *'ulama*; a prodigal dispenser of alms, a friend of science and learning, gracious and compassionate towards the poor'—an epitome, this, of the tragic irony that was the fate of Bornu in the closing decades of her Second empire.

## POLITICAL ORGANISATION

From the political history of Bornu to examine those traditions, institutions and practices which were elaborated over the centuries and so cannot be traced to any one period. We shall start with the social organisation.

The pre-Islamic history of Kanem-Bornu is almost blank for our period we have indicated in the opening chapter some of the tentative conclusions being drawn by scholars from studies of the scanty archaeological, numismatic and other evidence available. For the Islamic period, particularly for the Second Kanuri empire, the contemporary and subsequent data with which to reconstruct the social and political structure of the state. The kingdom was administered by a hereditary ruler, the Mai, who was prohibited from showing himself in public for two grand annual religious festivals, and always hidden behind a curtain while receiving strangers. He was aided by a governing state council of twelve who influenced almost all his decisions. In practice, however, the ability, force of character and political acumen of the ruler in large measure determined the extent of this control. The councillors were chosen from among the Maina, members of noble families, and the Kacella (Kogana), great dignitaries of the state. Each councillor was appointed for life and exercised authority over a particular territory. The most important councillors were the Kaigama (the commander-in-chief and Warden of the Yerima (Warden of the North); the Mestrema (Warden of the East and Keeper of the King's Household); and the Kacella (Warden of the West). This last functionary, whose seat was at Nguru, was throughout Saifawa history appreciably more powerful and relatively independent, living for the most part away from the capital. This might have been partly due to the fact that the state had no physical frontiers to the west where sandy dunes almost uninterrupted from the western shores of the lake to the eastern limits of Hausaland.

The Queen Mother; the Magara, the king's official wife; and the Gumsu, the first wife of the king—all enjoyed high positions and had great power and influence. Tradition

narrates that the energetic Mai Biri (1151-76) was imprisoned by the Magira of his time. And we have also noted the part played by the intelligent and wise Magira Amsa (Aicha) in the life and times of Idris Alooma (1571-1603). In actual fact the Magira was responsible for the Mai's food, and could prevent him from doing anything she did not approve of. The Magira had control over the Mai's sons who were brought up from birth in her house; and when they were old enough they were sent out to different parts of Bornu and not allowed to reside in the capital lest they should indulge in quarrels and intrigues.

The duties, privileges, and precedence of the Mai's courtiers were minutely regulated. Apparently the men did not hold as fiefs the portions of the kingdom which they supervised; they had fiefs elsewhere. Rather they held hereditary titles connected with military functions in sections of the kingdom and in the army as a whole. For instance the Yerima checked any raids on the north, and when the army was assembled for war he was in charge of the northern troops.

We shall say more about this politico-military organisation presently. Meanwhile we may note that all the higher nobles, except the Galadima, lived in the capital under the king's surveillance, and toured their districts only when trouble was brewing or taxes were needed.

Within this system the state was organised into fiefs held by the nobility, by rewarded servants of the king, and by military personnel. The receiver or inheritor of a fief was called the Chima Kura, but its administration was usually carried on by the Chima Gana (literally, small Chima) who was usually one of servile descent or a trusted servant of the Chima Kura. Generally the Chima Gana lived in the fief and collected taxes on the livestock and harvests of their subjects. In this way it was easy to bring a vassal state or nomad people into the Kanuri political system. As circumstances dictated, the leader of such a state or people was simply made the Chima Gana of one of the nobles, an office which was calculated at once to strengthen the position of the recipient in his group after conquest and to manoeuvre him into the Kanuri political organisation. Titled women were also given fiefs which were managed for them as for male fief-holders.

## MILITARY ORGANISATION AND WARFARE

With respect to military organisation and warfare, it is clear that armies of thousands were engaged in campaigns from year to year. The extant contemporary record of Idris Alooma, for instance, would appear to be in large measure almost entirely an account of one military campaign after another.

In order to meet adequately the demands of this fairly constant warfare there had to be careful organisation. In his recent study of Kanuri society Dr Ronald Cohen, an American social anthropologist,<sup>3</sup> states that in the pre-nineteenth century Bornu military system each of the four regional politico-military leaders (the Kaigama, Yerima, Mestrema and Galadima) had under him a force led by commanders (Kacella) each of whom was in charge of a regiment of horse and foot. Informants in Maiduguri recalled altogether twenty-four Kacella in pre-British Bornu. And the whole army is said to have been drawn into two divisions, under twelve Kacella per division. The first, called the 'home' force, generally remained close to the king, and its soldiers constituted a standing army and palace guard whose primary duty was to protect the monarchy.

The second division was called the 'bush' unit not because it fought in the country outside the capital but because it was largely composed of peasant subjects and rural followers of fief-holders whose homes were outside the capital, in the Bornu countryside. Each Kacella had his own little 'general staff' of close associates each of whom led his group in an advance on the enemy, and one of the groups stood sentry for the whole camp at the end of the day.

As Denham witnessed in the 1820s, the king himself inspected the manoeuvres of his troops before battle. Elaborate rituals and ceremonies helped to dramatise warfare, and the morale of the army was kept up by bolstering the belief in the supernatural power of the leader or his religious associates, a psychological condition which was also buoyed up by the hope of sharing in the booty.

To the common people, however, all this warfare must have meant a life of uneasy tension and unsettling mobility, particularly for those living near the scenes of hard-fought battles. Hence wherever possible, chiefly in the south, villages were built either near hills and mountains to which the people could betake themselves in the event of an attack, or in bushy places with barricaded

or camouflaged access routes. Sometimes, also, stockaded mud walls and spiked ditches were constructed for defence. We hardly need add that our knowledge of the place of warfare in the life of the ordinary Bornu people of these centuries derives from the evidence, particularly the oral tradition, that has come down to us. And, as is always the case with the human memory, the dramatic and exciting is often more easily remembered and narrated than the ordinary and inconspicuous; hence there will always be more of recollected military and political history than of judicial and economic history, for instance. Furthermore, it must never be supposed that Kanuri warfare, however convulsing and dislocating to the common people, can be likened, by any stretch of the imagination, to the effect on the same class of people of the totalitarian warfare of more recent times.

#### JUDICIAL AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

As regards judicial affairs, we have already noted how, in the reign of Idris Alooma, judicial power was divided between the political leaders and the Muslim *qādi*. According to tradition there was also in the capital, before the nineteenth century, the Mainin Kanendi (literally, 'the second person to the king') who was the chief judge and second most important man in the realm. The Mainin Kanendi and twelve other judges, who occupied the same quarter of the town with him, formed the high court. The Talba, the scribe or keeper of the records of this court, was considered the third most important man in the kingdom. By reason of its members' knowledge of law and religion, the court and its scribe also served as a legal and religious advisory council to the king. In the larger towns the king appointed local *mallamai* to act as judges, from whom appeal could come to the high court in the capital. In the 1820s Denham observed that local judges' decisions could be reversed by the high court or by the local political resident.

In the sphere of economic life, the Kanuri people remember that the pre-British system of taxation consisted of two separate levies. One, the *binemram*, was the personal property and organisational responsibility of the Chima Kura who owned the fief. It was collected in kind at the local peasant level. Generally, the Chima Kura sent out a messenger from the capital to his representative in the fief, the Chima Gana, instructing him on the total

demand of the levy. The messengers of the Chima Gana then raised the required tax in the *fief* and extracted a surplus for their labours. Another levy was the *sada'a* which was specifically a royal revenue. Opinion differs as to the organisation of this levy. Some sources speak of the king selling collection rights to trusted courtiers while others refer to this tax as a special harvest tithe collected by the *fief*-holder and his representative, partly for themselves and partly for the king.

Within his holdings a *fief*-holder might use some of the land for his own purposes. If he settled some of his slaves in a village, a large portion of the produce would come to him as his rightful property. Sometimes he might give a portion of his holding to a *mallam* or a group of *mallamai* so that they might cultivate the land and support themselves. Very often such a settlement would be *mahram*<sup>1</sup>, that is, exempt from tax. Such areas can still be noted in Bornu today in the names of villages, like Karliyarî ('slave town') or Mallamari ('a town of *mallamai*').

As for vassal states subdued in war, a portion of the tithes collected by the local chief would be sent as tribute to the Mai of Bornu. To this end the king often lodged a 'consul' or 'resident' (usually a slave, for obvious reasons; never a relative) in the principal town of the vassal state. Richardson saw one such representative of the Bornu king when he arrived at Zinder in the 1850s.

Another well-organised aspect of the economic life of Kanuri society in the past was trade. Trade in Bornu apparently developed from the presence of a large upper class and a royal court with its patterns of specialised consumption, the uneven distribution of areas of intensive cultivation and craft production, and contacts with North Africa and with the Central and Western Sudan. Grain was dispatched to Bilma in the desert and salt was received in return. The people of Bilma became so bound to the Kanuri on account of this trade that even today, when the trade has been much reduced, they still feel themselves very closely allied to the Kanuri. Natron (popularly referred to as 'potash') obtained from Lake Chad was carried to Kano and from there distributed over parts of the savannah of West Africa. We also hear of a copper trade which Kanuri middlemen carried on between Darfur in the east and the Nupe area in the south-west. Trade with the southern peoples was often channelled through Kano, but with regard to

the much-desired kola nuts it was sometimes done directly. Finally the slave trade, in which eunuchs were especially involved, was a ready source of revenue for political figures. There was an eager market for slaves in Cairo, Tripoli and Tunis—and (particularly for eunuchs) beyond, in the Levant and Turkey.

It is not now clear what form of currency was used for all this trade, but from the available evidence it would appear that currency came rather late to Bornu when compared with some other countries of the Sudan. It is certain that the nobles and large traders knew of the use of currency at least in the early nineteenth century, but the ordinary Kanuri peasant had not by then been in the habit of using currency, as had his contemporaries in Kano and Zinder, for instance. In the 1820s, Clapperton observed that at Kabayum cowries were only just being used, although rolls of cloth from local weavers were currency in some of the Bornu markets. By 1850, however, cowries had gradually replaced these rolls of cloth in many of the markets.

It was by the politico-military, judicial and economic arrangements which we have just outlined that the Kanuri state was able to lead nearly one thousand years of continuous independent life. Under the king, the nobility had their own fiefs which at once established their status in the kingdom and ensured their all-important military co-operation. There was a well-ordered and expandable war machine for the offensive and defensive policies of the state. Hence it was possible to incorporate—and subsequently assimilate—peoples of various ethnic groupings in the Kanuri polity. Flexibility was thus one of the important factors that made possible the survival of the Kanuri state into the twentieth century. As long as the nucleus of a monarch and his court remained, together with the idea of the centrality and paramountcy of this institution in the conception of the state, expansion and contraction could go on, depending upon the administrative and military ability of the government of the day and the external factors in operation. In the economic field, too, the existence of the royal court, with other administrative and military personnel, provided from early times a ready market for the sale of surplus produce and manufactured wares of domestic or foreign origin. With the progress of specialisation of labour in the kingdom, this important commercial nucleus contributed to the building of a huge volume of internal and external trade. In light of all this, it

should be easy to understand the tremendous influence exercised by this age-old Sudanic kingdom on various parts of the Nigerian region before its power was overthrown by Europeans at the turn of the present century.

## (ii) *The Hausa States*

### TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN

The Hausa, the western neighbours of the Kanuri, inhabit the north-western and north-central parts of Nigeria, and spread farther west and north into the Republic of Niger up to the edges of the Sahara desert. Within Nigeria, Hausaland is marked by wide plains only occasionally broken by low hills. As has been the case with the Kanuri, this open country has had great influence on the ethnic composition and history of the Hausa, and, as might be expected, a large number of those who today speak and are described as Hausa have not the same ethnic origin. Nevertheless there would appear to have been an original Negro stock which formed the nucleus of the present-day Hausa. In the early history of the country this stock was expanded and transformed by immigration from elsewhere, probably from the west, the north and the east; and by commercial, political, religious and other influences.

The Hausa language is classified by the linguist, Joseph Greenberg, among what he calls the Chad family of languages. This family, as the name implies, includes a very large number of languages spoken in the Chad area, such as Kotoko, Bata-Margi, Mandara, Musgu and others. Today Hausa is spoken as the mother-tongue by certainly over eight million people in Northern Nigeria, its motherland; and is becoming increasingly understood in parts of Southern Nigeria as well. Outside Nigeria, in the west, it is spoken in Dahomey, Togo and Ghana, particularly the northern parts; and in the north-west many speak it as far as Timbuktu. Farther in the north one hears Hausa in Niger as far as Agades and even at Tamanrasset in the Hoggar. In the north-east there are many thousands of Hausa at Wadi Medani and other towns of present-day Sudan, largely pilgrims to Mecca who have run out of money on their return journey and are unable to pay their way back to Nigeria. In the east Hausa is well-known not only among the Kanuri but also in the Fort Lamy area.

Indeed, as Greenberg has rightly said, Hausa is 'perhaps the most widely spoken (language) in Negro Africa'.

The origin of the Hausa states is a matter of controversy into which we cannot enter here. The oft-told Hausa legend of origin relates that, at an unspecified date in remote times, one Bayajidda fled from Baghdad to Kanem-Bornu which was already an important state in the Chad basin. There the Mai of Bornu gave Bayajidda his daughter in marriage but deprived him of his followers. This and other subsequent events caused Bayajidda to flee the country in fear of the Mai. Travelling westwards, Bayajidda left his wife at Biram-ta-Gabas to bear him a son. At Gaya, near Kano, he met some blacksmiths who made him a knife according to his specifications. Thence he came to a town whose people were deprived of water from a well by a sacred snake called Sarki (the Hausa word for 'king'). Bayajidda killed the snake, and in gratitude and admiration Daura, the queen of the place, married him and also gave him a Gwari concubine. By Daura, Bayajidda had a son called Bawo. Various accounts exist of what happened subsequently, but one of them (recorded by the German scholar and explorer Dr Heinrich Barth, among others) relates that Bawo had seven children who became the eponymous founders of the Hausa states—Hausa Bakwai. These were Biram and Daura, the oldest; Katsina and Zaria, twins; Kano and Rano, another set of twins; and Gobir, the youngest. Whether these were names of persons or places is not certain; it is clear, however, that in nearly all Hausa traditions Biram and Daura are considered the earliest settlements of the Hausa people in their present abode. It is also not certain how far each of the seven states was a political unit; but it is clear that they were largely independent of each other, though bound by ties of language and culture.

According to tradition several offices were assigned to the original founders of these states. Gobir was appointed Sarkin Yaki ('war leader' or commander-in-chief); Daura and Katsina, Sarakunan Kasuwa ('chiefs of market', directors of trade and commerce); Kano and Rano, Sarakunan Bāba ('chiefs of indigo', superintendents of the indigo industry); and Zaria, Sarkin Bāyi ('chief of slaves', procurer of labour). Biram, reputedly the original seat of government of the Hausa states, is usually passed over in this tradition. By the nineteenth century, it alone was in an impoverished condition, partly owing to the scourge of a dangerous

neighbour, Hadejia. It had come so close to losing its very identity that it was usually called 'Biram-ta-Gabas' (Biram in the east) to distinguish it from another more westerly town of the same name, 'Biram-ta-Katsina' (Biram in Katsina). Similarly, Daura had comparatively little to depend upon but its agriculture and in one tradition Daura was designated Sarkin Noma ('chief of agriculture').

In addition to the Hausa Bakwai, tradition also tells of the Banza Bakwai, the unreal or spurious seven. These latter were not among the original Hausa states but had subsequently come under the expanding influence of the Hausa people and of Islam. The areas usually named are Zamfara, Kebbi, Gwari, Yauri, Nupe, Yoruba (Ilorin) and Kwararafa (Jukun). The very existence of this Banza Bakwai tradition indicates an early attempt to explain the remarkable diffusion of the Hausa language and culture in many parts of what is now called Northern Nigeria—and beyond; a development which has continued with even greater intensity to the present day.

In the same manner we should view many of the other Hausa traditions of origin as in a way exhibiting the method by which events in remote times have been riveted into the people's memory. For example, the Bayajidda-Bawo legend apparently refers to the successive infiltration of new-comers into Hausaland or the conquest of the area by invaders; the introduction, so some traditions relate, by Bayajidda of 'a certain thing like an ox, but not an ox' probably refers to the advent of new beasts of burden like the horse or the camel; the story of the killing of the sacred serpent might suggest a change in the people's religious beliefs and practices; and the marriage of Queen Daura, after which 'the people of Daura spoke no longer of the queen but of the Maikashin Sarki (the slayer of the Sarki snake)', seems to suggest a change from the matrilinear to the patrilinear system of monarchical succession.

#### THE COMING OF ISLAM

In discussing the history of the Hausa states before the nineteenth century we shall first of all deal with the advent of Islam. We shall then note briefly some of the outstanding episodes in the history of the more important states. Finally we shall review, as we did with Kanem-Bornu, some of the important institutions and practices

which were evolved and elaborated over the centuries in fields such as social and political organisation, justice, revenue collection and taxation.

Islam has had such a long history in the Hausa country that, as one might expect, wherever the religion is practised seriously, it has become an integral part of the people's way of life. The political, legal, judicial and other institutions of the country are on the Muslim pattern. Social life is to a great extent ruled by Muslim norms, and Islam provides the framework for intellectual development.

Nevertheless, there is at least one group of Hausa people, the Maguzawa, who are not Muslims. This is important because it emphasises the persistence of older ideas and beliefs in spite of the introduction and even the general acceptance of a new religion. However, although the Hausa may privately accept that they are descended from the Maguzawa who have not been converted to Islam, they would not publicly regard the Maguzawa of today as Hausa. As a matter of fact they would, for instance, prefer to regard the Islamised (but linguistically and culturally distinct) Nupe and Kanuri as Hausa, rather than the Kutumbawa or Maguzawan Katsina.

The Hausa credit the introduction of Islam to one Maghili who, according to tradition, came from Bornu. Information collected by Barth confirms this tradition but indicates that Maghili came from the north or north-west. He would seem to be identical with Muhammad Al-Maghili, a renowned preacher of moral and religious austerity from Tlemcen (Algeria), who wrote a treatise on government, entitled *The Obligations of Princes*, for the king of Kano in the early sixteenth century. But Maghili was certainly not the first to preach Islam in Hausaland since we find traces of the religion there as much as a century before him. Since his memory has survived among the Hausa he was probably a most effective missionary. And whoever were the first Muslim missionaries in Hausaland the evidence indicates that they came from the Western Sudan and the Magrib, a fact which has left its mark on the subsequent history of the Hausa country.

The actual conversion of Hausaland probably proceeded in a manner not unlike what happens to this day in the lands south of it, namely, through the peaceable mission work of pilgrims, merchants and *mallamai*. The method was apparently slow, and so the

full impact of the religion was probably not felt in the country until the fourteenth century.

The Kano Chronicle describes how Yaji (c. 1349-85), a ruler of the Kutumbawa dynasty, was converted by a party of forty from Mali, who became absorbed in the general population of Kano. A far more powerful Islamic influence from the middle Niger region came with the Fulani, whose presence in Kano is first recorded in the reign of Ya'qūb (1452-63). Migrating from Mali, the Fulani and other itinerant Muslim scholars from the University of Timbuktu brought with them books on divinity and etymology, whereas the Hausa *mallamai* had hitherto only the books of the Law and the Traditions (Hadith). During their sojourn in Mali the Fulani had become thoroughly indoctrinated with the teachings of Islam in its Magribine or principally Moroccan form. And in the Hausa country they acted as a leaven among the people, hastening their conversion to Islam. Thereafter Islamised Fulani arrived in ever-increasing numbers.

Apparently Islam was at first adopted among the Hausa as a class religion, chiefly by the ruling group. The faith ran parallel to but did not displace the traditional religion even among this class. As for the masses, they were hardly expected to and did not adopt even a veneer of Islam for a long time to come.

#### DAWN OF THE HAUSA STATES

Turning to what is known of the early history of the more important Hausa states, we find that before the sixteenth century we have only dim reflections and faint echoes of how the people lived. Our main sources here are of course oral traditions, especially as they are detailed in the pages of the Kano Chronicle.<sup>4</sup> The old legend of the serpent-killer suggests that Daura was the most ancient of the Hausa settlements. But there is also a tradition that the first town founded in the area was not Daura but what is now called Tsofon Birni, a town situated about six miles farther north, and that it was only the ninth queen called Daura who founded the new town named after her. Daura was long considered the senior ('mother') kingdom among the Hausa, always sacrosanct and immune from attack by the others. Al-Bakrī, writing as early as the eleventh century, refers to Daura as a place of considerable importance.

Katsina according to tradition was founded by Kumayo,

perhaps in the fourteenth century or earlier. Its seat was Durbi ta Kusheyi, a village south-east of Katsina where the earliest seven kings are supposed to have been buried. The dynasty was named after the place, Durbawa. During the Durbawa period the ruling Sarki was not allowed to die of old age or ill-health but was despatched by an official called Kariagiwa, and the new king was elected through divination. The Durbawa also practised a system of matrilinear descent. One king, Sannau, is said to have been killed after a reign of thirty years by a man called Kwarau,<sup>6</sup> who subsequently founded a new dynasty about the middle of the fifteenth century. Kwarau was the leader of a group of invaders who, as tradition has it, were not widely distinct from those over whom they assumed rule and whose institutions they largely adopted. Rather strangely, the conquered people continued to hold important offices. They were regarded as the repositories of all knowledge concerning the local deities and spirits, good or evil. They even had a right to participate in the election of a new king since this was done by divination. But before long they lost this right which was then vested in three chiefs, presumably of the Kwarau lineage. However, in general, the kings selected were alternatively of the Durbawa and Kwarau dynasties. Among the successors of the first Kwarau was Sarkin Ibrahim Yaje with whose name tradition comes into contact with history. For he is recorded as having been converted to Islam by the celebrated missionary Al-Maghili who visited Hausaland towards the end of the fifteenth century.

With regard to Gobir, tradition maintains that the people who afterwards became the rulers of the state moved from Bilma in Kavar westwards to Asben (Aïr) where the kingdom gradually formed and grew in power between the eighth and twelfth centuries. The Kano Chronicle reports that in the reign of Ya'qūb (1452-63) 'the Asbenawa came to Gobir'. This suggests that an alien aristocracy immigrated southwards, under pressure of desert Tuareg, into territory formerly occupied by the indigenous Zamfarawa and Katsinawa. The territory is still known as Gobir Tudu and lies about 120 miles north and north-east of Sokoto.

The Zaria Chronicle contains a list of sixty rulers before the Fulani conquest, the first being Gunguma, son of Bawo, the hero of the Daura-serpent legend. The mention of someone other than Zaria as the first king of the state of that name emphasises the

point that the Hausa traditions discussed earlier are a later construction obviously aimed at deriving the people from a common stock and explaining the predominant features in the economic life of the various states. There is a tradition that Islam was introduced into Zaria in the middle of the fifteenth century, which might be true as the faith came from farther north, and Zaria long remained a frontier state with a culture slightly but significantly different from that of Katsina or Kano from which Islam apparently filtered into the rest of Hausaland.

In the case of Kano, tradition relates that the earliest inhabitants were the Abagiyawa, a name still borne by a few Kano blacksmiths. The Abagiyawa narrate that one of their ancestors, a smith called Kano, had come from Gaya, a place east-south-east of Kano town, in search of ironstone and charcoal. He had settled near Dala hill when the present site of the town was uninhabited. Besides smithing, the Abagiyawa also practised the arts of medicine, beer-brewing, archery, drumming, minstrelsy and dancing; and of mining and smelting iron. They obtained salt (perhaps natron) from Awar. They were organised in local patrilinear groups, each with its own head and distinguished by some special trait or skill. Among the Abagiyawa was a man called Barbushe, the hunter-priest of a local deity, described as 'a black man of great stature and might, a hunter, who slew elephants with his stick and carried them on his head about nine miles'—a symbolic portrayal of the power and influence which Barbushe enjoyed among the people of Kano of his day. Subsequently, several immigrant groups arrived in Kano; one of them led by a man called Bagauda (whose dates are given as A.D. 999-1063) 'overwhelmed' the Abagiyawa and settled at Sheme in the precincts of Kano. Probably among these immigrants were the men of the Bayajidda invasion and the legendary seven children of Bawo, one of whom was also called Kano. The ascription of the same name Kano to two different ancestors perhaps describes the complete assimilation and identification which, eventually, was achieved between the newcomers and the earlier inhabitants.

From the Kano Chronicle we gather that the walled city built some time in the twelfth century was solemnly inaugurated in the reign of Gijinmasu (1095-1134). The walls were afterwards completed by his son and successor, Yusa Tsaraki (1136-94), whose son Naguji (1194-1247) extended the dominion of Kano by

invading the country around. Naguji afterwards went down in Kano history as 'the first Sarki who collected a land tax of one-eighth of the crop from all husbandmen'. The next century, from the reign of Gugua (1247-90) to that of Tsamia (1307-43), was dominated by the unsuccessful attempt of the immigrant rulers to discover the mysteries of the religion of the indigenous people in order to paralyse their resistance and bring them under complete domination.

When, in the same century, Islam was introduced by Mali missionaries, Kano under Yaji (1349-85) began to exhibit the characteristics of a Muslim city. An imām (Muslim religious leader), a muezzin (announcer of the hours of prayer), and a qādi (magistrate) were appointed. A mosque was built where prayers were canonically said five times a day. But, as one might expect, this process of Islamisation was not accomplished without tenacious resistance from the protagonists and votaries of the traditional religion. They defiled the mosques and won back some men to the ancient faith. The eventual ascendancy of Islam is narrated by Muslims in the story of the miraculous blinding of their opponents after one of the episodes of defilement.

In the reign of Kanajeji (1390-1410) important advances were made in military equipment and technique. *Lifidi* (quilted protection for horses), iron helmets and coats of mail were all introduced into Kano. Not surprisingly, the Kanawa began to range farther afield in their military and political activities. Kanajeji is said to have demanded tribute from the Kwararafa (Jukun) and to have exchanged horses for slaves. Furthermore, we hear of wars between the Hausa states themselves. Kanajeji suffered reverses in his attempt to conquer Zaria, and as a result was persuaded by his advisers to revert from Islam to the religion of his fathers. After performing the traditional rites and ceremonies he returned to the fight with Zaria. This time he was successful, entered the capital of Zaria where he remained for eight months, and received 'a vast amount of tribute' from the people.

Kanajeji was succeeded by his son Dauda Bakon Damisa (1426-38) in whose reign a deposed ruler of Bornu, Dagachi, is said to have taken refuge in Kano where he introduced 'horse drums and trumpets and flags and guns',<sup>6</sup> and so worked his way into the good graces of Dauda that the latter left him in charge of Kano

when he went to war with Zaria. The regent, Dagachi, subsequently ruled for five months and reportedly became 'very wealthy'.

Dauda's successor, 'Abdullahi Burja (1438-52), another son of Kanajeji, was apparently 'the first in Hausaland to give Bornu *tsare* or *gaisua* (tribute)'. It is not clear what is meant here. Kano, the leading Hausa state on the western borders of Bornu, would sooner or later have engaged the attention of Bornu, particularly after the building of the new Bornu capital at N'gazaragamu (c. 1470). But Bornu had been badly torn by civil wars between the Mai and the Kaigama shortly before this, and was unlikely to be expanding. We can only conclude, therefore, that there was some close connection between Bornu and Kano and other parts of Hausaland during the fifteenth century. To Burja also is attributed the early extensive use of camels, and the opening of roads for trade from Bornu to Gwanja (in present day Ghana), presumably because the first market for external trade at Karabka in the vicinity of Kano had recently been established. The linguistic evidence suggests that it was probably at this period also that the Hausa learned to read and write (in Arabic) from Kanuri immigrants. During the first half of the fifteenth century, therefore, trade and communication between Kano and Bornu grew and there were probably additional, as yet unexplained, developments.

We have already mentioned the arrival of Fulani Muslims from Mali in the reign of Ya'qūb (1452-63) which was one of uninterrupted peace, with trade flourishing accordingly in salt, natron, eunuchs and kola nuts.

Muhammad Rimfa (1463-99) is remembered in history as the greatest king of Kano before the Fulani jihād. He further built and extended the walls of Kano and constructed the Kurmi Market. In the military sphere, he introduced new formations by the use of *dawakin zaggi* (foot-soldiers accompanying and taking cover among the horses) in the war with Katsina. To glorify the monarchy, he introduced the royal use of *figinni* (ostrich-feather fans) and sandals, and built the Dakin Rimfa (Rimfa's Palace). In the realm of government, the king established the Tara-ta-Kano (the Kano Nine), a council of state comparable to the council of twelve of the Mai of Bornu. Two of the Kano Nine were men of servile origin, one of them, the Sarkin Bai, a eunuch. Rimfa was

the first to appoint eunuchs to important offices of state, placing them in charge of the treasury, the town and palace guards, communication with free-born office-holders, and the control of the king's household in which he had started *kulle* (purdah or wife-seclusion). Finally, to promote the practice of Islam, Rimfa cut down the traditional sacred tree in Kano and built a minaret on the site; more important still, he inaugurated the public celebration of '*Id al-Fitr*, the feast following the fast of Ramadan. The Kano Chronicle's glowing assessment of Rimfa is enshrined in the following words: 'He can have no equal in might, from the time of the founding of Kano, until it shall end. . . . Surely there was no Sarki more powerful than Rimfa.'

#### SONGHAI INFLUENCE

The sixteenth century is a highly significant period in the history of Hausaland. The most important of the many events and developments of this century were the Kano-Katsina struggle, the Songhai invasions, the intellectual ascendancy of Timbuktu, the rise of Kotal Kanta of Kebbi and the reign of Queen Amina of Zaria.

Of the Kano-Katsina wars not much is known at the moment. The real cause of the struggle would appear to have been the control of the central Sudanese end of the trans-Saharan trade. Katsina had hitherto been the dominant power with respect to this trade. But in view of the developments which had taken place in Kano during the fifteenth century—particularly the improvements in military equipment and techniques—we should not be surprised that Kano also wanted to acquire a substantial share of the trans-Saharan trade. The occasion for war would probably be petty boundary disputes, blood feuds or personal quarrels between the ruling families of the two states. The struggle grew in intensity with the years, and reached its climax after the Moroccan overthrow of the Songhai empire towards the end of the century, an event which led to the increased diversion of trade from Timbuktu and Jenne to Kano and Katsina. The crucial period was the eighty years between 1570 and 1650. In spite of her improved military techniques Kano did not always win. In 1650, in fact, Katsina inflicted a defeat on Kano, and thereupon made an alliance with her against the common enemy, the Kwararafa, who were then overrunning Hausaland; an arrangement

which, we are told, was not disturbed by subsequent Habe rulers.

We do not now know why Askia Muhammad Towri of Songhai, generally known as Askia the Great, undertook the military campaigns against Hausaland in the second decade of the sixteenth century. Maybe he simply wanted to add fresh and wealthy territories to his ever-growing empire. Leo Africanus relates that Askia defeated and sacked the Hausa States of Gobir, Katsina, Kano, Zamfara and Zaria in the years 1512-13. Although Hausaland lacks natural defences and its warring states did not unite against the common foe, the accounts of these campaigns are so meagre that one suspects they were probably mere raids which were sometimes successful and sometimes not. The career of Kotal Kanta of Kebbi shows that there was no easy conquest of Hausaland. Similarly, when a later Askia, Daud (1548-82), sent an expedition against Katsina it failed. But the Songhai warriors are said to have performed such feats of valour in the encounter with the Katsinawa that the captured survivors were carefully treated and chivalrously returned to Askia Daud with the message that such heroes should not be put to death. Kano and some of the other Hausa states may, for a time, have been subject to the Songhai empire, paying tributes and accepting resident agents but there was no long-lasting occupation. But, however ephemeral, the Songhai presence probably helped to reduce the inter-state quarrels and feuds which had been plaguing Hausaland for some time.

In the cultural sphere, the greatness of Songhai was contemporary with the greatness of Timbuktu. From Timbuktu, the Arabic language and Islamic culture were further diffused into the contiguous territories and beyond. The *Tarikh as-Sudan* (the history of the Sudan completed by 'Abd Al-Rahmān Al-Sa'di in 1655) contains a list of distinguished scholars of Sankore University and their attainments. Among them was Al-hājj Ahmad who on his return from Mecca in 1485 visited Kano and taught theology there. Makluf ibn 'Alī, a jurisconsult and geographer, visited Katsina and Kano in 1500. Muhammad ibn Ahrnad, yet another distinguished Sankore scholar, took up residence in Katsina about 1520, was treated honourably and finally made a qādī. 'Alī Fulan, a famous minister of Askia the Great, died at Kano in 1528. We have already mentioned Al-Maghīlī's *Obligations of Princes*, the treatise on government which was written for the king of Kano and

which, as E. W. Bovill has rightly said, 'reveals high ideals and the writer's keen appreciation of the practical difficulties of government'. Thus the history of Songhai-Hausa relations in the sixteenth century is a story not just of the conduct of wars and of conquests but also of the spread of knowledge and learning, a tradition which has continued in various forms in these parts down to our own day.

#### KANTA OF KEBBI

Kotal Kanta, the sixteenth century military and political leader, made Kebbi one of the greatest powers of the western and central Sudan. He had assisted his suzerain, Askia the Great, in his campaign against Air, but subsequently quarrelled over the spoils, rebelled, and successfully established the independence of Kebbi (1515-16). Kanta had several advantages which he exploited: the strategic Kebbi marshes which made west-east movement of troops difficult; the strong and well-fortified capital of Surame, originally founded as a hamlet by Kanta and his boon companions in earlier days when he was something of an outlaw in the country; his knowledge of the weaknesses of the Songhai army; and the unflinching support of his devoted people. Consequently Kanta utterly defeated the Songhai forces at a place called Tara, a military achievement which still remains the most cherished tradition of the Kebbi people. Thereupon Kanta turned north, east and south in turn towards the states of Air, Gobir, Katsina, Kano, Daura and Zaria. He brought Air to heel and made the Asbenawa pay him tribute. He overran the above-mentioned Hausa states and is even said to have established a sub-kingdom of Gabi at Mokwa in Nupe.

The magnitude of Kanta's kingdom necessitated a force of considerable numbers to 'police' the area; so he established a large standing camp near Surame. This was the origin of Gungu, a town which Kanta built partly by the forced labour of subject peoples. Most of these were allowed eventually to go home, except the Zaria men who were retained and placed in a colony now known as Zazzagawa. Since many parts of Kebbi were inundated by floods during the rainy season, making the roads impassable, Kanta had also built a canoe sheathed with copper and seating fifty paddlers, with which he was able to inspect the towns along the River Sokoto by water.

As was usual in other Sudanese kingdoms, Kanta left the Hausa and other subject rulers in control of their peoples, absorbing only Zamfara, Ader and Wangara into his own personal state. An extremely energetic person with a fierce temper, Kanta ruled strictly. Though there were large numbers of wandering Fulani in Kebbi, tradition has it that he would not allow them to build houses. After a reign of nearly forty years, Kanta died around 1545-50 at about the age of eighty—either in battle or on his way back from his war with the Kanuri. His body is said to have been embalmed (over a smoke fire) and buried in Surame.

In his time Kanta was the strongest force in Hausaland. In many ways he was, with the possible exception of Usuman dan Fodio, the greatest individual produced by the Hausa states. Even Usuman's son and successor, Sultan Muhammad Bello, an author never very kind to the old Habe kings, gives Kanta credit for his wide conquests and other achievements. Kanta's was the only attempt in his time and for long afterwards to build an empire in Hausaland comparable to those of Songhai to the west and Bornu to the east. As Sultan Bello wrote: 'No other kingdom in the past history of these (Hausa) countries ever equalled it in power. Their ruins (i.e. of the garrison towns of Kebbi), though it is about a hundred years since their cities were broken, surpass any we have ever seen.'

#### QUEEN AMINA OF ZARIA

In Zaria, in the sixteenth century, the most momentous events were the exploits and achievements of Sarauniya (Queen) Amina. The founding of Zaria Town itself (1536-7) is attributed to Sarkin Bakwa Turunku (1536-9), the twenty-second ruler in the Zaria Chronicle, who was perhaps a woman. Turunku is still a town with extensive ruins situated seventeen miles south of Zaria city. Bakwa is revered as a great ruler who freed the country from the terrors of the Kwararafa invasions. The ruins of the royal house and stable are usually shown, and a large mound representing the ruins of the building in which the Sarki was buried is still an object of pilgrimage. Bakwa is said to have found Turunku too small as a capital and the water supply too precarious, hence the transfer to Zaria. Zaria was named after the second of Bakwa's daughters.

The first of Bakwa's daughters, Amina (or Aminatu), reigned

probably in the later sixteenth century. She is credited by tradition with many exploits. Sultan Bello in *Infaq al-Maysur* writes: 'In these seven countries of Hausa there are many wonderful things and strange happenings. The first to whom power was given in this land, according to what we have been told, was Aminatu, daughter of Sarkin Zakzak (Zaria). She made war upon these countries and overcame them entirely so that the people of Katsina paid tribute to her and the men of Kano. She also made war on the cities of Bauchi (presumably any non-Muslim—'pagan'—country) till her kingdom reached the sea (river) in the south and west. . . . In this way Zakzak became the most extensive of all the countries of Hausa for many of the towns of Bauchi were included in it.'

The Kano Chronicle expresses the achievements of Amina in even more emphatic terms: 'At this time Zaria, under Queen Amina, conquered all the towns as far as Kwararafa and Nupe. Every town paid tribute to her. The Sarkin Nupe sent forty eunuchs and ten thousand kolas to her. She first had eunuchs and kolas in Hausaland. Her conquest extended over thirty-four years. In her time the whole of the products of the west (from Zaria) were brought to Hausaland.'

Amina is said to have built walled camps wherever she halted, so that all over Hausaland ancient town walls are called *ganuwar Amina* (Amina's wall). There is also the saying '*ya dade kamar ganuwar Amina*' (it has lasted as long as Amina's wall), that is, 'it is as old as the hills'. This tradition may be referring to the introduction of wall-building into Hausaland. Possibly, too, the various *ganuwar Amina* may have been built for defence or to mark boundaries. Whoever may have built the walls, the Amina cycle of legends merits close study, for the unravelling of the historical contexts of these ramparts might shed much light on Hausa history. Dr M. G. Smith suggests that: 'Wall-building on this scale implies mass use of corvée labour, substantial military force, intense political centralisation, warfare on an imperial scale, slavery, tribute and technological development.'

Sarauniya Amina is a semi-legendary, but probably an historical, personage the stories of whose exploits and conquests must not be taken too literally. But while making allowance for some exaggeration in the accounts, they nevertheless serve to indicate the power and influence which Zaria, under Sarauniya Amina, wielded in late sixteenth century Northern Nigeria.

## SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

The Kano Chronicle for the seventeenth century opens with the story of a very severe famine which scourged the city for eleven years, perhaps, in part, a consequence of the almost interminable wars of the preceding century. Hausa had hitherto been doubly exposed to influences from Songhai and Bornu, a situation which had given rise not only to military and political development but also to economic and social change. With the fall of Songhai, however, Bornu became the predominant power in the Central Sudan in the seventeenth century. Kano, Katsina, and Zaria all paid tribute to Bornu during the period and for some time afterwards. But clearly the most significant phenomenon of the century was the Kwararafa (Jukun) invasions from the south. In the reign of Sarki Muhammad Zaki (1582-1618) the Kwararafa are reported in the Kano Chronicle to have marched on Kano and laid waste the country around; though, out of respect for the *mallamai*, they refrained from entering the town itself. However, during their second invasion in the seventeenth century they entered the town, defeated the Kano forces with great slaughter, and chased them as far as Jelli (on the road to Daura). There is also a tradition at Misau, to the east of Kano, that the original inhabitants of the place were wiped out by an army of Kwararafa in the seventeenth century.

From the Katsina records we learn that at some date in the reign of Tar Hazo Bakki (1667-84) the city was attacked by the Kwararafa, but they were repulsed owing to the sanctity of the Katsina *mallam*, Dan Massani. Religion alone may not account for the ill-success of the Kwararafa in Katsina. Distance must have played a part also, and Bornu may have afforded some protection to Katsina. In any case, Katsina was more successful than other Hausa states in resisting the Kwararafa attacks: she was never conquered and made tributary to the conquerors as was Kano, for instance. Kwararafa forces are also said to have penetrated even as far north as Gobir.

The martial exploits of the Kwararafa in Northern Nigeria (in Bornu as well as in Hausaland) form an aspect of the history of the area about which little is known at present, particularly since the Kwararafa themselves retain little memory of the military and glorious past suggested by the extant Bornu and Hausa Chronicles.

In our consideration of the state of Bornu during the eighteenth century, we sounded a caveat about the facile acceptance of statements emphasising the weakness of the rulers and the decline of the empire. This point assumes even greater importance when we view the history of the times in the light of the Hausa records. For instance, Hassan and Shuaibu, two recent chroniclers of Zaria, wrote: 'The predominance of Zazzau came to an end in 1734 when the Beriberi of Bornu made war on all the Hausa states. It was from this time that the people of Zaria began to pay tribute to Bornu and for this reason that henceforward the Kings of Zazzau were always installed by a representative of the ruler of Bornu, the Magajin Malam; there was also an emissary of the ruler of Bornu called the Kachalla (Kacella), sent to live at the court of the King of Zazzau'. These authors have probably dated too late the beginning of the payment of tribute by Zaria to Bornu. But the tradition which they have recorded can hardly have ascribed this and other developments mentioned—particularly the Bornu invasion of the Hausa states—to the eighteenth century if Bornu was the total cipher suggested by the other traditions. Furthermore we are told in a Kano tradition that in the early eighteenth century an eclipse of the sun occurred while the Mai of Bornu was invading the city. Since a total eclipse of the sun is known to have taken place in 1734, that might be the date of the invasion. Thus both Kano and Zaria traditions agree that Bornu in the eighteenth century was not too weak to invade Hausaland.

The most important development in the military and political history of Hausaland in the eighteenth century was, on present evidence, the rise and primacy of Gobir in the north-west. Because of her geographical position and the necessity of constant conflict with the desert peoples, Gobir early acquired a more warlike reputation than her sister states. Her main weapon was a formidable army consisting largely of heavy cavalry with which she often assumed the offensive. Gobir naturally became an important buffer state keeping the Tuareg at bay when the power of Kebbi had declined. But early in the eighteenth century a rather strange alliance of the rulers of Gobir, Zamfara and Asben dismembered the Kebbi empire. According to Sultan Bello, each ally, particularly the first two, seized the towns near to him; and Sarkin Zamfara, who conquered the greater part, ruined the three principal Kebbi cities of Leka, Gungu and Surame. This led

to the abandonment of Surame around 1715 and the building of the new capital, Birnin Kebbi, by Tomo (the tenth successor of the first Kanta).

The alliance of these three kings was clearly a 'union of convenience', for there was no love lost among them. The Tuareg of Asben had continually been pressing southwards on Gobir territory and the people of Gobir themselves had covetously been eyeing the more fertile lands of Zamfara farther south, to which, as the century progressed, the Gobirawa began to gravitate. Barbari, the Sarkin Gobir, had given his sister Fara in marriage to Mairoki (Malu) the Sarkin Zamfara, and established a settlement on the official estates of the Alkali (Judge) of Zamfara. The settlement was accordingly called Alkalawa. This town was to become famous in the history of Northern Nigeria on account of its connection with the eruption of the jihād. In time more Gobirawa moved into Alkalawa and its neighbourhood. The Zamfarawa at first welcomed these immigrants whom they found useful warriors, and the Gobirawa in return pledged their friendship.

In 1764, according to Barth, Barbari, helped by the treachery of some Zamfarawa, suddenly attacked and captured Birnin Zamfara, the capital. Mairoki managed to escape, and sought refuge with his vassal, Tsaidu, the ruler of Kiawa, a town inhabited by the Katsinawa. There for fifteen years Mairoki and Tsaidu, assisted by Gozo, the Sarkin Katsina, defied the Gobirawa and finally defeated them at a place called Dutsin Wake, close to Kiawa. But Mairoki, still stricken with remorse for the loss of his kingdom, afterwards committed suicide.

Successive rulers of Gobir not only continued the struggle with Zamfara and Katsina but also fought with Asben, Zaberma, Gurwa, Kano and Kebbi. Gobir was by no means uniformly successful in these campaigns. The struggle with the Tuareg of Asben dragged on for a long time. Gobir occasionally defeated Kano but never completely subjugated the kingdom. It was only in the west, after the capture of Birnin Kwonni and the submission of Kebbi, that there was actually no threat to Gobir. But even in respect of Kebbi, one suspects that though Gobir appointed the king, Kebbi, thanks to her position and the energy of her people, enjoyed for the most part a virtually independent existence. Moreover, so much fighting during this century had its repercussions on Gobir. Under Sarkin Nafata (*c.* 1796-1802) the state

is said to have been in disorder and her power to have been weakened; Zamfara was in revolt, Katsina continued to raid, and Kebbi no longer had her king appointed by Gobir. The harsh lesson of the internecine wars in which Gobir had engaged with her fellow Hausa states was to be learned when the Fulani raised the standard of revolt a couple of years after Nafata's death.

However, while Alkalawa, the Gobir capital, was firmly and strategically established, Katsina was also gradually assuming an eminent position in Hausaland as a city of international trade and Muslim learning. One probable indication of the relative prosperity and security of Katsina is that in 1740 some Arab traders who had settled for many years in Kano moved to Katsina. The names of her present city wards also indicate the extent of Katsina's foreign trade and cultural connections. There are wards for people from Gobir, Mali, Songhai, Asben and Bornu; as well as for various trades, for dancing and for students. In point of fact, Katsina became a sort of university town in the tradition of Timbuktu, a town whose schools were famous for their Islamic scholarship and where the Hausa language attained what Barth has described as 'the greatest richness of form and the most refined pronunciation'. Katsina administration and her law courts were known for their wisdom, and Katsina manners were distinguished from those of other Hausa cities by their unmistakable politeness.

#### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Early Hausa social and political organisation was centred round the *birni*, the walled or stockaded town; as distinct from the *gari* or *kauye*, the village or hamlet. The *birni* wall usually enclosed a large self-sufficient community, which was united by trade and industry, as well as a large area of open land which was used for agriculture. Thus the inhabitants of the *birni* could support a long siege and the people of the neighbouring hamlets could take refuge within the walls in times of invasion. Gradually, the *birni* expanded through the absorption or subjugation of outlying territory. This expansion promoted simultaneous increases not only in territory but also in population and power. A Hausa state emerged when one *birni* secured the acknowledgement of a widening circle of hamlets and then of other *birnis* also. The expanding *birni* developed into a capital town whose head—the Sarki—changed

from a village to a city chief with an elaborate court and official hierarchy. The other *bimis* became subordinate chieftaincies. The earlier Hausa states were doubtless small, the sphere of influence being within a radius of only a few days' march from the capital with subject communities having vassal status and rendering tribute in grain and other local products.

Religion provided important supports for the customary social and political order, and political power was closely integrated with ritual sanction and forms. While dealing with Kano we have already noted the ritual jurisdiction and leadership which Barbushe, in association with other senior lineage heads, exercised over the Abagiyawa. Embodied in the foundation myth, the priest-king, town and regal deities, symbols and taboos were spiritual bonds which reinforced political unity.

As Islam became the religion of the ruling classes in the fifteenth century and onwards, it gradually affected the political institutions of the Hausa people. The Sarki acquired more and more extensive powers, but these were generally checked and limited by his central council composed of the chief ministers and territorial officials who, though they were acting in an advisory capacity, could not be easily ignored. Some of these offices were hereditary. Dr M. G. Smith notes that 'several offices among the Hausa of Daura and Katsina (Maradi) have been filled by members of a given patrilineage since time immemorial. For example the Galadima of Daura in 1958-9 was the forty-ninth member of his patrilineage to hold this position.'

The Galadima himself was often the heir, but in some states, e.g. Zaria, he was always a eunuch who was left in charge of the town when the Sarki and other chiefs went out to war. There was also the Madawaki (Madaki), literally 'Master of the Horse', i.e. commander-in-chief. He was actually next in importance to the king and was, under him, the commander of the army; he advised the king on the appointment or dismissal of the title-holders; he replied to the king's address on feast days; he summoned the chief councillors to their meetings; and with these councillors he chose the new king. In some states these functions were performed by the Waziri (Chief Minister). Among other officials were the Magaji (Ma'aji), Lord of the Treasury; the Yari, Head Gaoler; the Sarkin Dogarai, Head of the King's Bodyguard; and the Sarkin Yan Doka, Chief of the Police, who were responsible for the

custody of prisoners charged with serious offences, inflicted corporal punishment and acted as town criers and watchmen. Thus each councillor or official held charge of a particular department of state, subject to the Sarki's overall control.

Local government was usually exercised through district and village heads. The district heads were appointed by the king sometimes from his own or other important families, but generally from the traditional rulers of the locality. Their duties were mainly executive and administrative. Each of them had a representative in the capital, to whom the district head reported events in the district and who informed the king accordingly. Supervision of the smaller towns and the villages was also divided among the councillors and members of the royal family; but village heads, though nominally appointed by the king, were in practice selected by the people through traditional methods.

With respect to judicial affairs we learn that in early times anyone who had a complaint to make brought it before the village or district head or, if in the capital, to the king. The king sat in his compound with the Sarkin Fada (Chief Official of the Household) and others to listen to grievances. If the matter was not of great importance (not a case of murder or grievous injury) the king dealt with it himself. But if it was serious the councillors were consulted.

With the progress of Islam, the Muslim system of justice was gradually adopted. There was a separation of the executive from the judiciary. Yet the king, as head of state and supreme judge, continued to exercise judicial functions in some matters, with the advice of the Chief Alkali and other legal experts. Such matters of major importance particularly concerned land and the king's political position; cases of murder and manslaughter were also usually subject to the king's final revision.

The bulk of judicial work was, however, carried out by the Alkali, with a sole judicial function, administering the Maliki code. As the administration of law in a Muslim state required not merely a knowledge of local customs but an intimate knowledge of the *Shari'a*, it was entrusted, in the towns at any rate, to this special class of professional magistrates who were generally learned in the law and had access to libraries containing the works of eminent jurists.

In the outlying districts there were local courts from which

appeals lay to the Chief Alkali's court in the capital. Occasionally there was also a travelling judge whose decisions were also subject to revision by the Chief Alkali. In the smaller villages the judicial authority was commonly the village head, but minor offences could of course be dealt with by the heads of wards and families.

As regards taxation and revenue, with the adoption of Islam an elaborate system of taxes and dues developed from the ancient tribute in grain and other local products. These taxes and dues included the *zakat* (*zakka*), a tax on available income authorised by the Qurān for charitable purposes; the *jangali* paid on livestock; the *kharaj* (*kurdin kasa*) or land tax; and the *jizyah* (*gandu*) or capitation tax, generally levied on conquered peoples and usually paid in slaves. There were also taxes on professions, paid for instance, by craftsmen, butchers, dyers, prostitutes, dancing girls, and others. Dues were moreover levied on 'luxury' crops, such as tobacco, onions and sugar cane. Tolls were collected on the caravan routes, and fees on markets. *Gaisua* (tribute) was brought by all men visiting their superiors.

Though these taxes and dues were sanctioned by Muslim law there were, as in every other system of taxation, abuses and malpractices which the leaders of the jihād of the nineteenth century were to make so much of. Some people in the capital cities, particularly the noblemen and their connections, refused to pay tax. There were arbitrary methods of assessment and extortionate processes of collection which clearly robbed the system of its religious sanction. Collection was left in the hands of court favourites, influential men and fief-holders, all of whom resided in the capital and delegated their duties to minor officials; these in turn employed retainers and agents to collect their taxes from the villages; consequently extortion and oppression were practised, and only a proportion of the taxes collected ever reached the central authority.

At all events the Hausa kings must have realised that it was in their interest to cater for the well-being of their subjects. And the generality of their subjects who were Muslims resigned themselves to their lot, although there were periodic risings especially among non-Muslims who could be raided for slaves by the rulers with a good religious conscience. However, the Hausa kings successfully held their territories together until the outbreak of the jihād.

In conclusion then we see that, as far as our knowledge goes at present, there was no substantial political union of the Hausa states before the nineteenth century. But there were certainly occasions of association and probably even of co-operation. Such must have been the case when, for some period, one of the states (like Kebbi, Zaria or Gobir) assumed dominance over the others. There is moreover a tradition in Daura (which Palmer also reports) that while Hausaland was under the suzerainty of Bornu the heads of six Hausa states (perhaps the only one left out was Biram) used to meet annually in Daura to review 'the news of the year' which was then carried to Bornu. We learn, furthermore, that at the outbreak of the jihād, Sarkin Gobir Yunfa made diplomatic contact with the other Hausa rulers in order to state his case against the enemy and warn the others about coming events. This sensible, if belated, manoeuvre did not result in military co-operation, however; hence, until the Hausa confederacy was formed in the second decade of the jihād, the leaders of the revolt could deal with the Hausa states piecemeal.

Many times conquered, the majority of the states have nevertheless managed to preserve a great deal of their local independence down the centuries. In the absence of mountain ranges and other physical barriers, the only way of maintaining their individuality was to build walls and ditches around their principal towns. On the other hand, the very geographical configuration of the Hausa country has made social intercourse easy and indeed inevitable. The great common bonds of the Hausa-speaking peoples have been their religion and their language: the religion which they share with the rest of the Islamic world has become one of the main foundations of their culture; the language which has helped to remove misunderstandings, has always been carried with their trade goods, has become the *lingua franca* of a great part of West Africa and is, next to Swahili, the most widespread indigenous language in the whole continent.

## NOTES

1 The *mahram* a 'letter of privilege', was a document which stated that someone and his descendants were *harim*, that is, 'set apart', 'privileged'. This meant that the persons in question were exempted from things like taxes, military services, hospitality charges, etc. Quite naturally, such documents

were carefully preserved by families in order to secure their renewal by subsequent rulers. On the other hand, it is possible that the documents might have been faked or tampered with in order that their possessors might obtain the benefits which they purported to confer; as a consequence we now have to use them with caution.

2 See Section (ii) of this chapter.

3 For the bulk of the material from this point to the end of this study of Kanem-Bornu I am deeply indebted to Dr Cohen whose excellent doctoral thesis, *The Structure of Kanuri Society*, Wisconsin, 1960, is extremely useful.

4 Of the extant Hausa documents the Kano Chronicle is much the most informative. Palmer regards it as 'fairly accurate' and suggests that it acquired its present form in the late nineteenth century but was based on earlier documents and traditions. The Chronicle does not merely recount the names of kings and the lengths of their reigns but actually provides an indispensable frame of reference for any study of the early history of the region around Kano. As Dr M. G. Smith has rightly said, the document probably contains some 'errors of location in time and place', but these are not sufficiently important to invalidate entirely its use as a guide to Hausa development. The present discussion draws heavily on it.

5 Kwarau is derived from the Hausa word *kore*, 'to expel', and so means 'expeller'.

6 With regard to 'guns' (*bindiga*) at this time, it is known that the Portuguese were in communication with the Songhai empire to the west of the Hausa states during the fifteenth century and that when the Moors took Gao at the end of the next century, they found there 'a piece of artillery bearing the Portuguese arms, a small image of Our Lady, and a metal crucifix'. Also Idris Alooma of Bornu (1571-1603) probably recruited Turkish musketeers from Tripoli.

## 6 Islam in West Africa,

A.D. 1000-1800

J. O. HUNWICK

### THE ORIGINS OF ISLAM

MUSLIMS claim that Islam, in the literal meaning of the word 'submission (to God)', is the original or 'natural' religion of mankind; the natural state of man is for him to submit himself to the will of God and to worship Him. Muslim belief is that God communicated His will for mankind through a series of prophets of whom Adam was the first. The passing of time and the perversity of man caused the first revealed message to be corrupted and so other prophets were sent, among whom were Moses and Jesus, all having equal status. Their messages were in turn corrupted by man and so finally God revealed once again, and in a final form, His will for mankind in the form of the Qurān and through the agency of the last or Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad.

As far as the historian is concerned Islam, as a world force, begins at this point. Strictly speaking it begins at the point where Muhammad first claimed to receive divine revelations, in about A.D. 610 at the age of forty. He had been born into an impoverished clan of Qurāish, the leading tribe of Mecca, a flourishing commercial town situated in the chain of hills called the Hejaz which runs down western Arabia. Mecca was almost half way between Syria and the Yemen and it was there that the south-north trade route, bringing goods from as far afield as India, met the east-west route going from the Persian Gulf to Abyssinia.

Muhammad, who was orphaned in his early youth, was brought up by his grandfather and one of his uncles and at an early age began to take part in trading expeditions to Syria. At the age of about twenty-five he married Khadija, a rich widow some fifteen years his senior and took no other wife until after her death. Muhammad was inclined to solitude and meditation and every year he used to retire to a cave in the hills near Mecca during the month of Ramadan. It was during one of these retreats in about the year 610 that he first claimed to have received a divine revelation



China, particularly exemplified in common rituals. Naturally so brief a book as the Qurān—it is slightly shorter than the New Testament—cannot contain legislation for all possible circumstances. In the *Sharī'a*, the 'canon law' of Islam, second place was therefore given to the sayings of Muhammad as recorded by his Companions and handed down, and to reports of his actions similarly handed down and recorded in books. Together these are known as the *Sunna*, or established practice of the Prophet, recommended for all believers. Other subsidiary principles were also allowed, notably that of reasoning by analogy. Four distinct schools of Islamic law came to be recognised as orthodox during the first two centuries of Islam. The earliest of these in point of time, the Maliki law school, is that which prevails over most of Muslim Africa, with the exception of Egypt, the Horn of Africa and the East African coast. It is the law books of this school with their numerous commentaries and super-commentaries which are still studied and taught in Bamako, Jenne, Timbuktu, Bondoukou, Sokoto, Katsina, Bida and Ibadan, and a host of other centres of Islamic learning in West Africa.

#### ISLAMISATION OF NORTH AFRICA AND THE WESTERN SAHARA

During the first century of Islam (i.e. from 622-722) there was a mighty expansionist movement of the Arab people out of the Arabian peninsula into the lands of Syria, Iraq, Persia and Central Asia and along the North African coast and into Spain. Although this has sometimes been pictured as the greatest religious war of all times, it was in fact a simple imperialist expansion motivated more by economic than religious factors. In most of the areas conquered, the former religions of those areas, whether Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Judaism or indigenous cults, continued to survive, without generally any oppression, for centuries after the conquest by Muslim armies. Thus even in those areas where political authority was in the hands of Muslims owing allegiance to the central power of the Caliphate in Damascus or Baghdad, the actual Islamisation of the population was generally a fairly slow process of absorption. This was even more true in West Africa where Islam first penetrated into most areas not by military conquest but by the influence of traders and nomadic Muslim groups. Even when a ruling dynasty became converted to Islam this did not necessarily lead to a rapid Islamisation of the bulk of the population.

Within ten years of the Prophet's death, in A.D. 632, the Muslim armies had already gained a foothold in Africa. The old Byzantine province of Egypt fell swiftly and during the period 660-70 raids were made further into Africa along the Mediterranean coast under the leadership of 'Uqba ibn Nāfi'. Some raids were also made into the Fezzan area of southern Libya and into Morocco, but in general the resistance of the indigenous Berbers, especially in the far west, proved too strong. However, Morocco was in its turn subdued in the early years of the eighth century and Berbers began to join the Muslim armies. While the coastlands of North Africa, which were largely Christian and under Byzantine tutelage, were easily conquered, the pagan Berber tribes of the interior proved more resistant and tended to withdraw farther into the Sahara under the pressure of the Arab armies. The Arab conquerors settled in their newly won lands and married Berber women, but for several centuries remained a small ruling minority. Later in the mid-eleventh century came fresh waves of Arab immigration, spearheaded by the nomadic Banū Hilāl who displaced the pastoral Berbers and drove them deeper into the desert regions of the Sahara.

It was the nomadic Berber tribes, particularly those of the Sanhaja confederation,<sup>1</sup> who formed the chief link between Islamic North Africa and the savannah lands of extreme West Africa. One tribe of this confederation, the Lamtuna, had moved into central Mauritania in the late eighth century and later pushed farther south to gain control of the town of Awdaghost<sup>2</sup> which was the terminus of a caravan route from Sijilmasa in southern Morocco. By the tenth century Islam had begun to have some influence among the Sanhaja and this influence began to spread out further from the Awdaghost region.

There had evidently been a trade route between Morocco and the Western Sudan<sup>3</sup> since early times and after the Muslim Arabs moved into North-West Africa they began to exploit this route. During the eighth and ninth centuries the Muslim state based on Tahert in the Algerian Sahara had trading relations with Awdaghost, and in the second half of the tenth century an Arab geographer, Ibn Hawqal, reported the presence of Arab merchants there who were apparently engaged in lucrative large-scale commercial activities. He tells us that he himself saw a debit note made out against a Sijilmasa merchant resident in Awdaghost for

a sum equivalent to over £100,000 by present day values. Arab traders had also established themselves in other towns of the savannah belt; by the late ninth century we hear of them at Kukia on the Niger, a little to the south of modern Gao and they were certainly in ancient Ghana by the early eleventh century.

#### ANCIENT GHANA

The presence of a Muslim community in ancient Ghana is reported by the Spanish Muslim geographer Al-Bakrī who wrote his *Book of Roads and Kingdoms* in A.D. 1067.

'The city of Ghana (wrote Al-Bakrī) consists of two towns lying on a plain, one of which is inhabited by Muslims and is large, possessing twelve mosques—one of which is a congregational mosque for Friday Prayer; each has its imām, its muezzin and paid reciters of the Qurān. The town possesses a large number of jurisconsults and learned men.'

This was evidently the foreigners' quarter mainly inhabited by Arab merchants from North Africa. At a distance of some six miles from it lay the royal capital containing the residence of the king. Here there was also a mosque and we learn from Al-Bakrī that the king used Muslims as his interpreters and that most of his ministers were Muslims. The interpreters may well have been foreigners who had settled in Ghana but it is likely that the ministers were local men. The value of Muslim ministers and advisers lay in the fact that they would be literate in Arabic and able to record decisions and events and engage in correspondence on behalf of the king with more distant rulers or subordinates. Also, as Muslims, they belonged to the larger body politic of the Islamic world and this would make it possible to establish international relations, as we shall see in the case of Mali.

The empire of Ghana was destroyed in the late eleventh century by the Almoravids, a militant Muslim movement which originated among the nomadic Berber tribes of the Sanhaja confederation. In the early eleventh century a Lamtuna leader, Tarsina, went on pilgrimage to Mecca and on his return tried to raise a jihād, or war for the propagation of Islam, among the pagan cultivators of the Senegal river area. However, he was killed in the first year of his struggle, 1023. His successor, Yahya, also went on pilgrimage and on his return brought with him a North African preacher,

'Abdullāh ibn Yasin, who preached Islam among the Goddala but with little success. On the death of Yahya, the Goddala turned firmly against 'Abdullāh who retired to a fortified retreat (*ribāt*) on an island, probably at the mouth of the Senegal river.

Here he established a recruiting centre for zealous Muslims who were sent out to preach Islam among the Berber tribes. When these peaceful methods failed, 'Abdullāh launched a jihād with the men of his *ribāt*, who were called Al-Murābjūn; hence their name in European writings, Almoravids. The jihād was very successful and soon the Almoravids controlled all the western Sahara including the two termini of the caravan route, Sijilmasa and Awdaghast. The movement then split in two and one half pushed northward to conquer Morocco and Spain while the other turned its attention to the lands of the Western Sudan.

By 1076 the Almoravids had conquered Ghana and, although their hold on it was very loose, it led to the break-up of the empire; in the following century the area came under the control of the Susu who lived to the south of Ghana. They in turn were conquered by the people of Mali who incorporated the former Ghana territory and the Susu lands into their growing empire around the year 1240.

#### ISLAM IN THE MALI EMPIRE

The Mali empire grew up from the unification of a number of Mande chiefdoms and was already in existence in embryo in the early eleventh century. Al-Bakrī mentions the conversion of its ruler to Islam after a prolonged drought had been brought to an end by the performance of certain Muslim prayers and ablutions. The succeeding rulers were probably not Muslims but in the second part of the thirteenth century we hear of one ruler, Mansa Uli, who made the pilgrimage to Mecca some time between 1260 and 1277. The most celebrated ruler of Mali was Mansa Musa<sup>1</sup> who ruled from 1312-37 and made a colourful and very costly pilgrimage to Mecca in 1324-5. On his return he brought with him a number of Muslim scholars and ordered the building of mosques and the institution of Friday congregational prayers. Through his efforts diplomatic relations were established with Tunis and Egypt and for the first time the name of Mali began to appear on maps of the known world.

Though the rulers of Mali continued to be Muslims, they never-

theless retained many indigenous features in their court ceremonial and tolerated the existence of some positively un-Islamic practices.

In 1353 during the reign of Mansa Sulaiman, the celebrated Arab traveller, Ibn Battūta, visited Mali and resided in the capital for several months. His accounts show clearly that while Islam was firmly established at that time, the ruler also respected local custom with a remarkable tolerance. Indeed it seems clear that he dealt with his non-Muslim subjects in a wholly traditional fashion, while at the same time observing Islamic festivals and religious practices. Here is how Ibn Battūta describes the public prayers held on the great festivals, the Breaking of the Fast (*'Id al-Fitr*) and the Sacrifice (*'Id al-Adhā*).

'The people went out to the prayer-ground, which was near the palace of the sultan, wearing fine white garments. The sultan, wearing a black turban and mantle (*tailasān*), rode there-on a horse. None of the negroes wear the *tailasān* except at the two festivals, with the exception of the judge and the preacher and the jurists who wear it at all times. On this occasion they precede the sultan chanting, "There is no god but God" and "God is great". Before the sultan are standards of red silk. On arrival at the prayer-ground the sultan enters a tent set up for him in order to prepare himself. He then goes to the prayer-ground and the prayer and sermon are performed. Afterwards the preacher descends from the platform, sits before the sultan and declaims for a long while. Beside him is a man with a spear in his hand who explains to the people in their own language the preacher's discourse which consists of admonition and warning, eulogy of the sultan and exhortations to persist in obedience to him and to pay him his dues.'

After this Ibn Battūta tells of the military reviews and the entertainments of singers, dancers and acrobats. In another passage he describes the colourful ceremonial of the Mansa's court when he was giving audience to his subjects.

'(The Mansa sits on) a dais with three steps under a tree. The dais is covered with silk, cushions are put on it and over it is raised a silken dome-shaped parasol surmounted by a golden bird of the shape of a falcon. The sultan emerges from a door in the corner of the palace with a bow in his hand and a quiver of arrows on his shoulders; on his head is a golden skull-cap, held

in place by a golden turban which has edges as thin as knives, eight inches or more long. Before him go singers bearing golden and silver lutes in their hands and he is followed by 300 armed slaves.

'When he calls one of his subjects at an audience, the man removes his clothes and puts on worn-out garments and replaces his turban by a dirty skull-cap. Then he enters raising his garments and pantaloons to halfway up his shins and comes forward in a submissive and humble way and strikes the ground hard with his elbows. He then stands like one bowed in prayer listening to the sultan's words. When one of them addresses the sultan and the sultan replies, the man removes the garments from his back and pours dust on his head and back like one washing with water.'

Such practices were evidently common in many areas of the Western Sudan and persisted through the centuries side by side with typically Islamic ceremonies. Just as Ibn Battūta was shocked by the fact that young women walked naked in the streets while taking food to the sultan of Mali during Ramadan, so was the North African theologian Muhammad ibn. 'Abd al-Karīm Al-Maghīlī scandalised to learn that in the fifteenth century the Songhai, while claiming to be Muslims, still consulted their local oracles and made sacrifices at certain venerated trees and stones. In the early nineteenth century the reformer Dan Fodio had cause to preach against the Hausa custom of covering the head with dust and prostrating before the ruler.

#### ISLAMIC CURRENTS IN THE FIFTEENTH AND SIXTEENTH CENTURIES

Until the turn of the sixteenth century Islam was chiefly associated with the great urban centres of the Western Sudan and was mainly the religion of the foreign traders and of the ruling classes. It had probably made very little impression on the peasants and fisher-folk or even perhaps on the mass of the populace in the towns. By the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, however, certain new factors had begun to make themselves felt. These were the movements of two nomadic groups, the Kunta Arabs and the Fulani, and the introduction of the Qādiriyya religious brotherhood, generally associated with Al-Maghīlī.

The Kunta Arabs, who originally came from the area of Tuwat in South Algeria in the twelfth or thirteenth century, wandered

down through Mauritania into the extreme southern limits of the western Sahara and then turned east along the northern bank of the river Niger and eventually towards the Zinder area of the modern Niger Republic, some of them occupying areas en route for grazing their camels and goats while others broke off again and moved on. Under the famous Shaikh Sidi Ahmad al-Bakkā'i (d. 1504) the Kunta became the great Islamisers of the Saharan tribes and the Negro peoples of the Saharan fringes. After him the Kunta became more and more devoted to preaching and teaching and became what one writer has described as a 'clerical' tribe. Shaikh Sidi Ahmad's son 'Umar (d. 1552-3) took up his father's task with a missionary fervour, travelled widely in North Africa and the Middle East and met Al-Maghili, from whom he received the *wird*,<sup>5</sup> or chain of mystic authority of the Qādiriyya brotherhood.

The Fulani trace their origin in West Africa back to Futa Toro in Senegal, through from perhaps as early as the thirteenth century they had begun their nomadic wanderings which were to take them over the coming centuries through to areas as far to the east as Bornu and Adamawa. They are reported to have begun coming into Hausaland in the mid-fifteenth century bringing with them books on Islamic law and theology. This was not perhaps the first appearance of Islam in Hausaland, for Dyula (Wangarāwa)<sup>6</sup> traders are said to have introduced it in the previous century and linguistic evidence seems to suggest that Islamic influences came at an early stage from the Kanuri-speaking people in Bornu.

By the second half of the fifteenth century many kingdoms in the Western Sudan had Muslim rulers including Mali, Songhai, Air (based on Agades), Kebbi, Kano, Katsina and Bornu. In Air, Kano and Katsina, Islam had been fairly recently introduced and the zealotry of recent conversion was quite apparent. The Sultan of Agades, Muhammad Sotfofe (ruled 1486-93), wrote to the Egyptian scholar Al-Suyūti for advice on ruling according to Islam and so also did the ruler of Katsina. Muhammad Rumfa, Sultan of Kano, 1463-99, received Al-Maghili at his court and asked him to write a treatise on Islamic government for him. Scholars from Timbuktu passed through Hausaland in the late fifteenth century and early sixteenth century and taught in Katsina and Kano.

## ISLAM IN THE SONGHAI EMPIRE

Timbuktu, the most famous city of Islamic learning in medieval West Africa, had been incorporated into the growing Songhai empire in 1468 by the vigorous ruler Sunni 'Alī (ruled 1464-92). Although a Muslim ruler in name, he used or abused the Islamic religion according to the dictates of his own state policies. On more than one occasion he persecuted the Muslim scholars and Al-Maghīlī went so far as to adjudge him a pagan. Islam had been known in the Songhai empire since the late ninth century and from the early twelfth century the rulers apparently bore Muslim names. However, it seems likely that Islam was until the sixteenth century only the religion of the ruling class in Gao and of the scholars and teachers of Timbuktu. Even at the court at Gao it was evidently only a part of the religious cult and there was a blending of Islam and traditional Songhai cults. Sunni 'Alī, like his ancestors, rested his authority mainly on his powers as a magician of the Songhai religious system, but the power of Islam was at that time on the rise in Songhai and he felt compelled to take account of this and to try and maintain a balance between it and the indigenous religion. He performed the externals of the Islamic rites, such as fasting and prayer, though he knew so little of the ritual of the latter that Muslim scholars considered his prayers a mockery. He also showed favour to some of the Muslim scholars, though it is likely that these were the minority who could be persuaded to sanction his actions and give them the stamp of religious approval.

The situation of Islam under Sunni 'Alī in Songhai, then, was that of a balance of forces between it and the indigenous religion. At the same time strong currents of Islamic influence were being felt in the surrounding territories and in Timbuktu the learned men were already beginning to become a force of Muslim opposition to royal practices adjudged to be un-Islamic. This orthodox opposition centred round the Berber family of Aqīt who had originally come from Arawan, a Saharan town to the north of Timbuktu. From the middle of the fifteenth century to the end of the sixteenth the learned men of this family filled the post of qādī or judge in the city of Timbuktu and were known for their fearless opposition to the temporal authorities whenever they considered that their actions were not in accordance with the dictates of Islam. Twice during his reign, in 1469 and 1486, Sunni 'Alī took stern repressive

measures against the scholars of Timbuktu. He evidently considered their strict Islamic views a threat to his own authority which was based mainly on his role as magician-king. It is clear that he was fighting against a tide of Islamic pressure both within his empire and from the surrounding territories whose rulers had recently become Muslims. The critical situation of Islam and the Songhai religion is highlighted by what followed on the death of Sunni 'Alī in 1492.

On Sunni 'Alī's death his son Sunni Barou was nominated ruler but was soon challenged by one of Sunni 'Alī's former military commanders Muhammad Towri, of a Tukolor family settled in Songhai<sup>7</sup>. He three times challenged Sunni Barou to make publicly the Muslim confession of faith and Sunni Barou refused. Muhammad then took up arms against him and defeated him. Sunni Barou's attempt to rule without regard to Muslim opinion ended, therefore, in failure. Muhammad Towri, on the other hand, decided to rule with the full support of the Muslim elements and to base his sovereign authority firmly on Islam. To this end he undertook a pilgrimage to Mecca shortly after assuming power, returning from it in 1497. It was while he was on pilgrimage that the ruler of Mecca is said to have given him a sword and a turban and invested him as Caliph of the Western Sudan.<sup>8</sup> On his return he used the honorific title *al-hājj* (pilgrim) before his name in addition to the title Askia which he adopted and which was adopted by his successors.

It is the pilgrimage of Askia Muhammad that really marks the beginning of the Islamic phase of the Songhai empire. Indeed, it may mark the real conversion of Askia Muhammad himself whose ideas about Islam prior to his pilgrimage were perhaps scanty; it is common for a newly 'converted' ruler to make the pilgrimage to establish for himself a respected position among the faithful and thus to enhance his authority as a ruler. Whereas Sunni 'Alī has been described as the magician-king, we may perhaps apply the title 'pilgrim-king' to Askia Muhammad who henceforth made the fullest use of Islam as a basis for sovereignty.

Shortly after his return from pilgrimage he received Al-Maghilī at his court and questioned him closely on religious matters, particularly on who were the proper persons to advise him, how to decide whether or not a man is a pagan and how to legislate for social problems in accordance with Islamic law. Al-Maghilī wrote

lengthy replies to the questions propounded by the Askia and not only were these replies read by the Askia, but copies of them circulated in the Songhai empire and passed down into Hausaland where the scholars studied them. It was in this way that Al-Maghili's thinking came to have a direct influence on Usuman dan Fodio, the early nineteenth-century reformer who had read his work and used his arguments as authorities in justifying his jihād.

Askia Muhammad kept in close touch with the Muslim scholars, especially those of Timbuktu, and frequently visited them and sought their advice. Indeed it seems that the qādī of Timbuktu, Mahmūd b. 'Umar of the Aqīt family, was a sort of *éminence grise* whose goodwill the Askia did not wish to forfeit. His successors to the post, all from the Aqīt family, enjoyed a similar prestige, particularly Al-'Aqib (d. 1583) of whom it is related, 'He was of stout heart, bold in the mighty affairs that others hesitate before, courageous in dealing with the ruler and those beneath him. He had many conflicts with them and they used to be submissive and obedient to him in every matter. If he saw something he thought reprehensible, he would suspend his activities as qādī and keep himself aloof. Then they would conciliate him until he returned.'

The pro-Islamic policies of Askia Muhammad did not, however, mean that Islam immediately became the common religion of the state. The attitude of some of his successors towards Islam was sometimes ambivalent and they were all compelled to pay some deference to non-Islamic indigenous customs. On the other hand Islamic learning and the teaching of Islamic sciences<sup>9</sup> continued to flourish in Timbuktu until the Moroccan invasion of 1591 which brought about the final collapse of the Songhai empire and created an economic and social situation largely inimical to the pursuit of learning.

#### THE INTRODUCTION OF ISLAM TO HAUSALAND

In Hausaland Islam is said to have been first introduced in the second half of the fourteenth century by Wangarāwa merchants, though it seems likely that something of Islam would have been known before this through contacts with Bornu whose tradition of Islam goes back some three centuries prior to this. Indeed, Greenberg has argued for this on a linguistic basis by pointing out that many Hausa words which have an ultimate Arabic source bear the imprint of having passed through Kanuri first.

The Kano Chronicle, an anonymous late nineteenth-century compilation based largely on oral traditions, claims that Islam was introduced into Kano in the reign of 'Alī Yaji (1349-85). According to this work, 'In Yaji's time the Wangarāwa came, bringing Islam and numbering up to forty in all. When they came they advised the Sarki to observe ritual prayer, which he did. They appointed an imām and a muezzin and a man to slaughter beasts according to Islamic law; they also appointed a qādī. The Sarki gave orders that every town in Kano country should observe ritual prayer and they did so. He also built a rectangular mosque and the five prayers were celebrated there.'

This minor wave of Islamic influence was apparently rather ephemeral. Yaji's successor, Kanajeje (1390-1410), was a pagan. In the reign of Ya'qūb (1452-63) there was an immigration of Fulani who brought with them books on Islamic law and theology and Arabic grammar. His successor, Muhammad Rumfa (1463-99), began to pursue more active Islamic policies including the building of mosques and the observance of festival prayers. He also began to look to the Muslim scholars for advice on ruling his state and when Al-Maghīlī visited Kano towards the end of his reign he asked him to write a treatise on Islamic government for him. It was during his reign that the sacred tree of Kano (*ardēb*) was cut down—an act traditionally associated with Al-Maghīlī—marking a clear and official break with the non-Islamic past. To further rub in the defeat of the old religion a mosque was built on the site of the old sacred tree. Scholars from Timbuktu also began to pay visits to Kano to teach and preach from the last quarter of the fifteenth century and it was at this time that the *Mukhtasar* of Khalil, now the standard work of Islamic law used in West Africa, was first introduced to Kano by a visiting Egyptian scholar.

Katsina, too, has a tradition of Islam going back into the mid-fourteenth century, but Islam did not gain much ground there either until the end of the fifteenth century when Timbuktu scholars also began to visit the city, often on their way back from pilgrimage, and the celebrated Al-Maghīlī also stayed there. The Gobir area, immediately to the north of Hausaland, however, was still reported to be pagan by Leo Africanus in the early sixteenth century. By the seventeenth century Katsina itself had established a tradition of Islamic learning and produced such native scholars as Dan Marina (d. 1655?) and Dan Masanih (d. 1667), some of

whose works have been handed down to us. In the other main town of Hausaland, Zaria, Islam appears to have made little impact until after the early nineteenth century jihād of Dan Fodio. Islam among the Hausa (or Habe) was probably mainly confined to the urban areas, but in some areas the immigrant Muslim Fulani, particularly of the Toronkawa, may have converted some of the Hausa cultivators. The situation at the end of the eighteenth century reveals that Islam evidently sat lightly on the heads of the Habe rulers who were prepared to accommodate to a very large extent with pagan Hausa practice. On the other hand some groups of the nomadic Fulani held strictly orthodox views and it was basically the clash of these two outlooks that led to the early nineteenth-century jihād.

#### ISLAM IN KANEM-BORNU

The name of Kanem was known to the Arab geographers from as early as the ninth century A.D. At that time it was a loosely knit state to the north and east of Lake Chad ruled by a nomadic Negro people called the Zaghawa by the Arab writers and probably of Teda origin. In the mid-eleventh century Al-Bakrī mentions Kanem as a land of pagans in which some refugees from Abbasid persecution<sup>10</sup> were said to have taken refuge. Legend takes the origin of the ruling dynasty, the Saifawa, back to the beginning of the ninth century. The dynasty itself claims descent from a certain Saif ibn Dhī Yazan, a pre-Islamic hero of Himyar in Southern Arabia. It was around the end of the eleventh century that we first hear of a Muslim ruler, Ume Jilmī, who is said to have reigned from 1085-97. He was said to have been converted to Islam by a certain Muhammad ibn Māni on account of which he made a grant of land to the latter and his descendants *in perpetuo*. An Arab source names the first Muslim ruler as Muhammad (Dunama Dabalemi) who ruled in the mid-thirteenth century. This probably means that while the rulers of the two preceding centuries were only nominal Muslims, Dunama Dabalemi (ruled 1221-1259) was the first mai to make a significant break at a state level with local religious cults. It was also during his reign that Kanem first began to make a serious impact on the wider Muslim world. Evidence to support this is not far to seek. Bornu tradition, asserting a supernatural explanation for the civil wars which plagued the area throughout the coming century, eventually leading to the loss of

Kanem as an integral part of the empire, associates the ill fortune with Dunama Dabalemi's opening of the sacred *mune*—the Bornu 'ark of the covenant'. This, like Muhammad Rumfa's sanctioning of the cutting down of the sacred *ardëb* tree in Kano at the end of the fifteenth century, was a symbolic gesture defying the old gods and implying a correspondingly increased dependence on the religion of Islam.

On the international plane, although we know of private scholarly contacts with Morocco from the late twelfth century, the first official contacts with North Africa were made in 1257, when an embassy was sent to the Hafsid prince Al-Mustansir in Tunis. Fifteen years earlier the number of Kanem students going to Cairo for higher studies had become sufficiently great to warrant the establishment of a special college and hostel for them in a suburb of that city, the *Madrasat Ibn Rashîq*. By the latter years of the fourteenth century diplomatic relations with the Mamlûks of Egypt were strong enough for the mai of Bornu to be able to appeal to the sultan to discipline Arab nomads who were pillaging his domains.

In the late fourteenth century the Saifawa dynasty moved into Bornu and centred on Gaga (or Kaka) and the old area of the Kanem empire fell to the Bulala centred at Gaw (or Yaw) to the east of Lake Chad. Under the energetic 'Alî ibn Dunama (1476-1503) a new capital was established in Bornu at N'gazaragamu which was to be the capital until 1811. Islam was still apparently only rather superficial among the ruling classes, though its strength may have varied from ruler to ruler. 'Alî ibn Dunama himself is said to have paid daily visits to the chief imâm 'Umar Masbarma to learn more about Islam while the imâm himself struggled to enforce Islamic law and particularly to persuade the ruler and other chiefs to limit the number of their free wives to four.

Probably the most celebrated ruler of Bornu in medieval times was the mai Idris Alooma (or Alawma) who ruled from 1570-1602. He is also the best known to history, as his chief imâm, Ahmad ibn Fartuwa, wrote a chronicle of the first twelve years of his reign and an account of the wars he fought. Mai Idris was apparently a zealous Muslim and it is from his reign that the real Islamisation of Bornu dates. He set up qādî's courts and began to try and substitute Islamic law (*Shari'a*) for customary law. He also ordered

the building of a number of mosques in brick and it was in his reign that firearms first appeared in the Chad area, having been imported from the Ottoman empire, the new rising power of the Islamic world.<sup>11</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter we have considered Islam only in the states of the Sudan belt, the savannah country immediately to the south of the Sahara desert. This is because information for these areas is at present much more abundant than it is for the lands of the orchard bush and tropical forest. Until recently it had been generally assumed that Islam made no progress in these latter areas before the mid-nineteenth century, but evidence is now coming to light to suggest that this was not entirely the case. For example it is thought that Muslim traders of the Dyula-speaking group of Mandinka may have begun to settle in Begho (near Wenchi in west central Ghana) as early as the first part of the fifteenth century. They began to disperse after the break-up of the empire of Ancient Ghana in the thirteenth century and their trading activities took them far and wide throughout West Africa. They journeyed south to Begho in search of gold which they transported back to Jenne for sale and onward transportation to Timbuktu and North Africa, and thence probably into Europe which had begun to face a crisis in the supply of gold in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. Islamic influences may also have penetrated the Gonja area of Ghana as early as the sixteenth century, partly through Dyula activity and partly through the influence of Hausa traders who established trade links between this area and Kano around this time. The ruling family of Gonja was converted to Islam at the beginning of the seventeenth century. By the end of the eighteenth century there was a Muslim community in Kumasi and some of the rulers' closest advisers were Muslim; in fact one of the Asante rulers, Osei Kwame (1777?-1802), is said to have been deposed on account of his partiality towards Islam.

Though it is yet too early in the study of Islam in West Africa to make any firm pronouncements about the way it spread or the influence it had on the course of African history before the nineteenth century some tentative remarks may be made.

In general the spread of Islam in West Africa until the nine-

teenth century was by means of the peaceful settlement of Muslim merchants in urban centres and the missionary influence of nomadic Muslim groups as they wandered in search of pasture. Even less is known about the influence of the latter than the former. The kind of pattern of Islamisation in the large urban centres and seats of government would seem to be as follows: Muslim merchants in pursuance of their commercial activities would arrive in certain centres and settle. The chief items they wished to purchase were gold, kola nuts and slaves. In return for these were bartered the imported goods of North Africa: cloth, horses, swords, utensils, and the all-important staple item from the central Sahara, salt. Along the lines of communication were established staging posts where some of the merchants also settled; communication could be more easily established by these Muslim merchants through their literacy, however defective, in the Arabic language.

Their ability to read and write and communicate over long distances would render them valuable in advising the ruler and through their skilful trading activities in major commodities they often gained monopolies which gave them an economic importance in their area of activity. In one way or another the religion of the outsiders began to interest either the ruler or his court circles. In the early stage only such ideas or practices as might supplement or augment local beliefs and practices would be made use of, in particular the use of talismans and charms for protecting the king and his soldiers or for use against enemies or for producing rain.<sup>12</sup> The religion itself, with its impressive ceremonies of prayers, fasting and ritual slaughter of animals and above all its holy book the Qurān, considered by Muslims to be the very words of God, would no doubt have excited the awe of the local inhabitants. Respect would begin to increase for the Muslims and their apparently powerful religion to the point where the ruler would declare himself a Muslim and therefore expect his court to follow him. At this stage any deep knowledge of Islam was probably lacking and it may be that rulers merely saw in Islam a new cult to add to their existing cults or a new and powerful element to blend into their own systems.

In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries new currents of Islam began to sweep through West Africa and we see rulers such as Muhammad Rumfa in Kano and Askia Muhammad in

Songhai endeavouring to strengthen Islam in their territories and embark on programmes of Islamic reform; a little later Idris Alooma in Bornu attempted the same. After the deaths of these energetic Muslim rulers their successors were often less enthusiastic about Islam and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries we see a general decline in the fortunes of Islam and an increasing degree of accommodation with the indigenous cults. It was the result of those processes which led to the emergence of militant Islamic movements—jihāds—in the first half of the nineteenth century.

## NOTES

1 The Sanhaja confederation consisted of three tribes: the Goddala, the Lamtuna and the Masufa. They wore the mouth-veil, or *lithām*, and were hence nicknamed *al-mulath thimūn*, wearers of the mouth-veil.

2 Awdaghost is now no longer an inhabited city but the French scholar Mauny believes he has identified it with some ruins at Tegdaost in the extreme south of modern Mauritania.

3 The term Western Sudan is used to designate the open savannah lands that lie between the southern fringes of the Sahara and the orchard bush lands from the Lake Chad area to the Atlantic. Central Sudan is employed for the same type of lands between Lake Chad and the White Nile, while Eastern Sudan is used for the lands adjacent to the banks of the two Niles.

4 See Chapter 4 on the Empires of the Western Sudan where Dr Awe writes of the contrasting points of view of traditional and Islamic sources.

5 The *wird* of a mystic brotherhood (*ṭarīqa*—path), of which there are a large number in the Islamic world, consists of certain passages of the Qurān, special litanies and the repetition for a stated number of times at various hours of the day of certain formulae (e.g. *Allāhu akbar*—God is Most Great; *astaghfir Allāh*—I ask God's pardon; or one or more of the ninety-nine names of God). The *wird* can only be passed on by a senior initiate into the brotherhood and the special formulae are a closely guarded secret. Every adherent of a *ṭarīqa* can trace his spiritual genealogy back through those who have handed down the *wird* from the founder of the order.

6 The Dyula, also called Wangarāwa, are primarily a Muslim trading class of the Maudinka.

7 Following the view of V. Monteil (*L'Islam noir*, p. 69) who opposes the view of Frittingham and others that he was a Soninke.

8 The accounts in our sources do not speak with one voice on this. One state that he met the Abbasid Caliph in Cairo who made him his deputy for the Western Sudan. While this sounds more plausible on the surface, the account which attributes this action to the ruler of Mecca is given by a man who actually accompanied Muhammad Tawri on his pilgrimage.

9 The principal Islamic 'sciences' are theology (*ʿilm al-dīn*), Qurānic interpretation (*tafsīr*), Tradition of the Prophet (*ḥadīth*), law (*fiqh*) and Arabic grammar (*naḥw*).

10 When the Abbasids came to power in the central Islamic world in 750 they undertook a systematic liquidation of members of the former Umayyad ruling dynasty.

11 For a more detailed treatment of the reign of Mai Idris and his successors, see Chapter 5.

12 In the late eighteenth century Mungo Park makes the following observations when travelling near the borders of modern Senegal and Mali: 'These saphies are prayers, or rather sentences, from the Koran, which the Moham-medan priests write on scraps of paper, and sell to the simple natives, who consider them to possess very extraordinary virtues. Some of the negroes wear them to guard themselves against the bite of snakes or alligators. . . . Others have recourse to them in time of war, to protect their persons against hostile weapons; but the common use to which these amulets are applied, is to prevent or cure bodily disease—to preserve from hunger and thirst—and generally to conciliate the favour of superior powers, under all the circumstances and occurrences of life . . . notwithstanding that the majority of negroes are pagans, and absolutely reject the doctrines of Muhammed I did not meet a man, whether a bushreen (Muslim) or Kafir (pagan), who was not fully persuaded of the powerful efficacy of these amulets . . . it is not in the doctrines of the prophet, but in the arts of the magician, that their confidence is placed.'

## 7 The Peoples of Senegambia

FLORENCE MAHONEY<sup>1</sup>

and H. O. IDOWU

THE peoples under consideration occupied territory which today lies within the states of the Senegal, the Gambia and Portuguese Guinea, along the Atlantic coast, and Mali in the interior. Europeans of the sixteenth century called this the upper Windward coast.

Unlike the lower Windward coast described in Chapter 8, this region has no high mountain ranges which separate the coast from the interior. The area is generally low-lying, well-watered by creeks and navigable rivers which linked the coastal peoples with those of the far interior. Behind the mangrove swamps of the lower river banks lay fertile alluvial lands for rice cultivation, such as in the Casamance, the Geba and Nunez valleys. In the Senegambia region, the sandy soil was particularly suited to millet and groundnut cultivation, though rice was also grown. Apart from the Futa Jallon highlands (in present-day Guinea) there are ironstone cliffs in Senegambia. It is this region which extends from the semi-desert conditions of the Senegal to the virgin forest of the Ivory Coast that forms the West Atlantic Circle.

Westermann and Baumann have shown that this Circle contained an extensive block of peoples who, while they did not constitute a unity, because of racial and linguistic differences, yet from the point of view of ethnography formed an ensemble. For they were all Negroes, notwithstanding their diversity, and spoke related languages. Through the work of Greenberg, it is now clear that all the languages in this area are part of the Niger-Congo family: Tukulor of Futa Toro, Serer and Wolof of Senegambia, Jola of the Casamance, Mandyako, Balante and Bayot of the Bissagos Isles, all are West Atlantic languages. Even Fula (Peul, Fulani) which used to be classified as of Hamitic origin, has been shown to belong to this group. Mande languages, too, form a sub-group of the Niger-Congo family; among them are Soninke (Serahuli), Malinke (Mandinka), Bambara and Dyula.

## RELATED PEOPLES WITH A COMMON CIVILISATION

The primitive civilisation of these coastal peoples was influenced by migrations from the Western Sudan, that is, a north-south movement of pastoral Berbers and Fula, and an east-west migration of agricultural Mande peoples. The merging of the two civilisations—a Sudanic culture on a paleonigrific base—produced what has been described as a 'neo-Sudanic' civilisation by Westermann and Baumann. Murdock, too, agrees that inter-tribal contacts and borrowing in the savannah produced a kind of cultural homogeneity; so that the original differences between linguistic groups in the West Atlantic Circle—the Atlantic tribes, the Mande and the Kru tribes—have become blurred.

The classic type of indigenous civilisation in the upper part of this Circle was found in what is today Portuguese Guinea, especially in the Bissagos Isles amongst the Bayot and Balante. The Tenda (of whom the Koniagi formed a tribe) who lived in the interior, to the east of the Balante were, like them, essentially palaeolithic. In contrast to these peoples, the Wolof of Senegal to the north-east of the Circle were the most distant from the intrinsic West Atlantic type. Their culture had been influenced, not only by immigrant Moors and Fula, but also by Islam.

Generally, however, it was Mande-speaking peoples who most influenced the culture of the majority of the tribes living in this Circle. For their predominance indicates that, prior to the rise of the empire and civilisation of the Mali Empire in the thirteenth century, Mandinka (Malinke) had left the Niger basin and penetrated the original Atlantic tribes. Their expansion was possibly stimulated, Murdock believes, by the development of Sudanic agriculture which enabled them to spread towards the coast and displace the indigenous hunting, fishing and fruit-gathering peoples in places suited to the cultivation of Sudanic crops, like rice.

Indeed, rice planted on hill slopes or in swamps was the crop which dominated the centre of the Circle, and represented a real contribution of neo-Sudanic civilisation. On the outskirts of the forest, and principally in Senegambia, millet dominated. Finde and groundnut were grown alongside millet. All tribes of this Circle were agriculturalists who cultivated crops in furrows and used the same implements, especially the hoe. Thus in the

economic field, one finds one of many common traits among these peoples of the West Atlantic Circle.

Some of them also showed a tendency towards livestock under the influence of pastoral Fula. The Koniagi, a semi-nomadic people, for example, bred large cattle, as did the Fula, though the Koniagi were primarily agriculturalists. Even where heavy rain in the forest zone prevented serious rearing of large herds, tribes like the Bayote and the Papel were exceptions, for important herds were found among them.

Other common traits among the peoples of this Circle were apparent in traditional forms of secret societies and initiation rites, often the very source of the secular and religious life of the tribe. Westermann and Baumann suggest that before the penetration of Islam, the paleonigrific divinity was the Earth herself, whose cult was intimately bound up with the chief and the whole tribe. They argue further that the stone circles of Senegambia were sacred places for the celebration of the cult of the land; for every year the people brought offerings of the produce of the earth there. They also use Henry Parker's evidence to support their argument: that 'black animals' were slaughtered at these sites, and their blood made to flow into a hole in the earth.

Oral tradition, however, suggests that the circles were built round burial mounds of kings and chiefs in pre-Islamic times, burial in this region following a similar pattern to that of the Sudanic empires. With Islamisation, holy persons as well as chiefs were buried in this way in Senegambia, and the sites might have become places of worship. Today it is not unusual to find offerings of vegetables, tomatoes and peppers laid on the stones.

No exact dating has yet been given for the origin of the stones, though it is likely that an approximate date will be possible when the finds of the 1965 excavation have been analysed, and the archaeologist's report made available. Meanwhile, it is popularly believed that the stone circles were built by the Serer or Jola, because the custom of 'tumulus burial' is still practised by both tribes. Governor Palmer in 1931, however, suggested that the builders of the circles might have been the peoples of Ancient Ghana, where this burial custom was extensively practised, and many of whom emigrated after the fall of that empire. These are the people called Soninke (because they remained pagans), or Serahuli in the Gambia.

In social organisation, too, there were many common factors, the most interesting of which was perhaps the indications of the existence of a matrilineal law in the West Atlantic Circle, especially within royal families, before the penetration of patrilineal Mande, or of Islam.

Even the political constitution of these tribes had a large degree of uniformity; the most characteristic of which was the absence of large states such as were found in Mande domains of the Sudan. Yet the neo-Sudanic institution of monarchy was found in many areas. In others, the clan or extended family system survived without change.

#### WOLOF ORIGINS

The Wolof are concentrated in Senegambia, in the north of this Circle, but very little is really known of their origin, though Wolof oral tradition contains numerous references to migrations and conquests in which many other ethnic groups—Berber, Fulbe, Serer, Mandinka—were involved. It is believed that they once occupied extensive areas to the north of the Senegal river, but that invasions of Fulbe and Berbers of Tekrur drove them southwards to the region between the Senegal and the Gambia rivers which they now occupy.

The kingdom of Tekrur, founded in the ninth century, had become the home of pastoral Berber tribes driven southwards by Arab invasions of North Africa. In Tekrur they had intermarried with the Negroes there, the ancestors of the Tukulor, some of them gaining political and social influence. Delafosse suggests that originally the Tukulor were closely related to the Serer, who at a later date separated from them. Indeed, Trimingham calls the Tukulor 'proto-Serer', and adds that not only the Tukulor and the Serer, but also the Wolof shared a common ancestry. What seems clear is that the Negroes of Tekrur on the Senegal (later known as Futa Toro) were the result of the mixture of many ethnic groups. Because the Tukulor were the first Negroes to accept Islam, about the tenth century, they became missionaries among the Wolof, Fulbe, Mandinka, and conducted widely celebrated Islamic schools throughout the western Sudan until recent times. In 1350, however, the state of Tekrur was conquered by the Wolof.

It is necessary to consider another ethnic group in the region of the Wolof—the Fulbe, who retreated before the advance of the

Berbers and lived in closer contact with the Negroes than did the Berbers. Because of the affinity between Fulbe, Tukulor and Serer languages, linguists have suggested that the Fulbe, when a relatively small group, adopted the language of the Negroes among whom they lived. From this area, Fulbe nomads emigrated all over the Sudan, spreading the language from the Atlantic to the shores of Lake Chad. It is interesting to note, however, that the Tukulor call themselves 'Halpularen', meaning 'those who speak Peul' (Fula).

Wolof culture, then, absorbed diverse elements; and today it has little that is not shared in some degree by neighbouring peoples. Islam, for example, and with it the *Shari'a*, came from the Moors; and the new faith brought the same set of beliefs, similar dress and etiquette to them as it did to the Fulbe and Mandinka. The conversion of Wolof chiefs to Islam was, however, superficial, and was intended to protect their subjects against the jihāds of the Moors. They also saw the advantage of having 'Marabouts' or 'white Bischerins' from Morocco at court. For these men could read and write, and make amulets which they wore round their necks and those of their horses for protection against all dangers.

They also learnt horsemanship from the Moors, who brought them Arab horses from the interior; later they bought Cape Verde horses from the Portuguese. Valentim Fernandez himself recorded that the king of 'Gyloffa' at the entrance of the river Senegal commanded 8,000 horsemen, though he alleged that horses were bought more for prestige than for war, since horses could not fight in the forest zone. Yet in the Gambia the cavalry formed an important part of the fighting force of Mandinka kings.

Originally, all Wolof states owed allegiance to the ruler of Jolof (known as Burba Jolof), from which centre Wolof domination spread westwards to the Atlantic coast, and southwards to the banks of the Gambia, making tributaries of Mandinka states along its lower course. Thus five major states, Kayor, Baol, Walo, Sine, and Saloum on the Gambia, came to regard Jolof as their territorial head. In the sixteenth century, Kayor revolted and became independent, and subsequently conquered Baol. The other Wolof rulers refused to accept the new leadership, and formed independent states too. By this period, the growth of the overseas trade had seriously affected the economic power of Jolof, which was cut off in the interior, with no trading port either on the Senegal river or the

coast. It was inevitable that her prosperity and therefore her political power, should decline, while the wealth and influence of the coastal states, Kayor and Baol, increased.

Fernandez explained that the subjugation of Sine by Jolof was particularly difficult because of the terrain—bushes and woods and streams—which could only be penetrated through narrow passages. Several times an invasion was attempted, but each time it failed. War canoes, each carrying sixty to one hundred men, under captains, guarded these passages. This was the country where the Serer, who had separated themselves from the region of Jolof, had settled. Here they had evolved a peculiar form of government, in contrast to that of the Wolof; for they would accept no king or chief. Neither were they influenced by Islam, but remained idolaters.

#### WOLOF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION

Wolof kingdoms were a typical example of neo-Sudanic monarchical organisation. The Wolof, as Gamble says, developed an elaborate system of government in which a noble class dominated the country, and elected rulers 'whose functions were to ensure the power of the state by leadership in war, and to bring prosperity through the exercise of magical power.' The earliest descriptions available of Wolof chiefs occur in the writings of Alvise Cadamosto in 1455:

'The kingdom (of Senega) is not hereditary, but commonly three or four lords (of which there are many in the country) choose a king to their liking (yet always of noble parentage) who reigns as long as he pleases them. They often dethrone their kings by force; and the kings many times render themselves so powerful as to stand on their defence. . . . This king has no certain revenues, but the lords of the country, to court his favour, make him presents every year of horses . . . and other beasts, such as cows and goats; also pulse, millet, and such like things. This king likewise lives by robberies, and forcing some of his subjects and those of neighbouring provinces into slavery, part whereof he employs in cultivating the lands assigned him, and sells the rest to the Azanaghi (Moors) and Arabian merchants, who trade here with horses, and other things, as well as to the Christians, since trade has been opened between them.'

The organisation of trade will be considered later; but an important point to notice about the Wolof political system is that it was autocratic. Wolof rulers and lesser chiefs had to show themselves strong and prosperous, otherwise they ran the risk of being displaced. For this reason, they often surrounded themselves with warriors (often of slave origin), dependents (generally young, unmarried men), and *gewel* or *griots* (who sang their praises). These groups both constituted their power and were a sign of it.

It was a system of government which contrasted sharply with that of their neighbours, like the Mandinka, as Francis Moore, an English trader in the Gambia in the eighteenth century, discovered. He wrote that the Wolof king of Saloum was 'so absolute, that he will not allow any of his people to advise with him, unless it be his Headman (and chief slave) called Ferbro (viz. master of the Horse). . . .' A Wolof ruler appointed local chiefs (often not of noble birth) over groups of villages. He gave them presents and wives, and in return they collected for him taxes in kind—cattle, grain and woven cotton cloth—keeping a share for themselves. Revenue was derived from recognised taxes imposed on traders, from cattle received from Fula nomads (whom the ruler protected against raids by other chiefs), from fines, presents, and tribute from peoples recently conquered.

#### THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Women themselves played a significant role in the Wolof political system. The head of the women in the kingdom held the title of *linger* (*lynguere*). She was normally the ruler's mother, or, in some cases, a sister (his father's sister or cousin). She, too, had a number of dependent villages which cultivated her farms and paid tribute to her; in coastal states, she derived an additional income from the salt industry. Courts placed under the jurisdiction of female chiefs dealt with women's matters, cases of adultery, etc. In the Wolof state of Walo, a woman could even succeed the ruler, and take the title of Bur (ruler).

Indeed, succession to ruling positions in the Wolof states was formerly transmitted through females. Gamble found that in Walo, succession went from a chief to the eldest son of his sisters, though rivalry between sons and sisters' sons often resulted in armed conflict. In Sine and Saloum, the Bur had to be of *gelowar* (noble) origin through his mother, and no account was taken of the status

of the father. In Baol and Kayor, too, the candidate for chieftainship had to belong to one of the noble matrilineages, and at the same time be descended in the male line from the first independent ruler of the state. Jolof was the only Wolof state in which succession followed the male line.

After election, a Wolof ruler had to undergo certain rituals designed to mark his change in status and to ensure the prosperity of his chiefdom. Westermann and Baumann state that this isolation of the king before his enthronement, partly for instruction, was found among other West Atlantic people like the Temne of Sierra Leone. Another common practice was for the death of the king to be kept secret for a long time. When a Wolof ruler died, he was buried in secret in his house or compound, though the corpse was simulated and carried to a public burial ground, all the people participating in the feasting and dancing which accompanied this.

#### SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

So elaborate and rigid was social stratification with freemen (*jambur* or *gor*) and slaves (*jam*), that the freeborn were organised hierarchically, with royal lineages at the top, and peasants, smiths, leather-workers and *gewels* on the lowest rungs of the ladder. Slaves formed a class on their own. The Wolof despised those members of society who were potters, workers in wood, blacksmiths, but regarded leather-workers as a caste superior to other craftsmen. Even if a man did not practise the traditional craft of his father he did not lose his low caste status.

The caste system, though particularly rigid among the Wolof, was not peculiar to it. Noble and low caste groups were also found in other tribal communities in the West Atlantic Circle. Among the Fulbe of Futa Toro there were low castes too: the *laubee* (woodworkers), the *aulabe* (praisers), the *wambabe* (musicians), the *mabo* (professional weavers). The Mandinka, too, accepted the division of society into castes.

In all these communities, despite their low caste status, blacksmiths were men of considerable importance. In the days of tribal warfare, it was the blacksmith who made spears and knives and lances, and, at a later date, bullets, too, and repaired guns. Through his occupation, he even assumed power as an intermediary in settling disputes. Among the Tenda and other groups

in this Circle, the smith was often the chief of the secret society, and exercised great authority over the tribe.

The *gewel*, too, held a special place in society (as he does to this day). Only he could play a traditional instrument, or shout the praises of the ruler, and recite his genealogy. Each major freeborn lineage had its attached *gewel*, who knew and recounted its history; and at social functions provided entertainment for guests (play-acting, story-telling, acrobatic dancing, etc.). Among the Wolof he was the confidant of the chief; he accompanied him to war and urged on his armies with martial songs. Indeed, some *gewels* were greatly feared and often amassed considerable wealth.

All organised and settled communities in this region followed a uniform pattern of domestic slavery. Slaves were generally divided into two categories: first, those acquired in war or raids or by purchase, who could be sold; and second, those born in the household who were considered as members of the family, and could not be sold except for very grave offences. Indeed, slaves of a royal household enjoyed greater power than many freemen. Some of them were advisers to chiefs; they published their orders and saw that their commands were carried out. From an economic viewpoint, slaves were valuable property; and they also had prestige value. In the early nineteenth century, a French traveller named Durand estimated that in Mandinka society, only one-quarter of the people were born free. Three-quarters of the population were domestic slaves whose primary task was to till the earth for the masters.

#### MANDINKA STATES

The states organised by Mande-speaking peoples along the Atlantic were not as isolated in the tropical forest zone as Murdock suggests. He argues that they remained relatively unaffected by subsequent cultural advance in the Western Sudan, but contact with the interior could never have been entirely lost. Legend even has it that it was one of Sundiata Keita's generals, Amari Sonko, who, having fought several battles, subjugated Barra, Koular and Baddibu in the lower Gambia, and formed them into one kingdom. It is not without reason that for generations the Sonko have provided the chiefs in the Barra area. Sometimes by peaceful penetration, sometimes by force of arms, the

tribes along the Gambia and adjacent areas were subjugated by the lieutenants of the Mali empire.

The hegemony of Mali did in fact extend over a vast area for more than two centuries, and facilitated the expansion of peoples. In the fifteenth century, Cadamosto reported that the Mandinka of the Gambia regarded the Emperor of Mali as their overlord. The Wolof of the Gambia told another explorer, Diego Gomez, that the Bur of Mali controlled all the interior. One consequence of a vast empire like that of Mali was the growth of trading colonies over a wide network of trade routes, which in turn facilitated the movement of agriculturalists. Thus the Mandinka absorbed diverse elements into one culture.

Trimingham has explained how this worked in practice. The rulers of conquered states were often recognised and their organisations respected, as long as they swore allegiance and paid tribute to their new overlord, the Mansa of Mali. He invested such rulers with his authority and gave them a Mande title. To some of these tributaries the Mansa appointed a Mandinka resident called Fari-ba (Great Chief), whose main function was to keep an eye on the ruler and ensure that tribute was collected and transmitted to Mali. The Fari-ba could, if necessary, claim troops from the local ruler. Sometimes these resident governors were called Faren.

It was the Faren of the fief of Cabo (Cabou or Gabu) situated to the east of the river Geba, to whom Mandinka chiefs in the Gambia paid tribute. Cabo, in turn, paid tribute to Mali, so that the Mansa of Mali was in fact the overlord of all territories conquered by his lieutenants. Oral tradition has it that it was the ruler of Cabou who gave substantial help to the Mandinka in their struggle against the Jola on the south bank of the Gambia, and enabled them to establish political control over Combo. Once the new rulers had settled in the Gambia, they tended to give up traditional names of Mali for local ones, the 'Bojangs' of Combo, for instance, had been 'Contehs' in Mali.

#### POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The pattern of political organisation was the same in all Mandinka states. A hierarchy of kings (Mansas), chiefs, village heads and elders constituted the government of Barra, Baddibu, Niani, Wuli, Cantora and the majority of the riverain states. Portuguese explorers of the fifteenth century who entered the Gambia had to

...their traditional at the courts of rulers described by them as Mansas. Among these were Baurmansa and Nuimimansa (Nuim was another name for Barra).

According to the record of Valentim Fernandez, the nobles in Mandinka states were called *foroes*, and wielded great influence in society. They were in fact the officers, or governors of the king, and were highly respected. With growing Islamisation of this region, the title of these officials became *al-cadis*. It was on the industry and wisdom of these officials, rather than the administrative ability of the Mansas, that the stability and prosperity of the government depended. These district heads distributed land, administered justice in minor cases, collected the king's customs (taxes), and, in general, kept the machinery of state going.

To quote Francis Moore: 'If a person wants anything to be done by a good number of people, the best way is to apply to the alcade (*al-cadi*), who will agree with you about it, and order people to make dispatch with it; but if a factor does not take care to keep in with the alcade, he will seldom or never get things done as they ought to be.' In short, the *al-cadi* was an official of actual and potential authority, who might one day become king when it was the turn of his town to provide a candidate. The danger of this system, however, was that rotatory succession was itself an occasion for intrigue and rivalry between collaterals.

The Mandinka language early became the *lingua franca* of much of this region, partly because of the hegemony of Mali and the trading capacity of the Mandinka. Indeed, Moore reported that among who could speak this language could travel and trade with great facility from the mouth of the Gambia to the Upper Niger & language frontier for Mande and West Atlantic tribes.

#### THE ORGANISATION OF TRADE

Long distance trade in this region was conducted by specialists Ansaraka, Dyula and Sorahulu. Over many centuries, the Dyula formed trading communities along a vast network of trade routes with the consequence of creating domestic slaves who could be used to make long expeditions in pursuit of trade. Fittingham states that by the time Europe discovered the coast, hundreds of settlements in the Western Sudan were under their control. Long distance trade was virtually monopolised and conditions had it that it was 'love of commerce'.

that first brought Mande-speaking people to the very mouth of the Gambia.

Setting out from a large trading town on the banks of the Upper Niger, a caravan of Dyula and Serahuli merchants would take the long and hazardous route westwards, which would eventually lead them to Portuguese, British and French factories near the coast. As the caravan moved from town to town with its train of asses and slaves carrying merchandise, other merchants would join it, every merchant with his own consignment of slaves laden with bundles of cotton cloth, gold, elephant's teeth (ivory), beeswax and hides, and sometimes civet cats and monkeys for European merchants; and local iron, sweet-smelling gums (incense), corn and shea butter for the coastal tribes. He had to be a man of astute judgement, who, by diplomacy, could reduce the amount of customs he was otherwise obliged to pay to all alcaldes in whose towns he stopped to trade. Duties were particularly high on the return journey of the caravans from the coast, when the caravans carried a variety of European goods: blankets, woollen and cotton cloths, including blue and red bafts, beads, brass basins, writing paper and latterly, rum and brandy, pistols, gunpowder and gunflints.

This long-distance trade was controlled, not by coastal peoples as Europeans thought, but by the rulers of interior states. Kingdoms like Bondou, strategically situated between the upper Gambia and Senegal rivers, became important entrepôts for a diverse trade. Bondou also commanded the overland route from the Gambia to the goldfields of Bambuk. Such a trading centre was a hive of commercial activity; and heavy duties imposed on traders strengthened the economic and political power of its ruler. Thus he was able to bring pressure to bear on traders (by closing trade through his territory) as a political weapon against rivals whenever circumstances demanded it.

Trade, in consequence, had its setbacks at every stage. Often, political alliances between rulers formed a net in which the long-distance trader was caught. His movements might be restricted or accelerated from one kingdom to the next depending on whether those kingdoms were enemies or allies—Richard Jobson, an English trader of the seventeenth century, asserted that Islam was a passport for many a merchant. This was true, within limits; there is a story told of a company of Serahuli merchants shaving

their heads (an outward sign of a believer) in order to secure a safe passage through war-ridden territory. Yet the Muslim trader was not always treated as 'a privileged person' who could 'follow his trade, or course of travelling, without let or interruption of either side', as Jobson thought.

#### FULBE STATES

The states of Futa Toro, Bondou and Futa Jallon, came under the influence of Islamised Fula and Tukolor and were highly centralised. Bondou was the earliest of the theocratic states founded by the Fulbe in many parts of West Africa. Philip Curtin writes that the dominant traditions of this state assert that it was founded by Malik Si, a religious leader from Futa Toro in the seventeenth century, who took the religious title of Al-Imam (leader of prayer at the mosque). In Bondou, and later in Futa Jallon and Futa Toro, this religious office developed into a political office. Malik Si had such religious prestige that he had obtained the cession of territory in Bondou (without conquest) from a neighbouring ruler, who saw the spiritual advantages to be derived from such a neighbour. Si then settled with relatives and followers from Futa Toro, and immigrants from as far away as the Wolof States. In short, Bondou opened its frontiers to all strangers.

Mungo Park, travelling through Bondou in the late eighteenth century, described its inhabitants as 'more immediately under the influence of the Muhammadan laws' than he had found in Mandinka states along the Gambia. Durand, a French traveller, confirmed this observation, even though he, too, entered Bondou when its rulers were not as fervently religious as their forbears had been. He wrote that the Al-Imam was revered for his sanctity and valour, and 'has the absolute confidence of his own subjects, as well as of the neighbouring states, in so much that people come from all parts to buy his *gris-gris* (charms) and to kiss his feet'.

The pastoral Fulbe who immigrated into the Gambia never attempted to organise states of their own along that river. They preferred to live in small communities attached to the capitals of Mandinka states. There they received protection from the Mansas in return for keeping their herds and flocks. It was not till the latter part of the nineteenth century that economic reasons forced successive bands of Fulbe from Futa Jallon towards the upper Casamance and so to the south bank of the Gambia, where they

overran some Mandinka states and established the state of Fulladu, under Musa Molloh.

#### THE JOLA, FELOUP, BALANTE, PEPEL

Very little has been written about the Jola, Feloup, Balante and other tribes who lived in the well-watered areas of Vintang creek (a tributary of the Gambia), along the Casamance, the Geba and Nunez valleys, and in the Rissagos Isles. All these peoples spoke related languages, and traded with each other. The Pepel, particularly, were a seafaring people, who engaged in a coastal trade in the Isles and voyaged as far as the Cape Verde islands. This was a region rich in foodstuffs—rice, millet, yams, palm-oil—and trade goods for Europeans. The beeswax of Fogni was in great demand by European traders for its superior quality, beautiful pagne cloths of numerous colours and patterns woven by Mandyaka were exchanged for European cottons, and rice, which was very plentiful in the Casamance, was also among the exports from these parts.

All these peoples preferred to live in small hamlets and villages, and authority rested in the hands of the heads of families. Fernandez described the 'king' of the Balanga as a poor, miserable man who lived by his own labour like any other man. He found that the custom among the Feloup, who lived along a tributary of the Casamance river, was to choose a man 'with little sense' as 'king', but who could punish crimes without mercy. Indeed, all the Feloup were warriors, and greatly feared by their neighbours. The Jola, along the main valley of the Casamance, while also living in small communities were, according to Portuguese sources, tributaries to a king called Casa Mansa, a Mandinka ruler who owed allegiance to the overlord of Cabou. Fernandez adds that trade attracted many Portuguese Christians, permanent residents and merchants to the mansa's court.

The Jola who were distributed along the Vintang creek on the south bank of the Gambia, an area otherwise known as Fogni, recognised an overlord, whom European traders and officers called the 'emperor' of Fogni. For it was with him that they negotiated commercial treaties. Yet, this was also a decentralised and fragmentary 'empire' of isolated villages under village heads, who were independent of each other, but who would always unite against a common enemy. Like other rulers, the 'emperor'

received tribute from his subjects. Portuguese sources record that the king of the Feloup, for example, notwithstanding his insignificance, received a quarter of the property—cows, wine, rice, oil, etc.—from every subject, and on a man's death, inherited everything that he owned, including his wives.

Numerically, the Jola were an important tribe in the Gambia, but sheltered behind Vintang Creek. Fogni was isolated from the rest of the riverain states (though physically accessible by waterway). It was the political system of these people which virtually failed to be influenced by other cultures or to spread their own. The Jola, in fact, were ultra conservative, preferring to preserve their own customs and to avoid cultural contact with tribes different from themselves.

#### PORTUGUESE MULATTOES

The story of the peoples of Senegambia before 1800 would be incomplete without the Portuguese Mulattoes, a recognised community of mixed Portuguese and African parentage who were distributed along the Senegal, the Gambia, and other rivers to the south. From the latter part of the fifteenth century, a number of Portuguese colonists had settled in villages in this region and taken wives or mistresses from the local women; and though many of these men may have succumbed to malaria, Portuguese influence long survived them. For, not only did they introduce new plants from their colonies in the New World and the Spice Islands, and new words into the vernacular, they also improved the boat-building craft and seamanship of coastal tribes and produced the Portuguese Mulatto, who was to assume great importance during the slave trade.

Over many generations, the Portuguese had become 'very near as black' as the Africans with whom they lived. In certain towns in the Gambia, like Gillyfree and Tancrowall, there were districts reserved for them. It was an arrangement probably aimed at protecting a small Christian community from pagan and Islamic influences; and indeed, the flock remained faithful to the Roman Catholic church, and obedient to the Bishop of St Jago in the Cape Verde Islands (who sent them priests every year to perform the rites of the church). Religion, then, was a distinguishing feature between the Portuguese Mulattoes and their Mandinka neighbours, and so was the Portuguese language which was never

completely lost. After Mandinka, the *lingua franca* of the River, Portuguese Creole, 'a bastard sort of Portuguese', was next in importance, and sooner learnt by European traders than any other language there; even African linguists and interpreters needed it for transacting business.

The more industrious of this community engaged in trade, not only along the Senegal and Gambia valleys, but southwards from Vintang Creek to the Portuguese colonies on the Cacheo and Jebra rivers. It was the wax of Fogni—a lucrative commodity in Europe—that these mulattoes would buy in large quantities, 'melt and purify . . . form into cakes and send . . . to Cachaux (Cacheo)', where magazines were established. As entrepreneurs, or, as agents for trading companies like the Royal African Company in the Gambia, they gave invaluable service.

The Mulatto trader provided a point of contact for African and European in the River when it was a flourishing entrepôt for slaves. He undertook trading ventures into the interior, and so familiar was he with conditions in interior states, that some believed that it was possible to employ him for explorations as well as for trade. But the economic depression which resulted from the destruction of James Fort in 1779 by the French (during the American War of Independence), and the gradual withdrawal of many traders from the Gambia to the Senegal, hastened the decline of the Portuguese Mulatto. It was, however, the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 which completed the ruin of all middlemen, since there were now fewer vessels to purchase their slaves.

Yet by this date they had left their mark on the River—as shrewd men of business, as boat experts, as skilled mechanics and builders. Indeed, Portuguese Mulattoes influenced indigenous architecture by the juxtaposition of their solid and spacious houses with the less durable round mud huts of their Mandinka neighbours. Raised two or three feet above the ground, their long rectangular houses contained several rooms, the piazza, or open vestibule, being a distinguishing feature. In their gardens, they planted ornamental trees for shade, and fruit trees for food. It was not very long before the king of Barra and his courtiers were constructing similar residences for themselves. So that the economic decline of the Portuguese Mulattoes never meant their complete loss of influence in the Gambia.

In conclusion, it is necessary to emphasise that there was great

diversity of peoples in the West Atlantic Circle, but that an underlying homogeneity of culture, and sometimes of political organisation existed. Our evidence indicates, further, that there was relative stability within these West African states before European contact. Indeed, some of them must have been quite prosperous. This account then of the peoples of Senegambia and its environs is an indication of the kind of historical material currently available, and the opportunities for further research.

## NOTES

1 The original version of this chapter was produced during the Workshop at very short notice by Dr Mahoney and Dr Idowu, and has since been completely rewritten by Dr Mahoney.

## 8 Peoples of the Windward Coast

A.D. 1000-1800

CHRISTOPHER FYFE

### GEOGRAPHY

CAPE Palmas, the southern tip of Liberia, forms a geographical frontier. Early European navigators named the land that lay north of it the 'Windward Coast'—and beyond it the 'Leeward Coast'. Thus they distinguished the exposed Atlantic shore from the sheltered shore of the Gulf of Guinea. As this Windward Coast formed something of a political as well as a geographical unit, I am using the old name to describe the area now occupied by the modern states of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

High ranges of iron-bearing mountains separate this Windward Coast from the interior. On the far side rise the Niger and Senegal rivers. On the coastal side, too, rivers flow down to the Atlantic, at first rapidly as the land falls sharply away, then slowly as they move over the fifty to eighty miles of coastal plain, then sluggishly as they emerge through swampy deltas and sandbars into the sea. Hence they do not form long avenues of communication into the interior (like the Niger and Senegal), for rocks and rapids on their upland course prevent them being easily navigable. Surf-beaten sand beaches fringe most of the long coastline, though in the Cape Palmas region there are dangerous rocks jutting out into the sea.

A few mountain clusters rise over the flat coastal plain, notably at Cape Sierra Leone, Cape Mount and Cape Mesurado. The high range at Cape Sierra Leone has forced the river that flows beside it into a deep channel, a magnificent natural harbour, the only one on the coast. Until the nineteenth century the whole area was covered with thick primeval forest. So this south-west bastion of the West African bulge formed a geographical and ecological unit. Even today the plane passengers from Conakry to Roberts Field look down on what seems one country.

The geographical setting in which the peoples of the Windward Coast lived affected their history. The mountains and forests protected them from invasions by the rulers of the vast empires in

Here, then, we see linguistic evidence giving us clues to migration routes and settlement patterns, and showing us that the Windward Coast peoples have a very long history.

#### BOTANY

There is an indigenous African rice, *Oryza glaberrima* (different from the Asian rice usually eaten today). Botanists believe it was first cultivated round the middle Niger. If they are right, it shows that Africans learnt for themselves to cultivate the soil, without being taught by outsiders. From the Niger, rice cultivation spread into the forest country.

Until then the Windward Coast peoples probably did not farm at all, but lived by hunting, fishing and gathering wild fruit and vegetables. They must have lived a wandering, unsettled life, always moving on to find new food supplies. But once they began cultivating rice they could settle in one place if they wanted to and grow enough to live on. They could build permanent houses and form settled communities. With an assured food supply the population could expand. Agriculture brought a complete revolution in their way of life.

All over the Windward Coast rice became the main diet for the farming peoples. But a few miles beyond Cape Palmas at the Bandama river (in the modern Ivory Coast) there is a 'food frontier'. On one side the people eat rice; on the other they eat yams. So the Kru peoples, whose language relates them with the peoples to the east, are related by their diet to the peoples on the west.

#### SEROLOGY

Human blood varies in composition from one individual to another. Some genes are present in some people, absent in others, and people can be categorised according to their blood groups. Blood groups can cut across members of a community, even of a family (as you will know if you and your family have ever had blood tests). For though genes are inherited, they do not necessarily occur in the same pattern in parents and children.

But there are some blood groups which tend to recur in certain communities. One of them is the so-called 'sickle-cell' trait. Until about ten years ago this was thought to be a purely African trait. But medical research has now shown it to be connected with

malaria, and it has been found among peoples outside Africa too, in places where malaria is endemic. Those who have it are usually immune from malaria. So, as they survive malaria, and those who lack it are more likely to die, the number of sickle-cell people tends to increase in malarial areas.

Historians have been trying lately to see whether they could find out about migration patterns by studying blood groups. So far the results have been disappointing. But there is one successful demonstration of the method in the Windward Coast area. The Kru people are almost devoid of the sickle-cell trait. Yet all around them it is common. This confirms that the Kru have long been a closed community who have not intermarried with their neighbours.

These examples of how historians can employ unusual techniques in order to study the past demonstrate that history can be a lively study. It can be related to many kinds of human activity and knowledge, and can be constantly expanding its frontiers. You can make it far more than just learning details written down in books, which is what historians of Europe have so often tended to make it.

#### THE PRE-EUROPEAN PERIOD

Unwritten sources, then, have given us a very generalised picture of the Windward Coast in the pre-European period. They have shown us that it has been long inhabited by peoples who lived there in small isolated communities. Originally they lived nomadic lives, getting food as best they could; then they learnt to plant rice and could settle in permanent towns and villages. Nevertheless they were not completely sedentary, for there were migrations along the river courses.

Written sources enable us to fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge of this period. During the sixteenth century several Portuguese writers published descriptions of the country, taken from accounts by sailors or traders who had visited it. They describe the country as the Portuguese first saw it, before it was influenced by Europe.

From them we learn that the small communities lived in political as well as geographical isolation from their neighbours. There were no big empires: it was a country of small independent states each with its own government. Some were ruled by kings—but

they were not absolute monarchies. The kings had councils to advise them, and could not disregard their council's advice. If a king wanted war and his council did not, there was no war. Thus they were more democratic than the government the Portuguese knew at home, where the king had far greater powers (indeed more democratic than most of the governments of sixteenth century Europe).

Societies also exercised great power. One of the earliest Portuguese accounts describes an institution that may well be the Poro Society that still flourishes in the area. Societies had many functions (as they still do), partly political, partly religious, partly educational. Modern educationists should not forget that formal education (as distinct from the informal education children receive in the family or neighbourhood) has always been conducted in this country by the societies. Some writers imply that there was no education in West Africa until Europeans opened schools. Far from it. Societies were teaching children long before Europeans were ever heard of.

Islam had not spread to the Windward Coast peoples in the sixteenth century. Though occasional Muslim traders may perhaps have wandered through the country they had not disseminated their religion. All the peoples (including the Fulani in Futa Jallon) still practised their own indigenous religions at this period.

Religious and political organisation were combined: there was not the divorce of sacred and secular that modern Christians make. No distinction was made between the laws of God and the laws of man. All authority was backed by religious sanction. Economic life, too, was inextricably bound up with religion. Religious rites were an essential part of a farmer's or hunter's or fisherman's activities, and could not be dispensed with.

Everyone was continually conscious of unseen presences, particularly of the deceased members of the community. Indeed the communities were not just communities of the living, but of the living and the dead. This tended to make people conservative, unwilling to adopt new ways, for fear of upsetting their dead members by introducing something unfamiliar. So the innovator was not praised as a hero, but regarded with suspicion. He might even be convicted of witchcraft for disturbing the existing balance of social life.

Social order came first. Individuals had to subordinate their own wishes to those of the community and work together for the common good. Land was communally owned, and could not be permanently alienated to an individual and his family. No one could become much richer or more powerful than his neighbours. Even kings, as we have seen, had their power limited. They were also obliged to share their wealth with their subjects, they could not build it up for themselves exclusively. Everyone had inescapable rights and duties towards everyone else. Hence the sick and aged were assured of a place in the community, and had to be supported.

These, then, were orderly, well-organised states, whose members had been instructed in childhood what their rights and duties were. Many old history books assert that the Europeans brought 'law and order' to Africa. Plainly this is not so. The Windward Coast peoples (and indeed peoples all over Africa) had their own institutions for preserving law and order, long before European contact.

I am not trying to romanticise the pre-European past, or to make out it was a Golden Age. There were no doubt plenty of wars between the Windward Coast peoples; many of their customs were certainly very brutal. But the peoples of Europe, too, were fighting one another constantly at this time, and practising many brutal customs. The pre-European period in Africa may well have been a period of 'tribal warfare', but it was just the same in Europe (only the European peoples are not usually referred to as 'tribes').

Their religious feelings were expressed in music, dancing and sculpture. The wood-carvings from this era have long vanished, rotted away or eaten by termites, but many stone carvings survive. Soapstone carvings, called by the Bulom *nomoli*, and by the Kisi *pomta*, have been found all over the country the Kisi and Bulom originally inhabited. They also carved ivory. The Portuguese were so impressed by their skill that they commissioned them to carve ivory cups, spoons, hunting horns, etc. for them. These carvings, obviously African in workmanship, often include Portuguese designs, like coats of arms, as well as African ones. Many are preserved in museums in Europe.

These small isolated states tended to be economically self-sufficient. But few communities can produce all they want, so they

had to trade with one another for what they lacked. Those who lived by the sea made salt which they traded with their inland neighbours. In Futa Jallon the Fulani and Susu smelted iron and wove cloth to use and trade with. So there were regular trading patterns.

In the pre-European period, then, the Windward Coast peoples lived in small independent states. Each had its own form of government which preserved law and order with religious sanctions. They were tenaciously attached to tradition and mistrusted innovation. They had educational institutions to instruct their children how to behave. They produced beautiful works of art. They traded with their neighbours for the commodities they lacked, and sometimes fought wars against them.

Though today the kind of static, unenterprising life they lived may have little appeal (particularly to young people), we can still perhaps find something to admire in it.

#### THE PERIOD OF EUROPEAN CONTACT

The Windward Coast peoples first saw Europeans in the fifteenth century when Portuguese (and later other Europeans) began sailing down the coast and stopping to trade. Their contacts with them were trading contacts. Europeans did not try to conquer the country; they were content to trade. So they were known as customers, not as invaders.

No European power ruled any part of the Windward Coast until the end of the eighteenth century. Though two British forts were built there in the seventeenth century, one on Bence (also called Bance, and Bunče) island in the Sierra Leone river, and another on York island in the Sherbro estuary south of it, the British did not own them. Sovereignty remained vested in the African rulers, and the British occupiers paid them rent. It was the same in other parts of West Africa.

Apart from the inhabitants of these forts (and York island was soon abandoned), the Europeans who traded in this area lived unprotected among their African customers, alone or in small groups. They often lived with African wives. Hence by the seventeenth century there were small but influential Afro-Portuguese communities in some parts. In 1728 the British fort on Bence island was attacked and destroyed by a force led by an Afro-Portuguese called Lopez, who had quarrelled with its governor. In the

eighteenth century several families descended from English fathers and African mothers rose to prominence in the Sherbro country—notably the Caulker, Tucker and Rogers families, some of whose descendants are distinguished people in Sierra Leone today. But the number of Europeans was never large. Over the whole area they would normally be numbered by tens (sometimes perhaps fewer) than by hundreds. So their descendants formed only a tiny proportion of the population.

Few Europeans penetrated far inland. Some historians have alleged that they were kept out by malaria-bearing mosquitoes. But there are quite as many mosquitoes on the coast (if not more) than there are inland. Nor did mosquitoes keep Europeans out of the West Indies, where they are very prevalent, or out of Bengal, in India, one of the unhealthiest places in the world. It is rather that on the Windward Coast (as along most of the coast of West Africa) the coastal peoples were determined to keep the export trade in their own hands, and prevent anyone from the interior of the country trading with Europeans except through them. In this way they could fix prices to suit themselves, and make the inland peoples pay them commission. They were always afraid that if Europeans went inland they might settle there and trade direct with the inhabitants, thus breaking their own monopoly as middlemen. So to maintain their privileged position they kept firm control over their European customers and prevented them moving away.

Europeans were useful. They introduced manufactured goods which could not otherwise be obtained. Hence they were welcome visitors, even if they took away slaves in return for the goods they brought. There was little else on the Windward Coast that they were interested in buying at this period. There was only a little gold available here, brought from inland. Ivory was plentiful at first, but gradually the elephants were reduced in number. There was also a limited demand in Europe for camwood from which red dye can be made, which was available in some parts of the country. And at the eastern end of the coast there grew malaguetta pepper, which was also saleable in small quantities in Europe. But from the sixteenth century onwards the main export commodity was slaves.

In the early days of the slave trade some European ships' captains seized people from this part of the coast and carried them off as slaves. Sir John Hawkins is a notorious example. But when

this happened the relatives of those who had been kidnapped could retaliate on the Europeans settled among them. Living unprotected as they did, it was in the interest of such Europeans to see that trade was organised in a peaceable way. Otherwise they would suffer themselves. Trading regulations were gradually accepted. For instance a captain would send some of his crew on shore as hostages for his good behaviour. Thus mutual confidence was established between trading partners, African and European.

The brutal, inhuman slave trade was fitted into the pattern of life on the Windward Coast without apparently disrupting it in any drastic way. The existing institutions continued, adapted to new situations. Criminals, for instance, were now sold to Europeans, instead of being put to death or punished in some other way. Wars became more profitable, for prisoners could be sold. We cannot estimate the effect on population numbers, for we have no statistics. Hundreds of thousands must have been sold from the Windward Coast during the slave trading period (a late eighteenth century trader estimated about three thousand annually from the area). Yet there is no evidence of depopulation—no evidence that this thickly forested country supported a larger population in the fifteenth century, before the trans-Atlantic slave trade began, than it did in the eighteenth century after three centuries of slave trading. Emigration does not necessarily lead to a decline in total population. During the nineteenth century, for instance, millions—men, women and children—left Europe for America, yet the population of Europe rose steadily.

The sea coast now became the economic heart of the country, and the river mouths and offshore islands the centres of trade. The deep anchorage of the Sierra Leone estuary particularly attracted European ships. There they could put in safely for repairs, could cut firewood from the wooded slopes, and take on fresh water from a stream which flowed down from the mountains (the famous King Jimmy Water).

In the mid-sixteenth century the coastal peoples were attacked by invaders from inland. The Portuguese called the invaders 'Manes'; they were probably people in the Mandé speech-group. They were ferocious fighters who were said to eat their prisoners. This terrified their opponents: a Bulom king gave himself up to the Portuguese as a slave rather than fall into their hands. They descended either the Mano or Moa rivers to the sea, then turned

north up the coast and captured the Sierra Leone watering-place, the most important trading centre in the country. The Bulom and Temne could not stop them. The Portuguese gave the Manes help, and profited by the war, for as the Manes moved up the coast they followed in their ships, guided by the light of blazing Bulom and Temne towns, to pick up the fugitives as slaves.

The Manes then struck inland towards Futa Jallon. A Portuguese came with them, armed with a musket, still a rarity in Africa. But the Fulani and Susu combined against them, their army led by a small detachment of Fulani cavalry. The Manes were defeated and driven back to the coast. There they settled down, and seem, in time, to have become absorbed among the Temne and Bulom inhabitants.

This war left a permanent mark on the trade patterns of the country. Until the invasion the Fulani and Susu used to come down regularly to Sierra Leone to trade. After it, in order to avoid their enemies, they took to going due west to the Rio Nunez and Rio Pongas (in what is today the Republic of Guinea).

Some fifty or sixty years later there was another invasion, along much the same routes, by another Mande-speaking group allied apparently to some Kru-speaking peoples. As a result of these invasions the Vai (who speak a Mande language) became established on the sea coast at the mouths of the Mano and Moa. The Kono, inland from them, also probably took part. Tradition says the Kono felt tired and sat down inland, while the more adventurous Vai went on to the sea.

Other migrants in the Mande speech group, like the Mende, also spread over the coastal plain, though slowly and peaceably, not in violent invasions. The Mende were still an inland people at the end of the eighteenth century; not until the nineteenth century did they begin to settle on the sea coast.

By the late seventeenth century Temne were in control of the Sierra Leone watering-place, a source of wealth as well as trade to those who owned it. Its ruler made European ships' captains pay customs duties for water and firewood, and for the right to trade. Kings and chiefs in other places also regularly levied duties from their European customers, and were paid rent by those who were settled within their jurisdiction. Thus Europeans became a source of income for the coastal rulers who were now assured of a regular revenue.

This fiscal revolution does not seem to have made any radical change in the political structures of the country. Despite their revenues the rulers remained the prisoners of constitutions which obliged them to share their wealth with their subjects. Hence the restrictions on absolute rule persisted. Kings were not able to amass capital and dominate their subjects. In any case, they received their revenue in the form of non-capital-creating consumer goods like textiles, hardware, spirits and tobacco, which might confer prestige or comfort, but could not be used to create new wealth.

Nor did any kingdom grow strong enough to dominate its neighbours (like Asante and Dahomey down the coast). It remained a country of small states. No doubt the thick forest, which was not felled until the nineteenth century, except round towns and villages, helped to prevent the formation of large political units.

The rocky Kru Coast round Cape Palmas was too dangerous for ships to approach. Instead they would anchor out at sea, fire a gun, and people would come out in canoes to trade. This was a risky business. No Europeans lived on land on this rough shore to act as hostages (as elsewhere on the coast), so traders who ventured on board risked being carried off as slaves. This was the only part of the coast where kidnapping was common. Elsewhere, as we have seen, it was exceptional, once trade was systematically organised.

The Kru peoples were at home in and on the sea, expert fishermen, swimmers and canoeists. During the eighteenth century they began leaving home to seek their fortunes abroad (for there was little trade at home), working on board European ships. Used from childhood to swimming and managing canoes, they could easily perform such tricky tasks as bringing a canoe loaded with slaves through heavy surf to a waiting ship, which most sailors would find very difficult, if not impossible. So they were highly valued as members of ships' crews (their name 'Krumen' was often incorrectly written 'Crewmen'). They worked on naval ships as well as merchant ships, and soon came to be regarded as indispensable. Sometimes they took jobs on shore at European trading establishments, where they worked as competently as at sea on manual tasks. By the late eighteenth century wherever Europeans were working Kru were usually working too.

A Kru would leave home as a boy and work with a gang of his countrymen, giving his wages to an older man, his master and protector. When he grew older he kept these wages and trained boys himself. Every few years he would go home for a few months with the goods he had earned, and take a new wife. Eventually he retired for good and settled down with his wives as a leader of the community.

The effect of European contact on the Windward Coast from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century was, therefore, primarily economic. There was little political influence. Political life continued much as before, scarcely affected by Europeans.

Superficially there were outward changes in the way of life. Some men took to wearing European clothes. Women usually preserved their own style of dress, but made their clothes from imported material. Kings and important traders might use chairs and tables, imported from Europe; some adopted knives and forks for eating. A successful Euro-African trader in the Sherbro country in the mid-eighteenth century, Henry Tucker, had a sideboard in his house with silver plate displayed.

People also learned the trade language spoken on the coast, a compound of English, Portuguese, French and Spanish. Relics of this type of speech are still preserved in the Krio language of Sierra Leone, and in the so-called pidgin spoken in some parts of West Africa.

Sometimes a friendly slave trader would take an African customer on a visit to England. Children were also sent to England to school; in the 1780s there were said to be over fifty African children at school there. On their return these children usually became traders. None introduced the technical skills or improved farming methods they might have seen in England. When the slave trade provided such an easy livelihood there was little incentive to try anything else. In any case the peoples were so deeply set in their traditional ways that any attempt to change them would have been fiercely resisted. Religion, law, social organisation and farming methods were all bound up together, so that any change seemed a threat to society.

Hence it is not surprising to find that Europeans had no significant religious influence at this period. A few Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries visited the Windward Coast in the seventeenth century and baptised some kings and their subjects, but

without any lasting effect. The missions soon faded away, and only a few Afro-Portuguese were left professing a nominal Christianity. Nor can one at this period speak of the 'moral' influence of Europeans, for their activities were overwhelmingly immoral, based as they were on the evil trans-Atlantic slave trade.

#### ISLAM AND THE WINDWARD COAST

The Windward Coast was beyond the political control of the inland Muslim empires of Mali and Songhai. Nevertheless itinerant Muslim traders were certainly travelling through it by the early seventeenth century, and perhaps long before.

Islam was a religion which suited traders. But it was unattractive to the members of the farming communities of the Windward Coast. For, as we have seen, the political and social organisation of these states was firmly grounded on the sanctions of their own religions. If a man became a Muslim, and gave up the traditional rites and practices of his people, he cut himself off from them completely. He made himself a kind of outlaw who could have no part in their communal life.

Also many Muslim beliefs and practices were unsuited to such farming communities. Islam encourages its adherents to accumulate as much wealth as they can (so long as they give a certain proportion of it away in charity). But in the communally organised states, traditional custom prevented the accumulation of wealth by individuals. The Ramadan fast is a severe ordeal for a farmer who has to do hard physical labour; it is much less painful for a trader. Nor could settled farmers have much hope of making the pilgrimage to Mecca which Muslims are supposed to make. Itinerant traders, always moving about anyway, might hope to get there one day.

So though the Windward Coast peoples might admire Muslims, and welcome them to their villages—partly because they brought trade, partly because of the magic powers they claimed, of being able to make charms, or being able to see into the future—they had no inducement to adopt their religion, unless they were going to leave home themselves and become traders. So long as the social bond of their own life remained intact Islam had no place for them.

Among the Fulani and Susu farmers and cattle-owners in Futa Jallon there was a community of Muslim Fulani traders and scholars. Muslim Mandinka traders also lived there. They resented

being subordinated to the non-Muslim Fulani and Susu rulers of the country. They felt it humiliating to be ruled by men who practised religions they despised. At last they determined to put up with it no longer. In about 1725 they joined together to wage a holy war, or jihād, against the non-Muslims. A pious scholar, Karamoko Alfa, led them. After some initial setbacks he was replaced by a more competent military leader, Ibrahima Suri. There was a long, bitter war, and at the end the Muslims were victorious. The inhabitants of Futa Jallon were forced to adopt Islam or else were driven away. Futa Jallon became a Muslim state. Its ruler took the title 'Al-mami', a version of the Arabic word for 'Commander of the Faithful', a title traditional in Islam. The office was held alternately by a member of Karamoko Alfa's family and a member of Ibrahima Suri's family. They succeeded one another at the end of a recognised period of years, the new Al-mami replacing all the officials with his own relatives and adherents. Hence Futa Jallon was a kind of 'two party state'.

The Futa Jallon jihād was a turning point in the history of West Africa. It inspired other Muslims, and was the first of a series of jihāds which eventually brought an enormous area under Muslim rule. They include the famous jihāds of Usuman dan Fodio, and of Al-hājj 'Umar.

Though the countries bordering on Futa Jallon were not affected directly by the jihād they were affected indirectly. Many Susu refused to adopt Islam and left the country. Some moved towards the coast where they dominated the Baga and Temne. A group of Susu who were allowed to settle at Port Loko, an important trading centre, eventually seized control of the town. Some moved eastwards into the mountains. There the Yalunka, a Susu sub-group, founded a kingdom of their own, Falaba, which resisted Muslim encroachments until 1884. Others made themselves chiefs among the Kisi, Koranko and Limba.

Many Muslims too—Fulani, Mandinka and converted Susu—moved out as individuals from Futa Jallon where they had triumphed in war, to seek their fortunes in the neighbouring countries. Some conquered chiefdoms for themselves. Some were asked to take over rule by peoples who were attracted by the prestige of having a Muslim ruler. All over the area it became usual, by the end of the eighteenth century, for peoples to be ruled by aliens, some of whom also practised an alien religion.

More Muslim traders moved in, too, attracted to places where their own co-religionists held power. In the upper reaches of the St Paul river (in the modern Liberia) Mandinka traders gradually gained political control of the region. But nowhere did the subject peoples adopt Islam as their own religion.

For though Islam spread widely here in the late eighteenth century it did not spread deeply. The mass of the peoples still remained firmly attached to their own faiths, the bond of their political, economic and social life.

#### CONCLUSION

Superficially this was a period of great change on the Windward Coast. Europeans arrived, bringing new economic opportunities, and harnessing the country to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Islam was entrenched in Futa Jallon and was diffused over the coastal plain.

But there was no fundamental change in political and social organisation, or in the ecology of the country. The thick forests were only cleared in small patches round the settlements, and continued to isolate the inhabitants from one another. The peoples were still divided into small self-governing units, organised in traditional ways. They still resisted new ideas, and clung tenaciously to what they had received from their forefathers.

## 9 Asante and Fante A.D. 1000-1800

A. ADU BOAHEN

### AKAN MIGRATIONS

THE Asante and Fante are part of the Akan or Twi-speaking peoples who constitute more than forty per cent of the population of present-day Ghana. The others are the Akyem, Kwahu, Akwapim, Gomoa, Assin, Twifu, Wassa, Denkyira and Nzima. That all these peoples are of a common origin, or branches of the same family, is borne out by three important considerations. In the first place, all of them speak dialects of the same language which belongs to the Kwa sub-family of the Niger-Congo family as classified by Greenberg. (It is interesting to note that Temne, Baule, Evalue, Guan, Ewe, Fon, Yoruba and Ibo belong to the same sub-family.) The various dialects of Twi result from the impact of the languages of the peoples already in the area on that of the incoming Akan. Secondly, the customs, usages, religious beliefs and symbolism of the domestic as well as the political institutions of all these peoples are virtually identical.

The third, and in many ways, the most interesting and crucial evidence of the common origin of these peoples consists of the eight exogamous matrilineal (Abusua) and eight patrilineal (Ntoro or Kra) groups (or lineages) into which they are all divided. The eight *matrilineal* groups and their moieties are Ekoona and Asokore, Oyoko (Anona in Fante) and Dako, Asona and Dwum (or Dwimina), Aseneē and Adōnten, Agona and Toa, Bretuo (Twidan in Fante) and Tena, Asakyiri and Amoakaade, Aduana and Atwea and Aberadi. The principal *patrilineal* groups are Bosommuru, Bosompra, Bosomtwe, Bosommaram, Nketia, Poakwa, Afram, and Abankwaade. Every Akan belongs to one of the two groups by inheritance from his mother and his father. Not only are all these divisions found among all the above groups of peoples, but an Akyem who belongs to the Asona clan considers an Asante or Assin or Denkyira, belonging to the same clan, as his brother or sister, observes the same taboos with him, looks on the same animal as their totemic animal, shares funeral expenses with

him, and cannot marry him (or her). In other words, clan membership, affiliations and loyalties completely cut across tribal and political boundaries. Since the system of inheritance not only of property but also of stools is matrilineal, membership of the matrilineal groups is far more important and consequently often better remembered and cherished than that of the patrilineal groups. All the Akan states that arose in modern Ghana—Twifu, Adansi, Denkyira, Fante, Akwamu, Asante, etc.—were in the final analysis the result of the imposition of the power of a lineage or family belonging to one of the matrilineal groups on the pre-existing clan groups.

Where did these Akan originate from? Some scholars have traced them as far as Mesopotamia and Meroë, others to North Africa, and others again to ancient Ghana. My own surmise, based mainly on the oral traditions of the matrilineal groups I have referred to, is that the Akan evolved and developed in the savannah region to the north of the forest belt of Ghana between the Black Volta and the Comoé rivers, that is, in the area occupied today by Tekyiman, Bona and Gyaman. The very fact that the language, social and political institutions of all these peoples are, by and large, the same wherever they are found to this very day suggests that these institutions were evolved before their migration into the regions they now occupy.

We do not yet know when these migrations took place but we can safely say at this stage that they occurred between A.D. 1000 and 1300. This exodus southwards may have been caused by population pressure as well as by political upheavals in the Western Sudan. The migrations probably took place in two large groups of different families or clans, along two main routes. One group, represented today by the Wassa, Gwira, Ahanta and Sefwi, who are found mainly to the west of the Pra river, must have moved directly south along the banks of the Tano and Ankobra rivers. The second group, consisting of the modern Adansi, Asante, Akwamu, Assin and Fante, might have migrated first in a south-easterly direction and then down the Pra and Ofin rivers. They appear to have settled first at the confluence of these two rivers and then dispersed again, some moving northwards ultimately to found Asante, others moving south-eastwards to establish Akyem and Akwamu, and southwards to found Fante and Aguafo. These Akan reached the coastal regions of modern Ghana

probably during the latter part of the thirteenth century or the beginning of the fourteenth century. At about the same period the Ga-Adangbe and the Ewe moved into Ghana from farther east, the areas of present-day Dahomey or southern Nigeria.

Neither the Akan nor the Ga-Adangbe found the forest and the coastal districts of Ghana unoccupied. It is clear from oral traditions as well as linguistic evidence that these immigrants met the Guan who were living in these areas in different degrees of concentration and political organisation. These Guan are represented today by the Anum, Kycerepong, Bassa, Breku, Etsii, Afutu and Asebu.

When these Akan arrived, they pushed the Guan eastwards and south-eastwards and either totally or partially assimilated them culturally and ethnically, a fact which mainly explains the linguistic differences found among the Akan today. Indeed the Fante today are not a homogenous group but rather a mixture of four or more peoples—the Fante, the Assin (Arcanes of the records), the Asebu, the Afutu (Fetu of the records), and the Etsii, with the dominant Fante imposing their culture and language (which underwent considerable change) on the others. This process of cultural assimilation, however, took place over a long period of time and has not yet been fully accomplished, since pockets of pure Etsii and Afutu are still found here and there in the Fante region.

Prior to this cultural assimilation, the Akan peoples first established trading contacts with the Guan and the Ga-Adangbe peoples mainly for fish and salt. These contacts eventually extended as far east as Benin, as far west as the Ivory or Quagua Coast (mainly for cloth and beads), and as far north as Begho and Gonja, and on to Mali and Hausaland. Using documentary sources, Wilks has shown that as early as 1400, this pre-European trade was being carried on along at least three main routes. The first of them radiated from the region of Elmina, through Twifu, Ahafo and Domaa to Begho in Banda and then northwards to Jenne and Timbuktu on the Niger. The second began in the region of Cape Coast and went through Assin, Adansi, Tafo, and Wenchi to Begho; at Tafo another route branched off in a north-easterly direction to Hausaland. The third linked Accra, the Volta gorge and the Afram plains with the great markets of Hausaland and Mali via Begho. Salt and cloth from the coastal regions, and kola-nuts,

gold dust and slaves from the forest areas, constituted the main commodities exchanged for items of Turkish, North African and European manufacture, as well as rock salt brought across the Sahara. It should be noted that this northern-oriented trade was never eliminated by the development of the Atlantic trade.<sup>1</sup>

As a result of this commercial enterprise and the activities of some of the members of the lineages or families belonging to the matrilineal clans, a number of states began to emerge in the forest

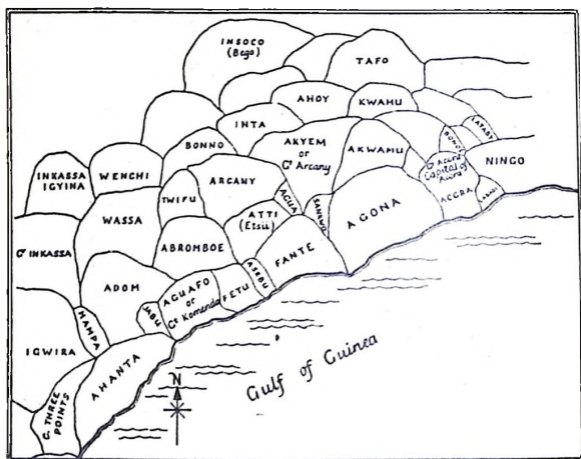


Fig. 6 The Gold Coast in 1629.

and coastal regions of Ghana from the fourteenth century onwards. The earliest Portuguese accounts of the Gold Coast as well as reports sent by the governors of Elmina Castle (especially by Pacheco Pereira), between 1490 and 1520, make it clear that by the end of the fifteenth century, a number of full-fledged states were in existence on the Gold Coast. On a seventeenth century Dutch map of the Gold Coast published in 1629 (Fig. 6), all these coastal states are shown, and a number of interior ones in addition. The coastal states from west to east are Axim, Ahanta, Jabu, Aguafo, Fetu, Asebu, Fante, Agona and Accra. In the hinterland

of these are Igwira, Adom, Wassa, Quay-fero (Twifu), Atty (Etsii), Arcany (Assin), Akyem (or Great Arcany), Akwamu, Kwahu, and Tafo. Though Adansi, Denkyira and Asante are not shown on this map, we do know from oral traditions that the first two certainly were in existence by 1629, and the third by 1680.

An eighteenth-century map of 1729 (Fig. 7) reveals, on the other hand, a picture radically different from that presented on the map of 1629, or by both Barbot and Bosman in their later accounts. For in place of the six coastal states between the mouth

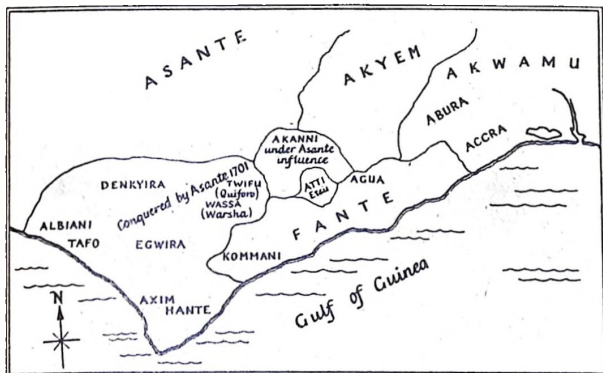


Fig. 7 The Gold Coast in 1729.

of the Pra and Accra listed by Bosman is found the single state of Fante, while in the interior even Akwamu, Akyem and Denkyira were being swallowed up by the Asante empire and would be completely absorbed by 1750 (Fig. 8). A political revolution had obviously taken place in the Gold Coast during the relatively short period between 1680 and 1750, which resulted in the partition of the Gold Coast among the two leading Akan peoples, the Fante and the Asante—a noticeable advance in the direction of the evolution of the nation-state of Ghana. We must turn now to examine what caused these striking political changes, what systems of government were evolved by the two leading states and what relationship existed between them.

## THE RISE OF ASANTE

The rise of the Asante empire was due to five main factors. The first was the founding of a number of petty Akan states and city-states in the neighbourhood of modern Kumasi. The second was the conquest and oppression of these states by Denkyira. The third was the rise of the Atlantic trade. The fourth was the homogeneity displayed by the lineages of the Oyoko clan that arrived in the region of modern Kumasi. The fifth and final one was the ambi-

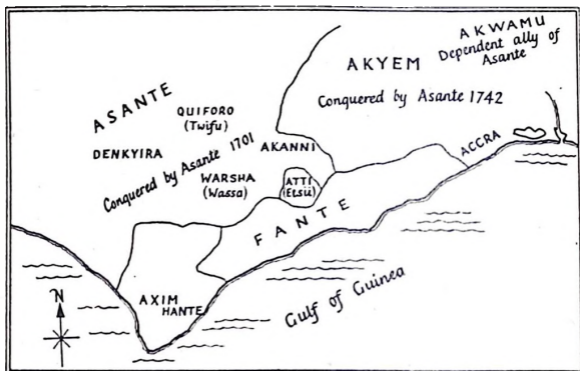


Fig. 8 The Gold Coast in 1750.

tion, martial ardour, sagacity, and statecraft displayed by the first three rulers of Asante, namely, Obiri Yeboa, Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware whose joint reigns extended from about 1670 to 1750. The first three factors were the stimulants, and the final two the precipitants.

It is absolutely clear from oral traditions that after settling first at the confluence of the Pra and Ofin rivers, various families of the matrilineal clans began to move north again into the basin of the Pra and Oda rivers (the present Amanse, Kwabere, Atwima and Sekyere districts), during the second half of the seventeenth century, to establish a number of kingdoms and city-states. It appears that the first clan leaders to arrive with their followers

were the Ekoona, Aduana, and Aseneē. The first founded Asokore, Oukrom, Sekyere, Mamponten, Fawobaware; the second established Tafo, Kaase, Ohwim, Domaa, Gyaakye, Kwaso and Kumawu, and the Aseneē founded Aduaben, Abooso, Baman, Amakom and Agona. They were followed probably by the Bretuo who established Mampong, Seniagya and Afigyaase, and it appears the last group to arrive were the Oyoko group which established Kumasi, Juaben, Kokofu, Nsuta and Bekwai. All of these states arose within a radius of not more than twenty miles of modern Kumasi and indeed more than half of them were within a radius of only five miles. Concentrated as they were within so limited an area, many of them could not but be small and indeed it is clear that most of them were no more than mere city-states.

The rise of so many states and kingdoms within so small an area was due mainly to the fact that it was the area in which the two main trade routes from the western Sudan—the western route from Timbuktu, Jenne and Begho and the eastern route from Hausaland, Nupe and Gonja—met, and from where branches radiated southwards to the coast. And the convergence of these routes in that area was no accident since the area was the main source for gold and kola-nuts, the two mainstays of the north-south trade. It was obviously with a view to controlling this trade that these sections of Akan moving northwards settled where they did. Since it was these very states that were later constituted as the core of the Asante empire, their establishment was obviously of crucial importance in the emergence of that empire.

The second factor which favoured the conversion of these states into an empire was their conquest by Denkyira and the tyrannical rule to which they were subsequently subjected. Oral traditions of most of the states enumerated here are unanimous on the point—and it is confirmed by documentary evidence—that they were all reduced to tributary states by Denkyira between about 1650 and 1660. That the Denkyira were tyrannical towards their subjected territories is evident from the same sources. Bosman, an impartial and contemporary observer, wrote, 'Dinkira, elevated by its great Riches and Power, became so arrogant that it looked on all other Negroes with a contemptible eye, esteeming them no more than slaves.' Not only were the Denkyira overbearing and tyrannical towards their subjects, but they also prevented them from getting direct access to the coast. For political as well as economic reasons,

then, the pre-Asante states, as well as those of Twifu, Assin and Wassa whom the Denkyira conquered between 1680 and 1698, developed, as Bosman noted, a 'common hatred' for Denkyira and were all ready, and indeed anxious, to throw off the yoke if only they could find leadership. It was precisely this that the members of the Oyoko clan, that arrived from the south in the 1660s and 1670s, provided.

The third factor contributing to the emergence of Asante was the rise of the Atlantic trade. This affected the situation in two ways. The first was the new pattern of trade that developed and the second was the introduction of firearms. According to the new pattern of trade, the peoples of the interior could not trade directly with the Europeans. They had to obtain their needs through the coastal peoples who established inland markets, such as Abonse in the east and Manso in the west, for the purpose. Naturally, these inland states objected to this and it was mainly for this reason that Akwamu and Denkyira in the east and west respectively broke through to the coast. The Amanse and Sekyere states also looked forward to the day when they would have direct access to the forts and castles on the coast, a hope which materialised, as we shall see presently, during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The Atlantic trade provided not only this incentive but also the means for its accomplishment in the guns and gunpowder that it introduced. It is clear from the written records that guns and gunpowder were not imported into the country on any large scale until after 1650. By the end of the seventeenth century, guns were the articles in the greatest demand on the Gold Coast. The introduction of firearms naturally had revolutionary effects on warfare, and *ipso facto* on political conditions and the emergence of empires. One of the paradoxical effects of the introduction of firearms is that it was not the states that first acquired them, the coastal states, that developed into empires but rather the inland ones. This was due primarily to the active interference of the European nations in the internal affairs of the coastal states. Whereas, out of reach of the European powers, the inland states could develop unmolested and were able, by the time they did emerge on the coast, to present the Europeans with a *fait accompli*. This was true of Denkyira, Akwamu, Dahomey, and Oyo and, above all, of Asante. It can scarcely be denied that but for the introduction of guns and gunpowder, the Asante could not have built so huge an

empire in so short a time given the geographical and ecological factors.

All the factors which I have so far been discussing were merely preparing the way for, or alternatively creating an atmosphere conducive to the emergence of an empire. The immediate causes were the arrival of the groups belonging to the Oyoko clan as well as the work of the first three rulers of Kumasi, namely, Obiri Yeboa, Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware. The Oyoko clan members were able to accomplish what the earlier clan groups had failed to do primarily because they were a more closely knit or homogenous group. When these groups left the region of the confluence of the Pra and Ofin (or Asantemanso as their traditions call it) they, like the earlier groups, founded a number of states, namely, Juaben, Kokofu, Nsuta, Bekwai and Kumasi, all of them within some twenty miles radius of Kumasi. Unlike the earlier emigrants, the founders of all these states considered themselves very closely related and were able to co-operate instead of competing among themselves. The kings of Juaben, Kumasi, Bekwai and Kokofu consider themselves to this day as brothers, and the king of Nsuta as their uncle. With the formation of these five Oyoko states which co-operated and pooled their military and political resources (until after the 1830s) the nucleus of an empire was automatically created.

The development of this nucleus into the Asante empire under the hegemony of the Oyoko clan of Kumasi was due to the wisdom, martial ardour and ability of the first three rulers of Kumasi, namely, Obiri Yeboa, Osei Tutu and Opoku Ware. It is clear from the oral traditions that when the Oyoko clan group arrived, the Ekoona and the Aduana had founded Tafo, Mamponten, Kwaaman, Amakom and Domaa (now Suntreso), all now part of the Kumasi municipality; that the leading town was Kwaaman; and that a section of the Oyoko people led by Obiri Yeboa either settled in that town or founded a new one, Kumasi, nearby. Either through diplomacy or war, it appears that Obiri Yeboa soon took over the Kwaaman state. He then went on to admit the ruling families of most of the states and city-states in the immediate neighbourhood into his clan. Hence today, Kumasi alone has ten different Oyoko families instead of one or two. This very shrewd move on the part of Obiri Yeboa not only enlarged the ranks of the original Oyoko group of Kumasi, but it also secured his own

position as well as that of his lineage as rulers of the new union. This has never been challenged since. Having thus consolidated his position, he embarked on his wars of expansion by attacking those states in the neighbourhood which had apparently refused to join his creation. He does not appear to have been particularly successful in these wars, and tradition has it that he was killed, probably in the late 1670s, in a campaign against the Domaa who were then occupying Suntreso, now part of the Kumasi municipality.

#### OSEI TUTU AND THE ASANTE CONSTITUTION

Had Obiri Yeboa been succeeded by an imbecile or a nonentity, his work would have ended with him. Fortunately, his successor was endowed with even greater talent, courage and organising ability than himself. He was none other than Osei Tutu of renowned memory who came to the throne probably in the late 1670s. Assisted by Okomfo Anokye, his great friend, priest and constitutional adviser, Osei Tutu contributed to the emergence of the Asante empire in five important ways: he completed the formation of the Asante Union under the hegemony of his lineage; devised a constitution for the empire; endowed the union with a capital city; introduced a new military organisation; and finally, continued successfully to expand the empire. Let us look more closely at these achievements.

Soon after his accession, he took up his predecessor's work of uniting the existing states under the rule of their lineage. He aimed at bringing all the states surrounding Kumasi into the union, a difficult task which he accomplished by a shrewd mixture of patient diplomacy and magic. The common fear and hatred of all the states for Denkyira had already predisposed them towards an anti-Denkyira alliance, and it was on this fear that Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye first played. But they realised that something positive was needed to make the union a lasting and not an ephemeral one. They found the solution to this in the form of the now revered and sacrosanct Golden Stool. At a great meeting of most of the states in the region of Amanse, Kwabere, Atwima and Sekyere, Okomfo Anokye is said to have brought down from the sky 'in a black cloud and amidst rumblings' the Golden Stool. Okomfo is then said to have announced that the stool embodied the soul and the unity of the Asante people, that under no circumstances

should it be lost, that the lineage of Osei Tutu should for ever be recognised as the head of the union, and that all the older pre-Asante symbols of political authority were to be buried. That a golden stool could drop from the sky is a physical impossibility, but the important point is that the Asante then, and every Asante today, sincerely believes what Okomfo Anokye said, and it is a fitting testimony to the unifying force of the Golden Stool that Asante today consists almost solely of the states that were present when the Golden Stool allegedly alighted from the sky.

Having created the union, Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye went on to introduce a number of devices calculated to ensure its everlasting strength and survival. These devices included the establishment of a capital, a constitution, a national festival and a national military organisation. First of all, by a similar mixture of magic and diplomacy, Kumasi was chosen by Okomfo Anokye as the capital for the union. The constitution which Osei Tutu and Anokye went on to devise for the union was modelled on existing Akan practices. At the head of the union was the Kumasihene who now became known as the Asantehene. He ruled with the advice of the Confederacy Council consisting of the kings of the states, or divisions, forming the union. Each of these kings, or Amanhene, had to seek the recognition of the Asantehene by swearing the oath of allegiance to him, had to give up the right of declaring war at will upon a member Amanhene, had to recognise the right of the Asantehene to impose national levies, had to attend the annual Odwira festival, had to recognise the superiority of the Asantehene's major oath, had to contribute a contingent of soldiers when called upon to do so by the Asantehene, and had to grant their own subjects the right of appeal to the high court set up for the union in the capital. In all other spheres the Amanhene enjoyed complete autonomy. As Rattray has pointed out, this constitution helped to quell rivalries between Amanhene and Amanhene and welded the Asante into a nation.

#### EARLY EXPANSION

Since one of the principal motives for the formation of the union was revenge for the death of Obiri Yeboa and, above all, the overthrow of the Denkyira yoke, Osei Tutu and his priest friend paid particular attention to the establishment of a strong military organisation for the union. They introduced a new military

structure which, according to both Rattray and Wilks, they borrowed from the Akwamu. This consisted of the van (Adonten), the rear (Kyidom), the right wing (Nifa), and the left wing. Each member state was assigned a place in one of the wings, and each wing was placed under a commander who was at the same time the king of a state. Thus the Mamponhene was made the Krontihene, that is the commander-in-chief of the Asante national army, the Asumengyahene became the commander of the left wing, and the Ejisuhene that of the right wing, while Bekwai and Nsuta were made members of the right and left wings respectively. Military service was also made compulsory for every able-bodied male. Osei Tutu may have borrowed the military structure from Akwamu, but there is no doubt that under him and his successors it attained a peak of perfection and efficiency hitherto unknown, and was mainly responsible for the phenomenal expansion of the Oyoko kingdom whose foundations were laid by his uncle.

Having created a fully-fledged constitution, a military structure and the Golden Stool as the physical symbol of the soul and permanent unity of the union—and all these devices, it is important to note, were adopted by the member states of the union (each had a black instead of a golden stool)—Osei Tutu began his wars of revenge, liberation and expansion. As one would expect, his first war was with his neighbours, the Domaa, whom he routed and then compelled to emigrate and found the new state named Gyaman (i.e. the state of people who had left their original home behind) by the Asante. He next attacked and defeated the kings of Amakom, Tafo (now parts of Kumasi) and Ofinso who apparently had refused to submit to the new Oyoko regime. These victories, which must have taken place between 1680 and 1690, brought all the districts of Domaa, Atwima and Kwabere under Osei Tutu.

He next turned his attention to the real enemy, namely, Denkyira. A good opportunity for war was provided by a sudden exorbitant increase in the tribute to be paid by these states. In a much-contested series of battles between 1699 and 1701, the Asante emerged victorious and in the words of Bosman 'left the towering pride of Denkyira in ashes'. This victory had far-reaching consequences. Not only did it end the Denkyira yoke, but it also won for Osei Tutu the overlordship of all Denkyira's vassal states to the south, namely, Twifu, Wassa and Aowin and Elmina

including Elmina Castle. It was mainly to consolidate his hold on these southern districts that between 1712 and 1716 Osei conducted a number of campaigns in the western districts which brought the all-conquering and all-victorious Asante army to the sea coast at Appollonia in 1715. The victory also brought Asante to the attention of the European nations which had hitherto been blissfully ignorant of her. Indeed, a year after the final victory, the Dutch sent a full diplomatic mission to Kumasi while the English agents on the coast pleaded for the dispatch of a similar mission, as well as presents, to 'Zaay', that is to Osei Tutu. Finally, the victory did have a catalytic effect, as we shall see presently, on the rise of the Fante kingdom.

After defeating Denkyira, Osei Tutu turned east against Akyem which he also conquered after two fierce battles in 1702. It seems that between 1702 and 1712, Osei Tutu halted his campaigns and settled down to consolidate and devise a system of administration for his new acquisitions. He appears to have solved these problems by incorporating most of the areas he had fully mastered into his union. For instance, he tactfully married his own niece to the new Amakomhene, and Opoku Ware, his successor, was their child. Secondly, he admitted Amakom and Tafo as full members of the Kumasi division or Oman, while Ofinso was made a full member of the union and given the same rights and privileges as the original members. Not only were the states admitted but all their subjects, as well as those Domaa who stayed behind, were also naturalised and given due rights as Asante citizens. Apparently, because neither Denkyira and her former allies, nor Akyem, had then been fully mastered, this policy of incorporation and naturalisation was not applied to them. In fact, Osei Tutu was killed in 1717 while he was engaged in suppressing a revolt of the Akyem.

It should be clear from the above that if Obiri Yeboa began the establishment of the Oyoko kingdom of Kumasi, Osei Tutu not only completed it, but also began the process of converting that tiny kingdom into the Asante empire. He was by every standard a really great ruler, an original thinker, a statesman, a law-giver and a brilliant general, so it is not surprising that his name occupies such a place of renown in Asante oral tradition.

His rather sudden death, however, did leave the fate of the empire very much in the balance. The very circumstances in which he died shook the empire to its foundations; the Akyem

were in revolt, while Denkyira and her vassal states were only too anxious to crush this upstart; easy access to the coast had still not been obtained because of the intransigence of the Twifu and Assin. At home, too, a disputed succession ensued. Fortunately, Osei Tutu's grand-nephew and successor, Opoku Ware, proved more than equal to the tasks that confronted him. During his long reign from c. 1720 to 1750 he was able, not only to settle the internal problems and crush the Akyem and Denkyira rebellions, but also to continue with remarkable success his grand-uncle's wars of expansion.

#### OPOKU WARE

After about two or three years of contest between a nephew of Osei Tutu and Opoku Waer, his grand-nephew, the latter emerged victorious. Having consolidated his position on the throne, he then instituted the now famous and sacrosanct oath of the Asante, the Great Oath of Memeneda,<sup>2</sup> to commemorate the death of the great ruler and above all to revive the fighting spirit of the nation. He then attacked the rebellious states and in the early 1720s totally defeated not only the Akyem and their allies, the Denkyira and Akwapim, but also the Sefwi under their king Eberimoro. The Sefwi territory stretching from the Tano to the Bia was annexed and, since it was turned into the happy hunting grounds of the Asante kings, was named Ahafo.

From the east and west, Opoku began the Asante thrust north-westwards. From Arabic sources, it is now established that this development began with the invasion and conquest of Tekyiman in 1723-4. The campaign in the north was called off in 1725 because of the revolt of Wassa which was crushed in 1726. The army then returned to the north and between 1726 and 1740 conquered and annexed the important gold-producing regions of Banda and Gyaman, both of which were later constituted into the Brong region of Asante.

From 1741 to 1744, Opoku Ware was again drawn to the south mainly against Akyem which had become exceedingly powerful since her overthrow of Akwamu in 1730. In the campaign lasting from 1741 to 1744, the Asante army defeated the Akyem and their allies, annexed part of Akyem and Kwahu (the modern region of Asante Akyem), declared the Asantehene's overlordship over Akwapim, Ga-Adangbe and Akwamu, and entered Accra in 1744.

The European powers recognised these Asante annexations and victories by paying to the Asantehene, from 1742 onwards, the ground rent for their forts in Accra. Instead of turning against Wassa and Fante as had been generally expected, the Asante army returned north and, between 1744 and 1746, conquered and annexed Gonja and Krache in a series of wars in which the Juaben particularly distinguished themselves. Dagomba sued for peace at this time and was accepted as a protected state. These northern campaigns appear to have been the last that Opoku Ware launched.

It is clear that Opoku Ware did nothing to incorporate these new conquests into the Asante union. Some of the kings of the conquered provinces were deposed but new kings from the same lineages or royal families were elected, and the institutions and customs of all these new acquisitions were left intact. All that the newly conquered states were expected to do was to pay annual tribute and contribute a military contingent when called upon to do so, accept one of the Amanhene or Kumasi divisional chiefs as their intermediary between them and the Asantehene, and recognise the supremacy of the great oath over their own oaths. It has been said that the Asante were good conquerors but bad administrators, and this view is certainly correct with respect to Opoku Ware, though not Obiri Yeboa or Osei Tutu. Opoku Ware failed to devise any effective, provincial, administrative machinery, partly because he was too preoccupied with wars to have had much time for administration, and partly because of the failure of his attempts at constitutional reforms at home between 1746 and his death in 1750.

But even though he failed to devise any administrative machinery for his conquests, there is no doubt that Opoku Ware was a worthy successor of Osei Tutu. But for his martial ardour, the union would have been crushed. Not only did he prevent this, but he brought to its glorious conclusion the conversion of the Oyoko kingdom of Kumasi into the Asante empire. By the end of his reign, the empire had almost attained its maximum size, extending, as is evident from the map of 1750 (Fig. 8) as far north as Dagomba and Gonja, to Assin and Wassa in the south, and from Akwamu on the other side of the Volta in the east, to Sefwi and Gyaman (now part of the Ivory Coast) in the west. He was undoubtedly one of the greatest Asante rulers of the eighteenth century. The most striking tribute paid to his effectiveness is the

following by the author of the *Tarikh Gonja* (the history of Gonja): '... May God curse him, may He take his soul and cast it into the fire. He it was who troubled the people of Gonja; continually and at all times did he trouble them. He seized their possessions. Whatever he wished, so he did, for he was all-powerful in his rule.'

#### FANTE ORIGINS: THE MANKESSIM PERIOD

Very little work has so far been done on the history of Fante and a student who has to rely on secondary works has very, very little to go by. Indeed, most of what follows is based on research still in progress and all my conclusions should therefore be taken as extremely tentative. While the rise of Asante was a continuous process beginning in the 1670s and ending in 1750, that of Fante occurred, it would appear, in two phases; the first about 1660 to about 1690 and the second from 1704 to 1720.

Oral traditions among the Fante are unanimous on the point that their ancestors lived in Tekyiman from whence they migrated towards the coast in five groups led by three old priests, Obunumankoma, Odapagyan and Oson, and settled at Mankessim about six miles from the coast. The five groups (according to the Rev. Acquah) are Mankessim (or Kurentsi Aman), Abora, Anyan, Ekumfi and Nkusukum. These groups were later joined at Mankessim by Gomoa and Adjumako. At Mankessim, the three leaders died and they were all buried in a grave which later became a place of worship, the famous Nananom Mpcoom. From Mankessim, so oral traditions maintain, the different groups later began to move outwards to carve out kingdoms for themselves. According to the version collected by Christensen, the first groups to move were the Abora who founded the present state of Abora to the north-west, the Ekumfi who moved south-east and occupied the coast, and the Nkusukum who occupied the coastal regions to the south-west (Fig. 9). The last groups to leave were the Anyanfo who founded the states of Ayan Abasa, Ayan Denkyira, Ayan Maim and Esiam north of Mankessim, and then the Gomoa and Adjumako who moved east and north-east. It appears from some of the versions that it was two sections of the Abora that subsequently emigrated from Abora to establish the states of Anomabu and Adjumako to the south and east respectively.

One significant thing about these accounts is that they are corroborated on all the essential points by the documentary

sources consulted so far. In the first place, as we have already seen, it is clear from Portuguese sources that Fante was certainly in existence by the end of the fifteenth century, and that in the sixteenth and during the first half of the seventeenth century, it was essentially an inland state with Kormantin and the two small



## FANTE STATES

## NEIGHBOURING AKAN STATES

1	Komenda	11	Kwanan	20	Assin Atandaso
2	Aguafu	12	Ayan Maim	21	Winneba
3	Edina	13	Ayan Abasa	22-23	Gomoa Adjumako
4	Oguaa (Fetu)	14	Adjumako	24	Gomoa Assin
5	Asebu	15	Ayan Denkyira	25	Agona
6-7	Nkusukum	16	Esiam	26-29	Akyem Abuakwa
8	Anomabu	17	Esikuma	30	Akyem Kotoku
9	Ekumfi	18	Abcadzi	31-32	Akyem Bosome
10	Mankessim	19	Abora	33-34	Assin Apimenem

Fig. 9: Fante states and neighbouring Akan states.

villages of Adja and Anomabu as its main coastal outlets, and with its capital (called Fantyn in the written sources) inland. Since this town was said to be less than half a day's march north of Kormantin, it appears that this Fantyn is the Mankessim of the oral traditions. Of particular interest is the fact that the capital was divided into quarters, each of which was under a Braffo and that one of the quarters, mentioned in the Dutch records of the 1650s as

Inconfucum or Occumsocum, is easily identifiable as the Nkusukum of the oral traditions.

From oral traditions as well as written records, then, it appears that Fante was until the 1650s essentially a city-state. Some light is also thrown on its government at this time by the Dutch and English records. As we have seen, each quarter had its own Braffo but all of them recognised one of them as the supreme head, who was constantly referred to as the Braffo of Fantyn. The king's quarter is not stated but my guess is that it was the Mankessim quarter. His position was one of pre-eminence among equals and, as he told the Dutch factor in 1653, he had to rule with his principal caboceers, obviously the Braffos and elders of the different quarters, 'without whom he neither could nor might do anything'.

The various groups began to move out from this capital to found new colonies or states. This is borne out not only by the present political situation in Fanteland but also from contemporary documentary sources. In the first place it is clear from the map of the Fante region (Fig. 9), that the kingdom of Fante today consists of about nineteen states. Since no mention was made of most of them in the records until after 1670, it is not unreasonable to suppose that they were formed after the middle of the seventeenth century. The growth of Anomabu also testifies to this phase of colonisation from Mankessim. Anomabu was probably founded early in the sixteenth century as a tiny fishing village either by the Etsii, or the Asebu, or a group of Fante, and it is clear from the records that it was still a small village under the direct control of the Braffo of Fante by 1650. However, by the 1690s, Anomabu not only had an independent Braffo of her own, but had also become more or less a city-state and easily the most important trading centre on the Fante coast. Bosman is quite unequivocal on this point. 'The town Anomabu', he wrote, 'may very well pass for the strongest on the whole coast, affording as many armed men as the whole kingdoms of Saboe or Commany, yet in proportion but a fifth of Fantyn'. Anomabu could scarcely have become so powerful and populous in only thirty to forty years through the natural increase of its own inhabitants. Its rapid growth can be explained more satisfactorily in terms of an immigration of people from somewhere—which, according to oral tradition, must be Abora.

From all these pieces of evidence, as well as the present political set-up in Fante, it seems clear that (as asserted by oral traditions

there was a movement of groups of people from Mankessim, and that this exodus did take place mainly in the last three decades of the seventeenth century. In 1693, we have positive references to the Captain of Abora, the Captain of Kwaaman, the head Cabo-cer of Nkusukum and the Braffo of Anomabu, clear evidence that by that date those states or city-states had emerged as identifiable geopolitical entities.

The first and obvious reason for an exodus about this time was population pressure. However fertile the region of Mankessim was, it could not have sustained an increasingly growing population over an indefinite period and it was obvious that sooner or later there was bound to be a dispersion of people from that centre. Moreover, these various groups were growing increasingly wealthy, were probably correspondingly ambitious and therefore longed for larger states to dominate. Thirdly, the Atlantic trade became increasingly voluminous and prosperous, particularly following the introduction of sugar plantations in the West Indies after 1640 with a consequent phenomenal rise in the demand for slaves. The Fante presumably felt the need to occupy the surrounding areas more effectively so as to be able to control the routes leading into the interior. Finally, political rivalry among the various quarters may also have been an important factor. The dispersion from Mankessim did not take place earlier because the Etsii until the 1620s and the Assin until the 1660s presented an impenetrable barrier to the Fante. It was only after the virtual extinction of the Etsii as a result of their series of wars with the Asebu, Afutu and Assin, and the preoccupation of the Assin with the Denkyira between 1640 and 1660 that the dispersion of the Fante became possible.

From the late 1680s onwards, there are reports of clashes between the Fante and Assin to the north and the Fante and Agona to the east. This suggests that all the virtually empty spaces, left mainly by the Etsii, had been filled up and that the Fante had come up against fresh obstacles which had to be removed before they could expand. However, for some reason the Fante were in no position to do so until the first decade of the eighteenth century. During that and the following decade, in a sudden outburst, the Fante extended their sway over all the coastal states between the mouth of the Pra in the east and the Ga kingdom in the west. This second phase of expansion began in 1707 with the attack and

routing of the forces of Fetu, Asebu and Cabesterra. In 1708, the King of Aguafo, who was considered a Dutch puppet by the Fante and people of Komenda, was deposed. The Fante overran Cabesterra again in 1710, and Fetu and Asebu in the following year, and fully incorporated them into their confederacy. The Fante did not merely dominate these areas politically but they also attempted to assimilate them culturally with results which have already been pointed out earlier in this chapter.

The first and probably the main reason for the halting of the tide of Fante expansion in the late seventeenth century, was the rivalry and the disunity that followed the formation of the various Fante states shown in Fig. 9. Since all of them occupied quite a small area about thirty miles square, rather like the pre-Asante states of the modern Kumasi area, they were inevitably tiny principalities and city-states. They could therefore have been a powerful force only if they had pooled their resources as the contemporary Amanse and Atwima states were doing at that very time. Unfortunately, though all the states still recognised Mankessim as their sacred city, and in theory its Braffo as their king, in practice they all behaved not only as separate and independent but also as rival states. Both Barbot and Bosman, who were on the coast in the 1680s and 1690s, testify to the division among the Fante and the weakness of their governmental structure. 'If the Fentyneans were not in perpetual civil Divisions', Bosman wrote, 'the circumadjacent countries would soon find their Power by irruptions into their territories . . . Here is no King, the Government being in the Hands of the Chief Commander, whom they call Braffo, a Word importing Leader. He is a sort of Chief Governor, and has the greatest Power of any in the whole land, but is somewhat closely restrained by the old men, who are a sort of National Counsellors, not unlike some European Parliament, acting perfectly according to their inclinations without consulting the Braffo; besides these every part of Fantyn hath also its particular Chief, who will sometimes scarce own himself subject to the Braffo, who hath the ineffectual Name only of Supreme Power.'

Had the neighbouring states been as divided, small and decentralised as the Fante states were, the Fante could have infiltrated into or even conquered them. But until the 1690s Aguafo, Fetu, Asebu, Agona and Assin were not only individually larger

than most of the new Fante states, but also each of them had a king or queen who was both in theory and in practice in control.

With disunity at the centre and relatively strong states to the east, west and north, it is not surprising that the Fante expansion was halted from the late 1680s onwards. And had this disunity continued, there is no doubt that either Asante or Akyem would sooner or later have conquered and annexed the Fante states. But one factor compelled the Fante to close their ranks and pool their resources during the first decade of the eighteenth century, and this, coupled with the then weakened state of the coastal states, particularly to the west, brought about the launching of the second phase of Fante expansion. This factor was the emergence of Asante as a real power, demonstrated to the coastal peoples, European as well as African, by its dramatic and epoch-making defeat of Denkyira between 1699 and 1701.

#### THE SECOND PHASE OF FANTE EXPANSION: ABORA PERIOD

The emergence of Asante posed a two-fold threat, political and economic, for the Fante states. Politically, there was every likelihood that the Asante would continue southwards to occupy not only the territories of the tributary states of Denkyira, but also those of the Fante and the other coastal peoples. Economically, no sooner had the Asante overwhelmed the Denkyira than the Europeans on the coast began to court their friendship and attract them to the coast. These attempts were successful for, from 1704 onwards, the Asante traders began to come directly to the coast in large numbers. This development seriously threatened not only their role as middlemen which the Fante had wrested from the Assin at this time, but also their security, since the commodities that the Asante regularly demanded above everything else were guns and gunpowder. The Fante realised that if they prevented the acquisition of guns and powder by the Asante, they would ensure their own security and at the same time safeguard their position as middlemen in the trade between the Europeans and the interior peoples. To do this they had to control the trading outlets particularly from Cape Coast, Elmina and Anomabu into the interior. And the surest way to accomplish both ends was the incorporation of the neighbouring states into their union. In the interests of political as well as economic survival, then, the Fante states began to rally together, apparently under Abora rather than

Mankessim, and it is this that partly explains their launching of the second phase of the expansion at the time they did.

Another factor which facilitated Fante expansion was the fact that as a result of the Komenda-Dutch war of 1695-7, the states of Komenda, Aguafó and Fetu had become weakened, while Asebu and Acron were each too tiny to put up any real resistance. The state of Agona in the extreme east might conceivably have held out. However, just as the rise and expansion of Asante threatened Fante with extinction, that of Akyem threatened Agona in the second decade of the eighteenth century. She therefore naturally looked for an ally and the all-conquering and all-powerful Fante union was an obvious choice.

The only other powers that could have thwarted Fante expansion were the Europeans on the coast, particularly the Dutch and the English. Both of them had welcomed the emergence of Asante as the dominant power in the interior and began moves to ensure that they gained easy and direct access to the coast. Also they were aware that the Fante would object to this. However, neither of them had the means of resisting the Fante even if they joined their forces together, weakened as both were by the activities of the interlopers and the 'ten per cent traders'. Indeed, as Bosman pointed out, by 1700, both the Dutch and the English were at the mercy of the Fante, particularly those of Anomabu. 'From what I have said,' he wrote to his friend, 'you may be informed what places the English and we possess in Fantyn. Both of us having an equal power, that is, none at all. For when these villainous people are inclined to it, they shut up all the passes so close that not one merchant can possibly come from the inland country to trade with us, and sometimes, not content with this, they prevent the bringing of provisions to us, till we have made peace with them.'

Clearly then, the rapid imperial expansion of the Fante on the coast between 1707 and 1720 was the outcome of the unity among the Fante generated by their own fear of the rising Asante power and the relative weakness both of the neighbouring African states, as well as of the British and Dutch companies on the Gold Coast.

It is clear from the records that the Fante formed a union parliament composed of delegates, or as they are called in the records, Curranteers, from the states, with the Braffo at the head. Unfortunately, they did not have an Okomfo Anokye to endow this union with a spiritual or mystical unifying force. The only force

that appears to have served in pulling and holding the members of the union together was the common fear of Asante, and whenever this force was removed, the union fell again into its component parts. The Asante threat was certainly strong during the first three decades of the eighteenth century and the union therefore remained stable, with Abora playing the leading role and its capital becoming in practice the capital of the union. But from 1720 onwards, when the Asante turned their attention northwards, and the possibility of their invading the Fante became more and more remote, the union began to disintegrate. By 1750, not only had the union broken up into two parts, Western (or the Boroboro) Fante and Eastern (or Ekumfi) Fante, but each part consisted of states which in practice considered themselves more or less sovereign and independent.

#### FANTE-ASANTE RELATIONS

By 1750, then, the Asante and Fante had emerged as the dominant peoples of the Gold Coast, the former having by then established a really huge and relatively well-organised empire, while the latter had formed a comparatively small and rather loosely organised kingdom. There is no doubt that fear of an Asante invasion revived after 1750 following the successful conclusion of their northern campaigns and their effective subjugation of the Akyem, Akwamu and Ga areas, and throughout this period there are numerous references to an impending Asante attack on the Fante and the Wassa. It is interesting to note that this possibility had its usual unifying effect on the Fante. In February 1758, for instance, we do have a report that 'all the principal people of Fante have been assembled for this month past at great Cormantyn to settle and adjust all differences in their country, to make new laws and appoint a new Braffo'. In actual fact, however, during the second half of the eighteenth century, it was only on two occasions that the Asante and Fante faced each other on the battlefield—in 1765, when the Asante army actually fought the Fante in Abora, and in 1776, when the Fante sent a contingent to assist the Wassa, then their allies, to beat back an Asante invasion. On the contrary, on many occasions, the Fante and the Asante joined together against other states. Between 1757 and 1763 they allied against Wassa and Akyem. Moreover from 1777 till the end of the century, there was certainly no overt enmity between them. Indeed, there

are numerous references to hundreds of Asante trading with the Fante in the inland markets of Manso and Foso. The Fante were more concerned, during the period under review, not with the Asante but rather with the Wassa with whom they clashed in 1757, 1760, 1776 and 1785-7.

This rather unexpected turn of events was due to four main factors, namely, the internal conditions in Asante itself, the barrier presented by Wassa and Akyem, the diplomatic skill displayed by the Fante, and the attitude of the British and the Dutch on the coast. In the first place, conditions at the capital of the Asante empire itself were not particularly conducive to any further expansion or aggression. This was particularly true of the reigns of Kusi Obodum (1750-64) and Osei Kwame (1777-1801). Kusi Obodum's reign was heralded by civil wars which continued till 1755. Even as late as 1760 reports still came in of disunity in Asante, of the principal chiefs being at loggerheads with the king and waiting for an opportunity to depose him and put Osei, the son of Opoku Ware, in his place. The total defeat of the Asante army by the Akyem and Krobo, with the assistance of an Oyo contingent, in 1764, provided this opportunity and Kusi Obodum was promptly deposed. The effect of the political situation in Kumasi had been that Kusi was afraid to leave the capital himself, and, until the ill-fated expedition of 1764, resorted to diplomacy to gain access to the coast and win back the rebellious vassal states. During the reign of his successor, Osei Kwadwo, from 1764 to 1777, conditions at home became, and remained stable, but because of his preoccupation with constitutional reforms at home, his failure to crush the rebellions in Akyem and Wassa, and the attitude of the British, the Fante could not be subdued. The stability at home, however, ended with Osei Kwadwo, and the reign of his successor, Osei Kwame (1777-1801), was marked by continuous instability, disunity and civil wars. This was due to the fact that Osei Kwame came to the throne as a minor, and, when he assumed full control from the 1790s onwards, turned out to be a very tyrannical and cruel ruler. But what made him even more unpopular was partly the fact that he continued the constitutional reforms begun by his predecessor and, in the words of Dupuis, partly because of 'his attachment to the Muslims and his inclination to establish "the Koranic" Law for the civil code of the Empire'. The Asante chiefs reacted sharply, particularly

against the latter, because they feared 'that the Muslim religion, which they well know levels all ranks and orders of men, and places them at the arbitrary discretion of the sovereign, might be introduced, whereby they would loose that ascendancy they now enjoy'. For these reasons, therefore, the chiefs and the Queen Mother conspired against Osei Kwame and de-stooled him in 1801. This deposition, as is clear from Bowditch and Dupuis, made the confusion worse, for the Muslim member-states of the north-west revolted with a view to restoring Osei Kwame to the throne, and it was only after a series of campaigns by Opoku II and his successor Osei Bonsu, and the execution of Osei Kwame himself in 1803, that the revolt was suppressed. Preoccupied as the Asante were by their internal problems, it is not surprising that between 1777 and 1801, it was only on one occasion, in 1785, that an Asante army appeared on the coast in Apollonia.

The other factor which safeguarded the position of the Fante was the attitude of the British. From 1765 till the end of the century, the British adopted the policy of dissuading the Asante from attacking the Fante and, in their own words, of assisting 'those whom it is in our interest should be the conquerors, and these are certainly the Fantes'. The reason for this was, according to Governor Hippisley, that the English derived the supremest advantage from the mixed government of the Fante. 'At variance with one Town or District,' he explained in 1766, 'we are friends with the rest, and no very great harm ensues. Besieged in the Fort (a most uncommon case) we still have communication by water to the next, every Town in the way being Independent of the other, and never willing to enter into Quarrels with white men but for their own particular concerns . . . Master of the Coast, Master of the Water's edge, what communication could we have between one fort and another if the Black monarch put an Interdict upon it?' There is certainly no doubt that the Asante abstained from attacking the Fante during the reign of Osei Kwadwo partly because of their fear, and a justifiable one, too, that they might have a direct clash with the British.

Throughout the period under review, the Fante formed, joined and withdrew from alliances as and when they deemed it expedient politically and economically. It was, for instance, because of the economic difficulties they encountered as a result of the Wassa closure of the trade routes, and the Fante failure to persuade them

to re-open these routes, that they joined the Asante in 1753, early in 1765 and again in 1775. On the other hand, since the defeat of the Akyem by the Asante early in 1765 constituted a threat to themselves, they not only abandoned their Asante allies, but shrewdly and successfully built up a new alliance consisting of Twifu, Wassa, Appollonia and themselves between July and November 1765. Undoubtedly it was not only the British, but also the formidable nature of this alliance, that prevented the Asante invasion of Fante in the late 1760s.

By 1800 at the end of our period a state of cold war, if not of actual friendly relations, existed between the two powers, mainly because of internal difficulties in Asante, the attitude of the British, and the resistance of the Wassa and Akyem, to which we should add the diplomatic skill and good sense of the Fante. However, only seven years later, this was brought to an end, and the long-expected invasion and conquest of Fante did take place. What brought this about, and its effects, form the subject of my later chapter.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 13.

<sup>2</sup> To swear an Asante oath is to mention a name or phrase that is forbidden and thus cause the guardian of the oath to call an investigation into the circumstances leading to the violation of the tabu. The normal way to get a case transferred from a lower court to a court of appeal is for one of the litigants to swear an oath of which the president of the higher court is the guardian. The introduction of a new oath is therefore of great importance to the whole Asante nation.

# 10 Peoples of Southern Nigeria

A. A. B. ADERIBIGBE

THE very title of this chapter raises an obvious question: to what extent are we right in speaking of Southern Nigeria before 1800 if, as we are often reminded, the whole concept of Nigeria came in the much later period of colonial rule? This question assumes that the different peoples of modern Nigeria lived in isolation until they were brought together by British rule, and nothing could be further from the truth. The peoples of Southern (indeed of the whole of) Nigeria were linked together in various ways. There were the forcible links created by wars and which resulted in conquest, overlordship or enslavement; there were the more beneficial links of trade; and there were the movements of people—and ideas—from one area to another. And all this may be illustrated from the history of the three peoples—the Yoruba, Bini and Ibo—who are the subject of this chapter. The impact of the Yoruba on the Bini is beyond dispute. It was from Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba, that the Bini got their long line of kings, the Oranmiyan dynasty, as well as the technological know-how of brass-casting which produced the bronzes for which Benin is now universally famous. Similarly, the impact of the Bini was great over neighbouring peoples like the Urhobo, Western Ijaw, and the Western and Onitsha Ibo. This can be seen in the traditions of these peoples who trace their origin to Benin, as well as in their forms of government which reflect Bini influence. Finally, we must not forget the long period of economic interdependence between the Ibo hinterland and the Delta states with all the contact that this implies.

This is not to deny the obvious fact that the Yoruba, Bini and Ibo each have their own history. The point here is that the culture of each group, as we know it today, is the product of a long period of cultural contact and development in what we now call Southern Nigeria. And viewed against this larger background, the history of each separate cultural area seems more significant.

## YORUBA ORIGINS

The origin of the Yoruba, like the earliest history of other non-literate peoples, is still a bickering ground for the erudite. Many

speculations and scholarly theories abound but no definite knowledge has yet emerged. The general trend of these theories, most of them based on Yoruba oral traditions, is that of a possible origin from 'the East'. Some scholars, impressed by the similarities between Yoruba and ancient Egyptian culture—religious observances, works of art, burial and other customs—speak of a possible migration of the ancestors of the Yoruba from the Upper

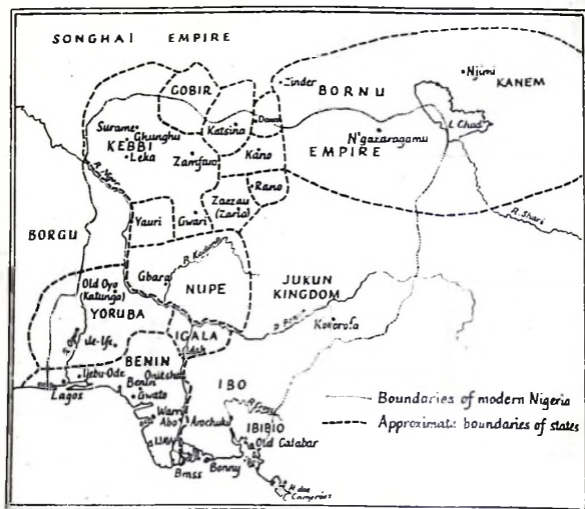


Fig. 10 Nigerian states in the eighteenth century.

Nile (as early as 2000–1000 B.C.)<sup>1</sup> as a result of some upheavals in ancient Egypt. But the same is often said of several other West African peoples like the Jukun and the Busawa in Northern Nigeria, and the Ga in modern Ghana. There is also the difficulty of deciding whether similarities between the cultures of two societies are evidence of large-scale migrations or of borrowing from a common source. For these and other reasons, there is no longer the old tendency to accept the idea of Yoruba migration from Egypt, without question.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever their precise origin, it is now generally agreed that Ile-Ife represents the earliest stage in the development of Yoruba culture. We do not know the exact date of this; most probably it took place towards the end of the first millennium (1000) A.D. From this original base which, according to oral traditions, was founded by the mythical Oduduwa, the Yoruba extended their sway over the aboriginal inhabitants (about whom little is known), creating other settlements as they advanced southwards. There is no doubt that in this first settlement, now revered as the cradle of the people, the Yoruba must have attained a high level of material culture. This can be seen in the quality of their stone, bronze and iron works; most remarkable are the terra cottas, the artistic excellence of which is now widely acclaimed by experts.

#### OLD OYO EMPIRE

Another clearly recognisable stage in the early history of the Yoruba was the emergence of the Old Oyo state. According to local traditions, this state was founded by Oranmiyan, the son of Oduduwa, who came from Ife and who, according to Bini tradition, also founded a new dynasty at Benin. Thus from the very beginning, the Oyo and Bini dynasties were linked by a common ancestry. Now, whether Oranmiyan belongs to the realm of real history or legend, he represents the emergence of the two dynasties and empires which were to dominate most of what is now Southern Nigeria for more than four centuries. We may see in the Oranmiyan story an attempt to explain what is in all essentials an historical fact. He represents a new phase of Yoruba history, in which effective political power and the political supremacy passed from Ife to Old Oyo. Henceforth, the former became the spiritual 'headquarters', and the latter the real hub of a new Yoruba empire. Modern research has, tentatively, ascribed the beginning of this episode to somewhere between 1388 and 1431.

The history of this Yoruba empire based on Old Oyo, or of the Old Oyo empire as it is often called, is not difficult to follow for the next four centuries. By the fifteenth century, the empire was well-established; its ruler, the Alafin, was already regarded as the ruler of a powerful empire, the 'lord of many lands'. The exploits of the deified Alafin Sango probably took place in this period. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of expansion. It was in the latter part of this period that the empire

expanded to the north of the Niger. For the greater part of the eighteenth century Oyo was still the major power in southern Nigeria. European traders on the coast recorded their impression of the large size and effectiveness of its army. And from Samuel Johnson, the historian of the Yoruba, we get the idea of an extensive empire which stretched from the Niger westwards to include not only the Popo and the peoples of Dahomey but also the Ga.

In this brief survey of the empire, two questions will be raised: why was the Oyo empire able to last so long and what were the causes of its eventual decline?

It is very tempting to ascribe the long survival of the Oyo empire only to the efficiency of its army. There is no doubt that an efficient army is an indispensable means not only of imperial expansion but also of keeping the dissident elements within the empire quiet. And the Oyo army performed both functions very well. Consisting of infantry as well as cavalry, it became the terror of neighbouring territories; and it was large and efficient enough to make such a powerful kingdom as Dahomey tributary to Oyo from 1748 to 1819. Indeed, the importance attached to the military aspect of the empire by the Oyo Yoruba themselves may be seen in the fact that military prowess was one of the avenues to social eminence. The Eso were more than veteran soldiers or 'a praetorian guard' of the Alafin; they were the military peers of the whole realm. It is equally significant that the best general of the day (often resident in a province most menaced by external foes) received, as a reward for his valour, the exalted title of *Are-Ona-Kakanfo* by which he became the head of the Oyo forces—and a minor Alafin in his particular province. Yet, important as it was, the army alone cannot adequately explain the success of the Old Oyo empire. There were other factors.

Firstly, not all the constituent parts of the empire were mere vassals, constrained to buy peace by the payment of annual tributes. There was the hard core of the empire categorised by Johnson as 'Yoruba Proper'. This had some cohesion of its own, based on a feeling of kinship in the numerous towns and hamlets characteristic of the people; on a common language (or variants of it); and on a religion which acknowledged a Supreme Being high above in the heavens but too exalted to be approached directly by human beings (a condition which necessitated the intervention of minor gods or *Orisa*).

Secondly, the empire was well-organised. At the head and resident in the capital, Old Oyo, was the Alafin with his very elaborate 'court of priests, officials and eunuchs'. In theory he was in the words of his titles the fountain of authority and 'companion of the gods'. But in practice, his powers were limited by the Oyomesi, an aristocratic Council of State of seven members. Individually, the seven were leaders of the seven wards into which the capital was divided; collectively, they were the king-makers. Headed by the Bashorun (their 'president' and a sort of prime minister), the Oyomesi had the power of getting rid of a tyrannical Alafin by asking him to 'go to sleep', meaning that he should commit suicide. There was also at a later period the Ogboni cult, in the deliberations of which the Oyomesi participated and which exercised a mediating role between them and the Alafin. Members of the Ogboni cult were freemen, remarkable for their age and experience, and their prominence in the social and political life of the community. Thus the essence of the metropolitan administrative system was participation by all elements of the society. It was a system in which royalty, freemen and slaves participated. And the internal administration of the rest of the empire was modelled, more or less, on that of Oyo and was conducted by princes, minor kings and Bale (provincial governors), subject to the oversight of the metropolis. So long as the provinces paid their tributes and kept in line with the policy of the metropolitan government, they enjoyed a considerable measure of local autonomy.

Thirdly, Old Oyo was lucky to have rulers equal to the task for the greater part of the period under survey. Oral traditions stress more or less the necessary qualities, even when dealing with the mythical or semi-legendary kings. For example Oranmiyan was said to be brave, warlike and of 'indomitable courage'. Sango, reputed to be the fourth king, was 'of a very wild disposition, fiery temper and skilful in sleight of hand tricks. He had a habit of emitting fire and smoke out of his mouth by which he greatly increased the dread his subjects had of him'. Similarly, Orompoto, a much more real and historical figure than Sango, was a skilful commander in war who not only regained the lost military fame of Old Oyo but was also a successful statesman. Finally, to cite only one more example, Ojigi was the powerful king who brought Dahomey under Oyo sway.<sup>3</sup>

Fourthly, the Oyo authorities made use of the time-honoured

imperial expedient of extolling the powers and divinity of the emperor on state occasions. At the Bere, the annual king's festival, for example, the provincial rulers did more than acknowledge their position as vassals by paying their tributes; in paying homage, they were reminded of the dignity of their imperial connection.

Fifthly, and finally, there were the financial means of supporting the Oyo system of government. The total amount of tribute paid to Oyo must have been considerable. For example, Dr I. Akinjogbin in his recent study of Dahomey, has shown that the annual tribute exacted from Dahomey, expressed in terms of money, amounted to about £32,000. Nor must we overlook the revenue accruing from trade for which Old Oyo was well situated. Add to this the right of the Alafin to demand the services of his subjects (for public works) and the potentiality of the imperial resources becomes very clear.

So much for the success of the Old Oyo empire. The question of the causes of its decline cannot be adequately tackled here for lack of space. Even if we had the necessary space, a full discussion of the various factors would take us beyond the time-span covered by this chapter. For these reasons only a brief review is attempted.

To begin with, not all historians are agreed about the date when the Old Oyo empire began to decline but this should not surprise us. The process of decline is a continuous one, a process which could manifest itself at different rates in different aspects of the life of the empire. For example, an empire might appear militarily strong when its economic basis was already undermined. A period of obvious decline might also be followed by one of active expansion and reconstruction. (We have already seen this in the reigns of Orompoto and Ojigi.) The available evidence, however, points to the latter part of the second half of the eighteenth century as the period when the decline of the Oyo empire began.

It has been suggested that towards the end of the eighteenth century the Old Oyo empire had been overstretched; in other words, that it had gone beyond the optimum size. This view is only plausible when seen against the difficulties of communications between the metropolis and the provinces. But it must also be remembered that the Oyo rulers tried to circumvent these difficulties by granting a large measure of autonomy to the distant provinces.

A much more important factor was the continuous weakness of

the central government. For example, Old Oyo itself was torn by internal strife for about twenty years. This was the period when the notorious Bashorun Gaha (c. 1754-74) usurped the throne of the Alafin. The fact that this man arrogated to himself all the attributes of sovereignty is clear evidence that the unwritten constitution had broken down. Samuel Johnson says that King Abiodun; who tried to arrest the situation, had to keep a body-guard of about four thousand Popos under the command of his son. Where were the Eso, the traditional 'praetorian guards' of the king? The Oyo army with its solid core of cavalry which was formerly the effective instrument of expansion as well as the bugbear of tributary states was now a ghost of its former self. It was this weakness of the central authority that made possible the successful provincial revolts that took place in this period.

The appearance of effective leaders in the provinces (long weighed down by the proverbially unjust exactions of the Alafin's representatives) must not be left out of this account. Two examples will suffice. Lishabi, whom Dr Biobaku has rightly called the Egba Lycurgus, took the opportunity to free the Egba from the Oyo yoke. In similar circumstances, Gezo, the king of Dahomey, was able later on to stop the payment of the crushing annual tribute to Oyo. But long before the feat performed by Gezo, the dismemberment of the Oyo empire was apparent. The failure of Abiodun to bring back the Egba (1775-80) to Oyo allegiance; the revolt of the Bariba and the defeat of the Oyo army sent against them; the series of quarrels which broke out between 1781 and 1788 in the coastal parts of the empire which the Alafin could not compose; all these are eloquent testimonies to the fact that the Oyo empire was in decline. A new age was dawning, soon to be more clearly heralded by the repercussions of the Fulani jihād. The era of the Yoruba successor-states to the Old Oyo empire was already in sight.

But the fact that the Old Oyo empire finally disintegrated should not be allowed to obscure the achievements of the Yoruba in this period. They attained remarkable artistic excellence as can be seen from the Ife works of art that survived the empire. They fashioned institutions of government, the spirit of which still pervades the institutions of the successor-states. The unity achieved by Old Oyo was certainly gone; but the idea of it continued to haunt the minds of succeeding generations.

## BENIN

In several respects the history of the Bini people is similar to that of the Yoruba. In the first place, the same 'Egyptian' origin has been suggested for the Bini;<sup>4</sup> and there is the same difficulty of determining the precise origin of the people and of working out an accurate chronological framework for their history.<sup>5</sup> Secondly, there is, as we have already seen, the same dynastic link with a common cultural centre, Ife, through Oranmiyan. Thirdly, the Benin empire owed its success (like the Old Oyo empire) to the emergence of capable rulers at the crucial moments in its history. Thus Eweka I successfully launched the 'second' Benin empire after the first had fallen on evil days; the Uzama, the Benin 'council of state', was said to have been created by him. Ewedo not only enhanced the powers of the Oba *vis-à-vis* the Uzama; he also made good laws. To cite only one more example, Ewuare, rightly called the Great, was more than the equivalent of the Yoruba Sango. Credited with magical powers, Ewuare combined military competence with remarkable statesmanship, qualities which enabled him to revive the dwindling fortunes of Benin. He extended the empire and, to use a modern word, 'developed' the metropolis. Fourthly, Benin, like Old Oyo, had the necessary resources for maintaining its political system. In addition to the usual revenue accruing from tolls and the royal prerogative of demanding the labour of his subjects for public works, the Oba had other sources of income. There were the proceeds of the export trade with the Europeans; there were the half-yearly tributes of foodstuffs from the different parts of the empire; and there were court fees. Fifthly, and lastly, the Benin kingdom flourished in the same period as the Yoruba empire and dominated an equally great area of what is now Southern Nigeria. But there are also marked differences.

Take first the Bini version of the Oranmiyan dynasty. Bini traditions not only emphasise the existence of an older dynasty of native kings known as Ogiso, but the Oranmiyan story is also told with a peculiar twist. The Bini themselves brought their own indigenous dynasty to an end by asking the Oni (king) of Ife for a prince to rule over them. The Oni sent Oranmiyan who, as soon as he reached the capital, quickly perceived that only a prince with the requisite knowledge of local culture and customs could

successfully rule the people. Oranmiyan therefore decided to return to Ife, but not before he had made the daughter of a local chief pregnant. It was the son, born in these circumstances, who became Eweka I, the founder of the second Benin empire. Obviously there is an attempt in this story to gloss over what was in fact an alien imposition. The dynasty came from Ife, but its first king was a native-born Edo.<sup>6</sup> This contrasts sharply with the Yoruba's reverent attitude to Ife.

Benin, unlike Old Oyo, was remarkably accessible from the coast; and this fact accounts for the many contacts it had with Europeans very early in its recorded history. In 1485, when the empire was already well-established, the Portuguese came in search of trade. In the wake of the traders came Portuguese missionaries, anxious to found churches.<sup>7</sup> By the sixteenth century these early contacts had resulted in an exchange of ambassadors between Benin and Portugal; and Portuguese cultural influence was for a time felt at the court of the Oba. In the course of time, other Europeans, notably the Dutch and the English, followed the Portuguese. One of the consequences of these contacts with Europeans was the introduction of firearms which must have facilitated the further expansion of the Benin empire. Another is that they have left us eyewitness accounts of the Benin empire. From the European records we can learn something about the divine monarchy of the Bini; about the etiquette and the remarkable size of the court of the Oba; about the thirty main streets of the metropolis, all straight and wide; about the cleanliness of the people and their surroundings; and about the system of trading.

This last point brings us to yet another marked difference between Benin and Old Oyo. In the latter place, the Alafin's attitude to commerce was one of *laissez faire*; the interest of the government was confined to the collection of customs on goods and tolls from the traders passing through the many gates. In contrast to this, the Oba of Benin had a royal monopoly. Or, in the words of a European eyewitness: 'Commerce and military service are distinct functions, and no one has the right to trade nor to buy anything from Europeans except the traders and the merchants whom the King has appointed for that duty.' The trade in question was the export trade in which slaves, leopard skins, pepper, palm kernels and ivory were exchanged for European manufactured goods. It was the special duty of officials like the Unwagwe and

the Eribo, chiefs of high rank in the palace administration, to transact the business on behalf of the Oba. This does not mean that the common man could not engage in this trade; he took part only after the royal transaction was over and with the special permission of the Oba.

Controlled in a similar manner were the crafts and industries of Benin. The royal control was exercised through special ward guilds in the capital who had the duty of carrying on particular industries. For example, there was a guild of goldsmiths; there was another for brass-smiths, the members of which claimed descent from Iguoghae who was said to have introduced the art of brass-casting from Ife. This guild of brass-smiths, it should be noted, produced the famous 'bronzes' at the request of the Oba. Royal regulations and marked specialisation,<sup>8</sup> then, were the main features of Benin industries.

Though the Benin system of administration was as highly organised as that of the Old Oyo empire, it had its own distinguishing features. For example, the Yoruba were mainly town-dwellers; but in the Benin empire the village was the 'basic political unit'. Again, the Oba of Benin seems to have enjoyed greater powers than the Alafin of Oyo. True, both were regarded as divine and as the source of all authority. But the powers of the Oba of Benin were not as limited in practice as those of the Alafin were. The Uzama, the Benin counterpart of the Oyomesi, had lesser powers than their very high ranking and ancient titles would lead one to expect. Unlike the Oyomesi, the Uzama could not 'make' an Oba; their collective role, in a system based on primogeniture, was merely to install the eldest surviving son of a dead Oba. More important, they could not unseat the Oba. Indeed Dr R. E. Bradbury, one of the leading authorities on the Bini, assures us that there was no provision in the Benin constitution for unseating the king. (Contrast this with the power of the Oyomesi to get rid of an unwanted Alafin.) Furthermore, the powers of the Oba were further accentuated by his prerogative of conferring most of the state-system titles on his deserving subjects, while most chieftaincies in Oyo were held through membership of lineages in which the chieftaincies were vested.

If we now shift the focus of our attention from this brief comparison to the real achievements of the Bini, four things seem to stand out clearly. Firstly, the Bini had the singular honour (in

Southern Nigeria) of exchanging ambassadors with a European power as early as the fifteenth century. Secondly, the Benin empire was considerable in size. At different times, it extended as far as Lagos and Badagri in the west and as far as Bonny in the east; it included Akure and parts of the Ekiti country in the north. Thirdly the impact of the Bini on some of their vassals was also considerable. Lastly, we have in the Benin 'bronzes' abiding evidence of a complex society as well as of artistic achievements now universally acclaimed.

#### THE IBO

For two important reasons, very little is known about the origins and the early history of the Ibo. In the first place, the Ibo, like the Yoruba and the Bini, were a non-literate people with no written records of their own; but unlike the other two peoples, they were outside the sphere of the activities (or interest) of the Europeans for a long time. The Europeans knew much about the Delta city-states on the coast and very little about the Ibo hinterland until the journey of the Lander brothers in the 1830s. The result is that we have not the necessary written sources<sup>9</sup> with which to reconstruct a clear picture of the Ibo past. Secondly, and this is the greater handicap, there is no substantial corpus of oral traditions for the people as a whole like those which have proved so useful to historians and others in reconstructing the past of the Yoruba and Bini. This state of affairs arose from the fact that the Ibo had no centralised administrative system with an Oba. There was thus not the usual interest in dynastic lists, in the chronicles of events passed on from one generation to another as in the other parts of Southern Nigeria. In consequence only traditions of origin or migration of particular groups seem to have survived.

The available traditions point to the possibility of an original 'Ibo centre' somewhere in the present Awka and Orlu divisions and from which the Ibo dispersed over the surrounding areas. Two possible dispersions from such a centre have been suggested. The first was 'a massive movement' south-eastward to the Isuama area; the second consisted of lesser migrations of the Ibo westward across the Niger. That this theory of Ibo origins is not all-embracing, is evident from the existence of groups with traditions of independent origin. For example, the Umunri group maintain they migrated from Idah; the Onitsha Ibo claim to have come

from Benin.<sup>10</sup> The difficulties in reconciling all these different traditions is an illustration of how limited is our knowledge of the Ibo past.

Another consequence of the comparative lack of knowledge of the Ibo past was the mistaken notion that the Ibo had no 'government'. This was generally the view of those to whom centralisation of authority was the *sine qua non* of a viable government and who, for that very reason, missed the real nature of Ibo society. There was no one state with sovereign powers over all the Ibo; their society was 'fragmented' and consequently so was authority. But this should not be interpreted as indicating the absence of government. In their own ways, the Ibo met the several ends which the governments of other societies were expected to serve. True, they lacked formal 'institutions' but they made laws, punished offenders against law and customs, and tried to prevent crimes in their society; in short they strove to preserve law and order. Rightly has it been pointed out that rules rather than rulers are the essence of the Ibo system.<sup>11</sup>

The great point of difference between the Ibo and the Yoruba or the Bini, therefore, was the absence of centralisation. The basic social unit among the Ibo was the single village made up of scattered homesteads and linked together by ties of kinship. The largest political unit was no larger than the 'village group'. This last consisted of a number of villages sharing the same cultural identity, a guardian deity and a central meeting place or market. But each constituent village retained the right to manage its own affairs and it was still subject to the moral authority of the head of its lineage, called an Okpara, whose symbol was the club-like *ofo*. The village group, however, remained an ideological and political unit in the sense that the constituent villages regarded themselves as members of the larger group, a sense of belonging symbolised by the annual performances of religious rites and by the simultaneous clearing of the various paths leading to the central market. The overall picture for the whole of Ibo country, then, was a very large number of separate political units indicative of what has been called an 'excess of democracy' but certainly not an absence of 'government'.

Yet in spite of the multiplicity of social and political units, the Ibo were one people. They lived in the same geographical area. They spoke the same language or related dialects which were more

or less mutually 'intelligible'. They shared the same culture in the sense that, for the most part, they possessed the same kinship structure, that important cult symbols like the *ofò*, and social institutions like the *osu* (slaves dedicated to the service of particular deities and, therefore, tabu)<sup>12</sup> were widespread. Finally all Ibo recognised a Supreme Being, Chuku, or Chineke (among the southern Ibo), who controlled all things in heaven and earth and to whom many spirits ministered.

Beneath the numerous political units characteristic of the Ibo, there operated several integrating mechanisms. Remarkable in this respect was the existence of powerful oracles whose influence cut across the several Ibo units. For example, the oracle of Chuku (the High God) at Arochuku, commonly known to Europeans as the Long Juju, exercised a predominant influence over the whole of Iboland. It was the final court of appeal to which suitors came from far and wide; and generally all Ibo respected its pronouncements. Indeed, it was the exploitation of the universal respect and awe which all Ibo had for this oracle that enabled the Aro (called by other Ibo 'Umu-Chuku', the children of God) to dominate Iboland economically and politically during the period of the slave trade. In the same manner the oracle of Agballa at Awka was eagerly sought by many Ibo for judicial decisions and for the good things of life. And in this particular instance the process was aided by the itinerant blacksmiths of Awka; they plied their trade as well as extolling the great powers of their oracle throughout Iboland. Mention may also be made of lesser oracles like those of Igweke Ala at Umunora and Onyili-ora.

The prevalence of markets was another factor that tended to bring the Ibo closer together. The central markets in all the village groups were the focal points for all the members of the groups. They also encouraged frequent contacts between one village group and another. The importance of these markets for Ibo communities can be fully realised only if it is appreciated that they were more than places where people bought and sold; they were social centres and many social arrangements revolved around market days.

Nor must the consequences of the Ibo practice of exogamy (which encouraged a man to seek a wife from a village group other than his own) be overlooked. This practice gave rise to an intricate mesh of personal relationships which bound one village group with several others. For, under the system, a married man was linked

with the village of his wife, with that of his mother and with those of his sisters' husbands. And the consequences of these relationships were beneficial. They facilitated inter-village trading by providing mutual protection. They multiplied personal contacts through the many reciprocal visits which tradition imposed on in-laws. They tended to soften inter-village fighting. As M. M. Green in her *Ibo Village Affairs* concluded, 'This fact of inter-marriage between different and potentially hostile groups must have contributed in no small degree to the survival of the Ibo people.'

Finally, the Ibo were not completely cut off from the rest of what we now call the Eastern Region of Nigeria. Like the Yoruba and Bini, they had contact with their neighbours—the Ibibio and the Ijaw, for example. The impact of the Ibo on Bonny is writ large in its population; and the long period of economic interdependence between the eastern delta and the Ibo hinterland is too well-known to be laboured here.

What were the achievements of the Ibo in this period? Any answer to this question must be tentative, given the present state of our knowledge. A realistic assessment must await the results of the large-scale research schemes now in progress.<sup>13</sup> But this much can be said. The most significant point, perhaps, is not that the Ibo lacked a centralised system of administration, like the Yoruba and the Bini, but that their numerous political units lasted so long. Thanks to their integrating mechanisms, their 'system' of fragmentation of authority effectively met the needs of the Ibo. Theirs was a system, 'excessively' democratic no doubt, but one that gave ample scope to the individual's ability and initiative.

#### CONCLUSION

Such were the separate pasts of the Yoruba, Bini and Ibo. As emphasised at the beginning of this chapter, the various links between the different peoples of Southern Nigeria should always be borne in mind. It was in this period that these peoples developed their salient characteristics, characteristics which were to influence not only their responses to alien rule but also the course of that rule. For example, it was only when the architects of indirect rule recognised the real nature of Ibo communities, where there were no large political entities, that British administration succeeded. In Yorubaland and Benin, on the other hand, the large political

organisations, built up in the period under survey, facilitated the work of British administration even though they had been somewhat undermined in the first flush of British intrusion.

## NOTES

1 The best exponent of this theory is P. A. Talbot in his *Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, Vol. 1, pp. 276-78, London, 1926.

2 The origin of the Yoruba is one of the problems which the Yoruba Historical Research Scheme directed by Dr S. O. Biobaku is trying to solve.

3 For what traditions have to say about the earliest Alafins, see Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, pp. 143-176, Lagos, C.M.S., 1950.

4 Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, U.I.P., 3rd edition, 1960.

5 For details see Dr R. E. Bradbury, 'Chronological Problems in the Study of Benin History', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 1, no. 4.

6 See Dr R. E. Bradbury, 'The Historical Uses of Comparative Ethnography with Special Reference to Benin and the Yoruba', *The Historian in Tropical Africa*, eds. Vansina, Mauny and Thompson, O.U.P., 1964; and also Dr R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria*, O.U.P., 1957, 1964.

7 For details see Professor A. F. C. Ryder, 'The Benin Mission', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. 2, no. 2, 1961.

8 There was of course a considerable measure of specialisation in Yoruba industries and the main point of difference was, therefore, not specialisation.

9 The only known exception is the biography of Olaudah Equiano, an ex-Ibo slave.

10 G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers*, pp. 30-31, O.U.P., 1963, contains a good account of the known Ibo traditions of origins.

11 M. M. Green, *Ibo Village Affairs*, p. 8, Frank Cass, 2nd edition, 1964.

12 The *osu*, or 'cult slaves', were peculiar to the Ibo. They were different from the domestic slaves (*ohu*) common to Ibo and all other African societies. Unlike the latter they could not be redeemed and were socially ostracised.

13 Worthy of mention are the series of fruitful excavations being made by Professor Thurston Shaw of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan; and the Eastern Region Research Scheme which is being jointly operated by the Departments of History of Ibadan and Nsukka.

# 11 Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence

T. N. TAMUNO

ATTENTION will be focused in this chapter on the Jukun, Tiv (Munshi), Idoma, Igara, Igbira, and Nupe clusters along the Niger and Benue rivers. Their traditions of origin, the bases of traditional governments, the rise and fall of empires and kingdoms, commercial and cultural links—these are the main themes briefly discussed—roughly in the period before the nineteenth century. To avoid unnecessary confusion, each cluster of peoples will be examined separately before commercial and cultural links are discussed.

One general observation that can be made about the traditions of origin of the Jukun, Tiv, Idoma, Igara, Igbira and Nupe, is that no precise dates can be assigned to the periods when these people came to, or began settling in, their present habitats. Where there are traditions of migrations, the places of origin cannot be satisfactorily ascertained. Much of our evidence today about such traditions is based on oral tradition or remembered history, and linguistic evidence with, of course, all the obvious defects this entails.

## THE JUKUN

The traditions of origin of the Jukun (called Kororofa, Kwararafa or Kororofawa by the Hausa) suggest that they migrated to their present habitat from the 'east'—probably Yemil, east of Mecca. Temple recorded one tradition that the Jukun left Mecca owing to disagreements with the Prophet (Muhammad) at a time not specifically indicated. The cause of their disagreement is not known, but according to this tradition, one Agadu and his followers withdrew from Mecca through fear of reprisals by the Prophet when he learned of an attack they had planned against him. The migrants led by Agadu, according to this tradition, passed through Kordofan, 'Fitri', Mandara, and the Gongola area before reaching the Benue. C. K. Meek, a former government anthropologist in Northern Nigeria, noted another tradition which

claimed that the Jukun had migrated with a related group—the Kanuri—from Yemen, and travelled by way of Wadai to N'garagam, a former capital of Bornu. The Jukun, it is further suggested, had settled for some time in the region of Lake Chad before proceeding to the Benue region, partly because of a series of disputes with the Kanuri and partly because of the pressure of population in the Chad region. H. R. Palmer, relying on Bornu traditions, affirmed that about A.D. 1250 the Kwona, a section of

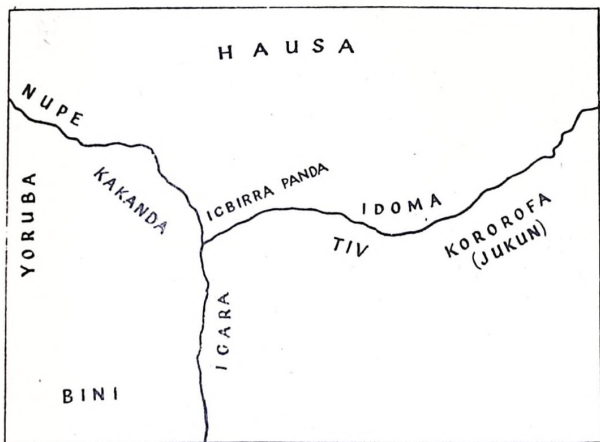


Fig. 11 Peoples of the Niger-Benue confluence.

the Jukun, had already established themselves on the Gongola river. J. M. Fremantle, on the other hand, mentioned yet another tradition in Hausa mythology which placed Kororofa as one of Biram's seven illegitimate children. Conflicting theories, such as these, are characteristic problems in our study of early African history—namely, how to distinguish history from legend. There is no ready guide. Students of traditions of origin in different African societies should be cautious about accepting one view as against another. There is, however, the possibility that with further research new evidence may come to light, which will allow us to speak with greater certainty.

Though views about Jukun origins are not unanimous, yet there is sufficient agreement about the fact that the Jukun capital was formerly at Bepi or Apa (or Kororofa in Hausa). Whether or not this capital was originally north of the Benue is disputed, but there is evidence which suggests that there had existed a town, Kororofa, south of the Benue, and that when this was destroyed either in the seventeenth or eighteenth century, a new one was founded at Puje close to the present capital of Wukari.

A feature of Jukun political institutions was their 'Divine King' (the Aku) who was subject to ritual tabus. Meek believes that the Jukun government was a theocracy in which the Aku represented the gods and constituted a link between them and his subjects. In theory, the Aku was supreme, but in practice well-understood conventions of the constitution provided checks and balances against royal tyranny.

The Aku was, in the eyes of his people, judged by results such as whether or not the harvest was good. Again he was surrounded by so many tabus that he could easily be accused of having broken one, a serious charge. His counsellors led by the Abo, comparable to a prime minister, could show their disapproval of unpopular measures by boycotting the Aku's religious ceremonies—a procedure which could embarrass the king and undermine his prestige, and was a curb on any despotic tendencies. Furthermore the priests, as guardians of the relics of former Akus, could hold a tyrannical Aku to ransom by threatening to expose these sacred objects. Also, since the Aku, because of the sacredness of his person, could not be approached by people with complaints, except through his counsellors, these functionaries also had a ready means of determining cases privately without the knowledge of the Aku. All things considered, a sensible Aku, though vested theoretically with absolute powers, would in practice not alienate his counsellors through high-handedness.

The Jukun state (and later empire) won many victories and suffered several defeats in its chequered history. According to the Kano Chronicle, Yahia (or Yaji) (1349-85), the first Muslim king of Kano, had extended his authority to the borders of Kororofa. The Jukun, the Chronicle further suggests, fled on Yaji's approach, and he remained seven months in their country. His son, Kanajeje (1390-1410), is said to have exacted a tribute of two hundred slaves from the Jukun. In the reign of Muhammad Zaki

(1582-1618), the Kororofawa in turn attacked Kano, and its inhabitants fled to Daura. Again in 1653 Kano became the target of further Kororofa attack which resulted in the destruction of Kofan Kawayi. Later, much of Kano was again destroyed by the 'Sarkin Kororofa' during the reign of Dadi (1670-1703). The Chronicle also states that earlier on in the reign of Dauda, Zaria, under Queen Amina, conquered all the towns as far as 'Kwararafa and Nupe'.

Katsina documents assert that Kwarau, the king of Katsina, about 1260 had waged war against the Kororofawa, and that between 1670 and 1684 Katsina was in turn invaded by the latter. There is not much evidence to support the claim made by Leo Africanus that in the reign of Bowa Dan Goinki, the 'first king' of Gobir, the 'Sarkin Kororofa' waged many successful wars against the 'Sarki of Gobir'. E. J. Arnett, who stated that the kingdom of Gobir was carved out of the territory which later comprised Sokoto province towards the end of the eighteenth century, made no reference to such a Jukun attack on Gobir. It is, however, on record that the Jukun invaded N'gazaragamu, the capital of the Bornu-Kanem empire, in the reign of 'Alī ibn Al-Hājj 'Umar (1645-84), but were repulsed by the people of Bornu assisted on this occasion by the Tuareg.

The second half of the seventeenth century marked the height of Jukun power. Sultan Bello, writing early in the nineteenth century, suggested that 'Kororofa' was one of the seven greatest kingdoms of the 'Sudan', and also claimed that at the height of its power, its domains 'extended south to the Cross river and even to the Atlantic', probably an exaggeration. According to J. M. Fremantle, the Jukun had at various times exercised sovereign rights over Kano, Bornu, Idoma, Igbira, and Igara. Like many other kingdoms in the Western and Central Sudan before it, Kororofa declined rapidly towards the end of the eighteenth century, and finally collapsed before Chamba and Fulani attacks early in the nineteenth. It is possible that the displacement of the trade in slaves by that in palm oil in Calabar (a probable Jukun market) at the beginning of the nineteenth century, coupled with internal dissension and probably pestilence, may have contributed to the Jukun decline. The spiritual influence of the Jukun as expert magicians, however, survived their political downfall, an influence which at a later stage spread to their neighbours, the Tiv.

## THE TIV

The origin of the Tiv is shrouded in mystery. R. M. Downes recorded a local tradition which traced this group's ancestry from one Takaruku. Like the Jukun, they appear to have migrated to their present abode around the Benue, in this case, from 'some area a long way south'. According to A. T. Grove this original Tiv home was in the foothills of the Southern Cameroons. Downes, on the other hand, is of the opinion that before their later migration, the Tiv had as neighbours the Iriko (Ekoi). Other enemies, like the Mbayongo had, according to Downes, harassed the Tiv and thus forced them to migrate northwards to a hilly, and no doubt more protected, area near the Benue. L. and P. Bohannan asserted that in the Benue region the Tiv had at first lived on a hill-top variously stated as Ibenda, Ngokuv, and Selagi. Downes, however, suggested the Sonkwala hill. From this relatively safe abode daring Tiv groups later (and probably early in the nineteenth century) moved to more open country mainly because of population pressure. The iHarev and the iMasev are believed to have been the first Tiv clusters to leave their hilly abode.

The Tiv, who had been mainly agriculturists (producing varieties of yam, cocoyam, and millet) and skilled hunters using wooden and stone implements, later acquired skill in the use of iron—especially for making arrows, spears, knives, and other tools. These improvements may well have encouraged them to leave the hilly habitat for the plains as they were then more capable of defending themselves against enemies, for example, the Chamba. Having left their former home the Tiv came into contact with the Fulani and Jukun.

The Tiv system of government, before contact with the Jukun, centred around a secret society called the *mba tsav* whose members, with some exceptions, provided the two principal rulers of every kindred. One of these rulers was the Tee (or Spokesman) who was believed to have been gifted with magical powers which should advance the prosperity of the people. He also controlled spiritual and legislative matters. The second ruler was the Shagba Or (Man of Substance). A wealthy person (or one blessed with children), though not a member of the *mba tsav*, could hold office as a Shagba Or. Both the Tee and the Shagba Or were elected by a council which advised the Shagba Or in his duties, especially

those relating to safeguarding internal security and settling disputes. It was also the Shagba Or who administered the laws enacted by the Tee, and with the assistance of the council, passed sentences on convicted criminals.

After contact between the Tiv and the Jukun, the basis of the former administration of a Tiv kindred became considerably modified. The Tee and Shagba Or gave way to a new class of chiefs: the so-called Drum Chiefs.<sup>1</sup> The Drum Chief (Tor Agbande) received his sanction and regalia from the Jukun king. At first, only the Tiv clans nearest Wukari (for example, Gambe and Kpav) had Drum Chiefs, but the term was copied by other Tiv clans. Drum Chiefs were of necessity members of the *mba tsav*.

#### THE IDOMA

Near the Tiv were the Idoma who, with the exception of the Iyala, claim that their ancestors had a Wukari (i.e. a Jukun) origin. According to Armstrong, the Idoma-speaking peoples originally occupied an area extending from Idah in the south-west to Wukari in the east. Under pressure from several neighbours, they now occupy a much smaller area.

Though the Idoma were united linguistically, they were not united into a single political state. Most of them had no political institutions extending beyond the Land or clan, consisting of a few related kindred groups. In each Land there was a hierarchy of titled elders known as the Igabo who selected and advised the head chief. In a few places, state organisations emerged extending beyond single clans. The three most important were Doma and Keana in the north and Agala in the south. It is not clear whether these states existed before the advent of the Jukun to the Benue valley or whether their emergence was due specifically to Jukun influence.

#### THE IGARA (IGALA)

The Igara (Igala) constitute another important ethnic cluster around the Niger-Benue confluence. Various traditions link the Igara with the Yoruba, Bini, and Jukun. Similarities as well as differences in the institution of divine kingship, methods of succession, royal regalia, and languages among the Igara, Yoruba, Bini, and Jukun have led, amongst other things, to a controversy about the origin of Igara kingship and political institutions. There is one local tradition which regards Agenapoje as the ancestor of

the Ata (King) of Igara. According to this tradition Agenapoje 'landed on a rock near Idah (the capital) being sent from the Gods'.

The Ata was at one time a vassal of the Oba of Benin. Partly owing to personal friction between Oba Esigie and a Benin nobleman (the Oliha), and partly because of a desire to control trade along the Niger, Benin was involved in a war with Idah, a conflict in which Portuguese Christian missionaries fought on the side of Esigie. Probably soon after this war, which was fought about 1517, the Atas of Igara secured their independence from the Obas of Benin. According to another tradition, the Igara, later, also fought a war with the Jukun when the former stopped paying tribute to the king at Wukari. The date and details of this war are not clear; but the Igara claimed victory, and so gained independence from the Jukun.

The Ata, assisted by a council of nine elders, called the Igala Mela,<sup>2</sup> controlled the affairs of the Igara. Together with an official known as the Ashadu (a sort of Lord Chamberlain) this council selected successive Atas from among members of four royal families descended from Ayagba, the successor of Agenapoje. Neighbouring states (for instance, the Igbira, Idoma and Nupe) under the hegemony of the Igara, paid tribute to the Ata. Their chiefs were confirmed in office by him and given a bead bracelet.

#### THE IGBIRA

The Igbira, according to P. Brown, were descendants of colonists from the Igara of Idah. One of such early colonists was Ohimi, the son of a former Ata, who had crossed the Benue about 1750. Igbira groups also claim ultimate ancestry from the Jukun of Wukari. Some Igbira groups, for example those of Panda and Igu probably came within the Igara domains in the eighteenth century.

#### THE NUPE

The Nupe comprised eleven or twelve related ethnic groups: Ebe, Gbedye or Gbedegi, Kusopa, Benu, Beni, Dibo or Zitako (called Gana-Gana by the Hausa), Kyedye or Kede, Ebagi, Batsoi, Kupa, Cekpa, and probably Gwagba. Of the above groups the Kyedye and the Beni deserve special mention. Preoccupation with trading and fishing had assisted the Kyedye in 'colonial' expansion and conquests. From Muregi, close to the confluence of the Niger and its tributary, the Kaduna, the Kyedye had established all along

the river banks trading and fishing posts which subsequently became colonies. The Beni, unlike the Kyedye, lacked the ability for conquest and colonisation. However, the twelve Beni 'towns'—Bida, Tafie, Esa, Doko, Towagi, Egbe, Gaba, Nupeko (close to which was the village of Nku), Eda, Panjuru, Ewu, and Yesa—were knit together in a confederacy. Each of these units acknowledged the supremacy of one 'town' to which a small tribute was paid. Moreover, in war they all co-operated against a non-Beni invader. About the middle of the fifteenth century, the Beni groups acknowledged the suzerainty of the chief of Nku.

Hermon-Hodge concluded from a remark by Ibn Battūta that the Nupe were already settled on the Niger by 1352, but this must be treated with caution. What seems certain is that the Nupe originally were in the sphere of influence of the Igara. According to tradition recorded by Nadel, it was Tsoede, son of an Idah prince (who later became Ata) and an Nku mother, who was the first Etsu (king) of an independent Nupe kingdom. With the assistance of the twelve Beni chiefs he conquered Nku and proclaimed himself the Etsu. He was renowned for his magical powers and he used these and the royal insignia he received from his father—a bronze cannon, long bronze trumpets, state drums with brass bells, unnaturally heavy iron chairs—to build up a divine monarchy. Nupe tradition credits him with introducing from Idah the arts of canoe-building and smithery as well as human sacrifice.

There is no doubt that Tsoede was a warrior-king. With his residence at Nupcko (or Great Nupe) and later at Gbaro, he laid the foundations of the new Nupe kingdom which tried to establish political supremacy over all the Nupe groups. He went beyond and conquered other groups, the Yagba, Bunu and Kakanda to the south, the Ebe, Kamberi and Kamuku to the north. He was supposed to have died around 1590 at the ripe age of 120 years.

Etsu Mamma (1795-6), one of Tsoede's successors, is credited by Nadel with the founding of another capital, Raba. After the death of Mamma, the Nupe kingdom witnessed succession disputes which resulted in its sub-division under two rival Etsus, Jimada (1796-1805) with headquarters at Jimi (Gbara), and Majiya II (1796-1810) with his capital at Raba. Jimada died while fighting against Majiya who was assisted by Mallam Dendo and other Fulani groups in Nupe. Later, Majiya turned against his former Fulani supporters who, with the help of Mallam Alimi of Ilorin,

routed Majiya's forces early in the nineteenth century. Thereafter, the Fulani victors allowed the reign of puppet Etsus until 1836 (a year after Majiya's death) when Usman Zaki, son of Mallam Dendo, became the first Fulani Etsu Nupe.

The political institutions of the various peoples along the Niger and Benue rivers have shown that in early times they had had links one with the other, for example in the payment of tribute to overlords who in turn recognised the selection of vassal chiefs. Jukun influence, it will be recalled, had extended to the Idoma, Igbira and Igara. In turn, Igara influence extended not only to Nupe, but also to the Igbira. The two Igbira kingdoms of Koton Karafi and Funda (or Panda) paid tribute to the Atas of Igara up to the early 1850s. Panda fell before Fulani raids in 1853. Its destruction preceded the foundation, by the Fulani, of Nasarawa which replaced Panda's commanding position in the Benue valley. But apart from political and cultural contacts, there were also important commercial links which should be explored further.

#### COMMERCE

The commercial links among these peoples were considerable. MacGregor Laird and Oldfield, for the earlier, and Baikie for the mid-nineteenth century, have left on record interesting descriptions of commercial and cultural contact among the riverain peoples, which are useful since it is arguable that the pattern of commercial and cultural activities they had recorded was not very different from what might have obtained up to 1800. The Niger-Benue peoples and others in the neighbourhood met at important market centres: especially those at Raba (close to Jebba), Egga lower down the Niger, Funda (Panda or Odokodo) above the confluence of the Niger-Benue, and Ikiri (or Okiri, and called Bocquah by Richard Lander) between Idah and Igbegbe near the confluence.

E. W. Bovill referred to Raba (spelt also as Rabba or Rabbah) and Komie (Wonjerque) just below Bussa, as the two principal places on the Niger, where caravan traders were ferried across the river by the local inhabitants. At the time Laird and Oldfield visited the Niger, they found vigorous trading at Raba. Here Hausa, Yoruba, Nupe and other traders met Arabs who did business with Bornu, Kano, Sokoto, Timbuktu and Tripoli. The Arabs were the principal dealers in horses, asses, raw silk, red caps

from Tripoli, armlets, and trona (a salt substitute and medicine). Laird and Oldfield inform us that 'Zagoshie', an island off Raba, produced a considerable proportion of the goods sold at Raba. The principal products found at Raba comprised yams, onions, *dawa* corn, *gero* (a species of millet seed), Indian corn, rice, sweet potatoes, fine cows, sheep, goats, and fowls. There was also a brisk trade in ivory, indigo, ostriches, camels, leopard skins, beeswax and slaves.

The market at Egga, at the time Laird and Oldfield visited it, contained plain and dyed robes, cloth, sandals, saddles, bridles, beads (some of English manufacture), iron, sulphurate of antimony (black lead), raw indigo, armlets of copper, wooden spoons, bowls, calabashes, spice nuts, pepper, sweet potatoes, onions, and other commodities. Egga, however, was less important than the Raba market.

Laird and Oldfield saw caravans from Kano and Bornu at yet another market—that of Funda (Panda). The inhabitants of this town produced cotton cloths, dye-works, iron, and copper utensils. Blacksmiths here were held in high esteem. Arabs and 'Felatahs' (Fulani) also frequented this market and exchanged European goods with slaves before Funda was destroyed by Fulani raids soon after the end of the expedition of Laird and Oldfield.

A much more important centre of trade lay to the south—Bocquah or Ikiri mentioned earlier. Along a sandbank here a market was held for three days every ten days. Traders from Aboh, and Bonny farther south, Idah, Egga, Koton-Karafi, Panda (Funda) and 'great numbers from the interior country' on both banks of the Niger met here at the appointed times. Produce from the markets in the neighbourhood was sold in this market for cash in the form of cowries. The ivory sold here came mainly from the region later designated Adamawa, and the trona from Bornu. Ikiri was also a principal market for Bonny and other slave dealers. Laird and Oldfield reckoned that more than 6,000 people attended this market and that about 11,000 slaves were sold here annually. A majority of the slaves, these travellers observed, were of Nupe origin and found their way ultimately to the coast.

Around the confluence, especially at Igbegbe, Baikie and his party found Ibo woven cloth from 'Elugu' sold. About the same place Baikie bought a mat which Mr (later Bishop) S. A. Crowther 'at once recognised as being similar to those made by the Yoruba of Ijebu'. His party also saw around the confluence a slave who

claimed to have been from 'a place called Bagari, near Bornu'. Incidents such as this suggest that commercial contact around the confluence was widely diffused and affected various peoples near to, or fairly distant from, the Niger-Benue area.

Evidence of wide commercial and associated cultural diffusion in this region may be inferred from the existence of a form of currency which resembled a small hoe with a long spike at one end, known as far north as Katsina, and called *akika* in Idoma and Kororofa, *ibia* among the Tiv, and *agelema* in Hausa. Manillas, or copper bars, were used as currency on a large scale in the Benue valley around 1931, but it may well have been the case that Bonny traders, or others using trade routes linking Calabar and the Jukun area, introduced manillas, which were widely used as currency along the coast from the sixteenth century onwards, into the more inland regions of the Benue during the period under consideration.

The Idoma country also had markets, such as Abakpa in Yan-gedde, Utonkon, and Igumale, which were visited frequently by slave dealers from Nupe and Arochuku. Rogan-Koto, close to Tiv and Jukun territories, constituted, at the time of Baikie's visit, and probably earlier, 'the principal place' where the commodities of the Benue were exchanged.

#### CONCLUSION

Language difficulties did not impede the commercial and cultural intermingling of the various peoples in these markets. Hausa was the *lingua franca* of most traders in these places. The cultural unity of this area, with certain exceptions, is further exemplified in similarities among the main languages spoken here and Dr Greenberg placed Igala (Igara), Nupe, Igbira, Idoma, Jukun, and Tiv under sub-divisions of a common 'family' called 'Niger-Congo'. We can safely conclude, therefore, that the Niger-Benue confluence from fairly early times was a cultural melting-pot and that it served as a meeting ground not only for the exchange of trade goods but also for ideas.

#### NOTES

1 After recognition by the Jukun king, the Drum Chief (Tor Agbande) was accompanied home from the Jukun capital by drummers.

2 Igala is a reference to Igara. It is both the name of the people and of their language.

## 12 Portuguese and Dutch in West Africa before 1800

A. F. C. RYDER

### THE PORTUGUESE

THE roots of Portuguese enterprise in Africa lay in the great expansion of mercantile activity which transformed Europe in the later Middle Ages. Rising towns, growing wealth, expanding populations quickened the pace of international trade and aided the development of the bureaucratic state. In wealth and techniques the Italian states were long the leaders of this progress which they carried beyond the bounds of Europe. Italians had their trading centres, called factories, in the Byzantine empire, some of them fortified and self-governing; by the end of the twelfth century, the Genoese were carrying coral to North Africa, and by the fourteenth century they and the Venetians were trading with the Magrib as far south as Massa. A Genoese even took possession of one of the Canary islands in 1312 and maintained his claim for a number of years; Castilians followed in 1402 with the first permanent European settlement in those islands. But neither these enterprises nor any of the other expeditions mounted by Italians, Mallorcans, Andalusians and Portuguese in the fourteenth century led to effective contact with the islands and mainland of West Africa. That achievement awaited the development of a sound economic incentive and a political power adequate to back the merchants. Such a combination of power and enterprise was being nurtured in Portugal where the concentrated experience of the Mediterranean fused with the knowledge and skills of a people versed in the Atlantic fisheries and with the enlightened self-interest of a crown and nobility actively devoted to trade and all that went with the business of shipping. 'Portugal advanced more rapidly than any other nation in Europe toward the mobilisation of *all* the factors needed to support a strong national action of the type required to build an empire.'<sup>1</sup>

Two principal considerations determined that Portuguese imperialism should turn first towards Africa, Commercial expecta-

tions engendered by current knowledge and notions of Africa drew them powerfully in that direction. Information about the wealth of the interior had accumulated from contact with Moorish North Africa and the caravan route terminating in the gold port of Massa. Jews of the Iberian kingdoms had acquired additional knowledge from their co-religionists in northern Africa, to such an extent that the Catalan Atlas compiled by a Mallorcan Jew in 1375 could show Timbuktu, Mali, Gao and Taghaza—reputed sources of gold, ivory, slaves and pepper. The other attraction towards Africa arose from the centuries-old conflict of Christian and Muslim which the slow process of Reconquest had kept constantly aflame in the Iberian peninsula. Since the eleventh century Christian states had been moving forward against the Muslims, fighting for the conquest of territory, but equally eager to secure commercial rights within Muslim states. While in the eastern Mediterranean the Crusade was a dying cause, hastened to its end by the Turkish advance, for Portuguese and Castilians it remained an ever-present challenge. Their 'frontier of opportunity'—fame, wealth and salvation—lay in Africa.

The Portuguese empire was launched in the grand manner when in 1415 a fleet of a size unprecedented in that state carried John I, his three sons and the flower of Portuguese chivalry to the conquest of Ceuta. How that foothold was to develop remained uncertain and unpremeditated. Most contemporaries probably envisaged an extension of Portuguese control over the Barbary coast which would also serve to master the trans-Saharan trade at its northern terminals. Such a policy presented grave difficulties to a kingdom as small as Portugal, confronted with the certainty of fierce Moorish resistance, and it never progressed far beyond its triumphant beginning. Yet it was an end never wholly abandoned. Henry the Navigator returned to it in 1437 when he led a disastrous expedition against Tangier. Alfonso V of Portugal expended far more blood and treasure upon the capture of the three Moorish cities, Alcazar, Arcila and Tangier, than upon voyages to Guinea, and about one century later that same vision brought total disaster to Portugal when King Sebastian and his army were destroyed on the field of Alcacer-Kabir (1578). Meanwhile, anticipations of commercial profit from these Moroccan conquests proved wholly illusory; they remained little more than isolated fortresses dedicated at great expense to the eternal war against Islam.

However, the resources and knowledge accumulated in Portugal offered an alternative—military and commercial—to the policy of frontal assault upon Islam. Exploration in the fourteenth century had revealed islands in the Atlantic Ocean and a mainland stretching far to the southward towards regions where the best contemporary information located non-Muslim peoples and lands from which Moorish North Africa drew much of its wealth. Duarte, Pedro and Henry, the three sons of John I who fought at Ceuta, and doubtless many of their fellow-countrymen appreciated these possibilities. Each contributed of his authority and wealth to their realisation, but none more than the youngest, commonly known as Henry the Navigator. Few personalities of the fifteenth century have been more thoroughly examined than Henry, inevitably with considerable loss to the legend that gathered round him; but he emerges still as a great creative patron of Portuguese expansion. Nor have his self-avowed motives—conversion of the heathen, material profit and honour—been usefully enlarged upon.

About 1420 Henry began to despatch his ships regularly along the African coast, but for more than a decade they went as corsairs preying on Moors rather than as explorers, for they did not venture beyond regions already known to Europeans. During those same years others of his men settled Madeira and reached the Azores. Expeditions over fairly familiar seas gave way to a new phase of intense activity when Henry's brother Duarte became king of Portugal in 1433. Immediately Henry sent his ships beyond Cape Bojador, till then the accepted limit of European navigation.<sup>2</sup> A constant succession of voyages over the succeeding fourteen years, interrupted only by the Tangier fiasco, carried the Portuguese fifteen hundred miles to the south, until in 1448 they reached Cape Roxo, a little south of the Gambia. These achievements satisfied the adventuring spirit among their promoters, they stimulated the arts of seamanship—in particular they hastened the development of the caravel which made its first recorded West African appearance in 1441—but they yielded little profit. The first serious attempt to trade with the inhabitants of the desert coast was made at Rio de Oro in 1444 and it failed. In fact, voyages made after the first reconnaissance of the coast were little more than a series of slave raids in the course of which the buccaneering spirits spoiled the prospects for the more commercially-minded and secured less than a thousand slaves for themselves. Profit appeared

equally remote when, beyond the Senegal river, the Portuguese first made contact with the more populous and fertile Guinea.<sup>3</sup> There would-be slave raiders met a much fiercer resistance than in the Berber country. So Prince Henry ended the voyages of exploration at the point they had reached in 1448, and for the remainder of his life the Portuguese turned to develop their trade and knowledge in the lands already visited.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE

The most ambitious undertaking in this period of consolidation was the construction of a fortified trading post on Arguin island, the prototype of several others by which Portugal was to secure its overseas trade. To this post Henry hoped to divert the gold trade of Wadan, one of the most important centres on the caravan route between Guinea and Mauritania. But he was only partially successful. Farther south the Portuguese pushed far up the great rivers, hoping to find the sources of gold. On the Senegal river they reached the Felou Falls; on the Gambia they found the important trading centre at Cantor; they reached far into the interior by the Geba river; but though a little gold was obtained in all these rivers, they found neither the source nor the supply they had anticipated. Off the coast began the exploration and colonisation of the Cape Verde islands.

In many rivers a regular trade began to grow with a profit rate that confounded critics of the earlier enterprises. The Venetian Cadamosto was told in 1455 that voyages to Guinea yielded a return of between six and ten times the outlay. So lucrative was it that Castilians, Genoese and Venetians, as well as Portuguese, scrambled into the Guinea trade, either under licence from Prince Henry, or in defiance of the monopoly rights claimed by the Crown of Portugal.<sup>4</sup> This latter course could be dangerous in face of Portuguese domination of the seas. Henry's death in 1460 produced no immediate change in the character of Portuguese enterprise, except that control of it now passed directly to the Crown. With the exception of a voyage a little beyond Sierra Leone in 1462, exploration of the coast continued to stand still for another decade. Alfonso V, intent on conquest in North Africa, declined to extend any further his difficult and distant commitments in Guinea.

It would appear that the initiative for the next and decisive leap

forward came not from the Portuguese government, favouring a standstill, but from the bustling merchants of that country. One of them, Fernão Gomes of Lisbon, secured a contract from the Crown granting him exclusive trading rights beyond Sierra Leone in return for certain payments and the undertaking to explore one hundred leagues of coastline each year. When the contract expired in 1475, Gomes' captains had reached Cape St. Catherine and discovered the long-sought region where gold could be had in abundance. War between Portugal and Castile (1475-9) put the future of this prize in some doubt, because Castile had never recognised Portuguese claims in Guinea, but the treaty of Alcaçovas, 1479, acknowledged the Portuguese position south of Cape Nun, reserving only the Canary islands for Castile. Exploitation of that position now devolved upon Alfonso's son John whom the king had invested with all the Crown's rights in Guinea. In 1481 the prince became John II of Portugal and proved a worthy successor to the forebear of that name who had laid the foundation of his country's commercial and imperial fortune.

Although John II pressed forward the voyages of discovery beyond the Cape of Good Hope, they did not reach India in his lifetime, so much of his attention was devoted to exploiting the golden fortunes of Guinea and to seeking for Prester John and the east through the African interior. Portuguese enterprise in West Africa owed much of its characteristic form and organisation to this ruler who in 1485 added Lord of Guinea to his titles. Enforcement of the royal monopoly was screwed to a new pitch of effectiveness through a complicated pattern of licences, contracts and charters which gave play to a wide variety of private initiative. Some were permitted a single voyage to a designated region, some obtained subordinate monopolies for a term of years, others received general concessions designed to facilitate colonisation of the Atlantic islands. In 1466, for example, the inhabitants of the Cape Verde islands had been granted a privilege permitting them to trade freely with the lands between the Senegal river and Sierra Leone on payment of the customary royal dues. A similar grant to the first settlers of São Tomé in 1485 allowed them to trade from the Niger delta southwards.

But John II ensured that the greatest trader of all was the Crown of Portugal itself. Many of the most valued products of Guinea had already been declared Crown monopolies, among them civet

(worth more than gold), malaguetta, spices and gems. To administer the royal trade and control its licensees John II established in Lisbon in 1482 an office known as the Casa da Mina de Guiné (House of the Mine of Guinea) in which were combined the functions of merchant company and colonial office. In the same year he built the castle of São Jorge da Mina in the centre of the most prized region of Guinea, the Gold Coast (or Costa da Mina as the Portuguese called it): it was at once the residence of a royal governor charged to defend the Crown's rights and assert its authority, and also a trading post designed to monopolise the gold traffic. Not knowing where the gold was produced, John II may have expected to engross all that came from Guinea. That objective, of course, was never achieved, but São Jorge da Mina and the subsidiary trading fort built at Axim about 1502 did attract many Mandingo merchants and others who brought gold from far inland, as well as those from the immediate hinterland of the forts. Contemporary chroniclers estimated that the Casa da Mina was receiving 5,000 pounds of gold annually around the end of the fifteenth century, but the accounts of that department suggest a true figure of between two and three thousand pounds a year, and sometimes less. Approximately once a month a caravel sailed from Lisbon to São Jorge carrying out the merchandise needed for trade, and on the return voyage bearing the gold and other produce of Guinea. For perhaps thirty years after the building of the fortress all went well for the Portuguese on the Costa da Mina enabling the Crown to draw from there a profit estimated by some at five hundred per cent.

Elsewhere the Portuguese gathered less dazzling but still substantial riches. An unfortified trading post maintained in the kingdom of Benin for about twenty years (*c.* 1486-*c.* 1506) yielded a supply of slaves to be bartered for gold at São Jorge and a variety of pepper which sold at a great profit in Europe until the Portuguese government banned it in order to promote the sale of Asian peppers. In Upper Guinea John II endeavoured to repeat his success on the Costa da Mina by building more strategically situated fortresses. One was placed on Freetown Bay, but, failing to justify its existence by attracting gold from the Coya region, was soon demolished. An attempt to construct a fortress at the mouth of the Senegal river had to be abandoned when the building was half-finished. From it John II had planned to restore the Christianised

Wolof prince Bemoy to his throne, and with his assistance divert the gold traffic of Timbuktu and Jenne to the Senegal. That scheme having miscarried, in 1487 he sent three Portuguese from Arguin to establish a trading post at Wadan, again without success for they were soon driven away. In addition at least three missions were despatched to major states of the Western Sudan—to Tekrur, Timbuktu and Mali—in this concerted effort to secure more of the gold trade through Upper Guinea. When all the endeavour came to nothing, the Portuguese Crown lost interest in the region and made no further attempts at fortification or settlement there for more than a century. Upper Guinea therefore lay open to private trade licensed by the Crown. The inhabitants of the Cape Verde islands frequented these coasts regularly, trading for hides, skins, rice, ivory and cotton. In the Senegal and Gambia rivers there was much profit to be made through the import of horses.

Lack of close supervision by the Portuguese government over its subjects trading in Upper Guinea encouraged the growth there of a settler population not found on the Costa da Mina. Traders, adventurers and runaways began to make their homes among the coastal peoples, thus producing sizeable half-caste communities especially in the region of the Cacheu and Casamance rivers. Their scant regard for Portuguese authority and trade regulation led that government in 1518 to decree the death penalty for all who did not immediately withdraw. This was an empty threat, so the numbers and problems continued to grow until Portuguese authority was effectively established in that area a century later. In the Atlantic islands, on the other hand, the government actively promoted the settlement of a similar collection of social outcasts. Portuguese Jews, criminals and deportees joined with free settlers and slaves from the mainland to people the Cape Verde islands, São Tomé and Príncipe with a mulatto population roughly attuned to the European way of life. The prevalence of Portuguese influence in West Africa and its survival against the attacks of far stronger European powers owed much to these self-sufficient island communities. They were also nurseries through which the Portuguese introduced many varieties of plants into West Africa. Sugar cane brought from Madeira generated a boom economy in São Tomé; by the middle of the sixteenth century that island had become Europe's principal source of sugar, and a great source of

wealth to Portugal. Many of the vegetables and fruits introduced to provide food for settlers and provisions for ships later spread to the mainland and became of major importance as food crops. Maize, pineapples, pawpaws, guavas and sweet potatoes were brought from the Americas at an early date. Cassava did not follow until the beginning of the seventeenth century, first to Angola and later to Guinea. The coconut and Asiatic yam came from the east; oranges, melons, lemons and some other fruits from Portugal. Of all these, maize and cassava merit special attention for they helped to ensure a more regular and abundant supply of staple foodstuffs throughout the year, thus making possible a rapid growth of population.

If the Portuguese helped in this way to increase the numbers of the West African peoples, through the slave trade they also became predatory upon them. Haphazard slave-raiding gave way after 1448 to systematic development of the trade; instead of capturing slaves, the Portuguese now bought them from the coastal peoples. By 1455, Cadamosto estimated that one thousand a year were obtained through Arguin, but this is certainly an exaggeration. The Senegal region was reckoned to furnish four hundred slaves a year when the traffic in that river reached its height towards the end of the fifteenth century.<sup>5</sup> By the beginning of the next century the centre of the slave trade had shifted far south to the Bights of Benin and Biafra and the Congo. Slaves were never taken in any number from the coast between Sierra Leone and the Volta river. São Tomé soon became the centre of the slave trade in Lower Guinea, thanks to its position in relation to the mainland sources of supply and to prevailing winds and currents. A royal factor established in the island in 1520 organised the slave trade in the same way that the factor at São Jorge da Mina managed the gold trade. The number of slaves involved in this traffic has often been exaggerated. For example, a visitor to São Tomé in 1506 affirmed that five or six thousand slaves were sometimes held there in transit. In fact, about two hundred were sent each year to the Costa da Mina for the gold trade; in addition perhaps five hundred were carried annually to Lisbon, from where some passed to the Antilles after 1503. A certain number were absorbed into the labour force of the islands, so the true total may have reached one thousand a year. Direct transportation of slaves from São Tomé to the Spanish West Indies began about 1530 when the Casa da

Mina contracted to deliver slaves in the island to merchants representing the government of Castile. It is interesting to note that the slave trade caused the Portuguese little of the heart-searching and moral qualms that the same problem aroused later in Castile in relation to the New World. Even the majority of priests in West Africa saw nothing incongruous in using the slave trade to support missionary activity.

#### MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

Proselytising zeal was never wholly absent from the policies the Portuguese pursued in Guinea. Islamised peoples they unquestioningly regarded as natural foes, but early hostilities against the Sinhaja of the Arguin region were halted when the Portuguese discovered that they were only partially Islamised and therefore entertained hopes of their conversion. In the event a rather casual missionary effort scored little success on the frontiers of Islam; there were very few like the chief of the Gambia who in 1456 was converted from that faith to Christianity. Understandably, more success was anticipated with the non-Islamic peoples of Guinea whom the emissaries of Portugal regularly exhorted to embrace Christianity; Barros' version of Diogo de Azambuja's address to Caramansa is a good example of the approach and arguments employed.<sup>6</sup> Some conversions were made, notably among those living near the Portuguese forts where the Crown endeavoured to maintain an adequate number of priests. They concentrated their efforts upon rulers and chiefs in the belief that if these were won their subjects would follow. There was some truth in that argument. Experience in the Congo seemed to support it, and it scored some lesser successes in Guinea. In 1503, for example, the king of Fetu led many of his chiefs and people to baptism at São Jorge da Mina. On a few occasions Obas of Benin appeared to be near conversion. Most successful of all were the missions to the kingdom of Warri where a semblance of Christianity persisted for more than two hundred years. But none of these conversions went deep; rulers could turn away from Christianity as easily as they turned to it, and there were never enough clergy to make a real impression on the mass of the people, even when the Portuguese began to train an African clergy. In the islands, of course, the missions met with more success, and in 1533 and 1534 Santiago in Cape Verde and São Tomé became the seats of bishoprics with jurisdiction

over Upper and Lower Guinea. In general it may be contended that only where the temporal power of Portugal was convincingly deployed did missionary endeavours meet with any permanent success.

#### DECLINE

From about 1530 the fortunes of Portugal in West Africa began to decline. The human and economic resources of so small a nation proved unequal to the burden of imperial ventures extending to China and the East Indies. Consequently, the Portuguese grip on Guinea relaxed at a time when European rivals stood ready to take advantage of such openings. French ships began to frequent the coast in great numbers, penetrating even into the jealously-guarded gold markets. Some traded at rates which undermined the Portuguese price structure; still more acquired the products of Guinea by attacks on Portuguese shipping and settlements. Even the well-defended island of São Tomé suffered a sack in 1567. That attack, combined with a disease of the sugar canes and slave revolts, brought an end to the island's prosperity. When civil war in France arrested the onslaught from that nation during the second half of the sixteenth century, its place was taken by English intervention which gathered strength from the middle of the century. Portugal replied with diplomatic pressures, sporadic displays of naval strength and, from 1552, a convoy system that gave some protection to shipping between the Azores and the home ports. But the balance of naval power was moving decisively against Portugal.

On the land, too, the situation of the Portuguese deteriorated. Peoples of the coast welcomed the interlopers and offered them sites to build forts, though none were built in the sixteenth century. In reply the Portuguese sought to strengthen their defences and extend the area covered by them, especially on the Costa da Mina where they established forts at Shama and Accra to defend the gold trade. After a brief existence, the latter post was destroyed by the local inhabitants. At the other extremity of Guinea, the fort of Arguin passed into Spanish hands after the accession of Philip II to the Portuguese throne in 1580. It is often asserted that the sixty years' subordination of Portugal to Spain (1580-1640) brought disaster to the interests of the former in West Africa and elsewhere, whereas it is in fact unlikely that the event would have been differ-

ent had Portugal maintained its independence. The earlier years of the century had proved clearly enough that peace, war, or alliances in Europe had little influence upon the determination of trade rivals to wrest the wealth of Guinea from Portugal.

#### THE DUTCH

The United Provinces of the Netherlands certainly used their war with Philip II to justify their incursions into the areas of Portuguese monopoly, but, considering that they disposed of the most vigorous maritime force in Europe, they would assuredly have done the same whatever the international status of Portugal might have been. Dutch ships appeared in West African waters in the last decade of the sixteenth century, first in the Cape Verde islands where they loaded salt or provisioned ships bound for the East Indies, then at Joal and Portudal on the mainland opposite the islands. So ineffective was Portuguese authority in this area that the Dutch were able to maintain a resident factor and hire houses from which to conduct a flourishing trade in wax, ambergris and hides. Even on the Costa da Mina, the centre of Portuguese power, the Dutch mounted an attack on São Jorge da Mina in 1596; though unsuccessful, it was an earnest indication of their confidence and intentions. Raids on São Tomé and Príncipe in 1598 and 1599 helped to undermine still further the tottering economy of those islands.

Having failed to seize a base from the Portuguese, the Dutch merchants engaged in the West African trade determined to build their own in the heart of the gold region on a site offered to the States General by the king of Saboe.<sup>7</sup> In 1612 a fort was accordingly built at Mourée under the very noses of the Portuguese. Another two forts placed at Gorée in 1617 secured Dutch trade in the Cape Verde area and emphasised Portuguese impotence in face of this direct challenge. Within two decades of their appearance in West Africa, the Dutch were probably doing more trade than all other European nations together. They made more than two hundred voyages in the years between 1593 and 1607, and later maintained an average of at least twenty voyages a year, and often more, for thirty-six Dutch vessels were lying on the Mina coast at one time during 1614. These voyages were mostly small-scale ventures because the trade to Guinea in its early years attracted men with a relatively small amount of capital who were thereby debarred

from costly East Indian enterprises. But the enormous success of the chartered East India Company and the increasingly ambitious scale of action against the Portuguese in the Atlantic area soon turned attention to the advantages of large-scale organisation. A first attempt to establish a chartered company for Dutch trade with West Africa and the Americas came to nothing in 1607, but the prospect of renewed war with Spain overcame the objections of private merchants and in 1621 the West India Company was established by a charter that gave it a twenty-four year monopoly of all Dutch trade with the Americas and West Africa from the Tropic of Cancer to the Cape of Good Hope. Assured of military and naval support from the States General, the Company intended to pursue its aims of colonisation and commerce through conquest.

In face of the Dutch attack the Spanish-controlled government of Portugal could do little but defend its possessions with whatever resources could be mustered locally. This was especially true in West Africa which ranked low in the Iberian scale of world commitments. Much therefore depended upon the strength of fortresses and the support of local inhabitants, both Negro and mulatto. The latter was not always denied; in 1625, a force of native auxiliaries destroyed a large body of Dutch sent to attack São Jorge da Mina. Nor did Portuguese commercial initiative wholly disappear in the adverse circumstances. In 1623, for example, they built a fort inland on the Ankobra river to protect newly-discovered gold-workings. In Upper Guinea Portuguese settlement on the mainland began towards the end of the sixteenth century with an establishment on the Geba river to which Mandingo merchants brought some gold. Cacheu was founded 1587-8, and about the middle of the seventeenth century Farim, which became a centre of the kola-nut trade with Sierra Leone. Traders from the Cape Verde islands and the activities of a Jesuit mission also helped to establish the Portuguese presence so firmly in this region that it withstood the debacle which everywhere else swept it from the mainland of Guinea.

#### TRADE EXPANSION AND RIVALRIES

The Dutch West India Company launched its career of conquest in 1630 when it seized a foothold in Pernambuco as the first step towards the mastery of Brazil. The area under Dutch control steadily expanded over the next decade when a number of West

Indian islands also fell into their hands. On the other shore of the Atlantic, the Company's forces took Arguin from Spain in 1633, but the main assault did not come until the Dutch felt confidently established in Brazil and turned their attention to the needs of a

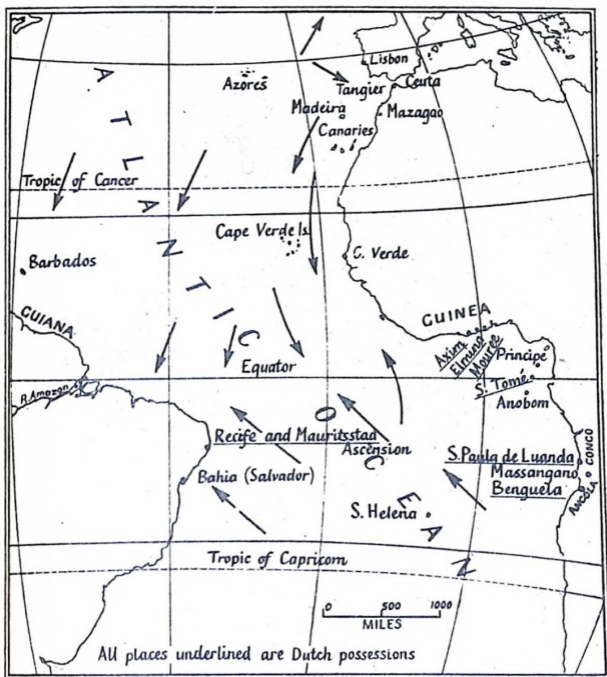


Fig. 12 The West India Company's empire in the South Atlantic, 1643

colony based upon a sugar economy. Then, in 1637, a fleet sailed from Pernambuco to drive the Portuguese from the Costa da Mina and win control of the slave markets. That expedition took São Jorge (afterwards known to the Dutch as Elmina) and Shama, and another fleet despatched from Brazil in 1641 captured Luanda

and São Tomé. The Dutch conquest of Lower Guinea was completed in 1642 by the seizure of Axim despite the truce signed with the newly independent kingdom of Portugal. The West India Company then stood at the height of its political and trading fortunes. In an average year it took home from Guinea 1,450 pounds of gold and a large quantity of ivory, while supplying to its own American colonies, and those of Spain, a large number of slaves. Because they had had no market for them, the first Dutch traders to West Africa had taken no interest in slaves, and the West India Company had agreed at its first meeting that it had no immediate concern with the slave trade. But possession of plantation colonies changed that policy, and between the years 1636 and 1645 a total of 23,163 slaves were carried into Recife, the Dutch capital in Brazil, besides an unknown number taken to the West Indies. More than half these slaves came from Angola; Ardra and Calabar supplied most of the remainder. Inexperience caused the Dutch company many difficulties in the first years of the slave trade with Guinea, and just as these were being overcome the administration at Recife recommended in 1645 that the Company should buy only Bantu slaves. The preference of the planters and a heavy mortality among Guinea slaves in the Atlantic crossing were the reasons given for this decision. Although some slaves from Guinea continued to reach Dutch markets in the West Indies, the 1645 decision undoubtedly contributed to the sharp decline which affected the Company's profit from the Guinea trade after that date. What it continued to gain was swallowed up by the demands of the Brazilian enterprise, for Portugal, spurred on by the recovery of its independence, was struggling vigorously to regain its overseas possessions. In 1648 São Tomé and Luanda were retaken, and in 1654 the Portuguese drove the Dutch from Brazil. No attempt was made upon Dutch positions on the mainland of Guinea, but despite the gold trade the West India Company found itself in a hopeless financial condition; so in 1674 it had to be wound up and replaced by something less ambitious.

The second West India Company began its career inauspiciously by losing Arguin and Gorée, its strongholds in Upper Guinea, to the French during the Franco-Dutch war (1672-8). Thereafter it concentrated its African activities upon Lower Guinea and especially upon the Gold Coast. But there it did not enjoy a monopoly of trade. The English Royal African Company competed

with increasing effectiveness, until by the end of the seventeenth century it possessed ten forts on the Gold Coast compared with eleven belonging to the West India Company. Even the Portuguese, or rather Brazilians, bent on developing their sugar, tobacco and mining industries, reappeared in strength on the coasts of Lower Guinea to trade for the necessary slave labour. They were, however, by treaties between Portugal and the United Provinces, debarred from trading on the Gold Coast and obliged to pay a tax of ten per cent of their cargoes to the Dutch company. These arrangements proved a fruitful source of conflict right to the end of the eighteenth century. The West India Company had also to contend with growing competition from its own countrymen who either embarked on private interloping ventures, or else operated for convenience through the Danish and Brandenburg Companies.<sup>8</sup> On occasion they even sailed under the Portuguese flag.

With so many powerful competitors entrenched closely together along the brief stretch of the Gold Coast, trade there inevitably assumed a more cut-throat character than ever before. The Dutch relied principally upon their superior military strength and the advantage of having rather more trading posts than any of their rivals. They also competed for the control or favour of the coastal states in order to use them as auxiliaries in the internecine trade wars which kept the region in turmoil. In 1694, for example, they instigated an attack by the Ahanta on the English fort at Sekondi. The English in return incited Commanay against the Dutch. On the Slave Coast the West India Company fared exceptionally badly in this contest for the favour of the local power, for there they incurred the bitter enmity of Agaja, king of Dahomey, who drove them out of his territories in ignominious fashion.

The relative fortunes of the rival nations around 1700 can be illustrated by the estimate which Bosman gives of their shares in the gold trade at that date. As one of the principal officials of the West India Company, he was well placed to give an accurate picture: his *Description of the Coast of Guinea* is, moreover, one of the most reliable works of its kind. He calculated that in a good year the whole coast might produce 7,000 marks, or 3,500 pounds, of gold, a quantity not notably different from that obtained in the sixteenth century. Of this the West India Company secured 1,500 marks, the English African Company 1,200 marks, the Brandenburg and Danish companies together 1,000 marks, the Portuguese

and French together 800 marks. The remaining 2,500 marks fell to Zeeland and English interlopers. Even these figures, Bosman believed, exaggerated his company's share in the trade, because in the last few years of the seventeenth century it had carried away scarcely more than 750 marks of gold a year while the English share of the trade had substantially increased. He apparently considered this state of affairs to be a temporary aberration from the true pattern reflected in the first set of figures. In fact, it proved to be a permanent decline in the prosperity of the Dutch company which was also falling well behind the English and Portuguese in the slave trade. Thus, the West India Company, for all its expenditure on men and fortifications, secured no corresponding share of West African trade, and as in the course of the eighteenth century the United Provinces themselves drifted farther and farther from their former maritime preponderance, so the importance and profitability of their African trade dwindled. At the same time, attacks by independent Dutch merchants on the privileges of the company made steady headway in the Netherlands. Changes in the Company's charter reflected these altered circumstances. Its monopoly was first restricted in 1730 to the Gold Coast; four years later it was abolished altogether, except for some advantages it retained in the slave trade to Guiana. For the remainder of the century, the largest and most lucrative Dutch trade with Guinea was in the hands of individual merchants and smaller companies unburdened with the cost of maintaining forts and garrisons. Notable among these newcomers was the Middelburg Commercial Company which from 1732 did a thriving business carrying slaves to the West Indies. The West India Company remained in existence, a symbol of national status and a venerable institution interlocked with the political structure of the United Provinces, until it passed into liquidation in 1795, along with the state itself, before the onslaught of the French Revolution.

In their conduct of trade, the Dutch, and indeed all other Europeans, followed the pattern established by the Portuguese. The Portuguese governor at São Jorge gave way to a Dutch director-general nominally assisted by a council of senior officials, but in practice absolute. The West India Company, like the Crown of Portugal, sought a monopoly of the Guinea trade, but never achieved one. The areas in which it traded were those earlier frequented by the Portuguese. If anything, the Dutch ranged less

widely and are not known to have sent emissaries far into the interior. For three centuries, gold, ivory and slaves remained the staple articles of trade despite Dutch attempts to develop a market in other commodities. Experiments were made with plantation crops: unsuccessfully with sugar near Boutry and with peppers in Benin early in the eighteenth century, somewhat more successfully with cotton at Axim and Shama later in the century. Such enterprises left little or no mark upon West Africa which was, however, much affected by some of the goods the Dutch traded there. Bosman reckoned that 150 different items were needed for trade on the Gold Coast, many of them familiar from the sixteenth century—cowries, manillas and a large variety of beads and cloth including imitations of Indian cloths. But they also included firearms and gunpowder, commodities which the Portuguese had strictly withheld and which the West India Company began to sell in quantity. Bosman made an interesting comment on this trade:

Perhaps you wonder how the Negroes come to be furnished with Fire-Arms, but you will have no Reason when you know we sell them incredible quantities, thereby obliging them with a Knife to cut our own throats. But we are forced to it; for if we would not, they might be sufficiently stored with that Commodity by the English, Danes, and Brandenburgers; and could we all agree together not to sell them any, the English and Zeeland Interlopers would abundantly furnish them: And since that and Gun-powder for some time hath been the chief vendible Merchandise here, we should have found but an indifferent Trade without our share in it. 'Twere indeed to be wished that these dangerous Commodities had never been brought hither, or at least that the Negroes might be in a short time brought to be content with somewhat else in their room: but this in all appearance is never likely.<sup>9</sup>

To the Dutch must also be ascribed a major part in the introduction of trust or credit trading, for, though it is uncertain which nation first practised it, trust bulked large in the Dutch company's trade during the second half of the seventeenth century. Much as the Dutch and other European traders disliked the practice, they found it indispensable as an incentive for the coastal middleman to gather cargoes from far in the interior. Only by means of credit

were they able to ensure the supply of slaves at Ardra, or of cloth and ivory in Benin.

#### THE BRAZILIAN TRADE

In the overall view of European trade with West Africa, the eighteenth century undoubtedly belongs to Britain and France; yet one of the most striking features of that period was the reappearance of the Portuguese, carried back to the Guinea coast as a major trading power by the economic vitality of Brazil. Indeed the use of the term Portuguese is rather a misnomer when applied to the slave trade between Guinea and Brazil. The capital, ships and men engaged in it were all Brazilian. It was directed wholly to the service of Brazilian interests. The government in Lisbon looked with disfavour upon a commerce that offended in so many ways against the strict theory and practice of colonial economy, but could exercise only an ineffective control through the distant viceroy in Bahia. The flood of shipping between Brazil and Guinea contrasted strongly with the trickle that passed between Portugal and its remaining West African possessions eking out a stagnant existence through the eighteenth century.

The tobacco, spirits, and gold produced by slave labour in Brazil furnished the means by which that labour was replenished from Guinea, or more precisely from that region east of the Gold Coast to which treaties with the United Provinces confined the Brazilians. Until the middle of the century most of the slaves were obtained through the port of Whydah where the Viceroy of Brazil authorised the building of a fortified trading post in 1721. But when the kings of Dahomey persisted in interfering with the fort—and very few of its governors escaped deportation at their hands—the centre of trade shifted eastwards to Porto Novo, Badagri, Lagos and the Niger delta where it was still running at a great volume at the close of the century. Any estimate of the number of slaves carried to Brazil in the course of this traffic must still rely largely upon guesswork, and it should be borne in mind that most global figures applied to earlier phases of West African trade, especially in relation to slaves and gold, are proving to be much exaggerated. As a starting point, it may be useful to remark that during the 1730s, when the Brazilian slave trade was very active, an average of 6,000 slaves from Guinea entered that colony each

year. The total result was a migration vast enough to implant the African element firmly into the multi-racial society of Brazil.

Through this frantic slaving activity ran an eccentric thread of missionary endeavour reminiscent of the mixture of materialism and idealism in the original expansion of Portugal. The Portuguese islands and the mainland bases in Upper Guinea, especially Bissau and Cacheu, served as bases from which missionaries, many of whom were Italian, conducted their campaigns. Like the traders, they depended more on Brazil than Portugal for supplies and support, and some were despatched to Guinea directly from Brazil. They followed the same policy as their predecessors by directing their efforts primarily towards the conversion of rulers, among them Agonglo, king of Dahomey, who received two priests in 1797. And they met with no better success. The Dutch, on the other hand, made no attempt to propagate their religion in Guinea; in this as in other matters, including the official if ineffective ban on concubinage, holding themselves more purposefully apart than the Portuguese from the peoples of West Africa.

Because these coasts were the highway by which the Portuguese broke through the confines of Europe to world empire and riches, the story of their progress in Guinea won the attention of contemporaries and later generations. Consequently we are comparatively well-informed about it. The same is true of the initial Dutch passage by the same route to a similar goal. Thereafter interest has tended to shift elsewhere, and we are singularly ill-informed about the subsequent development of Portuguese and Dutch enterprise here. Yet there is no lack of documentary material on these subjects, so it is to be hoped that the deficiencies will soon be made good.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bailey W. Diffie, *Prelude to Empire*, p. 60, University of Nebraska Press, 1960.

<sup>2</sup> Identification of Cape Bojador has raised problems. Many authorities now believe that the Cape in question should be identified with the present Cape Juby.

<sup>3</sup> For the Portuguese the Negro region of Africa, Guinea, began at the Senegal river: the term Africa was applied only to the region north of that river.

<sup>4</sup> Grants from the papacy and the kings of Portugal had invested Prince Henry with full rights over all trade beyond Cape Bojador. He permitted

Portuguese and others to voyage there under two types of contract: either the merchant furnished his own vessel and merchandise and then paid the prince a quarter of his profit, or else Henry provided the vessel, the merchant the cargo, and the profit was shared equally.

5 The Casa dos Escravos (Slave House), a department of the Casa da Mina established in 1486, sold 3,600 slaves in its first seven years. Most of these slaves came from Upper Guinea.

6 See the extract from *Du Asia* of Joūs de Barros in F. Wolfson, *A Pageant of Ghana* (O.U.P., 1958).

7 Enmity between the people of Saboe and the neighbouring Fante was one of the reasons which prompted this offer. The Dutch subsequently supported the Saboc against the Fante.

8 The Dutch Company bought out the Brandenburg Company in 1717.

9 W. Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, pp. 184-5. London, 1705.

## CHRISTOPHER FYFE

## LOCAL TRADE IN THE FOREST BELT

FEW communities are completely self-supporting. Some have commodities that others lack, so they trade with one another. There may be two neighbouring villages. One is by a river full of fish. The other has no river, but is built on clay soil which can be used to make pots. Each has something the other lacks, and the inhabitants can make an exchange—clay pots for fish.

This kind of simple barter trade needs no elaborate organisation. The fisherman brings the fish; the potter brings the pots. There is no need for specialised retailers whose profession it is to trade.

Several villages may be close to one another, each producing commodities which are wanted in the others. Here, instead of direct exchange, the commodities may be brought for barter to one of the villages, perhaps to each village in turn on successive days. This means a market, and a regular market-day. Here trade has to be more organised. If the market lasts all day the fisherman cannot take time off from work, so he sends his wife, who thus becomes a part-time trader.

This is how trade grew up in the forest belt of coastal West Africa. Small communities, largely, but not completely, self-supporting, exchanged goods with one another. But there was no need for a specialised trading profession, for women could combine trade with their household and family occupations.

## EXPORT TRADE IN THE FOREST BELT

Some highly valued commodities were made only in a few places, but were in demand over a wide area. Potential customers might be hundreds of miles away from the place of manufacture. To supply them, the commodity would have to be transported over long distances. Such trade we can reasonably call 'export trade', for the commodity was exported far from the place where it was made.

Salt, for instance, which most people find a necessity rather than a luxury, was manufactured on the West African seashore.

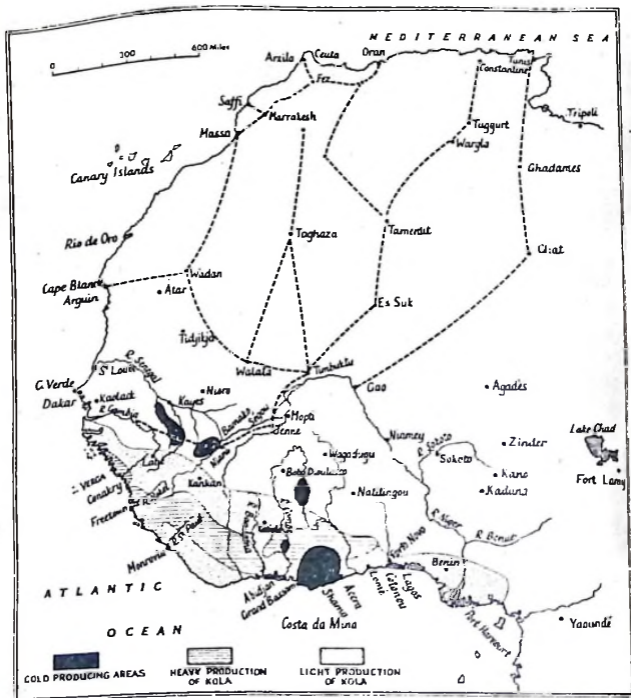


Fig. 13 West African trade before 1800.

Sea water was made to flow into shallow ponds where it evaporated in the heat of the sun, leaving a thick, salty crust on the ground. This deposit was scraped up, and purified by being mixed with warm water and poured through cone-shaped baskets, filled with straw. This strained off the earth. It was then re-dried in the sun. (Later, when European goods became available, special shallow pans were imported as driers.) The finished salt was then packed up in baskets to be bartered with the inland peoples who had no way of making it themselves.

Cotton, imported originally from North Africa, grew plentifully on many farms and in compounds (though it was not planted systematically in plantations). In some places people specialised in weaving it and exported their woven cloths to regions where they did not weave. Some special cloths were sought after over an enormous area (like the famous Kano cloth).

West Africa is rich in easily workable mineral deposits. The archaeologists who have investigated the Nok culture of Northern Nigeria have proved that iron has been worked here for about two thousand years. So much for the assertion, which one sometimes reads, that the inhabitants of West Africa were living in the 'Stone Age' until Europeans arrived.

In some places iron was extracted from the ground surface, in others shafts were tunnelled to reach the seams of iron ore. The extracted ore was smelted in furnaces (for a description of this process see Denis Williams, 'The Iconology of the Yoruba "Edan Ogboni"', *Africa*, Vol. xxxiv, No. 2 (1964), p. 152). The smelted iron was then shaped into bars. Iron was an exportable commodity which could be exchanged against other goods—salt, for instance, for most of the iron deposits were inland, away from the sea. Sometimes it was exported in the form of iron bars for blacksmiths to turn into swords or farming implements; sometimes it was ready manufactured by blacksmiths on the spot. Early European visitors praised the quality of the West African iron-work. The great Brazilian historian Gilberto Freyre<sup>1</sup> has pointed out that African miners and blacksmiths, transported as slaves across the Atlantic, were responsible for the mining industry of Brazil.

Other industries that produced goods for export were leather-making, and perhaps soap-making. The cattle-keeping peoples living on the fringe of the forest belt could export leather goods into the forest country, which was unsuited for rearing cattle—

either tanned hides or hides manufactured into goods like sandals or shields. Soap was made from palm oil mixed with ashes. The soap manufactured on the Plantain islands, off Sierra Leone, was of such high quality in the seventeenth century that the Portuguese government are said to have prohibited it being imported into Portugal to compete with the Portuguese soap.

The export trade, then, was based on localised industries. Some industrial workers were set apart from the rest of the (predominantly farming) population: miners, perhaps, and certainly blacksmiths. But in some industries there were no specialised full-time workers. For example sea-salt was made by women, or by men too old to farm. Hence industrial organisation did not lead to any widespread division of labour among manual workers. Nor was there the gulf between industrial workers and peasants that more intensive industrialisation leads to.

Export trade over long distances required specialised traders who were occupied solely with transporting goods and bartering them with distant customers. They tended to follow familiar paths from one locality to the next, so trade routes developed. People who lived on them could count on getting imported trade goods regularly. A village market might develop into a long-distance trade market if it lay on an important trade route. People would be attracted to live there, and the village become a town. As the market grew it needed a more complicated organisation: market officials to allot pitches, hear complaints and keep order. It also provided wealth for the ruler, who could levy duties on the market people.

In the village community every able-bodied person farmed: in the market town, occupations could be more specialised. In the Yoruba cities, for instance, there were many who did not farm: the Oba and his court, the market officials, and the itinerant import-export traders. Food had to be provided for them, either brought in from the surrounding villages, or grown by townspeople who went out daily to their farms. This swelled the volume of goods sold in the market, for food would be sold there, as well as imported commodities. Nevertheless, apart from the long-distance traders, there was no real trading class. As in the villages, the markets were carried on largely by women for whom it was a part-time occupation—though vital to the community. Nor, in the subsistence economy of West Africa, were farmers able to grow

food for export beyond their own locality, for each community grew the basic food to support itself.

The market was not solely an economic institution. People went there to meet their friends, hear news and repeat rumours; it was also a centre for political activity. Those who lived in a town with a big market could feel they were in touch with a wider world, and could feel superior to the bush people in remote villages.

Thus trade could spread through the forest belt region without needing any stimulus from outside.

#### THE SAHARA TRADE

Trade across the Sahara goes back at least one thousand years before the beginning of our period—perhaps many thousands of years. People often speak and write of 'Africa south of the Sahara', as if the Sahara was a frontier that divided Africa. Far from it. The Sahara, at all periods, has provided highways for Africans to cross; it is more of a bridge than a barrier. Those who separate Africa north and south of the Sahara as if they were two distinct entities make nonsense of history.

A series of stone engravings (which seem to represent chariots) have been traced out along a curve leading from southern Morocco to the Middle Niger near Timbuktu. This curve marks the western trade route across the desert. Farther east there was another route from the Lake Chad region northward through the Fezzan to near the modern Tripoli. There may have been other routes too.

Until the camel was introduced into north-western Africa (during the period of the Roman empire), the volume of trans-Saharan trade cannot have been large. It has been suggested that until then cattle must have been used to drag loads across the desert from one oasis to the next, for horses would not be able to stand such work. The main article exported into the Roman empire across the Sahara was probably precious stones. The Romans had other sources of gold (which was later to become the main export commodity), and of slaves (Britain, for instance).

The great development of the trans-Saharan trade of the Western Sudan began after the Muslim Arab invasion of North Africa in the seventh century. By this time camel transport had made the desert crossing easier and increased the freight loads that trading caravans could bring. Now began the large-scale export of gold.

Rich gold deposits lay across a wide area of the forest belt, in the regions of the Upper Senegal, the Upper Niger and the Upper Volta. This gold-producing country was known to Arabic (and later to European) writers as 'Wangara'. The ore could be easily extracted. Shafts were sunk, the gold-bearing rocks were hacked out and crushed, and the gold was washed from them in calabashes by women. It was then exported northwards. As the demand grew, gold-mining became a large industry. Professor Raymond Mauny has estimated<sup>2</sup> that, once it was fully organised, an average of about nine tons of gold was exported annually. (He mentions, for comparison, that in the year 1937, with all the advantages of the mining machinery and techniques then available, total gold exports from West Africa reached only twenty-one tons—an amazing tribute to the African miners of the past, working with rudimentary equipment.)

The gold trade linked the forest belt with the Mediterranean, and beyond it to Europe and Asia. African gold was in immense demand in Europe during the so-called 'Middle Ages' there, before the mineral wealth of the American continent was known to Europeans. Europe depended on Africa for its gold supply. Hence for people in Europe, West Africa was the land of gold, a country glittering with fabulous riches.

The gold export from the forest belt went in two stages. The first was from the gold-producing regions, through the forest into the open savannah country, where the gold was bartered with traders from the Mediterranean shores who had come southward to obtain it. The second was across the desert, where the traders from the north carried it in camel loads to the cities of North Africa. There it was either minted into coins for local use, or re-exported beyond Africa. Sijilmasa, in what is today south-eastern Morocco, was the chief terminus for the gold trade.

These northern traders are often referred to as 'Arabs'. At first, in the period immediately after the Arab invasions, many probably had come originally from Arabia. But in time they married with Africans, so that after a few generations they were in fact Africans themselves. However, as they were mostly Muslims, and wrote (and perhaps spoke) Arabic, they are often incorrectly described as 'Arabs'—indeed some writers use this word habitually to describe any African Muslim. It is true, Arabic is the language of Islam. But Muslims are no more necessarily Arabs than Roman

Catholics (who use a Latin liturgy) are necessarily Italians. This trade across the desert was an African trade, and was carried on principally by people who had been born and bred in Africa.

✦ In exchange for gold they bartered luxury goods: high quality textiles, leatherwork, metalwork, etc. The tenth century geographer Al-Masudi described how the barter was conducted between the two parties—silently. One party put down his wares and withdrew. The other advanced, laid beside them the equivalent in his own wares, and also withdrew. The first advanced again. If he was satisfied with what was offered he took it. If not he withdrew again, and the second party would have to put down more. Thus they moved silently back and forth until a bargain was struck.

Strange though this silent trade may seem, it has been common in other parts of Africa too. Herodotus, the fourth century B.C. Greek writer (whose works are a most valuable source for the early history of Africa) described it taking place on the north-west coast of Africa. And Cosmas, a Greek trader who visited East Africa in the sixth century A.D., described it in the hinterland of the modern Eritrea.

The ancient kingdom of Ghana rose to importance because the king was able to establish himself at the intersection of the two stages of the gold trade. Once he had extended his power over the savannah region west of the middle Niger he could force the gold exporters from the south, and the gold importers from the north, to meet at his city and do business there. Thus both stages of the gold trade were channelled through a central emporium, a vast market where all the traders had to congregate to meet their customers. From it the king drew immense wealth. "He established the right to own all gold nuggets; others might only trade in gold dust. In this way he kept control over the value of gold. If the supply of gold nuggets became excessive he would hoard them until the supply was less, or the demand greater, thus preventing inflation. He also levied duties on other export commodities.

Ghana was also the centre for the export trade in copper, mined in the Sahara regions; and was also the centre of the trade in desert salt. In the Sahara there were large deposits of hard rock salt which was quarried for export, cut into large slabs like building blocks. Indeed at Taghaza, the main salt mine in the middle

of the desert, about five hundred miles north of Timbuktu, the houses were all built of salt blocks, roofed with camel skins. From Taghaza the salt trade went south to Ghana and north to the cities of North Africa.

After Abū Bakr, the Almoravid leader, took Ghana in 1076 its importance as a trading centre declined. In the thirteenth century the Muslim traders moved away north-west to Walata, and Ghana was finally destroyed. The economic balance now shifted east to the bend of the middle Niger. Jenne, Timbuktu and Gao became the emporia for the import and export trade. The kings of Mali (and then of Songhai) replaced the kings of Ghana as the beneficiaries.

Jenne, Timbuktu and Gao, river ports on the middle reaches of the Niger, occupied a commanding middleman's position between the Sahara trade to the north and the gold trade to the south (as the king of Ghana's city once had). They grew into large cities with enormous markets where traders congregated from all directions. Trade here was not always by barter: gold was used as currency as well as a commodity, though the gold coins were not stamped with their value. Iron coinage was also used, and a sixteenth century account mentions cowries, small shells brought from the Indian Ocean. (In the period of European contact cowries were to be used widely as currency, and were specially imported.)

Nor were the cities purely commercial. They contained mosques and places of learning where Muslim scholars could study. There were fine public buildings. At Timbuktu the ruler's palace was built by a Muslim architect from Spain (for until the end of the fifteenth century part of Spain was under Muslim rule).

On the central Sahara route, northward from the country round Lake Chad, the kings of Bornu established a similar commanding position. The Hausa cities also grew into emporia for the export trade, particularly Kano, where a market was first started in the fifteenth century. Kano was also an industrial city: dyed Kano cloth was exported all over North and West Africa. Bornu trade went north-east, as well as north to Tripoli, following ancient routes that linked Lake Chad with the Nile. Firearms were first imported into Bornu from Egypt—not from the north.

In this eastern trading area there was no gold for export. Slaves were exported instead. There was a great demand for household

slaves in the Muslim cities of North Africa and South-west Asia. Once Islam had spread into Bornu and Hausaland, slaves were regularly procured to supply the demand, and sold to traders from the north who transported them across the Sahara. The trans-Saharan slave trade did not compare in extent with the slave trade later carried on across the Atlantic. The demand for household slaves was less than the demand for plantation slaves; nor was it possible to transport by land, across the desert, the large numbers that could be packed into ships. Their fate at their destination (if they reached it after the arduous desert journey) was likely to be preferable to what met slaves in America. In Muslim society a slave could rise to a high place, and was supposed to be freed when his owner died.

Nor was Muslim slavery based on colour. Though the slaves exported across the Sahara were all African many Muslim households in North Africa also had European slaves, captured in war or kidnapped from Europe. The famous king Mansa Musa of Mali, when he visited Cairo on his pilgrimage to Mecca, bought white Turkish slaves there to take home with him.

In Bornu particularly the king used slaves as a trading asset. The African Muslim traveller Al-Hassan (better known as Leo Africanus, the name under which he wrote his account of Africa in the early sixteenth century) described how Muslim traders would go down to Bornu from Tripoli with horses to sell. The king would then set out for the countries bordering his kingdom to round up slaves to pay for them, while the traders waited patiently for his return.

Horses are not easily bred in tropical regions, so there was a ready market for them in Bornu and in the Hausa cities. The Yoruba kingdom of Oyo (with its capital at Old Oyo, outside the forest belt) based its military strength on cavalry mounted on horses imported from the north. In the forest regions it is probable (though not certain) that trypanosomiasis, which attacks horses, was then prevalent; they do not seem to have been imported there. But other commodities were imported from North Africa into the gold-producing regions and beyond, down to the coast. Some gold was imported southwards to the coast too, presumably to make ornaments.

X Another trading commodity that linked the forest belt with the savannah and with North Africa was kola-nuts, which grow plenti-

fully on the edges of the forest region. As one of the few stimulants Muslims are allowed to enjoy, kolas found a ready market, and Muslim traders travelled round the kola-producing country, exchanging imported goods for kola.

Islam, as was indicated in Chapter 8, is a religion for traders. Much of the West African export trade was carried on by Muslims. Indeed if a man left his home and traditional ways and turned trader, he would usually become a Muslim. Conversely, if a Muslim trader settled down permanently in a village, his children and grandchildren, if they stayed at home, would probably abandon Islam, though the family might still retain its Muslim name and perhaps a certain exotic prestige. But where Muslim traders settled in communities of their own (like Begho, in the gold-producing country of what became, in the eighteenth century, Asante) they preserved their religion.

Thus the local networks of trade were linked up through the export trade within West Africa, to the intercontinental export trade beyond. The whole of North-west Africa formed a vast trading continuum, centred on the cities of the interior, with the Atlantic shore as its periphery. Trade routes, local and export, crossed and recrossed it, linking its peoples with one another, and with unknown peoples far away. Indeed trade had united West Africans and Europeans for centuries before they were physically confronted.

#### TRADE WITH EUROPEANS

From the late fifteenth century onwards Europeans were trading regularly with the coastal peoples. This completely altered the economic map of West Africa. The coast, instead of being on the periphery, became a centre of trade. Intercontinental export trade, hitherto absorbed into the centre and then dispersed to the north, was now diverted to a new outlet on the coast in a new pattern of trading networks.

The conquest of Songhai by Moroccan invaders in 1591 also helped to shift the balance of trade. After Ghana fell, trade had shifted east to the mid-Niger; after Songhai fell, it moved east again to Kano and the Hausa cities, which replaced Jenne, Timbuktu and Gao as the great emporia of the Western Sudan. The westerly trans-Saharan trade was also affected by a series of wars in North Africa, on the Mediterranean coast, between

Muslims and Spanish Christians. Sijilmasa, the northern terminus, was destroyed in the sixteenth century and never recovered.

At the same time trade was being diverted southwards to the Europeans on the coast. So the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were a period of economic decline for the long dominant mid-Niger regions. (Here we might find an underlying economic motivation for the jihāds of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.)

✱The trans-Saharan trade did not come to an end. It continued particularly from Kano, on an important scale into the twentieth century (when the ancient trading continuum was divided up by arbitrary frontiers drawn by Europeans). But it was no longer the single centre of West African trade. From the sixteenth century onwards there were two trading spheres: the Muslim sphere inland, the Christian sphere on the coast.

In West Africa relations between Africans and Europeans, up to the end of the eighteenth century, were primarily economic. The Europeans did not come as conquerors, but as customers. The Portuguese came to Africa seeking gold. When, in 1415, they drove the Muslim invaders out of Portugal, they then took the offensive, invaded Africa, and captured Ceuta, opposite Gibraltar. They found Ceuta to be a terminus of the Sahara gold trade, and determined to find the source. Hence their voyage down the coast had the double aim of seeking a route to the Far East, and of reaching the African gold supply. (See Chapter 12.)

The gold-mining country, the fabled 'Wangara', lay too far inland for them to reach. But on the so-called 'Gold Coast' they found a region where gold could be obtained, exported along the established trade paths from the interior. From 1482, when the Portuguese settled at Elmina ('the mine', as they optimistically called it) the gold trade branched out southward on a large scale and export northward declined correspondingly.

European traders were ready to buy a few other commodities. There was a market for ivory in Europe, but the export of ivory from West Africa never reached anything like the proportions it did in East Africa (perhaps because the human population of West Africa was larger, and the elephant population therefore smaller). A few vegetable products were also exported to Europe. Benin pepper and malaguetta pepper, for instance—the former from Benin, the latter from the Kru coast. But oriental peppers<sup>3</sup>

were preferred in Europe, and as the European trade with the Far East expanded, the demand for African peppers declined.

On the coast (as in the Bornu-Hausa region) slaves were a potential commodity for export. The fifteenth century Portuguese traders took a few. There was a demand for them in Portugal and they were also employed on plantations on the Atlantic islands (the Cape Verde islands and São Tomé) which the Portuguese colonised. For about twenty years the Portuguese operated a carrying trade, transporting slaves from African vendors to African purchasers. Slaves were bought in Benin and the Congo, were taken in Portuguese ships to Elmina, and were bartered there for gold with itinerant Muslim traders who took them inland for sale. Eventually the king of Portugal prohibited this trade, because it meant selling slaves who had been baptised as Christians (for the Portuguese usually baptised their slaves) into slavery under Muslims. But once the European nations had begun to develop plantations in the New World with African slave labour the slave trade widened from a trickle to a vast river, revolutionising the commerce of coastal West Africa. European slave traders brought manufactured goods to West Africa and bartered them for slaves. From the sixteenth century onward the industrial economy of Europe was steadily increasing its output. More and more types of goods were being produced of a kind which could not be made in the existing West African economy where the industrial sector remained marginal. Hence there was an immense demand for European imports.

Textiles woven in Europe or in India (and imported to Africa via Europe) were the chief import commodity. It is strange that imported textiles should have been in such demand in countries with their own traditions of skilled weaving. Nevertheless, more textiles were imported into West Africa at this period than any other single commodity.

There was a big demand for firearms, recently invented in Europe, though guns and gunpowder were only imported on a large scale in the seventeenth century. From then on it became essential for rulers to have regular supplies. By the end of the eighteenth century there were factories in England (in Birmingham) turning out special arms for the African trade—long-barrelled guns which were often as dangerous to the user as to the victim. Other manufactured goods in demand were all kinds of

metalware (like cooking pots, or the brass pans used in salt-making), ornaments (beads, bracelets—and mirrors to display them to), distilled spirits (as a change from locally-made palm wine) and tobacco. Tobacco grows in West Africa, but nonetheless American tobacco was imported in large quantities.

With the notable exception of firearms, these goods were luxuries rather than necessities; they merely supplemented local manufactures with imports of superior quality. Some were not even superior: many imported cotton cloths, for instance, were inferior to the home-made kind, for all their gaudy appearance. But, as we know, foreign-made goods often have prestige value.

They were mostly consumer goods. Once they had been worn out, smoked, drunk, etc. they were gone for ever. In exchange, however, the European traders were given slaves who were employed to create wealth across the Atlantic; there they produced sugar which their owners could sell at a profit. Hence the slave trade was an unequal exchange, in which expendable consumer goods were bartered against a means of production. Even apart from its moral aspect, therefore, it was economic exploitation.

As manufactured goods were imported increasingly, local industry tended to suffer. Iron-mining declined in importance, because Europeans imported bars of iron ready for blacksmiths to use, as well as already manufactured iron implements. In Benin, however, there was a rare example of imports stimulating local productivity. Bronze was imported there from Europe on a large scale, thus enabling sculptors to produce far more works of art—notably the magnificent square bronze plaques used to decorate the walls of the Oba's place. Occasionally local industries might be protected. Rulers in the Sierra Leone coastal area, for instance, in the eighteenth century prohibited the import of European salt in order to protect their own salt-making industry. But in general European trade discouraged industry. Hence, in a country where capital formation was in any case difficult, except for Muslims,<sup>4</sup> there was little incentive to improve production methods or to increase productivity.

The organisation of trade with Europeans varied from place to place along the coast. In some parts they built forts to trade from; in the Niger Delta they traded from ships anchored in the rivers; elsewhere they settled singly or in groups in towns and villages. The coastal peoples acted as middlemen between them and the

150  
peoples of the interior, and prevented them going inland to trade direct, lest they lose their privileged middlemen's position.

On the parts of the coast where Europeans settled, the king or chief of the country constituted himself their protector or (as he was called in some places) landlord. He received rents from them, and other customary dues—perhaps a commission on each slave sold. In return he undertook to look after them, not only protecting them physically and supplying their everyday wants (housing, food and wives), but representing them in any law cases they might be involved with, or in any dispute in which their interests were affected. In this way Europeans were kept out of the law courts, and prevented from interfering in the political affairs of the country. Where they were settled in any large numbers, though, as in the Gold Coast forts, it was impossible to prevent them from having some political influence.

In the Niger Delta the trading system was fitted into the social and political organisation of the country. The trading unit was the 'house', originally the extended family of the dominant member, but widened to include all his trading subordinates. European traders did business with the head of the house, giving him goods on credit, or 'trust', and getting slaves in return.

Elsewhere, too, credit was given. In areas where Europeans lived under the protection of a 'landlord' they would advance goods to his subjects, who eventually returned with slaves. If they did not return the trader held his landlord responsible for the debt. The landlord would pay it—and reimburse himself by selling the defaulter's family. So the European could safely give credit, knowing he would not lose in the long run. Thus there grew up a system of credit trading which has persisted in West Africa long after the end of the slave trade.

Trade by barter, the simple exchange of one commodity against another, was gradually modified in many parts of the coast. In the Niger Delta manillas, small copper or brass bars twisted into half-moons, were used as currency. Cowries (already mentioned as being used in the mid-Niger cities) were also used. In some parts of the coast a currency system grew up based on iron bars. Goods would be valued in notional 'bars' and traded against one another. For example, so many slaves would be valued at 100 bars; and so many yards of cloth, barrels of gunpowder, or brass pots, would also be valued at 100 bars. The two would then be exchanged—

without any actual pieces of iron being used at all. The value of commodities in bars varied with supply and demand; if gunpowder was plentiful its value in bars fell. So the system offered plenty of scope for bargaining.

Usually the European trader profited, for his African customers did not know what he had paid for his goods in Europe, and he would try to make up his assortments of 'bars' in such a way as to give himself a profit. On the other hand the African could often benefit by the system too. For instance, he could insist on selling his slaves in one lot, instead of individually, so that the purchaser had to take some old or sick slaves along with the young and healthy.

In addition Europeans had to pay recognised dues in order to be allowed to trade. Not only were there customs duties (like the 'comey' of the Niger Delta) payable to the authorities, but also 'dashes', or customary presents which had to be paid to customers. Business always began with the European paying a dash, and another was usually paid at the conclusion.

These details of the slave trade illustrate that it was a well-organised trade, carried on according to recognised commercial rules, with mutual confidence between trading partners—for without confidence, credit could not have been given. It could, therefore, easily be adopted by peoples who were long used to trading with one another—so long as they were ready to overlook its moral implications.

Contact with Europeans, then, immensely stimulated West African trade. Far more commodities were available than ever before, and were diffused over the country through the networks of trade and village markets. More people traded, moving about the country, bringing isolated communities into touch with one another. The existing patterns of trade were extended and intensified.

#### CONCLUSION

During the seven centuries this chapter covers, West African trade changed in many ways. The trade routes shifted about. New commodities and customers appeared. The volume of trade increased. But it did not alter radically. Trade remained based on the exchange of produce (including as 'produce', slaves, as well as gold, salt, kola-nuts, etc.) for manufactured imports. There was no

development of industrial production, indeed industry probably declined over the period. So, though foreign imports tended to be luxury goods, and the country still remained self-supporting in essentials, as the demand for imports grew steadily, the area was increasingly tied to the economies of countries overseas.

## NOTES

- 1 G. Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves*, p. 310, Knopf, New York, 1946.
- 2 R. Mauny, *Tableau Géographique de l'Ouest Africain au Moyen Age*, pp. 293-306, I.F.A.N., Dakar, 1961.
- 3 See also Chapter 12, p. 217
- 4 See Chapter 8.

# 14 West African States at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century

J. F. A. AJAYI

## INTRODUCTION

THE nineteenth century in West Africa was a transitional age. It was the age when from a personal religion Islam became established as the religion of the state through a series of Islamic revolutions in the Sudan belt. It was also the age when the Europeans, who for three centuries had been dealing in slaves along the coast, began to attack the slave trade and to send missionaries and others to spread European economic, religious and cultural ideas. Thus the opening years of the nineteenth century rumbled with criticisms of the West African states and with demands for thoroughgoing reforms.

The Muslim reformers in the Sudan were very critical of the existing political, social and religious institutions. They criticised the decline of true Islam and Islamic learning. They preached that the different governments were corrupt; that they levied unfair and uncanonical taxes, oppressed the poor and hindered the faithful in the exercise of their religion. They called for the establishment of new governments that would enforce the *Shari'a* and govern justly.

Europeans and Christian missionaries were even more sweeping in their criticism of West African states. They criticised the states as backward, unenlightened or 'benighted'. Generally, they regarded the governments as oppressive, petty and ineffective, hardly to be trusted to maintain law and order. Socially, they were critical of everything: the plurality of wives and other family arrangements, the institution of slavery, the absence of a wage-earning class and so on. Above all, they wished to destroy the traditional religions and beliefs and substitute Christianity along with European education, social habits and economic ideas. They wished to abolish the overseas slave trade and to free the domestic slaves. In short, as we would now say, they wished to modernise the West African states. The abolition of the overseas slave trade they

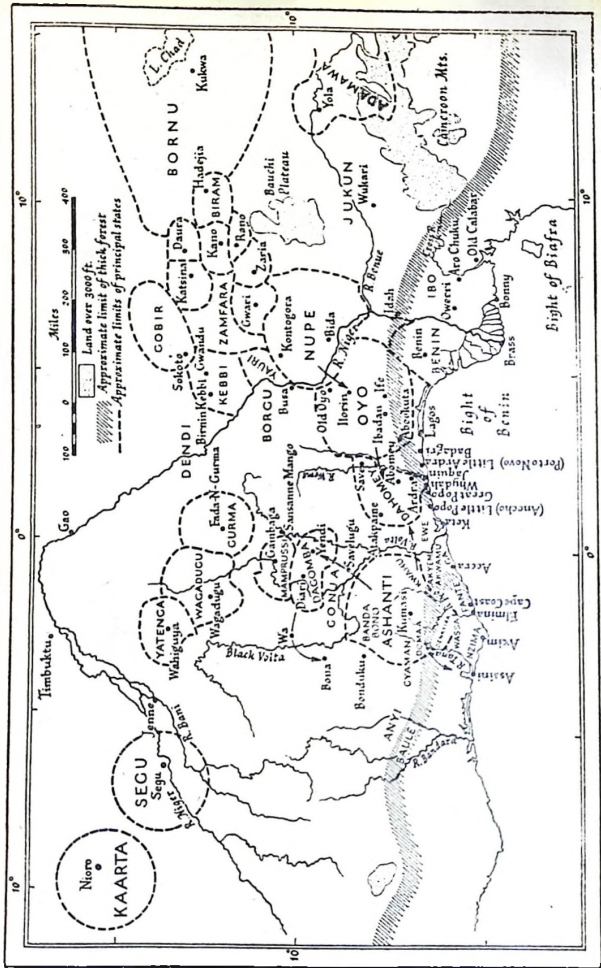


Fig. 14 States of the Guinea forest and savannah, and Segu and Kaarta, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.

regarded as urgent; the rest was to be the long-term result of the introduction of Christianity and European education.

Since most of the information we have about the West African states at the beginning of the nineteenth century is from these critics, it is not surprising that historians often show a rather poor opinion of the states. We get the impression that West Africa was in rapid decline; that it had long fallen from the epic days of the Sudanese empires of Ghana, Mali and Songhai, and that the Moroccan conquest of 1591 in the Sudan and the slave trade along the coast brought about 'the Dark Ages' in West Africa. We get the impression that the slave trade was so all-pervading that in its heyday it progressively weakened West African states and in its abolition brought immediate economic ruin and eventual political collapse. With the abolition of the slave trade, we are told, Benin reverted to ritual murder, the Yoruba to internecine war, Dahomey to annual immolation of prisoners she could not sell, and the Asante empire to internal dissension which encouraged outside interference.

The Islamic states of the nineteenth century, for all their social and political achievements, have not been exempted in contemporary European accounts from this picture of general decline. Where these achievements are acknowledged at all, the contention has been that they were not permanent. By the end of the nineteenth century, everywhere in West Africa was declared corrupt and degenerate. The existing social and political institutions were regarded as inadequate for the expanding European trade. From this point of view, the overthrow of these institutions and the establishment of European rule became a necessity of further economic development.

These then are the issues to be considered in this brief chapter, which will inevitably traverse ground already covered more systematically in previous chapters. But, in spite of the repetitions, it may be useful at this point to make this general survey and in particular to suggest that there was no general or uniform decline; that, rather, the history of West African states provides an interesting study in continuing adaptation to changing circumstances.

Too often West African history is seen in static terms, partly because our knowledge is patchy, partly also because we often approach the history through studies of 'traditional' institutions as

they existed in the early twentieth century, and we imagine these institutions to have existed for all time uninfluenced by changing politics and personalities. That is why it is important to stress here the factor of change and adaptation.

#### RESPONSE TO CHANGE

Undoubtedly the Moroccan conquest and the decline of the power of Songhai was a tremendous shock to the people of the Western Sudan. As the Timbuktu scholars proclaimed till the seventeenth century, it brought misery and unrest where there had been prosperity and peace. What is perhaps just as interesting a study is the way people adapted themselves and adjusted their institutions to meet the challenge of the changing situation. It is true that there is at the moment little material on this period. The Arabic sources dry up after the middle of the seventeenth century. Little archaeological work has been done. Oral tradition for the period is only just being collected. Even the writings of early nineteenth century explorers like Mungo Park, who described parts of the Western Sudan in the pre-jihād period with less than the usual amount of prejudice, have not been fully utilised. Therefore, as soon as we relate the story of the glorious era of Ghana, Mali and Songhai we tend to regard the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the Sudan as a blank or a gloomy interlude before the other glorious age of Usuman dan Fodio.

Islam undoubtedly declined. A number of non-Muslim dynasties began to rule in old centres of Islam: in Tekrur, Segu and Masina. This was principally because the Moroccan Pasha and the Arma, the descendants of the troops, were unable to protect the main cities of the old Songhai empire—Jenne, Timbuktu, Gao—from the frequent attacks of the Tuaregs from the north and the Mossi from the south. More than this, there occurred what was probably a reaction of the rural areas against the cities, a reaction of farmers and adherents of traditional religions against the hegemony of the traders and Muslims. This conflict on the whole dominated the seventeenth century, but by the eighteenth century, new political systems emerged. The new non-Muslim dynasties began to achieve stability based not upon Islam and Muslim officials but on traditional age-grades, caste-systems and religious sanctions. In Segu, a band of warriors, taking advantage of the decline of the towns to plunder them, began to carve out a state in the middle

Niger. They emerged as a military oligarchy, with an offshoot of a rival dynasty at Kaarta. The kingdoms survived several military revolts and changes of dynasties, and by the end of the eighteenth century they could claim to have met the challenge of the decline of Islam by establishing a new and stable administration based on the revival of traditional institutions. Nevertheless, Islam survived as a *personal* religion in most places and it was in that century that there began the movement for reform and revival among the Fulani, Mandingo and Susu of the Futa Jallon in 1725 and of the Tukolor and Fulani of Futa Toro in 1770.

In the same way, it can be claimed that a similar response to the challenge of the slave trade had taken place on the Guinea Coast and in the forest areas. The existing states along the coast responded well to the European trade and adapted themselves to it. Small fishing villages developed into large city-states organised socially and politically to take advantage of the trade. In the immediate hinterland, different peoples began to organise themselves to avoid being preyed upon by the coastal peoples looking for slaves. Thus in the Ibo country, the Aro, without creating a new state, established colonies of traders and agents of the Arochuku oracle to organise the slave trade to the coast. Dahomey organised a powerful state and came south to dominate the coastal traders. All the major West African states, whether the slave trade contributed to their rise or not, organised themselves to exploit it to their own advantage.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Benin traders were able to bring down to the coast not only slaves from distant places, but also glass beads from Nupe and cloth from northern Yoruba. Similarly Old Oyo in its day organised trade connections between the coast and the far interior. None did better than Dahomey in organising the European trade, even supervising the European forts and sending embassies to Europe and South America. All along the coast, people were willing to trade with Europeans on certain conditions. They rejected Christianity and resisted the cultural influence of Europe. But they were willing to cultivate new crops from the New World, willing to learn European languages, and even to employ European advisers in training soldiers and building fortifications.

The slave trade certainly left its debilitating effect on the West Africa of the early nineteenth century. The loss of population,

particularly of young men and women, was more than could be borne without adverse effect. The slave trade made the capture of slaves if not usually the cause of wars, certainly a lucrative result of wars, with consequent sharpening of conflicts and a growing desire to fight wars to the bitter end. This in turn must have affected initiative in industry, arts and crafts, and caused a gradual coarsening of social and cultural life. Nevertheless, the point is worth making that, to a remarkable degree, the West African states on the whole had adjusted their institutions to exploit the trade and preserve themselves as much as possible from the consequences. It was the smaller, relatively unorganised, communities who bore the full brunt of the slave trade, except where in the larger states, such as the Yoruba in the nineteenth century, there was internal collapse and civil war. It was precisely because the states had so geared themselves to exploiting the slave trade that its abolition brought not a feeling of relief but a real challenge to the ability of the states to readapt themselves to a new type of economic relationship with Europe.

To many of the states, abolition of the slave trade meant a loss not only of the European trade, but also of the trade they conducted with other peoples in the goods they received from Europeans. These included guns and ammunition, luxury goods, rum, manillas, knives and other European manufactures. Even where alternative produce like palm oil, ivory, shea-butter and indigo came to replace slaves, it took a long time to build up adequate trade in them. There were areas where the slave trade had been lucrative but palm oil was not available. Generally, however, the West African states avoided economic ruin partly by fighting to delay the abolition of the slave trade until they had alternative products to sell, partly also by diverting the slaves they could not sell into producing alternative crops. In this way, abolition of the slave trade meant more extensive and intensive use of domestic slaves.

The overseas slave trade to some extent rested on the basis of internal domestic slavery, but the two institutions were distinct. The abolitionists who had argued that the two were the same and that the destruction of one would lead to the extinction of the other soon discovered that the more the slave trade declined and trade in agricultural produce took its place, the more established domestic slavery became. Domestic slaves were needed not only to

produce the crops and process them, but also to carry them to the coast. In the absence of a wage economy, there was no way of recruiting large-scale labour other than by using occasionally age-grade associations on a voluntary basis, or more usually domestic slaves. Slaves were needed for labour on the farms, for carrying goods over long distances, for working in the mines and other industries. It was usual to recruit technical skill, say of blacksmiths, weavers or horse attendants, by recruiting slaves from areas noted for these skills. Slaves were also used in large transactions as a form of currency. As long, therefore, as the abolition of the slave trade was gradual and it was possible to evade the British anti-slavery squadron, and as long as there was no attack on the institution of domestic slavery, the West African states were able to meet the challenge of abolition and the rise of the new 'legitimate' commerce.

#### THE FOREST STATES

To examine these issues further, we should take a few specific examples, and we could begin with Benin, about which we know very little in the nineteenth century. It is usually dismissed as having been declining since the end of the seventeenth century. It is said that under increasing European pressure in the nineteenth century there was so much frustration and fear in Benin that the incidence of human sacrifice became alarming. Nevertheless, there is evidence that at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was still a very powerful state. It still exercised power in Lagos. With a base at Akure, it consolidated its hold on southern Ekiti and it continued to control western Ibo and most parts of the Itsekiri and Urhobo countries. Abolition of the slave trade had no sudden or catastrophic result in Benin. For a long time, it was possible to evade British anti-slave-trade squadrons through a number of creeks, while the trade in ivory and palm oil was being built up. Gradually, however, the effects became noticeable. Trade in palm oil favoured the Itsekiri and Urhobo more than Benin. The area of the Benin empire where the Oba could collect tribute, protect Benin traders and enforce military service, began to diminish. But the Benin kingdom, the core of the empire, remained intact and it struggled successfully to adjust itself to the changing economic situation.

It is the view of Dr Bradbury that 'beset as it was with pressures

on all sides the Benin kingdom itself suffered no internal collapse'. The great strength of Benin was in its monarchy. The monarch was the representative of the ancestors and he was surrounded with a great aura of mystery, fear and respect. Benin political institutions proved durable because the monarchy continued to maintain a balance between the competing power groups in the state. The principle of primogeniture limited the choice of the Oba to those who could claim to be the eldest son of the late king. This did not of itself end succession disputes because different claimants still had to win support from the chiefs. But once elected, the Oba was in a position to use the elective offices and the distribution of fief-holdings to maintain a balance between the different categories of chiefs: the Uzama, the palace chiefs and the town chiefs.

—The Yoruba states are thought to provide the classic example of the evil effects of the slave trade on West Africa. It is often said that the slave trade weakened the Old Oyo empire and the general monarchical principles of the Yoruba people; and that the abolition of the slave trade, instead of bringing relief and development, precipitated the Yoruba wars which went on throughout the nineteenth century. It is in fact not easy to assess the effects of the slave trade on the Yoruba states without more research on the history of these states in the eighteenth century. It would appear that before the nineteenth century the Yoruba were sufficiently well-organised to see to it that it was not they, but their northern neighbours, who suffered most from the slave trade. This organisation was based partly on the theory of a common descent of all Yoruba Obas and partly on the military strength of the Old Oyo empire which stabilised the day-to-day relations between the Obas and their states. The disintegration of the Old Oyo empire in the nineteenth century precipitated the Yoruba wars and brought the full impact of the slave trade to the Yoruba people for the first time. It has been suggested that the slave trade, by introducing new economic factors which conflicted with the traditional constitutional arrangements, must take responsibility for the collapse of the Old Oyo empire. This view probably exaggerates the importance of the slave trade in the economy of the Old Oyo empire. At any rate in explaining the collapse of the empire, we cannot neglect the internal politics within the empire itself, and between it and other Yoruba states. There were personal, constitutional and political conflicts as well as the problems of an empire that

seems to have expanded beyond the limits of its administrative resources.

While we focus attention on the wars and try to understand their causes and effects, it is also important to look at the way in which the different states were adapting themselves to the changing conditions of the nineteenth century. In their variety and their vitality, these adaptations showed that in spite of the wars, the Yoruba states and their internal structures were far from degenerate. A state like Abeokuta with acute constitutional problems welcomed missionaries and other aspects of European influence without destroying her traditional social and political institutions. Ibadan provides an even more instructive example of adaptation. In the second half of the nineteenth century it went near to assuming the mantle of Old Oyo by creating a really powerful state. Yet Ibadan was a very different state from Old Oyo. Two aspects of the growth of Ibadan should be noted. One was the clear departure from the monarchical principles of Old Oyo in favour of a republican constitution in which chiefs attained high office by promotion based not so much on birth as on military prowess and political acumen. This open society drew adventurers from different parts of the Yoruba country to Ibadan to seek their fortunes and helped to make Ibadan not only populous and turbulent but also powerful. Secondly, the economic base of Ibadan's military might depended not on the overseas slave trade but on the exploitation of domestic slaves recruited from wars. The slaves were used in farming plantations in hamlets around the city or drafted into armies which on annual exercises went to war to recruit more slaves. By creating a large empire, Ibadan brought under its control a great number of towns and villages which paid tribute in cowries or in kind, and whose resources were used to purchase arms and ammunition along the coast.

Of all West African states Dahomey was the most dependent on the slave trade and therefore the most hard hit economically by abolition. But nevertheless Dahomey was far from being a degenerate state in the nineteenth century. In the opening decade a number of political crises showed the magnitude of the economic depression. In 1797 the king was assassinated but his supporters succeeded in maintaining the dynasty. In 1818 his successor was deposed during the annual festival and this time a new dynasty

was established. Yet Dahomey revived under the new dynasty. The army was improved and a corps of semi-professional troops was introduced. Dahomey became independent of Oyo and was thus in a position to exploit the new opportunities created by the collapse of the Old Oyo empire. The king maintained close collaboration with Brazilian traders along the coast. While resisting the abolition of the slave trade, Dahomey went on seeking to control Egbado and other areas in order to capture legitimate trade. It encouraged the cultivation of palm trees and the collection of palm produce. It also developed plantations near the capital to improve the food supplies for the increasing population of Abomey. This increase of population, as well as the long reigns of the kings and the absence of disputed successions for the rest of the century, showed the reality of the Dahomey revival. It took the French two years, 1892-4, to bring the kingdom down.

Asante at the beginning of the nineteenth century provides the least excuse for the theory of a general decline. It is true, however, that when the British conquered the country at the end of the nineteenth century they destroyed its imperial system. Those who approached Asante history through its institutions as they existed at the beginning of the twentieth century therefore painted a picture of an empire without an imperial system. They argued that one major reason why the British frequently had to intervene in the country's affairs and go to war against it in the nineteenth century was because of its internal disunity. However, recent writings based upon a historical study of the institutions as well as closer examination of the written records of visitors to Asante show that, far from declining, Asante in the early nineteenth century was expanding and improving its imperial administration.

There were two types of administrations within the empire. First there were the so-called Amanto states, the original Asante clans who formed the union at the end of the seventeenth century. Among these states Kumasi the capital and its king the Asantehene were only leaders among equals. There was frequent conflict between the most powerful of the states like Mampong and Juaben and the expanding imperial ambitions of the Asantehene. This conflict often provided opportunities for interference. However, in the vast areas brought under control by the Asante, the Asantehene from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards

began to develop a new administrative service dependent upon himself in contrast to hereditary chiefs within the Amanto states. The king developed a bureaucratic class from which people were appointed to offices on merit. These officials could be transferred or dismissed at will. It was such people who represented the king in the conquered provinces and districts as well as in diplomatic relations with Europeans and the coastal states. Similarly the king began to establish special regiments, for example, a small cavalry force recruited from Hausa and Malinke mercenaries and others. Probably the most remarkable aspect of this imperial administration was the efficiency of its financial arrangements. A large and efficient body of officials levied and supervised the collection of tribute, tolls and death duties. They supervised the state enterprise in trading, mining and the collection of ivory. It was essentially because of the efficiency of this administrative system that the Asante could withstand abolition of the slave trade as well as military, diplomatic and economic pressures from Britain throughout the nineteenth century and, even after repeated conquests, were still able in 1900 to put up a good fight.

#### THE STATES OF THE WESTERN SUDAN

I have already emphasised that in the states of the Western Sudan there was much more continuity from the golden era of Songhai to the nineteenth century, and from the pre-jihād states to those created by the Islamic revolutions, than is often suggested by the Arabic sources.

Bornu in the early nineteenth century appeared weaker than it was in the seventeenth century. Our rather patchy knowledge suggests that even though Bornu continued to exact tribute from some of the Hausa states, its military might had declined and the area had shrunk over which the Mai could exercise control. It has also been suggested that the monarchy itself declined; the Mais no longer led their troops to war; all six Mais of the eighteenth century died in their capital; they were devoting too much attention to their harems as well as the arts and literature, and they left administration in the hands of a new bureaucracy. It was thus relatively easy for the Fulani reformers to sack the capital and drive Mai Ahmad into exile. Yet when Bornu found a leader in Al-Kānemī, he showed that the kingdom could be reformed and adapted to changing conditions. Bornu lost some territory to the

Fulani—especially Katagum and Hadejia—but Al-Kānemī had given it a new lease of life. He also showed that the charges of paganism with the implications of degeneration in religious, social and political life, were not well founded.

In spite of the relative ease with which the Fulani reformers took over control of the Hausa states from their Habe rulers, there has been no suggestion that the Habe states were decadent. The reformers of course often implied that the decline of Islam also meant the decline of justice, fair taxation and good government, true morality and the vitality of society generally. More usually, however, Fulani attacks were directed specifically at the rulers and not at society in general. There were many devout Hausa who joined the jihād. Habe society had provided opportunities and patronage to Muslim intellectuals. Katsina remained a famous centre of learning, and the Fulani themselves developed a learned and an administrative class. Opportunities for learning apart, the Fulani did not underrate the military strength of the Habe states. Gobir in particular had expanded in the eighteenth century, though largely at the expense of other Hausa states. Fulani success was by no means quick and easy and it was never complete; Habe centres of resistance survived throughout the nineteenth century at Argungu, Maradi, Abuja and other places. In short, Fulani success is to be explained not in terms of the decadence of the Habe states, but in terms of their disunity in the face of Fulani cohesion, and the revivalist enthusiasm that the Fulani generated among large numbers of Hausa, Tuareg and others. The continuing vitality of Habe political institutions may be seen in the extent to which these were carried over, though with modifications, into Fulani administration. The Fulani rulers discovered that many of the practices they had condemned in the Habe administration—like taking presents and showing respect to birth—were, for the age and society, normal administrative procedures which they themselves soon adopted. It is also remarkable that in terms of culture and language the Hausa were ultimately to conquer their conquerors.

Whereas the Habe rulers remained at least nominally Muslim, the rulers of the Bambara states, as we have seen, were pagan. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was great rivalry between Segou and Kaarta which occasioned many wars which feature prominently in the accounts of the explorers. But the same

explorers were impressed by the size and the commercial activities of capital cities like Segou. These Bambara states provided continuity in the Western Sudan in spite of the Moroccan conquest. Along with Mossi and other states resistant to Islam, they also demonstrated that the vitality of the states of the Western Sudan was not due to Islam alone.

Yet the advantages of Islam should not be underrated. In providing a written language, a literate and learned administrative class and, above all, a bond of union that cut across ethnic considerations, Islam was a powerful factor in nation building in West Africa. The eighteenth century saw the revival of Islam in the theocratic states of Futa Jallon and Futa Toro. From these two revivalist centres, Islam began to penetrate into the Wolof and Serer states of Senegambia, and the Sierra Leone hinterland. Between 1804 and 1810 the Muslim revival had great success in the Hausa states. In 1818, in Masina, another theocratic state was created out of a vassal province of Segou. From 1858 onwards Al-hājj 'Umar conquered the rest of the Segou empire and Kaarta and absorbed Masina itself. Later Samori Touré's conquests were to give Islam a further push into the forest belt of West Africa.

These new Muslim states involved yet another series of adaptations in West Africa. Not only did they lead to a revival of Islam, they also brought about new political and cultural unities. In fact these adaptations were important in seeing the states of the Western Sudan through changing economic circumstances that in the nineteenth century were only slightly less acute than on the coast. European anti-slavery activities to the south and in North Africa and the gradual penetration of the Western Sudan from both directions, soon began to interfere with the traditional pattern of trade. The revival of Islam and the new impetus in the Islamic states created more commercial opportunities in the Western Sudan itself and a new drive for commercial links with the south which gradually replaced the declining trans-Saharan trade.

It remains to add that the religious fervour of the Islamic revolutions did not always last very long and the ideals of justice and good administration were not always achieved. The successors of the reformers became a new ruling class grappling with the basic problems of administration, dynastic rivalries, good and bad officials and so on. But just as the Muslim reformers were biased in explaining their success over the pre-jihād rulers in terms of their

moral superiority over the latter, the Europeans were equally wrong to explain their victory over the Muslim states in similar terms.

The basic factor in the European conquest of West African states was not moral but technological superiority, in particular the Maxim gun to which the military ingenuity of the West Africans had no answer. Against the background of European technology, the West African states were backward. There were no railways, no large boats on the rivers, no telegraphs for fast and easy communications, no portable and convenient currency and so on. On the average, too, the states were small. Especially in the forest areas, each European trader had to negotiate with a great many states before he could trade over a distance of one or two hundred miles. But this is not to say that the states were static or declining or degenerate. As far as was compatible with the integrity of their culture and the security of their sovereignty, they were willing all through the nineteenth century to adapt themselves to changing circumstances and to meet the new European challenge. However, when the argument turned from an economic and cultural challenge to a military and technological confrontation—naval blockades, military expeditions and Maxim guns—the West African states had no effective answer.

## 15 The Nineteenth Century Jihāds'

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### ISLAM IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY WESTERN SUDAN

THE FALL of the Askia dynasty of Songhai in the 1590s before the impact of the Moroccan invasion, led to a rapid break-up of the far-flung empire that had been built up by Sunni 'Alī<sup>2</sup> and extended and consolidated by the first Askia, Al-hājj Muhammad (ruled 1493-1528). At its height this empire is said to have included the eastern arcas of the Mali empire, the area adjacent to the banks of the Niger from Jenne down to Kebbi, the desert areas north of Timbuktu to the Central Sahara and perhaps some areas of Hausaland. Within this area were united for a period such diverse peoples as Soninke, Fulani, Tuareg, Songhai, Bozo, Arabs and Hausa. The only unity the whole area possessed was that of a strong ruler with a well-organised system of provincial governors. Islam, though the religion of many, but by no means all (or even perhaps a majority) of the peoples, was not sufficiently strongly established to provide an effective bond in the face of an attack on the centre from a major foreign power. In the event, the Moroccan pashas of Timbuktu were only able to establish their sovereignty over the riverain area between Gao and Timbuktu and, with varying degrees of success, over Jenne. The other areas which had been incorporated into the Songhai empire by conquest broke off and re-established their independence.

Songhai, then, was the last major empire of the medieval Western Sudan and no other comparable empire was to be seen until the jihād of Usuman dan Fodio established one based on Sokoto in the early years of the nineteenth century. With the political disintegration of the great medieval empires of the Western Sudan, the fortunes of Islam in general fell, and the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries witnessed the proliferation of smaller states in which Islam was not generally the major force. In those areas where Islam had once been strong there was an increasing tendency to seek accommodation with local custom—even when directly opposed to the law of Islam. The days when the rulers sought the advice and counsel of their Muslim scholars

and jurists had gone; instead, the rulers, while formally declaring themselves Muslims, sought to accommodate local custom and practice and to produce some kind of synthesis between Islam and indigenous religious traditions and customs.

It is against this background that we must consider the three great jihād movements of the nineteenth century which all aimed at reforming the syncretist situation which had grown up, and at re-establishing Islam as the state religion and mode of government. In considering these movements, more attention will be paid to the jihād of Usuman dan Fodio than either that of Seku Ahmadu or Al-hājj 'Umar, partly because a good deal more is at present known about it and partly because it remains until this day a living tradition of reform and the basis of the administrative system which still exists in Northern Nigeria in the form of the emirates and their native authorities. However, it is necessary to stress the tentative nature of conclusions drawn in this chapter about the jihād movements. Serious study of these movements has only just begun and many of the written documents in Arabic have not yet been properly studied. Fortunately a number of scholars are now engaged in studies of these movements, so that it may well be that in a few years' time our picture of the nineteenth century Islamic movements will have changed considerably.

At the outset it may not be out of place to review the concept of jihād in Islam before seeing how it was interpreted and put into practice in nineteenth century West Africa. Jihād is a religious duty prescribed by the Qurān and endorsed by the *Sunna*, or received tradition of the sayings of the Prophet. It is, however, a 'collective duty' incumbent upon the Muslim community at large as opposed to an 'individual duty', such as the five daily prayers, the Ramadan fast and the pilgrimage to Mecca, required of every individual Muslim. That is to say, the duty is accomplished if some members of the community undertake it on behalf of the whole.

Muslim jurists divided the world into two parts, the 'Abode of Islam' and the 'Abode of War'—that is the territory not under Muslim rule. It is the duty of every Muslim to summon the unbelievers to embrace Islam; if they accept the invitation then they become members of the Muslim community and their territory becomes part of the Abode of Islam. If they refuse then

they should be fought against; if they are defeated, those captured in war become slaves and their goods become booty which goes into the Muslim state treasury. The ordinary citizens of a land so conquered are allowed to continue following their old religion but come now under the status of 'protected persons'; such people are required to pay a *per capita* tax and a tax on their lands but are in return, given military protection and not asked to join the Muslim army.

The jihād, then, is to be undertaken against the unbelievers, i.e. all those who do not declare themselves Muslims. This seems perfectly straightforward, but not half a century passed in the history of Islam before disputes arose as to who was a Muslim and certain extremist groups sought to denounce other Muslims as 'unbelievers' because they did not accept some of their stricter tenets.<sup>3</sup> This problem of who was a Muslim and who was not was the basis of the theological rationale of the nineteenth century jihād movements, and an understanding of this problem is fundamental to our understanding and interpretation of the jihāds.

#### THE SOKOTO JIHĀD

By the middle of the eighteenth century Zamfara was the leading power of the Rima river system, having superseded Kebbi in the early years of the century. However, Zamfara itself was soon to be eclipsed by the rising power of Gobir. In the second half of the eighteenth century Gobir sacked Birnin Zamfara and established its own capital at Alkalawa, some twenty-five miles downstream from Birnin Zamfara. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, Gobir itself had grown weak and under Nafata (c. 1796-1802) there was disorder; Zamfara was in revolt, Katsina was raiding, and Kebbi's allegiance had become uncertain.

Within the area of north-western Hausaland were large groups of Fulani who had migrated over the centuries from the Futa Toro area of Senegal. Many had settled in towns and villages and intermarried with the Hausa population; others were semi-nomadic. Both these groups were mainly Muslim. There were also purely nomadic pastoral Fulani who in the main were not Muslims. The two main concentrations of Fulani were one to the east of Birnin Kebbi—politically dependent on Kebbi—and the second grouped round Birnin Konni. Between these two groups lay two other

Fulani-speaking groups who were considered 'cousins' to the Fulani—the Toronkawa,<sup>4</sup> claiming some Arab blood, and the Sullebawa who had some admixture of Mandingo blood.

It was to the Toronkawa that Usuman dan Fodio<sup>5</sup> belonged, tracing his descent from a certain Musa Jokolo, who had migrated from Futa Toro in perhaps the fifteenth century. The ancestors of Dan Fodio, or the Shehu,<sup>6</sup> as he is commonly called, had settled in Konni originally. In the early eighteenth century they moved to Maratta and some time after the birth of the Shehu in 1754 had moved to Degel, to the north of the present Wurno and on the other side of the river. The Toronkawa were a strongly Muslim group, many of whose members were teachers and preachers; in fact they constituted something like a missionary clan. The Shehu himself was a very erudite man, as were many of the members of his family, and had undertaken a deep study of Islamic law, theology, and mysticism, all through the medium of the Arabic language which was, and is, the common medium of scholarship amongst all Muslim peoples.

The Muslims in Hausaland fall into two groups, those based primarily on the towns and those based outside the main centres who were nomadic or semi-nomadic. The former, who were largely Hausa or settled part-Hausa Fulani, were closely bound to the obligations of their settled society and had, through these circumstances, come to accommodate a great deal of non-Islamic practice into their expression of Islam; it was clearly in their better interests to keep the favour of the ruler. The latter, who were largely Fulani or Tuareg, lived a life independent of the towns and, particularly in the case of the Fulani, divorced from the pagan culture of their kin; they thus depended on Islam for their values, ambitions and their sense of security. In the final analysis it was the clash of outlook between these two groups that led to the jihād. During the course of the jihād campaigns and the establishment of Sokoto power no doubt many other and mixed motives were present, both among the leaders and among the rank and file who joined in the jihād, but there seems no reason to doubt that the Shehu himself was absolutely sincere in his ideals of reviving Islam and setting up an Islamic system of government and social order along lines which he considered to be orthodox. In order to appreciate this, we must, therefore, first examine the career of the Shehu up to the time of his declaration of jihād, and

see how far the movement fits into a more general pattern of Islamic reform in the Western Sudan.

In his early years the Shehu studied the Islamic sciences under his father and his uncles and, while still continuing his studies, began to preach in Degel around 1774-5 at the early age of twenty. Soon afterwards he began to go on preaching tours, one of which took him to Kebbi; he also spent five years in Zamfara, teaching and preaching. During the 1780s he also had some contacts with the rulers and visited Bawa, the Sultan of Gobir, to explain to him the doctrines of Islam; this certainly increased his prestige among the people, though he did not allow himself to become tied to court circles which would have inhibited his freedom to preach and exhort as he wished.

By the late 1780s the Shehu had built up a considerable following and there were already signs of strain in his relationship with the rulers. In 1788-9 the Sultan of Gobir plotted to kill him but failed. He then tried to buy his goodwill, but instead the Shehu seized the opportunity to obtain some concessions from Bawa, chief among which were the right to preach freely and the promise that those who responded to his preaching would not be subjected to pressure. At this point it is not clear whether the Shehu had the idea of a jihād clearly in his mind. However, he continued his preaching tours and the building up of his following who came to be known as his *jamā'a* (community), that is those who were convinced by his preaching and prepared to accept his spiritual leadership. The Shehu not only gained new adherents during his preaching tours but students also came to reside at Degel; the Shehu also spread his teachings through widely distributed pamphlets in Arabic and poems in Hausa and Fulani.

The Shehu, in addition to being a scholar and teacher, was also a mystic, belonging to the brotherhood called the Qādiriyya, named after its founder 'Abd Al-Qādir, a twelfth century saint of Baghdad. At the mystic age of forty<sup>7</sup> he claimed that he received a vision instructing him to 'unsheath the sword of truth'. The effect of this was that by 1795 he began to preach that the preparation of arms is a *sunna*—a recommended practice, sanctioned by the Prophet's usage.

The new sultan of Gobir, Nafata, who came to power in about 1796, tried to arrest the situation of potential conflict by seeking to restrict the Shehu's powers and curb the activities of his *jamā'a*.

He proclaimed that nobody except Dan Fodio (among the *jamā'a*) should be allowed to preach; that there should be no more conversions to Islam and that those who had not been born Muslims should recant. Finally he forbade men from wearing turbans and women from wearing veils. The last privation was no doubt aimed at demoralising the *jamā'a* since the wearing of turban and veils was considered a *sunna* and seems to have been the distinctive dress of the *jamā'a* and a unifying symbol of the group.

By the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the Shehu's power had grown to the extent that he had groups of supporters scattered throughout Gobir, Zamfara and Kebbi who were willing to come to his support at a moment of trouble. It was this widespread allegiance to him and his ideals which was to be crucial when the final clash with authority came in 1804.

In 1802 Nafata was succeeded by his son Yunfa who proved to be even more harsh in his attitude towards the *jamā'a* and he soon decided on a trial of strength. At the turn of the year 1804 Yunfa came into conflict with 'Abd al-Salām, a non-Fulani supporter of the Shehu, and attacked him and his followers. Members of the Shehu's *jamā'a* came to his aid and Yunfa planned a reprisal against them but asked the Shehu and his family to move away from Degel so as not to become involved. The Shehu refused but instead ordered his *jamā'a* to emigrate from the land of Gobir to Gudu which was outside of Gobir territory.

The decision to emigrate—to make a *hijra*<sup>b</sup>—was full of significance and could only lead to open hostility. This brings us back again to the Islamic doctrine which lay behind the *jihād* and the interpretation which the Shehu gave to it. The basic doctrine which the Shehu explained and elaborated upon in numerous pamphlets and books is as follows: a Muslim should not willingly dwell in a land of unbelief, but if he has the means at his disposal should emigrate from it to the Abode of Islam. Those Muslims dwelling in the Abode of Islam should wage the *jihād* against those in the Abode of War (the unbelievers). This is the more urgent if the unbelievers are making a pretence of Islam which may lead others astray or are claiming their actions to be in the name of Islam while in fact they contradict the law of Islam. Furthermore, Muslims should come to the aid of other Muslims who are being attacked or oppressed by unbelievers. These ideas are not new to Muslim thought nor were they new in the Western

Sudan, for Al-Maghilī, the late fifteenth century preacher and scholar, had reiterated them in a series of replies to questions put to him by Askia Al-hājj Muhammad of Gao round about the year 1500. The Shehu was deeply read in Islamic law and had carefully studied the replies of Al-Maghilī which provided the only authority from a Sudanese context.

The doctrine itself begs the much more difficult question of who is a believer, and in the situation of the early nineteenth century Hausaland this was not a simple matter to decide—indeed it led to a great deal of rather inconclusive argument with Al-Kānemī when the jihād later extended to Bornu. The extremist view that the commission of 'grave sins' made a man an unbeliever had been preached in and around Hausaland by a certain Jibril ibn 'Umar who had been one of the Shehu's teachers. The Shehu, however, was more moderate and did not accept this view of Jibril. The Shehu sought to argue that Gobir was infidel territory on three main counts: (1) the ruler, by his action, had shown himself not to be a Muslim and a land is to be considered a land of Islam or a land of unbelief according to the religion of its ruler; (2) the unbelief of the Sultan of Gobir was shown by the way in which he followed certain un-Islamic practices such as the veneration of rocks and trees, consultation with magicians and soothsayers, the imposition of illegal taxes, the banning of the wearing of the veil for women, etc. (3) the ruler had shown himself not to be a Muslim by the fact that he had attacked and persecuted Muslims.

The call to emigrate then went out to the Shehu's *jamā'a* and from all over the country they began to move towards him. The 'cold war' which had been in existence between the Gobir rulers and the *jamā'a* for nearly fifteen years now led to open hostilities through the attack of Yunfa who, by his action, had identified himself with the unbelievers. There seems little doubt that the Shehu's followers did sincerely regard their opponents as unbelievers and that the preaching of the Shehu and his writings on this subject were effective.

During the first few months after the *hijra* there was a lull, during which time the only military action was the capture of Matankari and Konni by the Shehu's forces. Then in June 1804 came the first major engagement with Gobir forces at Tabkin Kwotto some twenty miles to the south-west of Gudu. Although

the Gobir army was superior in numbers, with a hundred heavy cavalry, the superior morale and determination of the Shehu's forces, who were fighting for their own survival as a group and for their faith, won the day and Yunfa's army was routed. The effect of this victory on the Shehu's support was considerable. The Sullebawa now came to the side of the Shehu and the Kebbi Fulani came into active alliance. From now on the Shehu's cause came to be more closely identified with the Fulani and this may well have cost him the support of some of the Hausa, especially since the need to feed his army inevitably led to pressure on the peasants. The character of the jihād had already changed. At the very first the army had consisted largely of members of the Shehu's *jamā'a*, pious men and scholars; the pastoral Fulani who had now entered into the forces were no doubt less actively interested in the ideals for which the Shehu was fighting and were more in the nature of mercenary troops for whom the campaigns were a source of material enrichment. It is clear that as time went on the Shehu found it increasingly difficult to keep a check on these elements and he wrote a number of pamphlets and booklets in which he explained, for example, the correct way in which to divide the booty in accordance with Islamic law.

At the beginning of the dry season of 1804-5 the Shehu's forces moved up into the dry season pasture lands near the Gobir capital, Alkalawa. It was here that the Gobir forces with Tuareg support put in their counter-attack at Tsuntsua in December 1804, defeating the Shehu and killing at least two thousand of his followers. The Shehu's forces were not, however, dispersed and, recovering from the defeat, moved down into Zamfara territory in early 1805 in search of food and a more friendly environment. From Sabon Gari, where they camped, a successful expedition was sent against Kebbi led by the Shehu's brother 'Abdullāh and the army commander 'Alī Jedo. The Shehu's son, Muhammad Bello, also headed an expedition against Gobir. The capture of Birnin Kebbi and the defeat of the Kebbawa in April 1805 made possible the move in September 1805 to Gwandu which was to become a permanent base for the jihād.

From there contact was established with the Muslim leaders in Katsina, Kano, Daura and Zamfara who met with Muhammad Bello in the dry season of 1805-6 and swore oaths of allegiance to the Shehu. From Gwandu the campaigns continued to Yauri,

Borgu, Dendi and Bauchi. After the harvest of 1805 in October a major expedition was launched against the Gobir capital Alkalawa. An army was sent from Gwandu under Muhammad Bello and 'Alī Jedo, another came up from Zamfara while a third approached from Katsina led by 'Umar Dallaji who was the first emir of Katsina. Surrounded on all sides the walled town of Alkalawa fell to the Shehu's combined forces in October 1808 and the Sultan of Gobir was killed. The fall of Alkalawa was the turning point in the military history of the jihād and resistance to the Shehu was swiftly undermined as news of the defeat spread.

While the initial phase of the jihād was now over in Hausaland, the conflict had spread to Bornu. Local Fulani Muslim groups had already been engaged in conflict with pagans in Gombe and Bauchi and it is probable that there had been conflicts between them and the Bornu authorities. Two leaders arose, Buba Yero in Gombe and Bi Abdur in Hadejia on the western borders of Bornu, and Fulani began to emigrate to these leaders. When the rulers of Katsina, Kano and Daura had appealed to the Mai of Bornu for aid against the Shehu, the Mai had sent troops which were, however, blockaded and defeated by the Ardo Lerlima, through whose territory they had to pass. Prior to this there had been no conflict between the jihād leaders and Bornu. Now, however, the Sokoto leaders began to become increasingly involved in Bornu, though no definitive conquest ever came about. The Mai had written to ask about the reasons for the jihād and in his reply Muhammad Bello had asked him not to aid the Hausa rulers, whom he condemned as unbelievers, against the Muslim armies of the Shehu. The Fulani Muslim leaders in Bornu also corresponded with Bello and mentioned the un-Islamic practices which were current among the Muslims of Bornu. There arose a protracted but inconclusive correspondence between Bello and Al-Kānemī, who was himself a scholar of some standing, in which Bello sought to prove that Bornu was a pagan land because of the pagan customs which were tolerated there. Al-Kānemī defended his state against this charge with skill,<sup>9</sup> but Bello was able to fall back on the charge that Bornu had proved itself pagan by coming to the aid of the 'pagan' rulers of some of the Hausa states. To this Al-Kānemī did not reply in detail. The paper war was as inconclusive as the armed struggle, for while the Bornu capital, Birnin N'gazaragamu, was three times captured, it was also three times

recaptured by Al-Kānemī's forces and after 1810 there was no serious attempt to bring Bornu into direct military submission to Sokoto, though raids continued.

In 1812 the Shehu, who had in 1809 moved to Sifawa, about twenty miles south of Sokoto, divided the administration of the nascent empire between his brother 'Abdullāh and his son Muhammad Bello. The latter, whose territories included Zamfara, Katsina, Kanō, Daura, Bauchi and Katagum, based himself at Sokoto which he had established in 1809 while 'Abdullāh, who was to control Nupe, Dendi, Borgu, Ilorin and Liptako, stayed at Bodinga, two miles from Sifawa, until the Shehu's death in 1817 when he moved to Gwandu.

The Shehu himself had never taken an active part in the military campaigns. He was already fifty years old when the jihād began and was, by nature, a scholar and teacher rather than a warrior or administrator. He was given the title *Amīr al-mu'minin* (Commander of the Believers), the supreme title of the Muslim leader of a wide area, by general consent, at the outset. From then on his main role was to advise and counsel his army commanders and administrators on how to undertake the jihād according to the strict dictates of the Islamic law and how to administer their provinces in the same way. It has sometimes been asserted that the Shehu was an Islamic primitivist and that he wished to restore the kind of situation that had existed during the life of the Prophet and the first four caliphs. This is certainly a misconception of his thinking, for while he looked always to the sayings and deeds of the Prophet and his immediate followers as inspiring examples for emulation, he nevertheless looked more to the later law-books, written centuries after the Prophet's death, to see how the scholars had interpreted the divine law and what rules they had laid down for the working of the judiciary, the collection of taxes, the administration of markets, the organisation of the treasury and so on. He thus accepted in full the later organisational development of the Islamic state as part of the essence of the religion; he also accepted the idea of the *sufi* (mystic) brotherhoods with their accompanying litanies and cult of saints, through whom intercession with God might be sought.

The administration of the new empire was established in a somewhat haphazard fashion. When expeditions were sent out to specific areas, the commander was given a flag of authority by the

Shehu. Once these flag-bearers had successfully carried out their campaigns and established their power they were confirmed in this and made lieutenants or emirs. In some cases local Muslim leaders came to Sokoto to receive a flag and the Shehu's authority to carry on the jihād in his name in their own areas. All these flag-bearers but one (Ya'qūb in Bauchi) were Fulani, but this is perhaps not surprising since the main military strength of the jihād came from the Konni and Kebbi Fulani leaders and the leaders of the Sullebawa and Alibawa who were able to call upon large resources of warriors. The history of the jihād after the death of the Shehu and the accession to power of his son Bello as successor in 1817, is the history of the individual emirates rather than that of Sokoto. Although Sokoto maintained an overall hegemony most of the emirates were, in practice, semi-autonomous, tribute-paying subordinates under the shadow of the caliphal authority of the sultan at Sokoto.

#### THE JIHĀD OF SEKU AHMADU

The Masina area to the south of the lacustrine region of the Niger which lies upstream from Timbuktu is crossed by several branches of the Niger. Within the area, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, resided a number of different peoples including the Muslim Fulani and Soninke, side by side with the pagan Bambara and Bozo and some pagan pastoral Fulani. It was an area of direct confrontation between Muslims and non-Muslims and therefore a potential area of disturbance. The ruling clan of Masina was the Fulani Dyālo who were rivalled by another clan, the Sangare, to which Seku Ahmadu belonged.

Seku Ahmadu, who was born in 1775, received a traditional Muslim religious education and early in his life began to travel. In 1805 he had been in Hausaland, at the time when Dan Fodio was embarking upon his jihād; this no doubt provided him with the inspiration to challenge the leaders of his own area and later to proclaim his own jihād. On his return he settled in a small village near Jenne but was expelled from there by the Arma, the rulers of the town descended from the Moroccans who conquered the Songhai empire in 1591. He then settled in Sebera and taught there, gathering around him a group of ardent disciples, as Dan Fodio had done at Degel. One day one of his students killed the son of the ruler (Ardo) of Masina who sought to revenge this death

and called upon the Bambara ruler of Segou, to which he was a tributary, to assist him against Seku Ahmadu. This brought the tension to a head, for the ruler of Segou was a pagan and the fact that a Muslim ruler (the Ardo of Masina) had called upon a pagan to aid him against a Muslim (Seku Ahmadu) would be sufficient for him to be branded as a pagan. This is closely paralleled by the views of Dan Fodio on Al-Kānemī's aid to the Hausa rulers against him.

Seku Ahmadu had already sent two of his brothers to Sokoto in 1817 and they returned the following year with flags and letters of investiture to carry on the jihād in Masina. Seku Ahmadu therefore proclaimed his jihād with this moral support, but having obtained it, continued his struggles completely independent of Sokoto. The people of Jenne, a long-standing city of Islam, sought his protection but when he sent representatives to rule in his name they were killed by the Arma; Seku Ahmadu then besieged the town and captured it. He established a new capital at Hamdallahi (1819) and during the following years until his death in 1844 built up an empire which embraced the whole of the river region between Jenne and Timbuktu and some areas to the east and west.

The empire of Seku Ahmadu was remarkable, not for its territorial extent, which was not enormous by Sudanic standards, nor its longevity—for it was largely broken up by Al-hājj 'Umar in 1862. Rather it was remarkable for its well-organised administration and the firmly Islamic stamp which it bore. This Islamic character created an atmosphere of zealotry which helped to make the later jihād of Al-hājj 'Umar more acceptable. Executive, legislative and judicial power in the state<sup>10</sup> was vested in a Grand Council which consisted of forty learned men with a further sixty assistant arbitrators. At the head of this body was a Privy Council of three, consisting of Seku Ahmadu and two members of the Grand Council. The age of the councillors was to be about the mystical age of forty. In cases of conflict within the Grand Council, forty were chosen at random from the sixty arbitrators and their decision was final; no decision was ever to be taken that was not in accord with Islamic law. He also appointed an emir and a qādī to each province and organised a state treasury, taxes being raised by harvest tithes, war booty, fines and confiscations and legacies.

Before his death he nominated his son Ahmadu as successor and he ruled until his death in 1852. Ahmadu himself nominated his

son as successor but it was during his reign that the great conqueror Al-hājj 'Umar invaded. Although Ahmadu III allied himself with the Bambara of Segou and the Kunta Arabs he was defeated by Al-hājj 'Umar who entered Hamdallahi in 1862 and put Ahmadu III to death.

#### THE JIHĀD OF AL-HĀJJ 'UMAR

The man who largely broke up Seku Ahmadu's empire, Al-hājj 'Umar, had, in 1838, been his guest for a short while as he travelled westwards on his long drawn out return from a pilgrimage to Mecca. Born in 1794 in Futa Toro, 'Umar ibn Sa'id Tal set out on a pilgrimage in the 1820s. It was during his stay in Mecca that he was initiated into the newly formed Tijāniyya mystic brotherhood by a certain Sidi Muhammad Ghālī who was a deputy of the founder of the order, Ahmad al-Tijānī (died 1815). Al-hājj 'Umar became a zealous adherent of the brotherhood and was himself made a deputy (*khalīfa*) and attained the highest rank within the order. On his return from the pilgrimage he stopped for a time in Bornu with Al-Kānemī and then passed on to Sokoto where he spent several years with Muhammad Bello and married one of his daughters. He also assisted him in the campaigns he was still fighting and thus acquired a considerable booty of slaves.

There seems little doubt that the successful jihād of Usuman dan Fodio encouraged Al-hājj 'Umar to think in terms of raising the jihād in his own territory. The Tijānī brotherhood was of an exclusivist nature and held as a doctrine its own moral superiority over other mystic brotherhoods and the superiority of the brotherhoods in general over other Muslims who were not attached to any. Under these circumstances, Al-hājj 'Umar could not tolerate living side by side with pagans or those he considered to be pagans, nor could he even treat other Muslims on terms of equality:

Al-hājj 'Umar's jihād shows many parallels with that of Dan Fodio and, like the latter's jihād, some conscious modelling on the pattern of the Prophet Muhammad's struggles with the unbelievers of Mecca and his emigration (*hijra*) to Medina. In 1839 he settled in Futa Jallon with a following of disciples and for the next nine years prepared himself for his jihād by gathering together an army of disciples (*talaba*) all instructed in the Tijānī doctrines and litanies; he also began to purchase firearms from the Atlantic Coast.<sup>11</sup> In 1848 he 'emigrated' (or made the *hijra*) from Futa

Jallon to Dinguiray accompanied by his disciples who were then named *Muhadyiriina* like the *Muhājirīn*, the emigrants who followed Muhammad on his *hijra* from Mecca to Medina. Those who came to his support at Dinguiray were named *Lansaaru* like Al-Ansār who supported the Prophet in Medina.

In 1852, after spending forty days of meditation, Al-hājj 'Umar received the call to 'sweep the country' and launched his jihād. He tried to gain control of his native land, Futa Toro, but was repulsed, though his own people, the Tukulor, became his strongest supporters. In 1854 he entered Nyoro but by now the French were a force to be reckoned with in the area and three years later in 1857 they relieved the town of Medina which Al-hājj 'Umar had been blockading. He now turned his attention to the Bambara kingdom of Segou and captured the town in 1861. He pushed on to attack the Fulani state of Masina, accusing the Muslims there of being hypocrites or *naafige* (from the Arabic *munāfiq* which was applied to the Muslims of doubtful loyalty in Medina in the days of the Prophet). He tried to impose his Tijānī doctrines on a largely Qādirī population and this proved his undoing. It provoked a strong reaction among the Fulani Muslims who were aided by the Kunta Arabs, the most strongly Qādirī group in West Africa, and in the struggle Al-hājj 'Umar lost his life (1864). His attack on Segou could scarcely be called legitimate as he was attacking another group of Muslims, and he therefore sought to justify it. His main argument was that the ruler of Masina, Ahmadu III, had allied himself with the pagan ruler of Segou and that thereby he should be adjudged an infidel himself. This was the same kind of argument that Dan Fodio had used against Al-Kānemī who had sought to come to the aid of the Hausa sultans who were to be considered pagans. It is interesting that his second successor, Al-Tijānī, was prepared to call upon the pagan Dogon to aid him in reasserting his authority over Masina in 1874.

Before his death Al-hājj 'Umar designated his son Ahmad as successor but he had not the authority of his father and the various provinces of the empire were ruled in mutual independence by their governors. The break-up of the empire was brought about by the French who began to move into the interior of the border as from 1878, and by the rising empire of the Mandinka conqueror Samori.

The three great jihād movements of nineteenth century West

Africa are certainly linked together in their sources of inspiration and it is quite possible that the earliest, that of Dan Fodio, was itself partly inspired by early eighteenth century jihād movements in Futa Toro and Futa Jallon, but as yet no direct link can be shown. That of Dan Fodio differs from the other two in that Dan Fodio was not the military leader of the movement but the scholarly guiding hand in the background. He was concerned that the jihād be organised according to the strict dictates of Islamic law and that the empire thus set up should follow the same principles. Seku Ahmadu and Al-hājj 'Umar, on the other hand, were themselves men of action and their jihāds show a much less weighty intellectual approach. Again Dan Fodio had with his family and community the necessary scholars to carry on in the same fashion after his death, whereas this does not seem to have been the case with the other two. He was able to lay the foundations of an administrative system which was solid enough to last down to the end of the nineteenth century and which, in a very real sense, persists until today. The coming of the British to Hausaland at the turn of the twentieth century did not destroy the system, which had sufficient vitality to become the basis on which to rest a policy of indirect rule. The wave of deeper Islamisation which that jihād set in motion proved to be solid and lasting and the tide of Islamic influence it sent out is still a powerful influence in modern Nigeria.

## NOTES

1 The author is much indebted to Dr D. M. Last for permission to make use of material drawn from his Ph.D. thesis, 'Sokoto in the nineteenth century with special reference to the Vizierate', Ibadan, 1964, at present being prepared for publication.

This chapter should be read in conjunction with the author's 'Islam in West Africa, A.D. 1000-1800', Chapter 6.

2 See note on the spelling of Muslim names and note on Fulani, Fulbe, etc. on p. 283.

3 For example the Kharijites, who held that a Muslim who commits 'grave sin', such as adultery or wine-drinking, ceases to be a Muslim. Those who did not share this view (the vast majority of the early Muslims) were considered to be 'unbelievers'.

4 Toronkawa is the Hausa form; in Fulani the same people are called Torodbe.

5 This is the Hausa form of his name. In Arabic he usually referred to himself as 'Uthmān ibn Fūdi.

6 Shehu is a Hausa form of the Arabic *shaikh* which means 'chief' or 'senior'. The form *Seku* is also used in the far western areas of the Sudan.

7 Forty is considered by Muslims to be a mystic age because it was at the age of forty that the Prophet Muhammad received the first revelation of the Qurān.

8 The use of the word *hijra* by the Shehu is significant as it recalls the Prophet's action when persecuted. See the introduction to Chapter 6.

9 See Chapter 16, page 291, for the opening stage of Al-Kānemi's correspondence.

10 Called, significantly, *diina* from the Arabic *dīn*, religion.

11 In this he certainly differed from the Fulani leaders in Hausaland who appear to have made no use of firearms, though their use was known. This would not be for doctrinal reasons, but rather, perhaps, because a strategy based largely on camel and horse cavalry would have little place for firearms.

## NOTE ON MUSLIM NAMES

Probably the most common Muslim personal names in use are Muhammad (after the Prophet), Ahmad (also a name of the Prophet), Abū Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthmān and 'Alī (after the first four caliphs of Islam), and names compounded with 'Abd (servant, slave) such as 'Abd al-Rahmān (servant of the Merciful), 'Abdullāh (servant of God) and 'Abd al-Karīm (servant of the Generous). In Arab practice it is usual to denote one's descent from father and often grandfather and great-grandfather by indicating that one is son of so-and-so; thus Muhammad ibn 'Umar ibn 'Alī (Muhammad, son of 'Alī, son of 'Umar). The word *ibn* (son) is often abbreviated to the letter *b*. Sometimes men are best known simply as son of somebody, e.g. Ibn Battūta, Ibn Khaldūn.

A man may also be known by what is called his *nisba*, which relates him to a particular tribe, country or town. Thus Al-Kānemi, the man from Kānem, Al-Bakri, the man of the tribe of Bakr, Al-Maghīli, the man of the tribe of Maghila. Sometimes a nickname may be added to the personal name or even used in preference. Thus Ahmad Bābā—Ahmad nicknamed Bābā; Muhammad Bello—Muhammad nicknamed Bello, 'Uthmān ibn Fūdi, who was actually 'Uthmān son of Muhammad, nicknamed Fūdi. This is the Arabic form of his name which we commonly find in written documents, but he is also known by the Hausa form of his name Usuman dan (son of) Fodio or simply Dan Fodio.

Finally a man may have an honorific added to his name. The commonest is *al-hājj*, the pilgrim, often locally pronounced *alhaji* or *alaji*, e.g. Al-hājj Muhammad, Al-hājj 'Umar. Other common honorifics include Al-imām (the leader of prayer), Al-faqih (the jurist) and Al-shaikh (the leader or elder). Thus 'Uthmān b. Fūdi is commonly called Al-shaikh or, in Hausa usage, the Shehu. The same word is also pronounced as *Seku* in the more westerly areas of the udan belt—thus Seku Touré, Seku Ahmad.

The writing of Arabic names in Latin characters is a problem and in order to transliterate accurately one has to make use of a system of dots under certain letters to distinguish sounds which the Latin alphabet cannot represent and bars above the vowels a, i and u when these are to be pronounced as long vowels. The dots under letters can be left out for all practical purposes for the general reader but the bars above vowels may be usefully retained as an aid to correct stress.

The apostrophe placed thus ' (as in the word *mu'minīn* = believers) represents the Arabic *hamza*, a brief pause in the breath flow, doing a similar job to the hyphen in the English word 'co-exist'. The apostrophe placed thus ' (as in the name 'Umar) represents the Arabic *'ain*, a deep throaty sound which has no counterpart in English or any African language.

## NOTE ON FULANI, FULBE ETC.

A number of names have been used by various writers to describe this people and their language. The word Fulani is actually the Hausa plural form (sing. Ba-Fillaci) indicating the people. In their own language they call themselves Fulo in the singular and Fulbe in the plural; hence the French term Peuls or Peulhs. In Arabic they are known collectively as *Fellāta* (sing. *Fellāti* (masc.) and *Fellātiyya* (fem.)). Their language is called Fulfulde or Fula.

## A NOTE ON SAMORI TOURÉ

G. C. IFEMESLA

In the first part of this chapter, the jihāds led by Usuman dan Fodio, Seku Ahmadu and Al-hājj 'Umar in the Central and Western Sudan during the nineteenth century were considered. There were in the same area during the same period other movements which also had an element of the religious in them. But these movements were not jihāds in the same sense, for they were led by men who were neither Muslim priests nor teachers, nor moral and spiritual reformers. These men were imbued primarily with the idea of welding into single states the small and mutually hostile principalities of the neighbourhood in which they lived, and of fostering and propagating Islam in the process. One of these leaders was Samori ibn Lafiya Touré, a man who has recently been described as 'one of the most remarkable figures in modern African history'.<sup>1</sup>

Samori would appear to have been born between 1830 and 1835. His father was of Soninke origin and lived in Sanankoro, a village south-east of Kankan. Tradition maintains that Samori was at first a modest *dyula* (trader), but later, while he was still in his late teens, his mother, whom he adored, was held captive by a local chief. Out of filial piety, Samori, in order to serve out his mother's release, enlisted in the chief's army and thenceforth became a professional soldier. Before long, he won renown as a warrior, and soon conceived the idea of building an empire out

of the numerous warring principalities in the area around the sources and upper course of the Niger. He defeated Fa Modu, the chief of Kumadugu, and made Bissandugu his capital in 1866. From there he gained control over the chieftaincies of Toron, Konia and Wasulonke. Some years afterwards, in 1873, he captured Kankan, and in 1874 he took the title of Al-mami (Arabic, *al-imām*, the political and religious leader of a Muslim community). Samori's power later extended towards the neighbourhood of Bamako and was felt north of the Niger. Ultimately his empire had for its neighbours the Tukulor empire to the north-west, the Futa Jallon to the west, the kingdom of Kenedugu (Sikasso) to the east and the forest fringes of Sierra Leone and Liberia to the south.

Samori was soon in collision with the French, whose penetration into the West African interior from their base in Senegal he stoutly resisted. The first clash occurred in February 1882. Initially Samori even gained new territory from the encounter, but a year later, in February 1883, the French occupied Bamako and came into direct conflict with Samori's advance party at a place near Siguiri.

Samori was a military commander with considerable powers of organisation and leadership. Indeed, Peroz, one of his French adversaries, described him as the 'Bonaparte of the Sudan'. Samori's army was very well organised. It consisted of ten corps (corresponding to the ten governments) stationed on the frontiers with the task of expanding the empire further and further each year. Each corps had a permanent group of professional soldiers made up of *sofa* (regulars) and *bilakoro* (cadets). In time of war, each governor could levy troops from the villages on the basis of one to every ten able-bodied men in each locality. In time of peace the majority of the troops reverted to being reserves, and spent the six months of cultivation and harvest in their home villages. The Al-mami himself had a guard of specially trained young men, about 500 in number. The regular troops—cavalry, foot-soldiers and special guard—wore uniforms, usually consisting of a cap, tunic and yellow trousers close-fitting at the ankles, with variation according to function and rank. There were also military workshops, with craftsmen capable of making and repairing all the parts of a quick-firing rifle.

As a general, Samori revealed an excellent grasp of strategy

and tactics. Like Seku Ahmadu and other West African opponents of European imperial expansion, Samori had no artillery, but only quick-firing rifles which he obtained from French or English merchants in Senegal or Sierra Leone. He therefore avoided entrenching himself in fortified positions which could not withstand heavy gunfire. Instead, he organised his forces into three groups. One, with quick-firing rifles, was for defence and for fighting the French; another, with breach-loaders or *chasse-pot* rifles, was responsible for guarding the civilian populations and conducting their evacuation whenever necessary; a third, armed like the second, undertook the conquest of more territories towards the east where the Al-mami and his men could move if the need arose. In these circumstances the people changed their territory from year to year, moving ever eastwards into newly conquered regions. On the other hand, Samori's French adversaries found practically nothing left for them in the evacuated territory. It was in this way that Samori prolonged the resistance as far as possible. The French had calculated it would be over in a few weeks but it lasted for several years.

Samori carried his struggle with the French into the realm of diplomacy. In 1879 the Sierra Leone government sent a messenger to Samori and to the rulers of Futa Jallon and Dinguiray. Samori received and entertained the envoy and thereafter tried adroitly to play off French imperialism against British imperialism, and *vice versa*. In 1885, he offered his acceptance of British protection to the British governor at Freetown if he could be assured of a constant supply of firearms. In consequence the French, alarmed at the prospect of eventual British occupation of the sources of the Niger, sent envoys to Samori in 1886 and 1887 and afterwards claimed that they had obtained his signature on each occasion to a treaty accepting French protection. This is improbable since he was not a man who would lightly alienate his sovereignty. Two major developments would appear to have saved the situation eventually for the French. First, at about this time (1886-1887) Samori appeared strong enough to capture Sierra Leone; hence the news of his treaties with the French caused grave disquiet in British official circles both in Sierra Leone and in Britain. Secondly, the British government accepted the validity of these treaties and did not interfere when the French finally decided to deal with Samori.

Samori's military and diplomatic talent was matched by his political and administrative ability. His capital, Bissandugu, was remarkable for its 'relative comfort and exquisite cleanliness'. Of this town Peroz concluded: 'In a word, seen from a distance Bissandougu has the fresh and smiling appearance of a vast farm colony rather than the residence of that redoubtable chief of a vast empire'. Peroz also described the careful organisation of the empire itself. Samori based his administration on the village community. Twenty villages or so were grouped into a district, of which there were 162 in all. Each district chief had two *sofa* (regular soldiers) to support and supervise him. The districts were then grouped into ten governments, each under a governor who was a relative or companion of the Al-mami, and who was assisted by a war-chief, a religious leader and a jurist. As a device to foster unity; Samori arranged that each district and government included family and ethnic groups which had previously been opposed to each other. To this end also, and to facilitate administration, political, religious and judicial matters were often decided at the village and district levels; but an appeal lay to the governor and finally to the Al-mami himself.

With regard to taxation and finance, the burden imposed on the people was even lighter than that prescribed by Islamic law. Each village simply cultivated a special field for the Al-mami, and a tithe was levied on the gold-extractors of Wasulu. These earnings, together with his personal wealth, the presents he received from his subjects and the booty (including slaves) acquired in war, enabled him to obtain the equivalent in foreign exchange for the purchase of horses from the Moors for his cavalry and of firearms from the Europeans, both of which he needed to consolidate his power.

Samori's piety and sincerity in Islamisation have often been called in question. Admittedly he was not learned in Islamic law and tradition as Usuman dan Fodio or the Tukolor leaders. But he was a devout Muslim who wished to spread Islam through the length and breadth of his dominions; hence he took the religious title of Al-mami. He may have been less exacting in his religious demands than the jihād leaders, but he destroyed the groves and shrines and symbols of non-Muslims in conquered territory, built mosques, and compelled these non-Muslims to observe some at least of the practices laid down by the Qurān.

He even pressed the majority of his subjects, particularly the chiefs, to send their sons to school. Indeed it is said that at times he would examine the pupils himself to ascertain their knowledge. And, 'where necessary, heavy fines recalled to obedience those (chiefs and elders) who did not conform to his orders'. At all events, the causes for which Samori stood were attractive enough to draw many supporters to his standard. Besides the benefits of Islam, he also appealed to Mandinka solidarity and preached social equality. In this latter respect he went even further than Al-hājj 'Umar in attacking the worldliness of the Mandinka chiefs. However, like the jihād leaders, Samori too had followers who flocked to him in the hope of loot.

This last point brings us to the weaknesses of Samori's policies and practices. Although his military strategy enabled him to hold out for so long against the French, it also inflicted a great deal of suffering on his people who had to change territory every year for seven years. The cumulative effect of this continuing mobility helped to break their resistance. In addition, as often happens with soldiers in such situations, thousands of Africans were enslaved by Samori's troops; and in many places the existing politico-religious structure was overthrown, if not entirely destroyed.

Furthermore, in the field of diplomacy—and warfare—Samori failed to co-operate with other African leaders, particularly with Seku Ahmadu, against the French, perhaps because he did not realise till too late that all of them were facing a common enemy. But the fault should not be laid entirely at Samori's door. Rather than ally with Samori, Ahmadu for instance preferred to reorganise his dominions not only for eventual defence against the French but to resist the challenge to his authority apparently posed by the rise of rival African leaders like Samori. It has even been recently stated that as early as 1891 Samori offered his alliance and support to Ahmadu, who however rejected it 'out of pride'.<sup>2</sup>

The French columns, with their superior armament and technique, devastated the country between Kankan and Beyla far more thoroughly than Samori's ill-equipped troops could ever have done. And after the taking of Sikasso, thousands of the conquered were sold or distributed as captives by French troops. The eventual capture of Bobo Dioulasso made further retreat to the east impossible for Samori; the mobile populations who were

already exhausted now had to live in restricted territory. Samori sued for peace. But on 29 September 1898, while negotiations were in progress, he was unsuspectingly captured by a small party of French riflemen mistaken for negotiators. Subsequently Samori was condemned—a verdict he never recognised—and deported to the island of Ogowé, off the coast of Gabon, where he died two years later in 1900.

The most striking tributes to Samori as a man, a statesman and a strategist were paid by his French adversaries—Baratier, Galliéni and Peroz. 'His bitterest enemies themselves', wrote Peroz of Samori, 'are unanimous in recognising that he has never broken the word which he has given'. He was, to the end, a man of honour.

<sup>1</sup> J. D. Hargreaves, *Prelude to the Partition of West Africa*, p. 244, Macmillan, 1963.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Suret-Canale, 'Guinea Under the Colonial System', *Presence Africaine*, No. 29, English Edition, Vol. I, 1959-60, pp. 32-39, a work which I have drawn on in places for preparing this note. The whole career of Samori is at present being studied by M. Yves Person. Until more is known it is impossible to make any definitive statement about Samori's relations with Ahmadu and his other contemporaries.

## 16 Bornu Under the Shehus

### C. C. IFEMESIA

ALTHOUGH Bornu was ruled during the later decades of the eighteenth century<sup>1</sup> by princes who were pious and unwarlike, voluptuous and ostentatious, she was still the undisputed mistress of the eastern section of the Central Sudan. In the early nineteenth century, as we shall see, not only Kano and Zaria but also Daura and Katsina still owed at least nominal allegiance to Bornu and looked to her for help and support in times of crisis. The weaknesses which had developed in the empire towards the close of the eighteenth century were increased by a very severe pestilence which visited Bornu in Mai Ahmad's reign (1793-1810) and carried off a great number of people, a plague which was popularly believed to have been announced by an eclipse of the sun which preceded it by two years.

In the opening years of the nineteenth century Bornu became involved in the jihād of Usuman dan Fodio<sup>2</sup> which started in the Hausa states. In 1804 the Habe rulers of Katsina and Daura began to gather forces which they hoped to combine with those of Kano to suppress Fulani risings in their domains, but they were defeated by the Fulani and their supporters while on their way to Kano, and, later in the same year (1804), Katsina town itself was captured by the troops of Shehu Usuman. In consequence, Sarkin Daura fled to Bornu and Sarkin Kano also appealed to the same power, his suzerain, for help. In 1805, Mai Ahmad dispatched his Galadima, Kaigama and Waziri (Vizier) with token forces to help Kano. But the combined forces of Bornu and Kano were defeated by the Fulani troops at the battle of Dan Yahaya, an encounter which led to the fall of Kano itself.

Encouraged by the early successes of the Shehu's forces, the Fulani in the ill-administered western march-lands of Bornu—Shira, Auyo and Teshena—strove to establish petty kingdoms of their own. They were led by two pastoral Fulani, Abdur and Ardo Lerlima. The activities of Abdur, and of his sons after him, led to the founding of the little Fulani emirates of Auyo and Hadejia. The rebellion of Lerlima, who was a son-in-law of the Mai's Galadima,

eventually brought about the death of the Galadima and the destruction of his station at Nguru. Remembering the position and power of the Galadima in the long history of the Saifawa dynasty, we should appreciate that this was a serious disaster for Bornu. As a matter of fact Nguru was not rebuilt until 1814, the title of Galadima was permanently discredited, and its duties eventually passed on to other functionaries.

The second phase of the war in Bornu was carried out by three other Fulani leaders: Ibrahim Zaki, Buba Yero and Gwani Mukhtar. Ibrahim Zaki conquered northern Shira in 1807 and Teshena in 1809; eventually these districts were combined in the emirate of Katagum, whose capital was built in 1810. Buba Yero, a personal friend and disciple of Shehu Usuman, had received a flag from him as early as 1785 for operations in the Gongola basin; his conquests resulted at long last in the establishment of the emirate of Gombe in 1824. Meanwhile, the exploits of Gwani Mukhtar had brought matters to a climax. He had been given a flag in 1806, and in 1808 he carried into successful execution a master-plan. While Ibrahim Zaki was taking Shira and Teshena and Buba Yero was moving into west Bornu, Gwani Mukhtar moved north and attacked and captured the Bornu capital, N'gazaragamu. Mai Ahmad fled and appealed for aid to the only source of effective military force in the country—Muhammad Al-Amin Al-Kānemī (popularly known as Shaikh Laminu).

#### THE RULE OF AL-KĀNEMĪ

Al-Kānemī was a Muslim scholar who had a closer connection with the Muslim world than even Shehu Usuman. As his name implies, he was of Kanem origin—his father was Shaikh Ninga, a famous Fezzani *faqih* of Kanem extraction, but his mother came from Zuwila, also in the Fezzan. Al-Kānemī had made the pilgrimage and stayed for long periods in Medina and Egypt. With a small but well-organised force of Kanembu<sup>3</sup> and Shuwa Arabs he had successfully prevented any Fulani risings on the western shores of Lake Chad where he was residing. On receiving the Mai's appeal Al-Kānemī acted promptly. He sent a force under his son and, with the remnants of the Mai's forces, N'gazaragamu was recaptured nine months after its fall (1809). Two years later, however, Ibrahim Zaki, now with a flag and orders from Shehu Usuman, returned to the attack and pillage of N'gazaragamu

Once again, Al-Kānemī saved the situation and drove Ibrahim Zaki back to his war camp south of Teshena. Thereafter the Fulani had scarcely any significant successes in their military engagements in Bornu.

Al-Kānemī, an intellectual and learned man, carried his contest with the Fulani into the field of diplomacy and scholarship. Muhammad Bello, the son of Usuman dan Fodio, and other Fulani leaders had accused the Kanuri, as they had the Hausa, of reversion to heathenism; of professing Islam, making the confession of faith, praying and fasting and yet offering sacrifices to stones and trees; of professing the faith but refusing obedience to the law. To these charges were added others relating to more recent developments, namely, the supposed oppression of the Fulani minority in Bornu and giving encouragement and support to Katsina, Kano and Daura. Al-Kānemī opened correspondence with Bello and stated the case against the jihād in words so forceful and compelling that they are worth reproducing:

Tell us therefore why you are fighting us and enslaving our free men. If you say 'We have done that to you because of your heathenism', then I say 'We are innocent of heathenism and it is far from our court-yard.' If the performance of prayer, the giving of alms, knowledge of the unity of God, fasting (in) Ramadan and the building of mosques is heathenism what is Islam then? These buildings in which you have said the Friday prayer, are they churches, or synagogues or fine temples? If they were not for Muslim rites, then why did you perform the prayer in them when you captured the capital? This is nothing but sheer contradiction!

Among your greatest arguments for associating believers in general with heathenism is the practice of the emirs riding to some places for the purpose of offering sacrifices . . . As for this practice of the emirs, it is certainly a disgraceful and blame-worthy innovation which should be forbidden and its doers chided. But those who are guilty of it are not to be branded as heathens since not one of them claims that it is efficacious or intends by his act to associate other gods with God. The extent of their claim, which is due to their ignorance, is that sacrifice in these places is better (than in) others . . . There is Damietta, a great town among the Muslim towns between Egypt and

Syria, a place of learning and Islam; in it there is a tree to which the common people do as did the Ajam (non-Arabs). Nevertheless, none of the 'Ulama (learned men) rose to fight them and none attributed heathenism to them.

We have indeed heard of the qualities of Shaikh 'Uthman ibn Fudī and seen in his writings what is contrary to your actions. If this matter has its origins under his directions, then there is no power nor strength except with God, the most High, the most Glorious. Indeed we thought well of him before, but now, as the saying goes, we love the Shaikh and truth when they agree, but if they disagree it is the truth that comes first. . . .

Under the leadership of Al-Kānemī, Bornu entered upon a period of rehabilitation and reform. He had already won high esteem for 'the extreme uprightness and benevolence of his life', hence he easily brought his followers to believe that he was inspired by the vision of God to undertake the liberation of Bornu; and in the kingdom he insisted that the laws of Islam should be strictly observed. Al-Kānemī's regime promoted the extensive propagation of Islam in various parts of Bornu, particularly in the western march-lands; a policy which had far-reaching implications for law and justice, for government and taxation in the kingdom. As more and more power shifted into his hands it was possible for him to check the unacceptable accretions to the practice of Islam in Bornu and to lay a stronger emphasis on its status as the state religion.

In the military sphere, after the discomfiture of the Fulani in Bornu, Al-Kānemī defended the kingdom against fierce attacks by the Bagirmi whom he was eventually able to overcome in 1824 with the help of the ruler of Fezzan. He then turned westwards towards the Hausa states which he intended to regain for Bornu. In the same year (1824) Al-Kānemī fruitlessly attacked Hadejia and moved southwards to Katagum, whose emir fled. In 1825-6, he threatened Kano, but the Kanawa succeeded in diverting him southwards to Bauchi. There he was victorious at first and captured a large part of the province. But he soon met with reverses. His troops were roundly defeated by the Fulani and their adherents and he himself barely escaped with his life. In the same way, after the initial successes in Hadejia and Katagum, these emirates were permanently lost to Bornu. Eventually, after he had called

a halt to their expansion in the western march-lands, Al-Kānemī decided, in about 1830, to come to terms with the Fulani. He wrote to Muhammad Bello: 'We profess the same religion, and it is not fitting that our subjects should make war on each other. Between our two kingdoms are the pagan Bedde tribes, on whom it is permissible to levy contribution; let us respect this limit: what lies to the east of their country shall be ours: what lies to the west shall be yours. As for Muniyo, Damagaram, and Daura, they will continue to be vassals of the Sultan of Bornu, who in turn will surrender to you all his claims to Gobir and Katsina.'

Politically Al-Kānemī refused all titles for himself. He allowed the Mai to retain the pomp and ceremony of the ancient Saifawa court and to appoint his favourites to the traditional titles. But as head of the army, Al-Kānemī was the effective ruler of Bornu, and he appointed his own men to the important administrative offices. Al-Kānemī's position has been variously and appositely described as that of the 'power behind the throne' or the 'Mayor of the Palace'. However he is styled, Al-Kānemī, although he scarcely realised this at the time, had founded a new Bornu dynasty which was to be named after him and which, in spite of vicissitudes, still reigns in Bornu to this day.

Al-Kānemī at first wielded power from N'gornu, on the western shores of Lake Chad, but the constant threat of inundation from the lake and the increasing difficulty of keeping himself in the background, made him build a residence for himself at Kuka in 1814, the place which was afterwards named Kukawa and became the capital of Bornu. Judicially Al-Kānemī acted as the highest judge in the land, thus bringing political and judicial functions more closely together in the state. He retained local courts and a court of appeal but did much of the adjudication himself. The effectiveness of his administration and the enlightened reforms which he introduced immensely improved the condition of the kingdom. Major Denham, who visited him in 1823, described Al-Kānemī as 'a most extraordinary instance in the Eastern (Sudanese) world of fearless bravery, virtue and simplicity'.

Al-Kānemī's wide education had given him a knowledge of other countries which he now applied for the economic and social benefit of his own. Foreigners were welcomed at his residence, trade prospered, and the roads, as Denham again put it, were 'as safe as any, even in happy England itself'. In return for his services,

Al-Kānemī obtained from the son and successor of Mai Ahmad, Mai Dunama Lefiami (1810-11, 1814-18<sup>4</sup>) some land and half the revenues of the reconquered provinces. This enabled him to re-settle his Kanembu followers who subsequently intermarried with the Kanuri and became a permanent factor in Bornu society, with which they had been linked by history for so long.

At long last the wheel of Kanem-Bornu history had come full circle. In the fourteenth century Mai 'Umar ibn Idris (1384-88) had been obliged by the Bulala to move westwards from the cradle of the kingdom, Kanem, to Bornu. In the sixteenth century Idris Katakarmabe (1504-26) and Idris Aloomo (1571-1603) had re-captured the old Kanem capital of N'jimi, but had recognised the autonomy of the kingdom by conferring the crown on its king, Muhammad. Now in the nineteenth century, a son of Kanem—Al-Kānemī—had saved Bornu from disaster, re-settled a number of Kanembu on Bornu soil and integrated them into Bornu society.

One long-lasting effect of the Fulani invasion and the rise of Al-Kānemī has been the legacy of jealousy and hostility which was bequeathed to the Bornu and Sokoto empires. The correspondence between Al-Kānemī and Muhammad Bello, which we referred to earlier, increased in acrimony with the passage of time. In spite of Al-Kānemī's resignation of the old Bornu's vassal Hausa states to Bello and his willingness to come to terms with the Fulani, and in spite of periods of *rapprochement* in the course of the century, there was little love lost between the houses of Dan Fodio and Al-Kānemī throughout most of the nineteenth century and beyond.

#### SHAIKH 'UMAR

Al-Kānemī died in 1835 and was succeeded by his son Shaikh 'Umar who reigned till 1880. Mai Dunawa Lefiami had also been succeeded in 1818 by his brother Mai Ibrahim (1818-46). 'Umar was peace-loving and at first was on good terms with the Fulani and the Bagirmi. Nevertheless he wanted to regain the western march-lands lost to Bornu by 1830, so in 1835-40 he resumed a forward policy in the area. He made expeditions against Jema'are and Misau and against the Lere districts of Katagum. Then followed a stalemate. Subsequently 'Umar's relations with Bello's son, Aliyu Baba (1842-59), improved and Fulani raids into the western districts ceased. By 1846 Sokoto and Kukawa had reached an agreement over the administration of these lands.

'Umar had great difficulty in controlling the governors of the various provinces who wanted to be independent. Not unexpectedly, the partisans of the Saifawa dynasty also wanted to restore the ancient ruling house and to overthrow the Kānemī rulers. Ibrahim, whose subsidy 'Umar had reduced on coming to power, had opened secret negotiations with the Sultan of Wadai. During the absence of the Shaikh's troops on an expedition to Zinder, Muhammad Salih, Sultan of Wadai, and the malcontents of Bornu took advantage of the situation to invade the kingdom. On hearing this 'Umar put Ibrahim in irons, gathered all the troops at his disposal and marched against the Wadai army. But he was defeated at a place called Kusaeri at the junction of the Shari and Logone rivers. His vizier, Tirab, was killed and his brother, 'Alī, taken prisoner. 'Umar had Ibrahim executed and himself took refuge in the western provinces. The Wadai army ravaged Bornu and burned Kukawa, but retired on the approach of the Bornu army from Zinder and on the Sultan's receipt of a sum of 10,000 (Maria Theresa) dollars from 'Umar. In the meantime, before leaving Bornu for Wadai, the Sultan had installed 'Alī Dalatumi (1846), the seventeen-year-old son of Ibrahim ibn Ahmad, as Mai. Left to his own resources, the young man fought gallantly but could not resist for long the forces of Shaikh 'Umar. After a few months, 'Alī was defeated and killed at a place called Minarge on the Yobe. With him disappeared the last representative of the ancient Saifawa dynasty which had reigned in Bornu for over one thousand years.

Another difficulty encountered by 'Umar came from his own brother, 'Abd al-Rahmān who disputed his right to the throne and was especially jealous of the influence of 'Umar's vizier, Al-hājj Bashir, over the Shaikh. A revolt broke out in 1853 in which Bashir was put to death. 'Umar was forced to abdicate and was exiled to Dikwa. Not long afterwards, however, the Shaikh's piety and popularity raised a faction in his favour and his partisans soon defeated 'Abd al-Rahmān and had him executed in 1854. Thereafter 'Umar reigned and ruled undisturbed till his death in 1880.

While he was an upright man, who wished to see the country well-administered and devoted himself to religious studies, 'Umar allowed himself to be dominated by those around him. After the death of his vizier, Bashir, he fell under the influence of the eunuch

Shetima 'Abd al-Karīm who, in the name of the Shaikh, was the real ruler of Bornu. The 'Mayor of the Palace' had come into his own again. After 'Umar there were three other Shaikhs, all his sons: Abul Bukar (1880-4), Ibrahim (1884-5) and Hashim (1885-93). All three continued to use the system of government established by 'Umar which had several distinguishing features.

#### THE SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

In government, although the ruler retained the title of Shaikh instead of Mai, he still maintained the mystique which obtained when spiritual and temporal power were combined in the same person. The Shaikh appointed men dependent on him as his subordinates. He was surrounded by a council, the Nokena, whose members consisted of the Maina, princes of royal blood, and Kokenawa, the 'new' men. The council included the heir-presumptive, the sons and daughters of the Shaikh, great nobles, captains commanding troops, slaves and eunuchs. The Kokenawa were divided into two grades: the Kambe, men of free birth, and the Kachela (Kacella), eunuchs of servile origin. Indeed the Kachela had come to play a very important part in Bornu politics, as eunuchs did in many Muslim courts. Shetima 'Abd al-Karīm, for instance, was *de facto* master of Bornu for nearly half a century. One unfortunate consequence of this was that the people generally took little interest in public affairs.

The Kokenawa also served as administrative officials. They received no salaries but were given lands and governorships out of which they made as much as possible and gave the Shaikh an annual present. Prominent among the officials was the Digma, a royal secretary in charge of foreign affairs and of an administrative district; but, after the changes under 'Umar, his position became merely nominal. There were also the Fugoma, the executioner and governor of the town of N'gornu; the Kagelma, the governor of the Yo, charged with the special duty of containing the Tuareg; and the Galadima, who before the jihād was entrusted with the administration of the western districts, but after the struggle in that area had exposed the existing maladministration, the governorship fell to a Kachela, the first being Adullāhi.

Thus the dynastic changes which took place in Bornu in the middle of the nineteenth century did not really introduce an entirely new order, nor the formation of an entirely new type of

Islamic state. Changes were made in organisation but they were a continuation of tendencies which had long been in progress.

As for military affairs 'Umar maintained a regular army of 1,000 foot and 1,000 horse equipped with firearms, plus 3,000 men armed with spears and bows. In wartime all the provinces, including those inhabited by Shuwa Arabs, provided levies.

Bornu's influence embraced two types of territory—extended Bornu (Bilal Kukawa), ruled directly; and vassal states, ruled by their own chiefs and subject to tribute of produce and slaves. The Kanuri country was governed directly by the Shaikh's representatives. But subordinate states which retained their own chiefs were usually subject to the control of Bornu officials, and sometimes were represented at court by the Shaikh's appointee.

With respect to religion, the reforming zeal would seem to have evaporated after Al-Kāncmī, although 'Umar was a pious man. He still laid emphasis on Islam as the state religion and Kukawa became, like N'gazaragamu before it, a centre of Islamic culture. All the Kanuri proper were, of course, expected to be Muslims. The chief religious dignitaries were the *qādi mainin kihendi* and the *talib mainin kihendi*, as well as the greater and lesser *imām*.

Bornu under the Shaikhs had great troubles and problems which marred its peaceful existence. As time went on the great officials and tributary princes tended to do as they pleased. The Galadima, in particular, virtually declared himself independent. The Sultan of Zinder refused to pay tribute. The people of Wadai made continual incursions into Bornu territory.

In 1893, Rabeh, a conqueror from Sennar in the eastern Sudan, leading a small, disciplined and efficient military force, defeated Bornu soldiers at the battle of Ngala and took over the government of the kingdom. Rabeh left the local rulers in charge of their various districts but made them subordinate to his own officers. He reformed the public treasury, put up healthier and more comfortable buildings, and stored food for future campaigns. But the British, the Germans and the French soon appeared on the scene. Not long afterwards, in 1900, Rabeh was defeated and killed by the French. The ancient Bornu kingdom was eventually divided among the French, the British and the Germans and is now in parts of what we know as the Republics of Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria.

## NOTES

- 1 See Chapter 5, p. 83.
- 2 See the previous chapter, *passim*.
- 3 Made up of the Kuburi, his own clan, and the Sugurti.
- 4 In 1811, as Mai Lefiami did not agree with Al-Kânemi, he was replaced by Mai Muhammad Ngilliroma, who reigned till 1814, when he was in turn replaced by Lefiami.

# 17 Benin, Niger Delta, Ibo and Ibibio Peoples in the Nineteenth Century

J. C. ANENE

## BENIN

BENIN, one of the most remarkable of the states of the Guinea forest, was the centre of an empire the size and orderliness of which attracted the attention of the Portuguese who visited the Guinea coast towards the end of the fifteenth century. These visitors were impressed by the size of the metropolis itself with its great streets and rows of neat houses. They also noted the palace courtyards and galleries. The brass figures and the carvings which abounded bore witness to the artistic genius of the Benin people. The precise boundaries of the Benin empire remain a matter of speculation but it seems likely that at the zenith of the power of Benin, the empire stretched from the Niger to Lagos and from the Kukuruku country to the Niger delta and beyond. The period 1500 to 1800 spans three centuries during which a series of events occurred which, in one way or another, adversely affected the tranquillity and integrity of the Benin empire. These events included the rise of the Yoruba empire centred at Oyo, the slave trade, and a series of civil wars precipitated by disputes about the succession among the princes of the ruling house. In the circumstances, it is not surprising that at the opening of the nineteenth century, the decline of Benin was already in an advanced stage.

However, the Oba still remained at the centre of the remarkable political system evolved by the people of Benin. In theory he held absolute power. In practice, the title-holders, who formed a complicated hierarchy, wielded more or less extensive influence, depending on the personality of the Oba. There were also *juju* priests who alone could perform the religious ceremonies essential to the Oba's welfare. The people of Benin City came under two categories: the nobility and the common people. The nobility, from whom all the officers of state were appointed, were organised into three societies: the Iwebo society was charged with the Oba's regalia; the Iweguae society took care of the Oba's private

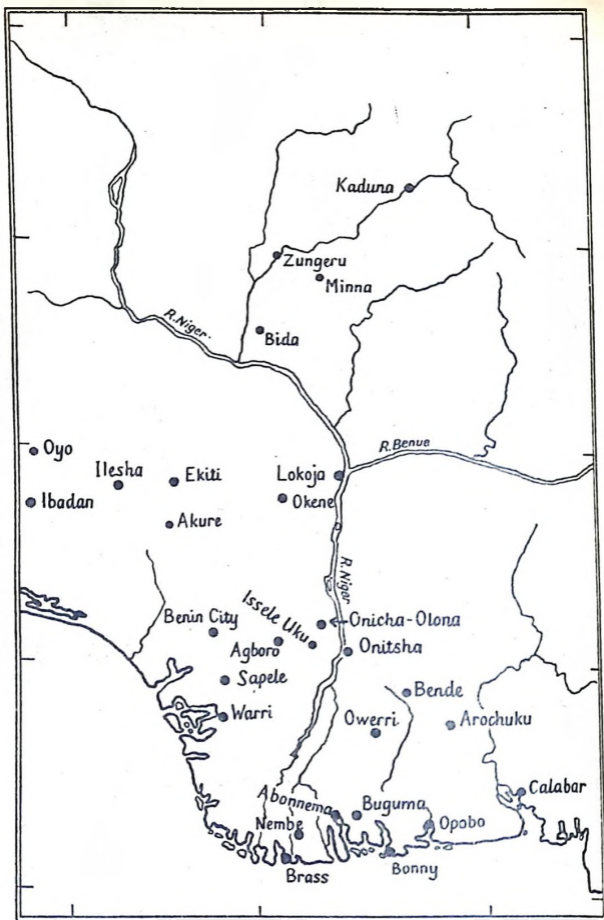


Fig. 15 Benin, the Niger delta, and Ibo and Ibibio peoples in the nineteenth century.

apartments and provided the personal attendants of the king, and the Ibiwe society supervised the harem. Outside the palace societies, there were also title-holders who were important state functionaries, for instance, the Iyashere, the Ebohon, and the Ologboshere.<sup>1</sup> All the title-holders formed in practice a council which the Oba consulted on major state questions, but the Oba also held an open court in the palace to which the title-holders had access and in which they could voice their opinions.

The Bini belong to the Edo-speaking peoples of Nigeria. Other Edo-speaking groups are today the Afenmai and the Ishan, to the north and east of Benin respectively. The Ibo who live west of the Niger were for a long time dominated by Benin and, during the nineteenth century, the ruling houses in the Ibo towns of Issele-Uku, Onicha-Olona, and Agbor claimed Benin ancestry. To the south of Benin live the Itsekiri and the Urhobo who were once under Benin hegemony. By the nineteenth century, however, the Itsekiri were virtually independent of Benin, and the Urhobo acknowledgment of Benin overlordship became more and more a matter of convenience. The area where Benin authority remained more or less firmly rooted was among the Ishan and the Afenmai. In the Ishan country, the administrative unit was under the Enogie whose title was conferred by the king of Benin. Usually each administrative unit had a protector in the person of a member of the Benin palace nobility. This person acted as a link between the Oba and the provincial Enogie. At the death of the Enogie, the eldest son and heir would send a message to announce the death. The Oba would in return send a white cloth to signify his assent to the burial. The heir of the late Enogie then sent presents (usually slaves) to the Oba to beg for the staff of office which was the token of the Oba's recognition of the Enogie's heir's right to succeed to his father's office. The continuance of the ceremony provides the best test of the extent to which Benin maintained her hold over the Ishan and the Afenmai during the nineteenth century.

It was also during this period that a number of Obas attempted to hold down some Yoruba groups to the west of the empire. The fortunes of Benin arms in this area do not reveal a clear picture and it seems likely that only peripheral towns in Owo district and in Ekiti country remained for any length of time under Benin overlordship. On the whole much depended on the personality of

the Oba and the exigencies of internal Benin politics. It is therefore necessary to consider briefly the careers of the Obas who reigned in Benin during the period under review.

The Oba who succeeded to the throne of Benin at the opening of the nineteenth century was Obanosa. Because of the unusually long reign of his father, he was practically an old man when he became Oba in 1804. There is a story in Benin that this man got tired of waiting for his father's death and took to sending his grey hair periodically to the old Oba in order to suggest that it was about time he succeeded to the throne. Even then the new king had to struggle with rivals when the old king at last died. A thousand people, according to Benin tradition, lost their lives in the struggle for the succession. The new king reigned for only thirteen years, and his two sons plunged Benin into a bloody civil war. One of the contestants finally hanged himself after setting fire to the palace. The next Oba, Osemwede, reigned long and rather successfully. He was popular among the Ishan people and was fully supported in his campaigns against Akure and Ekiti who were forced to accept the Oba as emperor and to pay tribute to him. The empire of Benin during the nineteenth century probably attained its widest extent under Osemwede's reign which lasted from 1816 to 1848.

The succession to the throne by Adolo in 1848 was accompanied by the now regular corrosion of civil war. The Oba's brother retired to his mother's town in the Ishan country and from there organised expeditions which did much to disturb the peace of the empire. In the meantime, the outlying portions of the empire exploited the divisions in Benin to declare their independence or passed under the control of other powers. Thus, for instance, the new power of Ibadan was able to extend its hold to Ilesha and to Ekiti towns formerly under Benin. In time Adolo proved himself a good-hearted Oba. He encouraged commerce, built new towns for his many slaves and reigned for forty years. He was succeeded after a period of turmoil by the last independent king of Benin, Ovonramwen, called Overammi in British records. The new Oba ascended the throne in 1888 and shortly afterwards the British established the Protectorate of the Oil Rivers. In 1892, one of the British vice-consuls, Gallwey, visited Benin City and met the Oba. The vice-consul reported that he had successfully persuaded the Oba of Benin to accept British protection and to open his

empire to trade. Gallwey's observation that there were many fetish restrictions on trade in Benin prepared the ground for the overthrow of that kingdom.

There is no way of verifying the allegation that the Oba forbade his subjects to trade. Considerable quantities of European goods certainly percolated into Benin, and there was no specific religious *tabu* against external trade. The Oba was undoubtedly suspicious of the activities of white men on the coast. He was also vaguely aware that somehow the presence of white men in his kingdom would upset religious practices cherished in Benin for centuries. The white men who now condemned slaving and banished local coast rulers could not countenance the mass slaughter of slaves for religious observations and funeral rites. In the meantime, the British agents and traders who were operating in the neighbourhood of the Benin river were fed with stories of dark happenings in Benin by Itsekiri middlemen traders who were anxious to exploit the economic resources of the Benin empire.

The British Protectorate officials began in 1895 to nurse plans for the overthrow of the kingdom of Benin. The consul-general, Ralph Moor, confessed in a private letter to his predecessor that if he ever got into Benin he would, to use his own words, 'act like soapy sponge'; once he got in, the Oba would not find it easy to get rid of him. In the following year the acting consul-general, J. R. Phillips, decided that the time had come to deal with Benin. He asked the British government for permission to visit Benin City and depose the Oba. This permission was not given, not because the British government wished to respect the independence of Benin, but because troops were not available to accomplish, without a hitch, the acting consul-general's objectives. Phillips at last decided to pay a friendly visit to Benin. Although he was advised by the Oba of Benin that the time was not the right one for receiving foreigners, the British agent insisted on going. The Itsekiri leaders who knew that the Oba of Benin was 'making country custom' pleaded with Phillips to postpone his trip. It was no use.

On 4 January 1897, the British party was ambushed on its way to Benin City. It is not easy to give a coherent account of the events in Benin City itself which culminated in the massacre of British agents. Oba Ovonramwen who was crowned in 1888 did not by any means succeed to an empire still possessed of its ancient power

and glory. The Ishan were in revolt. The Fulani incursions from Nupe had almost dismembered the Afenmai part of the empire. Internally the Oba had apparently lost the firm control which the ruler traditionally had over his titled councillors. According to one witness at the trial of the Oba later in 1897, the Oba had been willing to receive the British mission but his chiefs had overruled him. On the whole, the role of the Oba in the crisis which now engulfed his kingdom was not that of a master of his own house. To the British government, the next step was clear. Benin City must be destroyed; the king and the fetish priests must be punished and removed in order 'to do away with a reign of terror and all its accompanying horrors'.

The king of Benin and his chiefs knew what was coming. Even then there is no evidence that Benin City was placed in a state of defence or that the Oba rallied the support of 'feudal levies' from his chiefs and provincial representatives. The one positive undertaking of the Oba was to slaughter, on the advice of his priests, many slaves in order to ward off the impending British attack on Benin. It was not long before Benin City was captured. It was only natural that the British representatives could hardly resist the temptation to paint what they saw there in the most lurid colours. According to Ralph Moor, 'the city presented the most appalling sight, particularly around the King's quarters . . . Sacrificial trees in the open spaces still held the corpses of the latest victims . . . One large open space, 200 to 300 yards in length, was strewn with human bones and bodies in all stages of decomposition'. Moor concluded that he supposed that 'no worse state has ever existed in any country or at any time'. The Oba was soon brought to trial, was convicted, and then deported to Calabar. The Benin empire came to an end.

#### THE COAST COMMUNITIES

Benin City and the empire overthrown by the British in 1897 lay beyond the mangrove swamps which characterise the Nigerian coast. The latter region includes the Niger delta and is the home of the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, the Ijaw, the Kalabari, the Ibeno and the Efik peoples. The most striking feature of the coast is indeed the mangrove type of vegetation, most fully developed at the mouths of the many rivers and creeks which form an almost continuous network from the Benin river to the Cross river. The

land is low-lying, for the most part only a few feet above sea level. Local traditions are agreed about the early foundations of settlements and kingdoms on the coast, and also about the infiltration of Ibos from the hinterland which substantially affected the ethnic character of the communities.

The slave trade had provided a lucrative source of wealth with the result that the coast settlements underwent remarkable political and social developments. City-states had emerged. The most important were Warri, Sapele (Itsekiri and Urhobo), Brass, Akassa, Twon, Nembe (Ijaw), Buguma, Abonnema, Bakana (Kalabari), Bonny (Ibeno) and Creek Town, Henshaw Town and Duke Town (Efik). No description of the political life of the coast peoples is intelligible without an analysis of the social structure known as the 'house' system. Each city-state comprised a number of 'houses'. Now each 'house' was more or less a trading association of freemen and slaves under a head or chief. There were usually four social classes in a 'house'—the chief, the sub-chiefs, the freemen, and the slaves. The division into classes was not a rigid one, and a dynamic and successful slave could rise to become the head of a 'house'. Technically the heads of 'houses' formed a sort of advisory council over which presided the king of the city-state. Inter-house rivalry was a constant menace to stability, and if there was a weak king, civil war invariably threatened. Among the Efik there was evolved a remarkable society known as the Ekpe society which enforced peace and order, safeguarded the interests and privileges of the nobility, and kept the women, slaves and masses of the population in subjection.

The abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1808 transformed the economic life of the delta and coast communities. Where before they had traded profitably in slaves, they had now to turn their attention to exploiting hinterland products such as palm produce, timber and ivory. It took some time before the coast chiefs became reconciled to the less dramatic and less profitable trade in legitimate goods, but the British naval vessels which operated from Fernando Po kept close vigilance on the activities of the coastal communities. In time the chiefs were induced to negotiate treaties with the British naval commanders in which the chiefs promised to throw the weight of their authority on the side of humanitarianism. One of the British commanders, Edward Nicolls, declared it was his intention to make the coast area 'a glory

and advantage to British commerce and the cause of Humanity'. During the early decades of the nineteenth century, the peoples of the coast were gradually adjusting themselves to the new state of affairs created by the abolition of the slave trade and the presence of British naval officials who began to interfere in the internal affairs of the city-states. British merchants who were developing the new trade in palm produce indulged in the belief that, with the British navy behind them, they could defy the authority of the coast chiefs. Their complaints which flooded the British Foreign Office usually emphasised what they called 'the wickedness and the slaving propensities of the local rulers'.

The history of Bonny during the middle years of the century throws abundant light on the fortunes of the delta and coast peoples during the period. As already explained, the 'house' system which was the characteristic structure of the social, economic and political life of the people served a number of useful purposes. It was also a source of weakness. The strength and influence of a 'house' depended on the wealth derived from trade. It thus happened that the king of a city-state who owned his own 'house' had to compete in trade with subjects who also had their own 'houses'. A poor king could not hope to command respect in a society apparently preoccupied with trade. William Dappa Pepple ascended the throne of Bonny in 1837 as Pepple V. At this time, the royal 'house' was being outstripped in wealth by other 'houses', especially those of Manilla Pepple and Annie Pepple. These two 'houses' were under the control of dynamic ex-slaves who had risen to the headship of their 'houses'. The opposition which they led against the king stemmed directly from the manoeuvres of the latter to revive the fortunes of the royal 'house' through manipulating the trade of the hinterland markets. The growing weakness of the central authority produced far-reaching consequences. In the first place, the British merchants, supported by the British consul, formed their own courts, apparently to supersede the local courts presided over by the king. In 1854, the British consul, Beecroft, deported Pepple V of Bonny. A period of confusion thus began in Bonny affairs. After 1866, the situation further deteriorated, and the king, who reigned between 1886 and 1888, hardly exercised any influence over his 'over-mighty' subjects, who drifted into a civil war.

In Calabar, the same British consul who deported Pepple of

Bonny arrogated to himself the right to preside over the selection of a successor to the throne. There were serious weaknesses in the local affairs of Calabar which did much to undermine the independence of the Calabar 'republics'. The Calabar rulers had, in addition to the slave members of the trading corporations or 'houses', plantations in the neighbourhood which were occupied and cultivated by Calabar-owned slaves. In the 1850s, the plantation slaves organised themselves under their own leaders to protect their members against the arbitrary exactions of their masters. The slave society was aimed primarily at the Ekpe society which was the instrument at the disposal of the Calabar rulers for keeping their slave population in complete subjection. Now as soon as the slaves had organised their own secret society known as 'the Order of Blood', they not only defied the authority of the Ekpe society but threatened to invade Duke Town. Civil war was averted only by the intervention of the British consul, merchants and missionaries.

The internal affairs of the Kalabari people were not unlike those which reduced the rulers and chiefs of Bonny to the status of being mere satellites of the British consul. Up to 1879, the citizens of New Calabar had lived together under their king, Amachree. Here as elsewhere the divisive competitiveness inseparable from the 'house' system was bound to produce in New Calabar the political instability already noted in Bonny. Will Braid, the head of the Barboy 'house', became very prosperous through the energy of his boys' trading activities. Naturally King Amachree was apprehensive of the possibility of Braid becoming an 'over-mighty' subject. He therefore sought to destroy the Braid 'house' by various devices, including arbitrary fines. Braid did not wish to precipitate a civil war. He quietly evacuated his 'house' and occupied a new site on the main New Calabar route to the hinterland market. The king's dispute with Braid thus led to the splitting up of the city-state. The king and his followers settled at Buguma. Another wealthy chief, Bob Manuel, founded his own settlement at Abonnema, while Braid consolidated his position at Bakana. A kind of guerilla war persisted for some time between the various Kalabari factions, and canoes and goods as well as men and women were seized in this undeclared civil war.

## JAJA OF OPOBO

The history of the Coast was dominated during the 1870s and 1880s by one man who rose to greatness from the debris of the civil war in Bonny. This man was Jaja of Opobo. Jaja began his career as a slave who was sold in an Ibo market to a 'house' in Bonny. In time he rose to head the 'house' in which he had begun as a slave. During the civil war which broke out in Bonny in 1866, Jaja's 'house' was not having things its own way. Jaja, therefore, secretly planned the evacuation of the chiefs attached to his 'house'. A site in the territory of the Andoni people north-east of Bonny was chosen. Here Jaja founded the kingdom of Opobo. He not only established a port but also built plantation settlements in the immediate hinterland. Opobo's commercial expansion radiated in three directions. To the north, Jaja's men began to dominate the oil market of Ohambele. The oil producers from Bende and the Owerri districts in Iboland brought their oil to the Ohambele market. Jaja cemented his friendship with this important market by taking a wife from among its people. To the north-east Jaja established trading settlements on the creeks which discharge into the Opobo river. Here he was brought into contact with the Ibibio people and it took a number of military expeditions to guarantee the security of Jaja's trade in the area. Jaja's eastern frontier at the Qua-Eboe river was both commercial and political. The turbulent Annang groups were subdued and they acknowledged Jaja as their king in 1881.

Jaja acquired a pervasive influence throughout the coast. When Bonny and New Calabar threatened to destroy Okrika, it was Jaja's intervention which ultimately restored peace in the area. But it was precisely at this time that the British government had decided to establish its authority on the Nigerian coast. The British consul, Hewett, was instructed to obtain treaties of 'protection' from all the local chiefs who ruled the coast states from the Benin river to the Cameroons. In 1885 a British Protectorate was proclaimed over the Oil Rivers, and the independence of the coast city-states was shortly to come to a formal end. The only serious effort to resist the new political order was made by Jaja of Opobo. He subjected the British representative to searching questions and asked for a clarification of the word 'protectorate'. Jaja was told that the Queen of England did not want to take his

country but was anxious to extend to the king of Opobo her 'gracious favour and protection'. Jaja was apparently satisfied, and he signed the treaty accepting British protection. He believed, however, that his 'empire' would remain intact. The other chiefs of the coast city-states had no misgivings about accepting the protection of Britain. The British consul presented glittering articles which their cupidity could hardly resist, and they willingly accepted a new relationship with Britain, the implications of which they hardly understood.

The local British representative was not at all happy about the independent posture which Jaja of Opobo continued to assume after the formal proclamation of the British Protectorate of the Oil Rivers. He deliberately precipitated a quarrel with Jaja which culminated in the deportation of the latter to the West Indies in 1887. The details of the disgraceful sequence of events do not concern us here. The fall of Jaja, however, meant the final overthrow of the independence of these states which had for many centuries played a spectacular part not only in the slave trade but in the development of the trade in palm produce. Before the end of the nineteenth century British authority was firmly established on the coast.

#### THE IBO AND THE IBIBIO

While the Ijaw and other coastal communities figured prominently in the all-important trading activities of the coast and the Niger delta, the peoples of the hinterland supplied the main articles of trade, whether slaves or palm produce, which ensured the prosperity and existence of the coast city-states. The hinterland peoples comprised two major linguistic groups known as the Ibo and the Ibibio. It is not known for certain when these peoples first occupied their present home, but it is reasonable to assume that the Ibibio arrived first and were later pushed to the south-eastern corner of Nigeria by the more numerous Ibo groups who moved in later. As pointed out already, it is probable that these immigrants had also forced Ijaw-speaking peoples to move into the inhospitable regions of the Niger delta and its neighbourhood. During the nineteenth century, there is not much to tell about the Ibo and the Ibibio. They were not integrated into kingdoms seeking conquests. They produced no hierarchy of rulers whose lives and careers could provide material for dramatic stories. Nonetheless, the manner in

which they organised their political life, and the remarkable role that one Ibo group called the Aro came to play during the century under review deserve detailed consideration.

The physical environment of the Ibo country is one dominated to a large extent by thick forest. On the one hand, the thick vegetation provided excellent defence against large-scale invasion from outside; on the other hand, its very inaccessibility did not aid mobility and easy intercourse among people who were primarily agriculturists. The Ibo (probably because of the reasons indicated here) never came under a single pyramidal system. They lived in small communities, often described as village 'democracies'. The political unit was the village-group consisting of lineage segments bound together by the belief in the common descent of all the segments from one ancestor. These localised lineage groups were structurally equal units. The study of political authority among the Ibo is not concerned with formal institutions. The groups were concerned primarily with their corporate existence and therefore also with the formulation of rules and standards of social behaviour. The supernatural world was a pervasive reality and for this reason, religion, law, justice and politics were inextricably bound up. No Ibo community was complete without a shrine of the god of the land. There was indeed a hierarchy of gods. Law and custom were believed to have been handed down from the spiritual world, from time immemorial, from ancestor to ancestor.

The nearest one can get to what may be regarded as an organ of government was the council of elders who were 'fathers' of component family segments. These elders were fundamentally the representatives and mouthpieces of the community's ancestors. The council of elders was not a legislative body in the ordinary sense of the word. The meetings of the elders were neither formal nor frequent. When they prescribed any laws as deterrents against bad behaviour they were supposed to be reaffirming the wishes of the ancestors in order to preserve the solidarity of the village community. Judicial proceedings were also informal and were intended to restore solidarity. Misbehaviour on the part of a village member was expected to evoke the displeasure of the spirit world against the culprit and his family, and because of this belief, a police force formed no part of judicial control among the Ibo. The institution of age-groups, however, played an important part in the performance of services carried out in other societies by the

executive organs of government. The senior grade was concerned with peace and war and provided the leadership needed by the community to meet the exigencies of external danger. The junior age-grade of young men was charged with social services, such as sanitation and related matters. There were lower grades for music, recreation and for other agencies of socialisation. Generally speaking, the Ibo communities were democracies in the sense that the government of the communities was the concern of all. The manner in which these democracies functioned was subtle and complex.

Ibibio social and political organisation shared many of the characteristics evolved by the Ibo. The Ibibio had successfully amalgamated some lineage groups to form clans. The clan, however, did not represent a political organisation or a central authority. Thus, neither among the Ibo nor among the Ibibio was there any subjection to one political authority. The pervasive influence of religion among the Ibo and Ibibio provided a basis for the important role of priests who mediated between god and man. More important still were the Aro who controlled the Aro oracle, the notorious Long Juju at Arochuku. The Long Juju shrine was the court of appeal to which serious internal and inter-group disputes were referred.

#### ARO HEGEMONY

What was the nature of the hegemony enjoyed over the Ibo and Ibibio by the Aro up to the end of the nineteenth century? The Aro territory and Arochuku are located on the eastern periphery of the Ibo country. The Aro were an Ibo group which incorporated Ibibio elements. They were both priests and clever traders. In both capacities, they travelled and traded extensively in Ibo and Ibibio land. Various Aro settlements were established and through these the Aro dominated the local markets. They specialised in the buying and selling of slaves, and it was indeed through them that the coast communities received slaves and other commodities for their vital export trade. Trade routes in the hinterland which the Aro dominated radiated in all directions, but Aro domination did not amount to a comprehensive political control. As oracle agents and traders, they wielded tremendous influence; they deployed mercenaries in Ibo and Ibibio inter-village wars in order to facilitate the capture of slaves for export, but the Aro did not during

the nineteenth century, or earlier, evolve a centralised organisation with which to build and sustain an empire. When the British intruded into the country towards the end of the nineteenth century, they believed that there was an Aro empire, and grossly exaggerated the role of the Aro in Ibo and Ibibio village affairs. The result was that at the first opportunity the local British representatives mounted a colossal military expedition which destroyed the Long Juju shrine and subsequently subdued one Ibo and Ibibio village group after another.

#### NIGERIA-CAMEROONS BORDERLAND

The territory which lies east of the Cross river and stretches in a south-easterly direction to the Congo has been described as the borderland of the Bantu and semi-Bantu speaking peoples. It was also a sort of refuge for heterogeneous groups fleeing from more powerful neighbours. The rise of the Fulani Adamawa empire at the beginning of the nineteenth century intensified the influx of odd semi-Bantu and Bantu intrusive elements to produce a situation in which diverse groups speaking languages which are not mutually intelligible lived side by side. Some groups originally semi-Bantu speaking had in their migrations adopted Bantu, and *vice versa*. Thus, because of the extreme intermingling which must have begun before the nineteenth century, the complexity of linguistic pattern and the diversity of origin are perhaps without parallel in any African territory. During the nineteenth century there is little to tell of them beyond the fact that they did their best to escape the raiding expeditions organised by the Fulani from the Benue and from the direction of southern Adamawa. Many of these hinterland groups provided the articles of trade—human beings, and then ivory and palm produce which coast towns like Calabar and Duala relied upon for their prosperity. The fragmentary communities themselves lived in a state of perpetual fear. The legacy of the slave trade, of enmity and strife left its unmistakable mark. One of the groups north of Calabar informed the missionaries that 'Inside or outside, speaking, eating, or sleeping, we must have our guns always ready for use . . . we . . . know not the moment we may be attacked.'

The peoples considered in this chapter illustrate the variety which characterised the political organisation of indigenous African society. It is useless to speculate why Benin and its neighbours,

including the western Ibo, responded to centralised control, whilst the main Ibo and the Ibibio remained fragmented in isolated and autonomous village communities. As regards the latter, the absence of formalised institutions led to the assumption entertained by outsiders that anarchy prevailed. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Even among the fugitive groups encountered in the Upper Cross region, the village communities recognised priestly chiefs through whose ministrations the solidarity and well-being of the people were believed to be safeguarded. This observation emphasises the supreme role which religion played among most African peoples.

The 'house' system evolved by the coast communities was a fascinating political and commercial mechanism which for centuries provided a basis for group solidarity and prosperity. During the nineteenth century dynastic quarrels and petty civil wars were common enough. Nevertheless, the coast city-states retained trade relations with Europeans on the one hand and with the hinterland groups on the other. In one sense the contact which the city-states made with the type of European who had engaged in the slave trade produced unfortunate results. The adoption by the coast peoples of ridiculous names and attire suggested to them by the perverted humour of the European traders, drunkenness and an abundance of firearms were some of the evils of this contact.

By the end of the nineteenth century a new political order symbolising British rule had more or less overwhelmed one and all.

## NOTE

1 These title-holders performed functions approximating to those of prime minister, minister of external affairs and commander-in-chief.

# 18 Dahomey and Yoruba in the Nineteenth Century

I. A. AKINJOGBIN

## INTRODUCTION

FOR most of the nineteenth century, the kingdom of Dahomey covered only approximately the southern third of the present republic of Dahomey. It had a frightening reputation, particularly in the latter half of the century, when the mere mention of the name would rouse fiendish passion in Ketu, break up a crowded market in Egbado and send the people seeking safety, induce an Egba to reach for his cutlass to defend himself, and draw unwilling admiration from the Ibadan. The Yoruba manufactured an *oriki* (cognomen) from this reputation of the Dahomeans. A man described as *Idaoni okunrin* was one feared by all.

The Europeans, too, had a most fantastic impression of the kingdom. To some, it was the kingdom of the Amazons, where women fought much more efficiently than men. To others it was simply a barbaric outpost in jungle Africa, where the king made court garments out of the labels taken off beer bottles, whilst to yet others it was the land of darkness, of the slave trade and human sacrifice, which stood in the way of civilisation which the Europeans wanted to bring to Africa.

The Dahomean authorities themselves did little to give their kingdom a better image in the outside world. They mercilessly massacred their war prisoners and delighted in levelling a once crowded city. They delayed every European visitor and put him in something like honourable confinement. They paraded their army, sometimes, as Burton alleged, bringing each company out repeatedly to give a false impression of large numbers. They performed human sacrifices in the presence of Europeans and argued, often reasonably, that the slave trade should not be abolished.

The behaviour of the kings of Dahomey and the impression which they created outside their territories became more widely known in the nineteenth century through their relations with the

Yoruba. In turn, their attitude to the Yoruba was dictated by both economic and political considerations, the roots of which were laid far back in the eighteenth century when their kingdom was weak economically and, politically, was tributary to the Oyo, which was then the most powerful section of the Yoruba. For much of the eighteenth century therefore the Dahomeans were engaged mainly in a struggle to maintain the economic viability of their kingdom

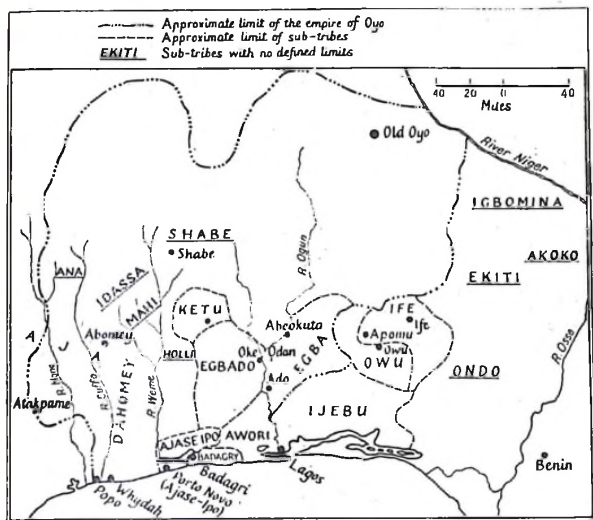


Fig. 16 Western Yorubaland in the eighteenth century.

and throw off the Oyo yoke. This latter they achieved in about 1822 only to discover soon afterwards that the Egba, another section of the Yoruba, had established a new kingdom not far away from Dahomey. From the fifth decade of the nineteenth century until practically the end of it, Dahomey repeatedly but unsuccessfully attempted a total annihilation of the nascent Egba kingdom in furtherance of its economic and political interests. In this chapter we shall examine briefly the history behind Dahomey's

adoption of the policies that gave it such a bad reputation, trace them through the nineteenth century, and find out their consequences.

The relations between Dahomey and Yoruba go far back into history. Oral traditions of the Yoruba, the Aja and the Ewe peoples witness to the fact that long before Dahomey had a political identity there had been strong cultural contact between the Aja peoples under the leadership of Tado, and the Yoruba peoples under the leadership of Ife. This cultural contact was so strong that by the early seventeenth century the Yoruba language was the *lingua franca* of both the Aja and the Ewe. Nor did the contact abate after that period, for recent studies show that the majority of the religious beliefs of Dahomey derived from the Yoruba country. But although we have evidence for this cultural contact we are yet uncertain as to its nature. Was it one that both the Yoruba and the Aja shared from a common origin, or was it imposed by force or persuasion on the Aja by the Yoruba? Some people like Jacques Bertho would claim that it was the former, whereas the existence of dual deities like Sango and Xevioso, Lisa (Orisa) and Mawu, represent apparently a conflation of Yoruba and traditional Dahomey gods and would suggest an element of the latter.

However, from about the last quarter of the seventeenth century the relationship between the Oyo (a section of the Yoruba) and the Aja started to change to that of master and vassal. Twice between 1680 and 1700 the Oyo army invaded Allada (Ardra) the capital of the Aja family of states. The first invasion occurred between 1680 and 1682, and by the time of the second invasion in 1698, Allada would seem to have become a vassal state to the Alafin of Oyo.

#### THE CONQUEST OF DAHOMEY

By the time that Oyo was overrunning Allada, events within the Aja family of states, notably the introduction of the trans-Atlantic slave trade with its effects on the pre-existing social and economic organisations, had started to weaken their traditional political organisation. From about the middle of the seventeenth century there were constant rebellions against Allada, the hitherto accepted leader of the Aja states. These rebellions often resulted in civil wars and further fragmentation, all of which clearly demonstrated

that the traditional concept of organisation was no longer adequate for the existing situation. But Oyo overlordship concerned itself mainly with the regular collection of tributes and not with internal administrative reforms, so that it did not stop disintegration within the Aja country. Clearly then at the beginning of the eighteenth century there was a power vacuum within the Aja family of states.

This gave Dahomey the chance to establish its political identity. Before the beginning of the eighteenth century, Dahomey had been only one of the states within the Aja family and by no means one of the most important. Its king had always been crowned at Allada. But partly as a result of adversity, which arose because of constant raids from its southern neighbours, particularly Whydah, Popo and Allada, Dahomey was forced to organise itself on a strong military basis which, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, was powerful enough to resist aggression from its southern neighbours and fill the political vacuum that was being created in Aja.

In 1724, on the invitation of a contestant to the Allada throne who lost, but was unwilling to abide by the traditional methods, Agaja, the king of Dahomey, invaded and destroyed Allada, thus destroying the basis of the traditional concept of government. It therefore became incumbent upon Dahomey to bring the rest of the Aja states under a new form of authority. In 1727, Whydah was conquered and by 1730 the 'Dahomean revolution' had been accomplished.

No sooner had Dahomey attempted to fill the vacuum in the Aja states than it fell foul of the Oyo authorities. For two reasons, the Oyo could not stand passively by and watch Dahomey's expansion. First there was, as we have seen, the tributary relationship between Allada and Oyo and naturally Oyo would not tamely submit to its rights being abrogated. Secondly, the Aja family of states was organised on patterns similar to the Yoruba family of states. The conquest of Allada therefore meant the overthrow of the old principles familiar to the Oyo and it was a revolutionary move which must be checked if it was not to spread confusion. So the Oyo authorities invaded Dahomey four times between 1726 and 1730, ravaging the area and breaking the powers of resistance of the nascent kingdom of Dahomey.

At the same time that the Oyo were showing their unmistakable dislike for the political implications of Agaja's conquests, the

Europeans were reaching the conclusion that he would not be such a ready slave dealer as they had expected. They noticed that he forbade his subjects to trade in slaves, burned the European slaving houses and sought contact with Europeans other than the slave traders. They therefore developed a hostile attitude to him and decided to side with his enemies. The result was that although the Europeans and the Oyo never came to an agreement for a concerted action against Dahomey, each side put pressures on Agaja simultaneously and forced him to do their will. In 1730 Agaja agreed formally to Dahomey being a tributary state of Oyo and that a small part of the old Allada kingdom should be carved out into a new kingdom of Porto Novo (Ajase-Ipo).

Furthermore, he agreed with the Europeans that he would protect those within his territory and not oppose the slave trade in the way he had hitherto done. But he also gained a few important concessions. He was left as master over the internal affairs of his kingdom and was allowed to retain his army—a concession which was not commonly granted to many tributary states of the Oyo empire. In the same way, it was left to Agaja and his successors on the throne of Dahomey to determine the positive policy that was to be taken about the slave trade in the future. In a way the relations between Dahomey and Yoruba in the nineteenth century were governed by the way this very important treaty of 1730 worked out during the rest of the eighteenth century.

Politically, for the rest of the century, Dahomey remained a tributary state within the Oyo empire. The attempt made towards the end of the reign of Agaja and the beginning of the reign of Tegbesu (between 1738 and 1748) to throw off the Oyo yoke seems to have resulted in very heavy punishment for Dahomey. After 1748, Dahomey did not again neglect to pay the annual tribute for the rest of the eighteenth century. Indeed from 1740 onwards until the end of the century, the court of Dahomey increasingly imbibed both cultural and religious ideas from the Yoruba. But Dahomey was not completely happy with the situation. Gaha, the famous (or infamous) Bashorun of Oyo, must have kept a very strict control over Dahomey as he did over all the rest of the Oyo empire. Alafin Abiodun, who was more conscious of his imperial rights than any of his immediate predecessors, and who knew how to exploit them to the full, maintained the control over Dahomey by diplomatic threats. It was made

quite plain to Dahomey that although it was allowed to keep its army in the 1730 treaty, Oyo regarded the Dahomean army as an agent that must be used mainly for Oyo interests, and expected to be consulted and its permission obtained before any military operations were independently undertaken by Dahomey. What may have irked Dahomey more than anything else were the petty restrictions which further emphasised that the prestige of its kings was very limited. For instance, Oyo periodically passed laws prohibiting the kings of Dahomey from using for their garments certain materials, regarded as only fit for the sovereign. The Alafin also regarded themselves as heirs to all the most important chiefs within Dahomey and would not tolerate any attempt to cheat them of this right.

The record of the Oyo rule over Dahomey was, however, not all oppression; indeed, it could be plausibly argued that Dahomey gained more than she lost. For example, Oyo shielded Dahomey from its estranged neighbours and therefore prevented its destruction when it was weak. Moreover, by preventing Dahomey from dissipating its energy in useless expansionist wars, Oyo gave Dahomey a period of peace at home during which the latter consolidated its internal organisation. Dahomey was even able to borrow administrative ideas from Oyo. But the Dahomeans did not always remember these. The net result left the Dahomeans completely dissatisfied with the Oyo rule and nurtured in them an inveterate hatred for the Yoruba. They watched assiduously for an opportunity to throw off the hateful yoke of the Oyo oppressors.

#### ECONOMIC DEPRESSION

While the Dahomeans were nursing their resentment against the Yoruba people, they were not feeling particularly happy about their economic situation at home. The slave trade which became the basis of their economy from about 1740 onwards only made the country superficially prosperous for a few years. From about the middle of the eighteenth century the true implications of a slave economy started to manifest themselves, though the Dahomean kings did not fully appreciate the situation. The slave trade depended on external forces for its regular supply and demand. If the forces of supply or demand were not favourable, Dahomey's economy would suffer greatly. From the middle of the eighteenth century onwards both the supply and demand conditions were

unfavourable to Dahomey. The Oyo, who were the largest suppliers, decided to export their slaves through Porto Novo, the port of the kingdom of Ajase-Ipo, a tributary state to Oyo, and the supply of slaves that should have gone to Dahomey from Oyo dwindled drastically. On the demand side, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, the European wars of that period not only restricted the number of ships that could be used in trade (since many of them were requisitioned for war purposes), they also made sailing on the seas hazardous because of seizures by combatants of enemy ships as prizes. European traders were therefore unwilling to risk their capital and they often did not venture out while the wars lasted. The greatest blow came in 1807 when the British government abolished the slave trade and gradually persuaded other European powers to do the same, thus seriously reducing demand. The result of both the Oyo policy and European actions was an economic depression in Dahomey which started around 1750 and continued for another century.

By the end of the eighteenth century therefore, political subjugation and economic depression had combined to cause a widespread dissatisfaction among the Dahomeans against their rulers. A Frenchman who visited Dahomey around that time rightly forecast that there would soon be a revolution. The first concrete sign of dissatisfaction came in 1797 when Agonglo was murdered and an unsuccessful attempt made to change the dynasty. For the next twenty years, conditions did not improve in Dahomey despite all the efforts made by Adandozan, Agonglo's young son and successor (1797-1818).

In 1818 therefore the clamour in Dahomey was still for political independence and economic improvement. On this crest of popular demand Gezo rose to power. With his organising ability and the backing of da Souza, the richest Portuguese mulatto slave trader at Whydah, Gezo overthrew Adandozan in 1818 to become king of Dahomey. For a few years afterwards he seems to have been engaged in overcoming the internal opposition to himself notably from the women's army corps which remained loyal to the deposed king. By 1821 the internal opposition would appear to have been dealt with and he was now ready to tackle the two most important problems which his subjects expected him to solve.

Attempts to achieve these two national Dahomean objectives

would inevitably bring conflict with the Yoruba. To achieve political independence, Gezo would have to fight the Oyo. To achieve economic viability he would have to find new raiding grounds if he was allowed to carry on the slave trade, or, if agricultural products became fashionable, he would have to secure an area climatically suitable for the growth of whatever products the Europeans demanded. Whichever economic product would eventually be needed, the country lying west and north of Dahomey was not attractive, being dry and naturally unproductive, and having been denuded of its population through the raiding of the previous century. It might be dangerous to raid within the country lying north-east of Dahomey, since that was the direction of the Old Oyo empire. Eastwards and south-eastwards, however, in the direction of the Egbado and the Egba kingdoms, Dahomey might secure the objects of its ambition.

#### THE BREAK-UP OF THE OYO EMPIRE

The political situation in the Yoruba country at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century made it increasingly feasible for Dahomey to realise its ambitions and solve its problems. From about 1796, trouble had started within the Oyo empire which caused the administration to collapse and rendered Oyo without a king for a fair, though unspecified, length of time. The lack of central authority in Oyo and the insecurity to life and property consequent upon this, compelled the ordinary Oyo citizens to flee and seek safety in other Yoruba kingdoms, and encouraged the ruling classes to reduce little areas to order under their own authority. The collapse of such a strong empire as the Oyo, which occupied more than half of the total land area of the Yoruba country, was bound to have far-reaching effects on the rest of the Yoruba country.

Before such consequences were completely worked out, however, another civil war, which was far more serious in its consequences on the Yoruba country, broke out. This was the Owu war which started in 1821 and went on until about 1828. The immediate cause of this war was a quarrel between two traders at Apomu over a few cowries' worth of Guinea pepper. But this could only have been the occasion, not a cause.

The real causes of this war are not adequately explained by our sources. According to the Oyo version, Amororo, the Olowu,

attacked a number of Ife towns and villages on the instigation of Adegun, the Onikoyi, and Toyeye of Ogbomosho, the Kakanfo, ostensibly to protect the Oyo from being taken captive and sold into slavery. In attacking these towns, however, Olowu Amororo was contravening what appeared to have been a very important principle in the constitution that bound the Yoruba country together. This was that the territory of the Oni of Ife must never be attacked by any other Yoruba king. In 1793, Alafin Awole had run into trouble from which he never recovered when he attempted to attack Apomu, a market town within the Ife kingdom. It is therefore difficult to understand why Olowu Amororo decided to repeat the same mistake. The most probable explanation may have been that among the people who ought to have been the jealous guardians of the Yoruba constitution, there was a feeling that the old constitution was no longer adequate.

The result of Amororo's action was unmistakably disastrous. It threw the whole of the Yoruba country into a series of civil wars. Ife invited Ijebu to join it to defend the traditional constitution, which the latter promptly did, particularly because many Ijebu traders allegedly suffered in the Owu attack. Also joining the Ife against the Owu were a large number of the Oyo population who had been driven out of their homes initially because their king had acted against the same constitution. They were the more willing to fight because they no longer had a permanent abode and naturally wanted to secure one for themselves. The Oni ordered, with his traditional authority, that the Owu capital must be completely destroyed, and must never again be inhabited, thus giving it as prey to the allied armies.

For five years, a siege was laid against the city of Owu. At first, the Owu people resisted bravely, but the longer the siege lasted, the more famished they became. Finally they submitted under great distress and were largely put to the sword. The survivors were pursued from one Owu town to another; first to Erunmu, then to Ogbere until all the large Owu towns were completely destroyed and the flourishing Owu kingdom reduced largely to farmlands.

It is not clear whether Adegun, the Onikoyi and Toyeye of Ogbomosho, who originally instigated Amororo, came to his aid. The chances were that they did not because they, too, had to face the consequences of Afonja's declaration of allegiance to the

Fulani jihād; a declaration that came openly in 1824, three years after the siege of Owu had started.

The end of the Owu war in about 1825 did not see the beginning of peace in the Yoruba country. The Egba kingdom, which had just become independent of Oyo towards the end of the eighteenth century, was attacked and its towns destroyed one after another. By 1828, the Egba kingdom had almost all been destroyed. The only important towns left were Ibadan, Ijaye and Ilugun.

The old constitution having thus been clearly shown to be no longer effective, it behoved the leaders of the country to seek alternative arrangements to ensure peace and prosperity. Unfortunately the events of 1821 to 1828 appear to have been an unpremeditated revolution. There was no singly thought-out notion of what was to take the place of the old constitution. Each of the most powerful leaders therefore sought to make effective arrangements in their new towns. In Ibadan, where the Oyo elements eventually dominated the situation, a military aristocracy was established. In Ijaye, another Oyo centre, military absolutism was established under Kurunmi. The remnants of the Egba left their different places of refuge and settled at Abeokuta where they eventually had a syncretic kind of constitution with little pieces of the new, held together by the notion of the British monarchical system which Egba repatriates had brought from Sierra Leone. Ife, of course, tenaciously held to the view that the old ways were best, and in this it was backed by Ijebu. Most of the political history of the Yoruba country for the rest of the nineteenth century, with its disastrous wars, centred largely on which of the four constitutions was to rule the whole of the Yoruba country. None eventually succeeded in doing so, though Ibadan and its military aristocracy came nearest to it.

#### DAHOMEY—EGBA RIVALRY

The first effect which the 'Yoruba revolution' of 1821-8 had on the relations between Dahomey and Yoruba was that it made it easy for Gezo, king of Dahomey (1818-28), successfully to declare independence of the Oyo. The Dahomean tradition relates that Gezo picked only a small number of men and led them against a nearby Yoruba garrison which he easily mastered, thus making Dahomey independent of the Yoruba country. This statement is consistent with what is known of the events at that time. By 1822

when the incident probably took place, the cream of the Oyo soldiers, as has been seen above, would have gone to the Owu war, and whatever Oyo army faced the Dahomeans could only have been a skeleton force, with no hope of reinforcement from anywhere. The fact that the civil war continued unabated until 1828 rendered permanent this fluke of a victory by Dahomey, for the Oyo were fighting for greater stakes than to seek to punish Dahomey for its affront. Gezo thus achieved the first objective which had been expected of him when he ascended the throne. It remained for him to solve the economic problem which had been confronting his kingdom since the mid-eighteenth century.

This was to prove more difficult. For after the 'Yoruba revolution', Abeokuta, the capital of the new Egba kingdom, was established in about 1830 in precisely the area towards which Dahomey would have liked to expand. This was naturally bound to cause fear and resentment in Dahomey. Would this new Yoruba town, in seeking to expand, not seek to conquer Dahomey as the Oyo had done a century before? Would it not bar Dahomey's own expansion eastwards and thus render the solution of its economic problems difficult? These political and economic considerations were basic in the relations between Dahomey and Abeokuta during the nineteenth century.

With the establishment of Abeokuta, however, a new rival for the same area emerged. The Egba and the Egbado were culturally related and both were for a time together under the rule of the Alafin. However, they had not always agreed on vital issues. While the Egba successfully fought for their independence from Oyo in the late eighteenth century, the Egbado remained loyal to the Alafin to the very last. The destruction of the old Egba kingdom and their resettlement in Abeokuta brought them nearer to the Egbado than hitherto. If therefore their new abode was to be safe, they would have to make sure that they controlled the Egbado people, who were in any case not very strong. That, however, was not the only reason why they wanted the control of Egbado. They needed a port of their own, the route to which it was vital for them to control, since, in the economic and political context of the early nineteenth century, possession of European firearms was essential to survival and these could be most easily had from the coast. Badagri appeared an easier place to attempt to control than Lagos and the route to Badagri from Abeokuta passes through the Egbado

country. For economic and political reasons therefore both Dahomey and Egba wanted the Egbado kingdom.

Finally there were differences in the reactions of the Dahomeans and the Egba to the 'civilising' missions of the Europeans. Dahomey resisted European infiltration. In 1797, Agonglo was murdered partly on the suspicion that he was willing to embrace the Roman Catholic faith and thus change the state religion. Since then, all the kings of Dahomey had been wary about which European ideas to accept. Moreover, the fact that more and more European nations were gradually turning against the slave trade appeared to the Dahomeans as a plot against their national economy. They could not understand why the English, who throughout the eighteenth century were the foremost slave traders, suddenly turned against the trade and took the lead in persuading others against it.

On the other hand, the Egba in their new abode at Abeokuta wholeheartedly accepted the Europeans and all that they stood for. They harboured them in their towns, protected them, gave them land to build their churches and permission to spread their ideas, and looked on them as a new benevolent force. Such differences in policy were bound sooner or later to lead to conflict between the two kingdoms.

The Dahomeans under Gezo moved first. Having destroyed Atakpamé (a small Yoruba kingdom now in the modern Togo Republic), they turned eastwards. In the mid-1830s Gezo's army attacked Refurefu, apparently a big and flourishing Egbado town, remembered today only in *ijala* (hunters' chants) as an elephant haunt. The unfortunate town was completely destroyed and ploughed to the ground and all its inhabitants who were not murdered were taken to Dahomey and resettled in a royal plantation renamed Lefulefu after the name of the destroyed town. So thoroughly was this destruction carried out that no one has yet been able precisely to identify the site of old Refurefu.

The Egba probably did not come to the aid of Refurefu mainly because they had not yet gained sufficient confidence. Certain of their leaders thought they should press on with territorial conquests while others thought they should consolidate each gain before venturing further. For a time the cautious party gained the upper hand. However, after the Egba conquest of Otta in 1842, a

detachment of Egba soldiers was sent to Ado, an Egbado town, which was thus besieged.

There at Ado, the first open clash between the Egba and the Dahomeans occurred. About 1844, Gezo decided to relieve Ado on the pretext that it was part of the Ajase-Ipo (Porto Novo) kingdom which had by then come under Dahomey. The relief force was allegedly led by Gezo himself. All the fears of Dahomey about the foundation of Abeokuta would seem to have been justified at this first encounter. For Dahomey had the worst of it. A few important items of the royal insignia of Dahomey, such as the royal umbrella, the royal stool and the royal war charms were seized by the Egba, and Gezo himself narrowly escaped capture. From then on, Dahomey decided, rather impudently, on a total destruction of Abeokuta under the pretext that it wanted to recover the royal emblems captured at Ado.

The first Dahomean attack on Abeokuta occurred on 3 March 1851. A large army of about sixteen thousand men and women (the so-called Amazons, generally called 'our mothers' in Dahomey), marched on the town from the direction of the Aro gate. Fortunately, the town walls were in a very good state of repair in that direction. As in 1844, the Dahomean army again had the worst of the engagement, despite their apparently sound military training and tactics. More than three thousand of them were killed, a great many more were wounded and hundreds were taken captive. Thus humiliated a second time, Gezo was never again able to face Abeokuta before his death in 1858.

His son and successor, Gelele, swore at his father's death that he would avenge the insult at Abeokuta and that he would not complete the full rites that would make him king of Dahomey until he had destroyed the town. After an abortive attempt in 1863, he finally attacked Abeokuta on the 15 March 1864. This Dahomean force was estimated at ten thousand strong. But even more than before, this army of invasion was heavily punished. Their total loss was estimated at about four thousand five hundred, almost half of the army that had set out. In this engagement, the Egba lost only fifty men, a clear indication of the superiority of the Egba over Dahomey. Indeed this engagement not only put an end to any effective invasion of Abeokuta, it also well nigh broke the strength of the Dahomean army. Henceforth, Dahomey caused awe in the neighbouring kingdoms mainly through bluffs and isolated acts of

brutal savagery committed against small and unsuspecting villages. This Dahomean failure to subjugate Abeokuta meant that it never got control of the rich areas of the Yoruba hinterland as Gezo had hoped. To that extent, the economic problem which had been facing Dahomey remained unsolved. Fortunately for Dahomey, however, Abeokuta never grew powerful enough to threaten Dahomey's political existence by carrying the war to its territory. Even when the French invited the Egba authorities in 1891 to send a contingent to invade Dahomey in conjunction with their own forces in order to avenge past atrocities, the Egba refused.

The Egba were able to ward off the Dahomean menace for many reasons. Among the most important was the help which the British government, through the representatives of the Church Missionary Society agents at Abeokuta, and the Lagos administration, gave to the Egba. In 1851, field-pieces were provided for the Egba army. Trained army officers were sent to Abeokuta to advise on the repairs needed for the defences and to train a few Sierra Leonean repatriates on how to mount and fire the field-pieces that had been provided. Even in 1863, when relations between Abeokuta and the Lagos administration were not at their best, the Lagos administration was instructed by the British government to allow the Egba to import as many firearms as would be needed to ward off the menace.

Help was also rendered by the Ishaga people. On the approach of the Dahomean army in 1851, the Ishaga declared themselves friends of the Dahomeans whom they 'advised' on how best to take Abeokuta. They asked the Dahomeans not to attack at night and told them that the Aro gate was the weakest point in the Abeokuta defence. These two pieces of advice were calculated to mislead the Dahomeans and, by taking them, Dahomey lost all the advantages of a surprise attack, its most effective weapon, and attacked Abeokuta at its strongest point.

A great deal of the credit must, however, go to the Egba themselves. On two out of the three occasions, between 1844 and 1864, they fought and conquered the Dahomeans on their own, or with very little help. In 1851, when the menace was most dangerous, the discovery by the Egba soldiers that they were fighting against women greatly restored their morale and self-confidence and made them determine on total victory. On that occasion also, the Egba women, led by Madam Tinubu of Lagos fame, performed as

they had never done before. They kept their male soldiers regularly supplied with food and drinks, thus keeping them refreshed at the battle front.

There was another important condition, created neither by the Europeans nor by the Egba, but by the general political situation within the Yoruba country, which helped in the Egba victory over the Dahomeans. On the three occasions between 1844 and 1864 when the Dahomeans had attacked Abeokuta, the Egba army had not been engaged in any other major war, and no major war had been going on in the rest of the Yoruba country. The result was that most, if not all, of the Egba able-bodied males were available for the defence of their town on only one front.

The three consecutive defeats which the Dahomeans suffered at the hands of the Egba may make one wonder also whether the Dahomean army was as strong as its reputation portrayed. Probably a large element in the supposed strength was psychological rather than real. Even the number of the soldiers may have been exaggerated guesses.

#### DAHOMY AND KETU

The story of Dahomean relations with Ketu is different. For it must be remembered that the Egba and Egbado were not the only Yoruba kingdoms which the Dahomeans attacked during the nineteenth century. Ketu was also attacked with much greater success than Abeokuta. The full details of the relations between Dahomey and Ketu are still to be traced in detail but the outlines are already known through the studies of eighteenth century Dahomey that have been made, and the invaluable works of Dunglas and Parrinder.

Between Ketu and Dahomey there does not seem to have been much political conflict until the last half of the nineteenth century. Indeed, for much of the eighteenth century, the impression created by the documents is that of amity between the two states. Dahomey respected Ketu because it was an ancient kingdom, and Ketu reciprocated because Dahomey was a brave little kingdom. In any case, while Oyo was able to keep Dahomey in effective check, it was unlikely that Dahomey would have attempted an attack on a respectable Yoruba kingdom.

Conditions changed towards the end of the reign of Abiodun. Oyo grew progressively weaker. Dahomey's economic problem

which had started around the middle of the eighteenth century remained unsolved despite all attempts. The traditional slave raiding grounds on which Dahomey depended for its prosperity seemed to have been denuded of their population. It was therefore necessary to find new raiding grounds since the Dahomean authorities were convinced that only an increase in the export of slaves could solve their economic problems. Kpengala, the energetic king of Dahomey between 1774 and 1789, thought that the time was opportune to make Ketu the new Dahomean slave raiding ground.

In 1788, he attacked Iwoye, a town within the kingdom of Ketu, but he was only partly successful though not discouraged. The following year, he mounted a formidable expedition against Ketu city itself but his army was beaten off, apparently with great losses. Kpengala died immediately after the return of the army to Abomey, allegedly of smallpox. The Dahomean authorities, in declaring the results of the war, in fact only offered excuses for their lack of success. They said that although they won, their oracle had forbidden them to attack Ketu; that it had warned them that whenever they did so, their king would die of smallpox. This really was the Dahomean way of admitting that Ketu was for the time being too strong for Dahomey to attack. For almost one hundred years after that, Dahomey made no other attempt on Ketu.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Dahomey once again moved against Ketu. Between 1883 and 1886, Gelele, king of Dahomey, attacked it twice. The first attack of 1883 occurred when the bulk of the Ketu soldiers had gone to protect their farms against Ibadan raiders. They believed that Dahomey was too friendly with Ketu to attack it, but they were soon undeceived. The Dahomeans thought it was the most favourable opportunity to attack Ketu, and accordingly encircled the city in the early hours of one morning, having travelled all night to conceal their movements. The inhabitants were taken unawares, and, though they fought bravely, the town was taken. The Dahomean army collected booty and then withdrew before the arrival of the main Ketu army. On their arrival, they repaired the defences of the town and took every precaution to prevent another surprise attack.

In 1886, the Dahomean army again appeared in front of Ketu,

but this time the town was fully prepared. The Dahomeans, in their usual style, attempted to take Ketu by storm but were repulsed from the walls with very heavy losses. They therefore laid siege to the town which finally surrendered because of the acute starvation of the besieged.

It is significant to note that on these two occasions Dahomey took no steps to occupy Ketu effectively. Had it done so, it really would have offered no advantage, because at that time the slave trade had already stopped and Ketu is climatically as poor as Dahomey for agriculture.

In explaining why Ketu fell, attention probably ought to be drawn to the isolation in which Ketu increasingly found itself, particularly since the civil wars had started in the Yoruba country in 1821. Moreover, although the age had shown the necessity of firearms and the importance of seaports in procuring them, Ketu remained completely shut off inland, and therefore unable to secure as much ammunition as either Dahomey or Abeokuta. Since Ketu had not befriended any of the power centres in the Yoruba country, it was unlikely that any of them would have come to its aid. Even if some freebooters had wanted to come, they probably would have found greater attraction in other directions. For the period of the Dahomean attacks on Ketu was the era of the Kiriji war, in which practically all the rest of the Yoruba country was involved.

#### CONCLUSION

Thus the reputation of Dahomey as a menace to the Yoruba country was more widespread than real. It would be more accurate to say that throughout the whole of the eighteenth century the Yoruba of the Oyo empire were a menace to Dahomey. In the nineteenth century, whenever the Dahomean army met a properly constituted Yoruba army in a planned battle, the Dahomean forces, more often than not, had the worst of it. Only against the isolated kingdom of Ketu were Dahomean arms successful.

Nor is it accurate to say that the Dahomeans were simply a bloodthirsty nation. They were fighting for political survival and economic self-sufficiency which made them seek independence from Oyo and brought them into conflict with the Egba, the Egbado and the Ketu. They succeeded in retaining their independence for most of the nineteenth century but although they

were victorious twice against Ketu, they were never able to take Abeokuta, a failure which rendered their economic gains in most of the Egbado area insecure.

# 19 Sierra Leone and Liberia in the Nineteenth Century

HOLLIS R. LYNCH<sup>1</sup>

## ORIGINS

The coastline now occupied by the states of Sierra Leone and Liberia was inhabited in the late eighteenth century by peoples who had long been in contact with Europeans, had traded with them for centuries and had worked out elaborate rules and customs to govern Afro-European relations. Among them, two settlements of similar origin were planted; Sierra Leone begun in 1787 with settlers from Britain, and Liberia begun in 1822 with settlers from the United States. Both were in part practical manifestations of a rising tide of humanitarianism in Europe and America which was concerned to suppress the slave trade in Africa and replace it with 'legitimate commerce', and diffuse 'Christianity and civilisation' throughout the continent; both began as attempts designed to rid the colonising countries of unwanted groups of people of African descent.

## THE FOUNDATION OF THE SIERRA LEONE COLONY

Lord Mansfield's notable judicial decision in the Somerset case in 1772 that the status slavery was not recognised by English Common Law had emancipated hundreds of Negro slaves who had been used as household servants and retainers by the wealthy absentee West Indian sugar planters. But the emancipation of these Negroes had created a social problem: they were now, for the most part, uncared for and without a means of livelihood in an inhospitable climate. Their numbers were swelled by a further influx of frequently destitute refugees after the end of the American War of Independence (1783). These distressed Negroes gave British humanitarians the opportunity to attempt to put into practice their conviction that Africa could be 'regenerated' through the influence of 'commerce and Christianity'. In 1786, they formed the St George's Bay Company for the dual purpose of colonising the 'Black Poor' of England in West Africa, and of seeking to

replace the slave trade by 'honourable commerce'. On the recommendation of Henry Smeathen, an amateur botanist and speculator, who had previously visited West Africa, it was decided that the settlement should be founded near the Sierra Leone river. The British government gave its full support to the scheme of colonisation. On 14 May 1787, the first settlers, including more than three hundred Negroes, arrived on the coast and successfully negotiated for a site with the local Temne rulers. The present State House stands on the site. The settlement was called Granville Town in honour of the British humanitarian, Granville Sharp, one of the main supporters of the scheme, who had drawn up elaborate plans for the administration of the colony. He had optimistically envisaged self-government in a short time, so the settlers chose Richard Weaver, a man of African descent, as governor.

Though the Temne had agreed to their settlement, quarrels broke out between them and the settlers, and a neighbouring ruler, King Jimmy, burnt down the town and dispersed the settlers. In 1792, a new group of settlers arrived sent by the Sierra Leone Company which had recently been formed in London. These were free Negroes from Nova Scotia who had been settled there after fighting on the side of the British during the American Revolution. In 1800, a group of some five hundred maroons were added to the colony; they had taken part in a revolt in Jamaica, had been transported to Nova Scotia but elected to emigrate to Sierra Leone. These New World Negroes, over fifteen hundred strong, constituted the original Creole<sup>2</sup> element in the settlement which they called Freetown.

According to long-established usage, the Temne were accustomed to expect regular rents and other payments from the Europeans who settled among them. The colony government, however, refused to pay, maintaining that the Temne had made over full sovereignty to the settlers. This was indeed stipulated in the treaty they had signed—but the Temne rulers did not so understand it. Relations between the colony and Temne deteriorated. At last in 1801 a Temne army attacked Freetown. It was beaten off and the Temne were eventually driven out of the area.

On 1 January 1808 Sierra Leone became a Crown Colony when the British government assumed direct control from the commercially unsuccessful Sierra Leone Company. In the previous year Britain had outlawed the slave trade, and Sierra Leone

became the centre from which the suppression of the slave trade in West Africa was enforced. Indeed, from this time on, the great bulk of the population who joined the colony were liberated Africans. A Liberated African Department was established in Freetown to make arrangements for the settlement and welfare of the new arrivals. Broadly speaking, this was done by one of three methods: apprenticeship in various trades, enlistment in the army and, perhaps most common of all, settlement under superintendents in rural villages, where the raising of livestock, cultivation of crops, and such skills as masonry and carpentry were taught.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF LIBERIA

It is not surprising that the success of the Sierra Leone colony should have attracted the attention of those free American Negroes who wished to emigrate to Africa to escape the humiliation and discrimination they suffered in the United States. Although the American colonies had fought and won their independence from Britain in the name of 'liberty, freedom and equality', they did not concede such 'inalienable rights' to Negroes. By 1808, the slave trade had been prohibited within the United States, the northern states abolished slavery by 1804, while even in the south, manumission was widespread, and there were hopes that here, too, slavery would soon come to an end. However, from the late eighteenth century, 'the peculiar institution' was given a fresh lease of life as a result of the invention of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney and the subsequent rapid spread of cotton plantations in response to the enormous demands of the British textile industry. But already a large free Negro community, forming one-tenth of the entire Negro population, had grown up: in 1800 there were 108,435 free Negroes which, mainly by natural increase, rose to 319,599 by 1830 and 488,070 by 1860. The southern slave states of the United States of America began to pass measures intended to facilitate the return of free Negroes to slavery, or drive them out, while the northern states, fearful of an influx, also passed prescriptive and discriminatory laws.

In addition, there were many well-meaning Americans, among them President Thomas Jefferson, who, while they wished to see Negroes emancipated, nevertheless believed that the two races could not live on terms of equality in the United States. They therefore supported the idea of emancipation of Negroes with

colonisation in Africa. Paul Cuffee, a wealthy trader and ship-owner from Massachusetts, was the first American coloniser in West Africa. He first visited Sierra Leone in 1811 and in 1815 returned with thirty-eight Negro settlers. His example inspired the formation of the American Colonization Society, a private organisation to send free Negroes to Africa. The Society included both humanitarians and slave-holders—strange bed-fellows. The humanitarians believed that such a colonisation scheme would give American Negroes genuine freedom as well as making them agents of civilisation in Africa, while the slave-holders were interested in getting rid of a group which posed a possible threat to the institution of slavery. The free Negroes soon realised this and most of them refused to co-operate with the Society. Only about fifteen thousand of them ever migrated.

The Society wanted to co-operate with the British government and at first thought of settling its colonists in or close to Sierra Leone. But Sir Charles M'Carthy, the Governor of Sierra Leone, viewed the prospective American emigrants as competitors with British subjects and advised his government to discourage the Society from planting its settlers close to Sierra Leone. The British government did not share Sir Charles's alarm and, accordingly, the first eighty-eight emigrants, with three white officials, made their first base on the north shore of Sherbro Island, off the Sierra Leone coast. After two years of uncertainty, difficulty, death and disaster, the remaining emigrants finally obtained a permanent site on the Cape Mesurado promontory—and thus started what was later to be known as Liberia. Thus, although theoretically the purpose and goal of Liberia and Sierra Leone were the same, depots for liberated Africans and centres from which 'civilisation' in Africa might radiate, they were to develop as separate entities.

#### GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF LIBERIA TO 1861

The Liberians, like the Sierra Leoneans, faced the initial difficulties of attacks from local Africans but made comparatively good progress. The official leaders of the colony continued to be white men up to 1841. But among the earliest emigrants were some very outstanding Negroes, men like Daniel Coker, Lott Cary, Colin Teage, and Elijah Johnson. They were inspired by a sense of mission and destiny: they had gone to Africa, they felt, to lay the foundation of a new civilisation and nation, which would reflect

credit on the Negro race. The most versatile of these early Negro leaders was Lott Cary who played the roles of clergyman, doctor, militiaman, builder, and pioneer in agriculture. He also preached to the indigenous people and looked forward to the day when they and the immigrants would amalgamate as one Christian community. Unfortunately Cary suffered an untimely death in an accident in 1828.

Under the vigorous governorship of Jehudi Ashmun, the territorial boundaries of Liberia were extended, new settlements planted and attempts made to stop the slave trade. In 1825, two new settlements—Caldwell and New Georgia—were planted on the St Paul river and this brought to an end the hitherto active slave trading in that area. For the same reason Grand Bassa and other settlements were planted on the St John river.

American missions played an important role in the religious and educational life of Liberia. The lead was given by the Baptists, and this was followed by the Methodists, the Protestant Episcopal Church and the Catholics. All the early important secondary schools—Alexander High School, the College of West Africa, the Baptist Academy, and Mt Vaughan High School were denominational schools.

Visitors to Liberia in the early 1830s were impressed by the enterprise and initiative of the American emigrants, and compared Sierra Leone unfavourably with the colony of American Negroes. Monrovia, the capital, had been modelled on Washington D.C., and ambitiously laid out with wide streets. Churches, schools, and houses, mainly wooden-frame on stone or brick foundations, had been erected. A few large warehouses attested to the commercial skill of the American emigrants. The first newspaper, the *Liberia Herald*, was founded in 1830, and remained for the next twenty-five years the only newspaper in West Africa. Some thriving coffee plantations and neat brick buildings could be seen along the St Paul river.

Politically, Liberia was under the direct control of the American Colonization Society whose powers were exercised by its agents. But, of necessity, much responsibility devolved upon emigrant leaders. In 1828, the elective principle was introduced: only the agents and vice-agents were nominated by the Society; all other officers were elected by universal adult male suffrage.

In 1838, there was a further constitutional development.

Liberia was divided into two countries, Montserrado and Grand Bassa, which had local elective governing bodies. Provision was made for a national council consisting of ten elected members, which together with the Agent and Vice-Agent, constituted the government of the country. This new constitution was the first to stipulate that citizenship of Liberia should be confined to 'Africans'. In 1841, J. J. Roberts, an able and experienced colonist, was appointed to succeed Thomas Buchanan, the last white Agent of the Society.

The efforts of Liberia combined with those of the British cruisers had succeeded in almost completely destroying the slave trade along the Sierra Leone and Liberia coastline, and in its place was fast growing up a valuable trade in palm oil and camwood. But competition for this trade created disputes between the neighbouring territories. For although Liberia had laid claims to more than three hundred miles of coastline by the 1840s, much of it was not effectively colonised, and English and other European traders flouted the customs regulations of the colony by trading directly with the local Africans. Protests to the British government brought the reply that Liberia was not a sovereign state and that in setting up customs barriers it was assuming the prerogatives of one. It was to acquire the sovereign power necessary to deal with recalcitrant European traders that Liberian leaders sought and obtained independence from the American Colonisation Society. The constitution reaffirmed that only 'men of colour' could become citizens of Liberia.

Circumstances had forced independence on Liberia, but it is doubtful whether in 1847 it constituted a viable political and economic unit. Its immigrant population was about five thousand living in scattered settlements. It had been in the past dependent mainly on foreign philanthropy, and possessed very few assets and no currency of its own. Moreover, since 1837 the majority of emigrants had been slaves set free expressly on the condition that they emigrated, but many of these were old or in ill-health and constituted a burden rather than an asset to Liberia. This helps partly to explain the high mortality rate in Liberia, and its slow progress despite a promising beginning. With the passing of the earliest emigrants, agriculture, which should have formed the basis of the Liberian economy, was neglected. The most enterprising Liberians turned to trading which brought quick profits; however,

they spent these on foreign luxury goods rather than in developing the productive capacity of the country. Finally, the Liberian constitution which was modelled on that of the United States, contained a provision which was to keep the young nation in an unstable political condition: the President, the House of Representatives, and half the Senators were to be elected every two years.

And yet its independence had invested it with new significance which induced an increasing number of American Negroes, who were at this time suffering intense discrimination, to emigrate. Between 1848 and the outbreak of the American Civil War in April 1861, almost six thousand American Negroes emigrated to Liberia, compared with less than five thousand in the previous thirty years. To prepare itself for a steady flow of emigrants, Liberia in the 1850s undertook an unprecedented territorial expansion through a number of treaties made with neighbouring African chiefs. In addition, Maryland, a colony to the south founded at Cape Palmas by the Maryland Colonization Society in 1834, was incorporated into Liberia in 1857. By 1860, Liberia claimed a coastline of six hundred miles, but during the 'scramble for Africa' she lost much of her legitimate territory to the British and French. From the late 1860s when American Negroes, now emancipated (1863), hoped to gain equality in the United States, the number of emigrants to Liberia was reduced to a mere trickle.

#### DEVELOPMENTS IN SIERRA LEONE

Liberia, then, had quickly outstripped its sister colony politically. Until 1863, Sierra Leone was ruled by a governor and seven officials, all appointees of the British government; there was not the slightest semblance of democratic rule. It is true though that, partly as a result of the high mortality rate among Europeans, and partly because of the influence of humanitarians on British policy, there were a few professionally trained West Indian emigrants who were appointed to the highest official positions in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Liberia's independence in 1847 had emphasised the political immaturity of Sierra Leone, and from the 1850s Sierra Leoneans began to clamour for some degree of political representation. Professionally trained West Indians, who had been attracted to Sierra Leone because of better economic opportunities there, were in the forefront of those calling for

political changes. In 1853, Mr Lenagham, a lawyer, formed the Sierra Leone Committee of Correspondence to press for 'the constitutional privilege of representation'. In 1855, William Drape started the first privately owned newspaper, the *New Era*, which directed its attacks against the 'old era'—the 'dictatorial' Crown Colony system. In the 1860s, William Rainy, another West Indian critic, a successful lawyer, dominated the Sierra Leone press and helped to awaken political consciousness.

In 1863, the old Council was divided into an Executive and Legislative branch, the latter to include a representative of the Sierra Leone community. John Ezzidio,<sup>4</sup> a successful businessman, was nominated to the Legislative Council as a result of an election held by the influential Sierra Leone Merchants' Association. Other successful liberated Africans and Creoles were subsequently nominated as unofficial members of the council. The most famous was Sir Samuel Lewis, a brilliant lawyer who, when Freetown was constituted a municipality in 1893, was elected its first mayor. Nevertheless, they were only appointed members; elections to the Legislative Council were not introduced until 1924.

A direct influence from Liberia on Sierra Leone at this period was Dr Edward Wilmot Blyden, a brilliant Liberian scholar, born in the West Indies. He often visited Freetown (indeed he died there in 1912), and expounded his views in the Freetown newspapers. Together with others like William Grant, a wealthy merchant, part-proprietor of the newspaper, *The Negro* (1871-4), and proprietor of the *West African Reporter* (1874-84); James Johnson, a pastor of the C.M.S. church; and the Rev. Joseph Claudius May, Principal of the Wesleyan Boys' High School and proprietor of the *Sierra Leone Weekly News* (1884-1922), he aroused some cultural nationalism. These men were critical of the obtrusive influence of Western culture and laid stress on the need to retain the positive aspects of traditional culture. Such teachings resulted in the founding of the Dress Reform Society in 1887, whose aim was to devise a loose-fitting 'national' dress to replace the 'unhealthy and uncomfortable' European mode of dress, as well as replacing European names by African ones. But this movement was not successful: most Sierra Leoneans regarded the Western way of life as their ideal. The early cultural nationalists had also advocated the setting up of a West African university run by Negroes themselves, and an independent African Church. Their

demand for the former resulted in Fourah Bay College which was affiliated to Durham University in 1876.

#### EDUCATION AND SOCIETY IN SIERRA LEONE

Although Liberia was more politically advanced, it was Sierra Leone as a British colony which made the greater impact upon West African history. This was because education took firm roots earlier here than anywhere else in West Africa, and its educational institutions produced teachers, missionaries, clerks and civil servants for other parts of West Africa. In 1804 the C.M.S. began to set up their own schools which from 1808 received government financial assistance. In 1811 the Wesleyan Methodists began missionary and educational work. Through the monitorial system, the more advanced African students helped to spread literacy. In 1827, the C.M.S. established a training college for teachers and catechists at Fourah Bay. In 1843, the Wesleyans started a similar institution at King Tom's Point. In the same year the Roman Catholics renewed their missionary and educational efforts. In 1845 the C.M.S. established a secondary school for boys and in 1849 a similar institution—the Annie Walsh Memorial School—for girls. In 1874, a Wesleyan boys' high school was established. And finally, from 1876 university work could be done at Fourah Bay College. Not only did the products of Sierra Leone schools work in several parts of West Africa, but its schools attracted students from all English-speaking West Africa, including Liberia.

Freetown became a prosperous community by the second half of the nineteenth century. Many Creoles did well in trade. Some of those educated at Freetown schools went to Britain for further studies and returned as doctors and lawyers. (The first to qualify as doctors, in 1859, were James Africanus Horton and William Broughton Davies.) Others became pastors and teachers and civil servants. As opportunities for trade were limited in Sierra Leone, many sought their fortunes along the coast. Liberated Africans, particularly those of Yoruba descent, returned to their homes in what is today the Western Region of Nigeria (but was then still under the government of its traditional rulers). These emigrant liberated Africans and Creoles brought with them the Christian religion and new ways they had learnt in Sierra Leone. The most famous of them was Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first student at Fourah Bay College, who was given charge of the Niger Mission

by the C.M.S., and became a bishop in 1864. These Sierra Leone emigrants were to have an immense influence in West Africa, for they brought new ideas and aspirations to the peoples they settled among, and can be regarded as among the pioneers of African nationalism.

Some went to Liberia too, for instance C. T. O. King, who became Mayor of Monrovia. His son, educated at the Freetown Grammar School, was to become President of Liberia. Some Creoles also went inland to trade among the peoples there. But most preferred to go along the coast, to their own ancestral homelands. Hence, there was not much Christian preaching in the areas adjoining the colony, where the peoples tended to retain their own traditional religions. The most effective Christian mission in this area was not based on the colony but in the United States, the United Brethren in Christ (today the Evangelical United Brethren). This mission, established in the Sherbro country, gradually spread its influence among the Sherbro and Mende peoples.

The most significant movements in the interior during the early and mid-nineteenth century were the rise to predominance of the Temne and Mende peoples. At the beginning of the century the Temne were threatened on all sides. They had been driven from the colony peninsula; at Port Loko they were under the rule of Susu invaders; in the Rokel river area they were encroached on by the Loko, under the rule of a powerful chief, Gumbu Smart. Indeed a Mandinka ruler boasted to the governor of the colony that he was proposing to sell all the Temne as slaves and so get rid of them all. But in 1815, under the leadership of Moriba Kindo, they drove the Susu from Port Loko and regained control. Then a long Temne-Loko war was fought, until about 1841 when the Loko were finally defeated. The Temne were not, however, politically united, but remained under the rule of their many traditional rulers.

The Mende penetration of the southern part of the country was largely by peaceful means. Small groups of Mende would move unobtrusively into Sherbro areas, ostensibly under the rule of Sherbro chiefs, but gradually becoming independent of them.

There was a growing export trade from West Africa in the nineteenth century in palm oil and palm kernels, which were used in Europe to manufacture soap, lubricants and synthetic foods. Hence, the oil-producing country of the south-east became

economically important. Traders from the colony settled there to buy up produce, and the places where they congregated became important centres. Chiefs began fighting one another to get control of these trading centres, which provided them with trade goods, and with revenue from rents and customs duties. All through the 1870s and 1880s there was a succession of these trade wars. Among those who emerged successful from these wars was Madam Yoko, the widow of a Mende war-chief, Gbanya, who, in alliance with the colony government, made herself the ruler of the largest chiefdom in the country.

#### THE ERA OF EUROPEAN EXPANSION

In the first seven decades of the nineteenth century there was little expansion of direct European rule in West Africa. The few European colonies were confined to the coast. In Sierra Leone the government was ready to give responsible official posts to Creoles. The British Parliament by a resolution of 1865 proposed that British rule be gradually withdrawn from West Africa, and the inhabitants be encouraged to govern themselves. The European governments were also friendly to Liberia, as for example when the British presented the Liberian government with an armed sailing-ship.

But the European partition of Africa which began in the 1880s reversed this policy: the European powers were henceforth eager to grab what they could in Africa. Liberia was among the victims. The British took over the Gallinas country at the mouth of the Mano and Moa rivers, which the Liberians maintained was theirs, and annexed it to Sierra Leone. At the eastern end of the Liberian coastline the French took the country beyond Cape Palmas and annexed it to the Ivory Coast. Indeed, that Liberia survived at all as an independent state was due to the mutual jealousy of the European powers and timely intervention on its behalf by the United States government. Nevertheless, boundaries were drawn in Europe to delimit the interior in such a way that the French became the predominant power, and Liberia and Sierra Leone were restricted to small enclaves.

A British Protectorate was proclaimed in 1896 over the British sphere. This was done without consulting the rulers, many of whom did not realise that they had lost their sovereignty and were now under British rule. As British Treasury and Colonial Office

usage insisted that British territories must provide the revenue for their own services and not be a charge on British taxpayers, the Governor of Sierra Leone, Sir Frederick Cardew, was told to raise revenue in the new protectorate, to pay for its administration. He therefore introduced a hut tax. The protectorate peoples could not see what right the British government had to make them pay tax for their homes, and early in 1898 some of the Temne rose against the British. They were led by Bai Bureh, a brilliant military organiser, who was able to hold out for many months, with ill-equipped forces, until finally forced to surrender.

Bai Bureh's war set off a rising among the Mende, whose chiefs were also resentful at the loss of their power. The Mende war was organised secretly. Suddenly in April 1898, they rose and massacred all the aliens—Europeans and Creoles—who were living among them. Hundreds were killed, including American and Creole missionaries, pastors and traders, and members of the frontier police, most of whom were recruited from among the indigenous peoples. No outstanding military leader emerged in this war to match Bai Bureh in the north, and the rising was quickly suppressed. Henceforth, until the coming of independence, the protectorate peoples had to accept British rule.

As British rule was expanding all over Africa, official power and responsibility were increasingly left only to European officials. The Creoles, who had held high office earlier in the nineteenth century, were gradually removed and replaced by Europeans. By the early twentieth century it became established that all important positions must be held by Europeans; and Africans, however well-qualified, were confined to inferior positions.

#### LIBERIAN POLITICS, 1860-1900

Liberia, encroached on at both ends, managed to preserve its independence. But strong indirect pressure was exerted against it. British firms which traded with the Kru coast and British shipping lines which relied on Kru labour<sup>5</sup> incited the Kru people to throw off their allegiance to Liberia, and there was a long series of Kru wars. In 1871 the Liberian government, to provide revenue to finance development, raised a loan of £100,000 on the London stock exchange. The terms were very unfavourable: the loan was for fifteen years at seven per cent interest, and the bankers retained £30,000 of the loan as discount and advance

interest. Much of the remaining loan money disappeared before it even reached the Liberian Treasury, and the country was then saddled with the burden of having to pay annual interest on the loan to British bankers. Thus, instead of enriching the country, the loan impoverished it further. The United States government gave no financial assistance, though it was ready to intervene to prevent any European power annexing Liberia.

Liberian society at this time tended to be centred on questions of the colour of the skin. Following the American pattern, light-skinned Liberians formed the social elite, next came the educated blacks, then the liberated Africans, and finally the local Africans. The colour question also assumed political significance: the Republican Party represented the interest of the powerful mulatto group, while the Whig Party was led by educated blacks. The Republican Party was founded by J. J. Roberts, one of the most influential men in Liberian history. Roberts, an octoroon and almost indistinguishable from white, was the Society's agent from 1841, and was elected Liberia's first president, a position he held first for eight years, and altogether for twelve years. Roberts was also appointed the first president of Liberia College which was supported by two American boards of trustees, and was opened in 1862. Cultivated blacks like Edward W. Blyden, Alexander Crummell, Stephen Benson and Edward J. Roye, objected to the concentration of power in the hands of mulattoes, to their social arrogance, and their presumption that they were best fitted to govern.

From the 1870s, mainly through Blyden's influence, the American Colonization Society ensured that the few immigrants were black people only. Gradually the mulattoes either died out or were absorbed and by the end of the century the 'colour problem' had ceased to be of importance. But the prejudices which these Liberian settlers had learnt in the United States survived for a longer period in their new African home. Both groups, light and dark, tended more and more as the century wore on to despise and remain aloof from the peoples of the interior. The example of Lott Cary and the preaching of Blyden were ignored, and only began to be remembered again in the 1940s under President Tubman.

#### CONCLUSION

Sierra Leone and Liberia in the nineteenth century, then, were not

dissimilar. In both, immigrant peoples of African descent were planted among the African population of the coast. Both immigrant communities prospered at first and evolved their own distinctive culture. The Sierra Leone liberated Africans, Creoles, by their emigration along the coast, spread Christianity and new ideas, and thus fostered the nationalist movements that were ultimately to gain power. Liberia, as the only state in West Africa not under European rule, served as an inspiration to nationalists during the colonial period (as testified in the writings of Presidents Kwame Nkrumah and Nnamdi Azikiwe). But in both territories the immigrant communities tended during this period to remain aloof (even hostile) to the neighbouring indigenous peoples. And both suffered from the expansion of the European powers in West Africa.

## NOTES

1 The author is indebted to Mr Christopher Fyfe for many helpful suggestions and advice in the writing of this chapter.

2 The word Creole is used to refer first only to the original settlers from Britain, the Nova Scotians and maroons and their descendants, then to all those born in the colony, which included children of the liberated Africans.

3 For instance, in 1844-46, William Fergusson, a former Army staff surgeon on the West African coast, was appointed Governor, having acted twice before in that capacity. In 1841, John Carr was appointed Chief Justice, a position he held for more than twenty years. John Carr, Robert Dougan and Alexander Fitzjames, all lawyers, acted as Governors in 1842, 1855, and 1859 respectively.

4 He was born in the Nupe country of what is now Nigeria, brought to Freetown as a child, became a trader, then a shopkeeper importing goods from Europe.

5 See Chapter 8, 'Peoples of the Windward Coast, A.D. 1000-1800'.

## A. ADU BOAHEN

IN my earlier chapter, I pointed out that during the second half of the eighteenth century, the conquest and annexation of Fante that was expected by all and sundry did not take place, and that, on the contrary, the Asante and Fante teamed up against their common enemy, Wassa, on many occasions, while from 1777 to 1800, they remained in peaceful trading relations with each other. Indeed, apart from the invasion of Appollonia in 1785, no direct clash occurred between Asante and the southern states during the last two decades of the eighteenth century. However, within the very first decade of the nineteenth century (in 1806 in fact) the long expected invasion of Fante took place, and this was followed by eight other clashes—in 1811, 1814-16, 1823-4, 1826, 1863, 1869, 1873 and 1874—between Asante and the southern states. In 1820, 1844, and 1853, clashes were also avoided only at the very last minute.

Before we go on to analyse the causes and consequences of these wars which form the dominant theme of the history of Ghana in the nineteenth century, some general observations should be made. In the first place, it is not true to contend, as some historians do, that it was in 1806 that 'the first Ashanti campaign in the coastal districts' occurred and that 'the two powers which had never come into contact were now face to face, and the whole balance of power depended on the result'. As we saw earlier, the Asante-Fante clash and the reaction of the Europeans to it have perfectly respectable eighteenth century precedents.

Secondly, it is true that on all but one single occasion, 1874, it was the Asante who invaded the southern or coastal districts. From the sheer frequency of these invasions, it is tempting to conclude that the Asante were aggressive, warlike and bloodthirsty people, and many scholars and historians have indeed drawn that conclusion, hence the stereotype of the Asante that persists to this day. But is this conclusion really justifiable? It should be pointed out and emphasised that on many occasions these invasions were preceded by days, weeks, months and at times even years of

negotiations, and that it was only when the Asante failed to achieve their demands through diplomatic channels that they resorted to arms. This was certainly the case in 1806, 1810, 1820, 1822, 1844 and 1863 as can be verified from Fuller, Claridge or Ward. Most of the others were, as we shall see presently, punitive expeditions against rebellious subjects. Osei Bonsu, during whose reign most of these wars occurred, in fact told Dupuis that it was 'a maxim associated with the religion he professed, never to appeal to the sword while a path lay open for negotiation'. It seems clear that this was true not only of him but also of his three successors, Osei Yaw (1824-38), Kwaku Dua I (1838-1867) and Kofi Kari-kari (1867-74). It is time then that the stereotype of the aggressive, warlike, bloodthirsty Asante was relegated to the museum of discarded or outmoded theories.

The third observation to be made about these wars is that three of the seven clashes and one of the 'scares' occurred, as has been pointed out, during the reign of Osei Bonsu, from 1801 to 1824, while the remaining four occurred over the long period between 1826 and 1880. Indeed, between 1827 and 1863—and this should be stressed since it tends to be forgotten—the Asante army never crossed the Pra. Not only were these wars concentrated in the reign of Osei Bonsu but they were also different from those that followed them as far as the combatants were concerned. Up to 1824 the wars were essentially between the Asante and the Fante states, and they resulted in the complete conquest of the latter states which had hitherto escaped the Asante yoke. The wars after 1824 were more or less an Anglo-Asante affair.

#### ASANTE GOVERNMENT

The frequency of these invasions on the part of the Asante presupposes stable and peaceful conditions at home. This, as has been recently demonstrated by Wilks in his study of Asante government in the nineteenth century, was indeed true of Asante government in general and the Kumasi state or division in particular, for a great part of the nineteenth century. As I pointed out in my earlier chapter, there was instability at the centre in Kumasi during the second half of the eighteenth century, caused often by a clash between the kings and the old aristocracy. Now, it is clear from Wilks' study (and what I have written in this chapter is all based on this study) that one of the reasons for these conflicts was the

attempts being made by the kings to introduce constitutional reforms aimed at replacing hereditary posts or stools in the civil service by appointive ones. This was first attempted by Opoku Ware during the last four years of his reign. But his attempt precipitated a civil war between him and his elders (or ministers as we might call them today) which led to his defeat and exile from Kumasi. He was able to regain the throne later only with the help of the Amanhene of the other divisions or states.

His successor, Kusi Obodum, did not dabble in constitutional reforms, but it is clear from the records, particularly the accounts of Bowditch and Dupuis, that Osei Kwadwo and his two successors, Osei Kwame and, above all, Osei Bonsu did. In fact so radical were the changes introduced by Osei Kwadwo in the government of the Kumasi Oman that Wilks has begun to talk of 'the Kwadwoan revolution in government'. He and his successors either abolished the hereditary posts or stools altogether, replacing them by appointive ones, or created new stools or (as we would call them today) ministries. Osei Kwadwo, for instance, created the Ankobia, which is more or less the Ministry of Home Affairs, and Osei Bonsu added four new stools or departments to this ministry during his reign. Osei Kwadwo also created the Gyaasewa stool or Ministry of Finance with its sub-department, the Samaa, in charge of the great chest or bank, and the Bata in charge of state trading. Thirdly he began the process of converting the diplomatic service consisting of Akyeame or linguists from a hereditary into an appointive service and this process was completed by Osei Bonsu.

Osei Kwadwo also introduced changes in the provincial administration of the empire, imposing on the existing provincial structure of conquered states under an Asante chief or Adamsfo, according to Wilks, 'a network of Ashanti resident commissioners, hierarchically organised at regional and district levels'. In 1776, Osei posted three District Commissioners, Boakye, Ankra and Nkansa, to Accra to be responsible for the Dutch, English and Danish trading quarters respectively and all of them were subordinated to the Regional Commissioner resident in Akwapim. Another District Commissioner was stationed in Akyem and it appears Osei Bonsu increased the number of these offices. He certainly stationed a Regional Commissioner in Abora, a District Commissioner in Cape Coast and another one in Elmina after his conquest of the Fante states between 1806 and 1816. The final

change which appears to have been effected, mainly during the reign of Osei Bonsu, was the conversion of the king's inner or Executive Council—referred to by different nineteenth century European observers as the Privy Council, the Senate, the Cabinet, the Kotoko Council—from a fixed council of permanent members into an *ad hoc* council to which the king invited his elders or ministers according to the case at issue.

The rise of this new bureaucracy, whose membership was determined not by birth but by appointment by the king, meant a tremendous concentration of power in the hands of the king. And as Dupuis observed, this was in fact the case with Osei Bonsu. 'The king rules with unrivalled sway,' he wrote, 'every king, chief, viceroy, or caboccer, being his absolute and unconditional vassal as tributaries or not, and most of them holding their governments by virtue of an appointment from the court.' Bonnat made the same observation of the government in the 1870s. 'The kingdom of Ashanti,' he wrote, 'is submissive to a despotic government. Each person from the greatest chief to the least slave, belongs body and possessions to the king, and is at the mercy of his will and of his whims.' But it must be emphasised that the Asantehene enjoyed these powers only in his capacity as the king or Omanhene of the Kumasi state or division. In his capacity as the head of the Asante empire or Asantehene, he still remained *primus inter pares* ruling with the advice of the Asanteman Council, consisting of the Amanhene of the various divisions and states. Secondly, since continued retention of post or stool came to depend on efficiency, it appears that the Kumasi state in particular, and the provinces in general, came to be better run by the early decades of the nineteenth century. Here again we do have concrete evidence of the law and order established by the new bureaucracy from two independent sources, Daendels, the Dutch Director-General of Elmina, and Dupuis, the British Agent and Consul for Asante. 'Law and order,' wrote the former in 1816, 'is just as great in the Ashantee kingdom as with the Asiatic Eastern Peoples. There thus exist no palavers between one town and another, and panyarring<sup>1</sup> finds no place.' And the latter stated in 1824, 'The ponderous power of Ashantee in lieu of contributing to the insecurity of life and property alone guarantees both to us, by its friendship, its interests and the position it occupies in the rear of the maritime provinces.'

It seems then that in the nineteenth century, thanks to the

Kwadwoan and Bonsuan revolutions in government, the Asantehene enjoyed such power and stability at home as had not been known in the previous century. In contrast to this, following the end of the Asante threat, from the late 1770s onwards the Fante states had become even more divided and independent of each other by the first decade of the nineteenth century than they were in the eighteenth century.

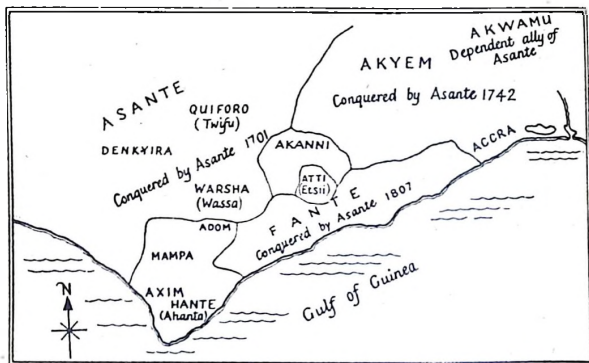


Fig. 17 The Gold Coast in 1807.

#### FANTE DISUNITY

While law and order were prevailing in Kumasi there were constant reports of internecine wars among the Fante states during the late eighteenth and the first decade of the nineteenth centuries. There were reports of wars between Cape Coast and Komenda in February 1789, between Anomabu and the Fante in August 1791, between Cape Coast and Anomabu in April 1802 and between Komenda and Shama in July 1805. Panyarring<sup>1</sup> was also rife while the activities of a group of priests, or Braffoes, had by the middle of the first decade rendered life in the Fante towns exceedingly precarious. 'The only troublesome persons now,' wrote Torraine, the Governor in charge of the Cape Coast Castle in 1805, 'are the Braffoes . . . They are a Common Nuisance, they

lay wait the traders, take a part of the goods from every bundle they purchase . . . They come to the peoples' houses, they obtain everything they ask for gratis, and in reward of their hospitable reception, they plunder every individual and such is the awe that Natives are in of the Braffoes that they complain only in silence.'

#### THE ASANTE-FANTE-BRITISH WARS

Against this background let us analyse the causes and consequences of these Asante-Fante-British wars. These wars seem to me to be the outcome of three basic factors. The first was the determination of the Asante to gain and retain direct access to the coast, and to maintain the integrity and unity of their empire. The second was the determination of the Fante to safeguard their independence and middlemen role in the trade between the coast and the interior. The third was the anxiety of the British to prevent the Asante from establishing political control over the coastal districts, particularly over the Fante regions; to abolish the slave trade and promote legitimate trade and western civilisation on the one hand and, on the other, their ignorance of, or refusal to recognise and pay deference to, Asante law and custom. The wars seem clearly then to be the product of the economic, political and social conditions in the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century. Let us examine each of these factors.

The determination of the Asante to gain and maintain direct access to the coast meant to the Asante either an occupation of the coastal districts entirely, or an alliance with some of the coastal states. The Asante wanted this direct foothold on the coast for two main reasons. In the first place, commercially it was obvious to them that if they could gain direct access to the European forts on the coast, they would be able to obtain more for their goods than they were getting. But, while by 1800 they had got direct access to the coast in Appollonia and Accra via the Wassa and Akyem paths respectively, they were still being prevented by the Fante from reaching the European forts at Anomabu, Kormantin, Cape Coast and Mouree. On the contrary, not only did the Fante insist on the Asante trading with them in the inland markets of Mansu and Fɔso but often on the slightest provocation they even tried to cut them off from these markets and block the paths through Wassa. In 1780, there were reports from the Cape Coast Castle that though Asante traders were at Accra and Appollonia,

they could not go to Cape Coast because the Fante would not let them pass through their country. Nine years later, it was reported that the routes were closed, and again in 1800, the English governor informed the London committee of the Company: 'The trading paths have for many months past been shut up, by a misunderstanding between the Fantees and Ashantees. This has occasioned a great stagnation of trade at Annamaboe where there is much competition.' There is absolutely no doubt that the Asante found the behaviour of the Fante increasingly exasperating and it was the basic reason for the invasion of 1806.

The second main reason why the Asante wanted to have direct access to the trading forts on the coast was political, to ensure a regular supply of arms and ammunition on which depended the very survival of their empire. This called for a firm alliance with some of the coastal peoples, in this case the Anlo and the Ga, and above all for a strong grip on Elmina. Indeed, since the Asante obtained these indispensable commodities mainly from the Dutch through Elmina, the link with Elmina became a question of life and death for the Asante throughout the nineteenth century. The Asante invasion of the coast in 1811 was clearly to relieve the Elmina and the Ga who had been besieged by the Fante as a punishment for their help to the Asante in 1806-7. One of the reasons for the Asante march to the eastern districts in 1826 was to punish the Ga for abandoning their ancient alliance with them, and in the 1860s an Asante army was dispatched to assist the Anlo against the British. But particularly sacrosanct was the Asante hold on Elmina. Hence, while in all the negotiations with the British the Asante were prepared to give up their claim to the Fante states, they never surrendered their claim to Elmina. In the negotiations with Bowditch, for instance, the Asantehene readily abandoned his claim to the Fante states but insisted on his sovereignty over Elmina being recognised and this was done, though not directly, in the third clause of the draft treaty. The Anglo-Asante peace talks of 1827 broke down because of the refusal of the Fante to stop their attacks on Elmina, and the Asante's massive invasion of the coast in 1869 was simply to warn the Fante confederation to keep its hands off Elmina.

A further main concern of the Asante, which involved them in the wars in question, was to maintain intact the empire they had inherited at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This naturally

involved the suppression of all rebellions and revolts and the punishment or disciplining of any vassal chief or subject who displayed a spirit of insubordination or disobedience. Unfortunately, as some of these states were to the south, any punitive action taken against them was bound to disrupt trade and commerce and therefore annoy or alarm the Europeans on the coast. In addition, most of these rebellious or insubordinate subjects and chiefs did not hesitate to seek refuge frequently, either with the coastal states or with the Europeans in their castles, and on several occasions, whatever the remote cause, it was the refusal of these states and peoples to hand over such fugitives that precipitated the Asante invasions.

The first Asante invasion of the coast in the nineteenth century was, as is well known, occasioned by the spirit of insubordination displayed by Otibu and Aputae, the kings of Assin, coupled with the refusal of the Fante to hand them over. Again, it was the refusal of the British governor to surrender two Asante fugitives for reasons to be discussed presently that precipitated the Asante invasion of 1863. It was for the suppression of the rebellions in Akycm and Akwapim, and in Wassa and Denkyira, that the invasions of 1814 and 1823 were launched. When, as a result of their defeat at Dodowa by the British and the Maclean Treaty of 1831, the Asante were compelled to surrender all their southern provinces—Akycm, Wassa, Denkyira, Accra, Fante and Assin—it was obvious that no lasting peace could really be established between them and the British because they never reconciled themselves to this loss. On the contrary, they cast envious glances across the Pra and looked forward to the day when the lost provinces would be regained. As a result of the skilful diplomacy of Maclean and Hill between 1830 and 1852, this nostalgic feeling was suppressed but after them it revived. It was obviously in the hope of winning back Assin that the Asantehene readily welcomed the intrigues of Otibu in 1852, an action which brought the Asante and the British face to face on the Pra in 1853 when only the last minute recall of the Asante army by the Asantehene saved the day. But there is no doubt that the invasion of 1873 was for the rescue of Elmina as well as for the reconquest of the lost provinces. It is significant that in reply to the ultimatum given by Sir Garnet Wolseley, the commander of the British forces, in October 1873, the commander-in-chief of the Asante army, Amankwatia, wrote in his

inimitable style: 'For what purpose I came here is that: Assin, Dankra, Akyem, Wassaw. These four nations belong to the king of Ashantee, and they refused to serve the king, and they escaped away unto you . . . and when you deliver Assin, Dankra, Akyem, and Wassaw unto me, I shall bring unto the king there is no any quarrel with you.' Sir Garnet of course refused this request and launched his counter-invasion.

The second main factor underlying the unrest in the Gold Coast was the position of the Fante *vis-à-vis* Asante. If the Fante either had agreed to grant the Asante free access to the coast, or had been strong enough to resist the Asante invasions or, after being conquered, had become docile subjects of the Asantehene, or even if their kings had had such control of their subjects as to be able to prevent them from abusing and insulting Asante traders, most of these wars would have been avoided. In view of the fact that they depended for their livelihood on their role as middlemen, it is natural to expect them not to have surrendered this position lightly. But realising this, they might have united themselves to resist Asante attacks, or failing that, accepted defeat and political domination by the victors. As was indicated in Chapter 9, they were divided and at each other's throats even as late as the first decade of the nineteenth century, and proved no match at all for the Asante, so that in all their encounters with them in the nineteenth century they were routed. But while, as a result of their defeats between 1806 and 1814, they became *de jure* subjects of the Asantehene as he repeatedly impressed on the British, neither the Fante nor the British would recognise this fact. In 1817, in reply to the Asantehene's claim that 'all the Fantes are his slaves by conquest, and subsequently by acts of homage, presents and tribute', the governor of the Cape Coast Castle wrote to Hutchison, the British consul in Kumasi, 'You will expressly state to the king, and in the most decided terms, that the Cape Coast people are not his slaves, nor have they ever been acknowledged as such; neither can they nor any of the natives residing under British protection be included in that most degrading title . . . Any interference on the part of the king in matters concerning the people residing under the protection of the forts cannot possibly be allowed.' The Dupuis Treaty of 1820 was rejected out of hand by the governor and his council nor was it ever ratified by the British government, because in the fifth clause the Asantehene's claim to sovereignty

over the whole of the Fante country was conceded. The failure of the British to ratify this treaty certainly strained relations between the Asantehene on the one hand and the British and the Fante on the other and was at the bottom of the invasions of the coast in the 1820s.

However, what further intensified this strain and often precipitated wars, was the fact that, besides refusing to accept their subordinate position, the Fante did not treat the Asante who came to the coast to trade with any respect, but rather tended to heap abuses on, or attack them. The rude behaviour of the people of Komenda to the Asantehene's envoys in 1819 following the arrival of news, later proved false, of the defeat of the Asante in Gyaman nearly led to war in 1820; the abuse of the Asantehene voiced by a policeman during an exchange with an Asante trader at Anomabu and his consequent execution, led to the first direct armed clash between the British and the Asante in 1824. Again in 1844, only the timely punishment of an Assin who attacked an Asante trading party and killed one of them, staved off another Asante invasion. It seems clear then that had the Fante, Assin and British recognised the sovereignty of the Asante over the coast, or even treated them with some dignity, some of the wars and scares of war would have been avoided.

A third and very important factor underlying these wars was the presence of the British on the coast. But for their encouragement of the Fante after 1823 and their physical intervention on the side of the coastal states, there is no doubt that the Asante would easily have established their sway over the whole of the coastal states and, for good or ill, Ghana today would be a monarchical kingdom ruled by the Asantehene. But neither the Company of Merchants nor later the British government would welcome the political domination of the coastal districts by the Asante for three main reasons. The first reason was precisely the same as the one given in the eighteenth century, namely, that if a single power dominated the entire coastal region it would be able to dictate the terms of trade and the European traders would be entirely at its mercy as they were in Dahomey. To this selfish eighteenth century consideration were now added two typically nineteenth century ones that were humanitarian. In the first place, the British considered the Asante as a barbarous slave-trading people and their presence on the coast would therefore not only

thwart all efforts being made to promote western education and Christianity but would also lead to the revival of the slave trade. Secondly, they argued that peace and order were the necessary prerequisites for the promotion of education and legitimate trade, and that these could only be achieved if the Asante could be given such a Palmerstonian blow as would 'deter them from repeating their aggressions'. Not only was their picture of the Asante a false one, but also, one imagines, the surest and most effective way of ensuring peace on the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century would have been for the British to have co-operated with the Asante. Yet it was for these reasons and not, it must be stressed, because of imperialistic considerations, that the British refused to recognise the Asante's perfectly legitimate claim to Fante by right of conquest, and rejected Dupuis' treaty out of hand, while they readily ratified that of Maclean in which the Asantehene was made to renounce his claims to all his southern and coastal districts. In 1824, 1826 and 1853 they went further and actually raised an army to beat back Asante invasions, and ultimately did deliver the 'Palmerstonian blow' in 1874.

However, besides these primarily selfish considerations, there was one other factor which on two occasions precipitated war. This was ignorance of, or deliberate refusal to recognise, the validity of certain Asante laws, customs and oaths on the part of the British. The execution of the policeman who abused the Asantehene was of course readily interpreted by the British as evidence of the barbarity, bloodthirstiness and brutality of the Asante, whereas it was in fact perfectly legitimate according to Asante law and custom. The best instance of this kind of thing, however, was the Kwasi Gyani episode leading to the Asante invasion of the coast in 1863. That invasion took place because the British governor, Richard Pine, refused to hand over a fugitive, Kwasi Gyani, who had refused to surrender to the Asantehene a gold nugget which he had discovered. The governor refused first because, though this was a criminal offence according to Asante law, it was not according to British law. Secondly, Pine could not believe that Gyani would 'be fairly tried; and if found guilty, will not lose a hair of his head' even though the Asantehene's messengers were prepared to swear an oath to that effect.

It seems quite obvious from the above analysis that the Asante-coastal wars of the nineteenth century were not the outcome just

of sheer love of war and bloodshed on the part of the Asante or a clash of two 'imperialisms', British and Asante. For the most part the Asante were in fact simply trying to defend the empire that they had inherited from their forefathers at the beginning of that century, while the concern of the British was ostensibly to ensure peace and order, the necessary prerequisites for the promotion of legitimate trade and civilisation; but at a deeper level the British sought to avoid the political domination of the coastal areas by the Asante.

#### EFFECTS OF THE WARS

What then were the main effects of these wars on Asante, Fante and British? The first was the dismemberment of the Asante empire. By the Maclean Treaty of 1831 and the Fomena Treaty of 1874, which followed the defeat of the Asante in 1826 and 1874 respectively, the Asante were compelled to give up for ever their sovereignty over all their southern districts: Sefwi, Denkyira, Wassa, Assin, Fante, Akyem, Accra and Kwahu. This explains why these districts today form part of the southern but not of the Asante region of Ghana. Secondly, the vassal states—Gonja, Dagomba, Krachi and Gyaman—took advantage of the destruction of Asante military power, which had been the main force holding provincial Asante together, to assert their independence and were never reconquered. Thus by 1874, the Asante empire had shrunk into the original core or metropolitan Asante (inextricably linked together by the Golden Stool), and the Brong-Ahafo states. This empire continued to exist until a few years ago when the Brong-Ahafo states were constituted into a separate region. Thus the Asante region today is coterminous with the original member states of the union, unimpeachable evidence of the strength of the state-building devices of Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye, particularly that of the Golden Stool.

Many historians—Claridge, Robinson and Gallagher, and more recently Kimble—are of the opinion that after 1874 the British adopted a policy of non-interference in Asante affairs and left the Asante to 'stew in their own juice'. 'The British were not sorry to see the break-up and weakening of the Ashanti kingdom,' writes Kimble, 'but no further action was sanctioned for some years, either to encourage or prevent it.' This view is totally wrong. The British did everything to encourage even members of the original

union to break away, particularly Juaben and Adansi. In July 1874, for instance, they sent an official, Lees, to force the Asantehene to grant complete independence to the Juabenhene and presented him with a gold-plated stool—for very obvious reasons. When news of an impending civil war between Juaben and Kumasi reached Accra in October 1875, the British sent Dr Gouldsbury to Kumasi and Juaben to offer 'his offices as a mediator'. This official was within two days march of Juaben when he heard of the defeat of Juaben. It was this defeat which led to the mass migration of the Juaben to the southern districts and the founding of modern Koforidua or New Juaben. Indeed, British policy towards Asante after 1874 was clearly stated by the Governor of the Gold Coast in his dispatch to the Colonial Office in October 1875 to be that of 'breaking up of Ashanti into two or more tribes who would be independent of each other', thereby 'preventing Kumasi from establishing itself in its former power'. It was clearly with this in view that Lees and Gouldsbury were sent to Asante, and the British pursued that policy throughout the 1870s and early 1880s during which there were rebellions even of some of the original members of the confederacy, Kokofu, Mampong and Nsuta.

However, it is evident from the recent work of Wilks and Tordoff that the last of the nineteenth century rulers of Asante, Kwaku Dua III (or Prempe I), 1888-96, proved equal to the machinations of the British. Within three years of his accession to power, he was able, thanks to the magnetic force of the Golden Stool, to win back Kokofu, Mampong and Nsuta, and to begin to negotiate with some success for the return of the Juaben, Adansi and Kokofu who had emigrated into the Colony. As Tordoff has concluded, 'Though Prempe had inherited a weak and divided kingdom, some measure of unity had been restored to it by 1891.' It is not surprising that Prempe I firmly but politely rejected the offer of British protection in 1891. The period 1883 to 1895 clearly covered not the progressive decline and inevitable downfall of the confederacy, as Kimble and other historians would have us believe, but rather its revival. Had Prempe I been given time, he would most probably have successfully retrieved the lost portions of Asante. But he was not. Five years after his firm rejection of British protection, he was arrested and exiled, ultimately to the Seychelles and, a further five years later, Asante was conquered and annexed by the British.

On the Fante, the effect of these wars was, paradoxically enough, very beneficial since, as usual, they drew closer and closer together, ending with the formation of the Confederation in 1868. It should be pointed out that up to 1826 it was the fear of Asante conquest and a common hatred of Elmina which acted as the magnet pulling the Fante states together. From 1826 to 1863, when, for all practical purposes, there was peace between them and the Asante, it was not unlikely that the union would fall apart again. However, the work of Maclean between 1830 and 1847, and from the 1850s to the early 1860s, the increasing encroachment on the judicial powers of the Fante chiefs, which led to a violent protest headed by King Aggrey of Cape Coast (who was exiled to Sierra Leone in 1867 as a consequence); and, in the late 1860s, the Anglo-Dutch exchange of forts; all three led to the retention of the union and its steady development into a full-fledged confederation in 1868. By then it had a confederate government under a king-president, a confederate army consisting of three wings—left, centre, and right—capable of putting fifteen thousand men into the field, and a confederate civil service. In August 1869, the confederation boldly declared itself independent of the British, set up a Supreme Court at Mankessim and ordered a poll tax to meet the cost of administration. The whole movement reached its climax and maturity at a meeting at Mankessim in October 1871 at which a complete constitution of forty-seven articles was adopted. It had then become, in the words of Horton, 'the pivot of national unity: headed by intelligent men, to whom a great deal of the powers of the kings and chiefs are delegated' and quite a force to be reckoned with. Certainly, had the British encouraged it or even left it alone, the confederation might well have survived. But instead they arrested the leaders a month after this epoch-making meeting, on the absolutely untenable charge of treason, and imprisoned them. Though the leaders were released a month later on the instructions of the Colonial Secretary, the confederation never recovered from the blow, and within two years it had ceased to exist.

On the British, the main effect of these wars was to establish a link between them and the southern states and peoples, which ended in the formal conversion of the latter into the British Crown Colony of the Gold Coast in July 1874. It should be noted that, although official British policy until the 1860s remained one of

non-interference in the affairs of the African states, the British officials on the spot ignored this, and in 1824 and 1826 actually took part in the wars on the side of the coastal states for reasons already outlined. When the British government officially withdrew from the coast in 1828 on the ground of the increasing cost of administration, it confidently hoped that British involvement in the affairs of the local states would also end, and, to ensure this, it specifically instructed the Committee of Merchants that took over to confine its jurisdiction only to the forts. Paradoxically enough this period of merchant rule from 1828 to 1843 witnessed a deeper involvement of the British in the affairs of the states than ever before, this being the direct outcome of the work of George Maclean who became the President—and not the Governor—of the Council of Merchants in Cape Coast from 1830 to 1843. Deliberately ignoring his instructions, Maclean concluded a treaty with the Asante and actively interfered in the affairs of the southern states with a view to ensuring peace and order, the necessary prerequisites for the promotion of trade. The outcome of his work was not only the establishment of peace between the Asante and the coastal peoples from 1831 till the 1860s, and the booming of trade between 1830 and 1840, but, as the Select Committee of 1842 reported, the exercise of 'a very wholesome influence over a coast not much less than 100-150 miles in extent, and considerable distance inland, preventing within that range external slave trade, maintaining peace and security, exercising a useful though irregular jurisdiction of the neighbouring tribes and mitigating some of their atrocious practices.'

However successful it was, Maclean's work was clearly irregular and illegal. It was mainly to allow for its legalisation and continuation that the British government accepted the Select Committee's recommendation to assume direct administration of the Gold Coast forts from the merchants, appointed Commander Hill as Governor in 1843 and Maclean as the Judicial Assessor. The work assigned to Hill was three-fold: to put Maclean's work on a proper legal footing, to set up a new system of administration and to continue the work of promoting Christianity and education.

#### THE BOND

The first of the assignments that Hill tackled was that of jurisdiction, and it was the negotiations that he commenced with the

coastal chiefs soon after his arrival in Cape Coast that led to the conclusion of the now famous Bond of 1844 on 6 March, the precise date that Ghana chose as her date for independence. The Bond consists of only three short clauses. In the first clause the signatory chiefs—eight of them including those of Denkyira Anomabu, Cape Coast and Assin—undertook to acknowledge the power and jurisdiction that had hitherto been exercised on behalf of the Queen of England and to declare that 'the first objects of law are the protection of individuals and property'. In the second clause, they agreed to consider human sacrifice and other barbarous customs such as panyarring as 'abominations and contrary to law'. In the third and final clause, they agreed to allow murders, robberies and other crimes and offences to be tried and inquired of 'before the Queen's judicial officers and the chiefs of the districts, moulding the customs of the country according to the general principles of British law'. It is evident from these terms that the Bond was primarily retrospective—it merely recognised, but did not create Maclean's work—and cannot therefore be considered as opening a new chapter, as Padmore contends. The sovereign power of the signatories, except over criminal offences, was fully recognised; even the exercise of this limited jurisdiction by the British officials was to be founded, as the Colonial Secretary insisted in 1844, 'on the assent and concurrence of the sovereign power of the state within which it is exercised'; and, as we shall see presently, the Bond had absolutely nothing to do with the circumstances leading to the creation of the Crown Colony of the Gold Coast in 1874. Neither can it in any way be regarded as the Magna Carta of the Fante, as Balmer maintains; it ended no despotism and conferred no rights on the Fante; on the contrary, it deprived the Fante chiefs of their sole right to exercise criminal jurisdiction and should therefore be regarded as the very opposite of a Magna Carta. It would seem from the above that the importance of the Bond in the history of Ghana has been grossly exaggerated.

The exercise of this formally recognised jurisdiction continued as before as long as Maclean remained the Judicial Assessor. But after his death in 1847, and the appointment of a Chief Justice in 1850, cases began to be tried according to British law only, and to the total exclusion of the chiefs. This usurpation of the judicial powers of the chiefs, which reached its climax in the late 1850s when a single person acted as the Chief Justice and Judicial

Assessor, began a wave of protests led by King Aggrey of Cape Coast and Otibu of Assin. As we have seen, this was one of the important factors leading to the rise of the Fante confederation movement. Two things prevented further extension of British power and jurisdiction in the southern districts in the 1850s and 1860s: first, the increasing opposition of the chiefs, and second, the failure to raise sufficient revenue either through custom duties or direct taxation (in the form of the poll tax of 1852) to meet administration costs, which became increasingly heavy with the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1850. And this failure coupled with the Asante war of 1863-4 led to the setting up of the Select Committee of 1865 which recommended the eventual withdrawal of the British from all West Africa 'except probably Sierra Leone'.

Had the recommendations of the Select Committee of 1865 been enforced, and the Fante Confederation received the blessing and support of the British officials on the spot, the British might well have reverted to the role they were playing at the beginning of the century. But the oft-quoted report of the Select Committee was actually not debated by Parliament until 1873, the Fante confederation movement was in fact killed by 1872 and, two years later, all the southern districts were converted into the British Crown Colony of the Gold Coast. It is clear then that a fundamental change occurred in the policy of the British government towards the Gold Coast in the early 1870s, a change from one of withdrawal, or at least non-interference, to one of entrenchment.

Three considerations account for this change. The first was financial. With the Anglo-Dutch exchange of forts and the consequent withdrawal of the Dutch from the Gold Coast in 1870, the British became hopeful of solving one of their principal problems, that of raising sufficient revenue from custom duties to meet the cost of administration. This hope did in fact materialise, for trade considerably revived after the departure of the Dutch, and between 1875 and 1880, the annual revenue derived from customs duties alone was £90,000 while the total expenditure on the country was £83,000. The second main reason was the change in British public opinion towards colonies, or as we might put it, the beginning of the rise of the new imperialism in Europe in general, and Britain in particular. It is interesting to note that one reason given by one of the top officials in the Colonial Office against implementing the

recommendations of the Select Committee, when they were being discussed in February 1873, was that 'in the present tone and temper of the British mind, no abandonment of territory would be permitted by Parliament or sanctioned by public opinion'. Indeed, because of these two considerations, Kimberley, the Colonial Secretary, decided early in 1873 to convert the southern districts into a British moral protectorate. But before the letter in which this new policy was outlined could be despatched to Accra, news of the Asante invasion of the coastal districts at the beginning of 1873 reached England. Anxious now to win respect for Britain and recognition of her as the paramount power on the coast, Kimberley abandoned his half-hearted measures, declared the war an 'imperial war' and ordered a counter-invasion of Asante. The conquest of Asante put Britain in a strong position to do whatever she liked with the states of the Gold Coast, on the grounds that 'the sole guarantee against further Ashanti attack lay in a strong government on the coast and a strong defensive grouping of the coastal states under British protection', or, as one of the under-secretaries in the Colonial Office minutes, more succinctly, put it in April 1874, 'complete annexation or total abandonment are I fear the only alternatives. The former is too ghastly a scheme to contemplate, the latter too charming to be capable of execution'. Lord Carnarvon, the new Colonial Secretary, decided on the 'very evil choice' of annexation. In July 1874 therefore, a new charter was issued converting the southern states into the British Crown Colony of the Gold Coast. It should be clear from this analysis then, that the establishment, and the time at which it was established, of a crown colony rather than a protectorate, were both the direct outcome of the Anglo-Asante war of 1873-4.

## NOTE

1 To panyar (originally Portuguese) was to kidnap a townsman of a debtor as security for debt and to get the relations of the man panyarred to put pressure on the debtor to pay up. From this, the practice developed of selling the man panyarred into slavery if the debt was not paid in time, and this could also develop into indiscriminate kidnapping of traders.

## 21 The Growth of European Influence in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century

J. E. FLINT

IT is one of the ironies of history that the slave trade period, during which European economic activities (if trading in men can be so termed) did incalculable damage to West African society, was also one in which direct European cultural or political influence was almost negligible. The centuries of European slave trading produced nothing more in the way of European political influence than a few French forts in the Senegal region, a British fort in the Gambia, and the British and Dutch forts built on sites rented from Africans in the Gold Coast.

Conversely, the movement to abolish the slave trade, and the new economic relationship brought about by European demands for produce instead of slaves, created a situation in which European political and cultural influence, from its weak position in 1800, was almost totally dominant by 1900, though the pace of this growth was far from steady, or uniform in all areas.

The first important victory of the anti-slavery movement, the ruling in 1772 by Chief Justice Mansfield that English law could not uphold slavery in England, led directly to the first positive attempt to create a new Afro-European relationship in the foundation of Sierra Leone in 1787 by private evangelical initiative. The new settlement began as a somewhat Utopian attempt to translate into practice both the moral and economic implications of the anti-slavery philosophy. It was to be a community of free Negroes in which the slave trade would play no part, and by its agricultural and commercial success with 'legitimate' products it would demonstrate to the surrounding African peoples and rulers that 'legitimate commerce' was not only more righteous, but more profitable, than the slave trade. It has been seen<sup>1</sup> that the Sierra Leone settlement ran into grave difficulties, and that much of the original idealism evaporated. Nevertheless the Sierra Leone experiment made a permanent impact on the nature of the British presence in West Africa. With the passing of the 1807 Act which

made slave trading illegal for British subjects, the Royal Navy's West African Squadron (which had the task of enforcing the Act) became based on Freetown harbour, and Sierra Leone was taken over from the Sierra Leone Company to become the first British Crown Colony in West Africa. Its significance thereafter for British influence was of the utmost importance. Politically it became the centre and base for all British activity until the 1880s, its importance as a harbour, its historical connection with the anti-slavery impulse, and the fact that it became a centre of missionary educational activity, meant that Britain never contemplated its abandonment (as she did her other areas of influence). Culturally, the significance of Sierra Leone became even more profound, for it became a diffusion centre for the English language, the Protestant religion, British trade, and British ideas throughout West Africa. This arose from the landing of thousands of Africans at Freetown, liberated from slave ships by the Royal Navy. These people came from almost every section of the peoples of West Africa; the experience of capture, being sold on board a slave ship, liberation and landing in Freetown, followed by the attempts at relief by the missionaries, was a shattering experience which could not fail to alter their attitudes to life. Torn from their families and homes, they were forced to develop just those qualities of individualism and self-help which missionaries at first believed would 'save' Africa. Most of them became pro-British and pro-Christian, and many of them returned to their original homelands.

The humanitarians thus succeeded in shifting the British centre of operations in West Africa. Hitherto, in the slave trade era, the Gold Coast forts, administered by the chartered Company of African Merchants, had been the focus of British activity. With the emergence of Sierra Leone the future of the British presence in the Gold Coast was seriously in doubt. The purpose of retaining a series of forts originally built to prosecute the slave trade, administered by a company historically implicated in the slave trade, was not at all clear in the new era of anti-slave trade policies. If a new and prosperous 'legitimate' trade had rapidly emerged in the Gold Coast, the British attitude would have been firmer, but Gold Coast trade remained feeble; a small gold trade trickled on, but the palm oil resources of the Gold Coast were confined to a narrow belt of territory behind the coast, and not at all comparable to those of the Niger area. In addition to these considerations

Britain had to adopt an attitude to the growing desire of the Asante to break the hold of the Fante power on the coast and establish direct contact with Europeans. Here Britain vacillated; in the abstract it could be seen that there might be real advantages in expanding trade through Asante's northern contacts with the trade routes to the Western Sudan; on the other hand British officials on the Gold Coast feared that their influence would be much limited if a strong power like Asante established a firm and unified control of the coast. Meanwhile the humanitarians, pressing home the idea that Sierra Leone should now be Britain's base, mounted attacks on the Company of African Merchants. In 1821 Parliament finally abolished the company for its failure to work effectively against the slave trade, and the Gold Coast forts were placed under the control of Governor M'Carthy of Sierra Leone.

M'Carthy resolved almost at once to break the Asante hold on the coast, and embarked upon the disastrous campaign which was to result in the defeat of the British forces and M'Carthy's own death in 1824. Though the Asante were defeated in 1826, such a disaster was bound to provoke further probing of the basic question as to whether the British presence in the Gold Coast served any purpose at all. The government decided by 1827 that it did not, and that Britain should withdraw. After opposition from traders on the Gold Coast, supported by the trinket manufacturers of Birmingham, a compromise was agreed whereby, in return for a small subsidy, the forts would be administered by a committee of merchants in London. It was this committee which appointed George Maclean as its representative on the coast, and it was Maclean, with very limited resources, who succeeded in making peace with Asante, and not only keeping alive but actually expanding British influence on the coast between 1830 and 1843. As far as the British government was concerned, it had withdrawn from the Gold Coast.

During the years from 1800 to 1830, the French, from their base in Senegal, faced similar frustrations to those of the British in the Gold Coast. The basic problem faced by the French was similar, for as a result of the European peace settlement of 1815 they had abandoned the slave trade. Senegal therefore had to be furnished with a new economic base. The French did not, at first, look to 'legitimate commerce' in the sense of trying to develop new and

existing trade with Africans. Instead they followed the plan of keeping Senegalese labour in Senegal and setting it to work on plantations of new crops. At first it was even planned to introduce white settlers for this purpose, and in 1818 the French government sent out troop reinforcements, agricultural experts and machinery to start the schemes. It was believed that white settlement and efficient farming would be observed and imitated by surrounding African chiefs, who would start their own plantations, and become a consuming class for French exports. When white settlement failed the French persisted in their view that the economy should be developed through plantations, owned if necessary by half-castes or Africans. The new Governor Roger arrived in Senegal in 1821 with instructions to develop Senegal as a producer of France's raw material needs, as a market for French exports, and as a 'centre of French civilisation'. He, too, brought experts, and began a botanical garden to encourage the establishment of plantations around St Louis, but had little more success than his predecessor. Almost the only result of all these efforts by 1830 was the annual export of about twenty tons of cotton. By 1840 the plantations policy was abandoned, and the French now turned their efforts to developing the commerce of the Senegal river with the Western Sudan, and in particular concentrated on the groundnut trade.

Between 1800 and 1830, therefore, European influence had grown very slowly and with setbacks. Senegal, Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast (precariously) were still the centres of interest and activity in West Africa. In the next thirty years a combination of factors began to push Europeans, especially the British, into the area of the Niger delta. These were: (1) the rise of the palm oil trade, (2) advances in European geographical knowledge of West Africa, and (3) a renewed surge of humanitarian interest. Let us look at each of these factors in turn.

The palm oil trade resulted from economic developments in England, taking place in and near one of the centres of English slave-trade shipping, Liverpool. South and west of Liverpool, in Cheshire, the English chemical industry was beginning to take shape, finding a basis in the production of soap in ever-increasing quantities. Soap had hitherto been a hand-made article, a luxury item for the use of the rich. But with the industrial revolution and its urban grime and grease, a mass demand arose. Vegetable oils were needed in mass production, and palm oil was found to be the

ingredient which produced the best lather. At the same time, north of Liverpool, the Lancashire cotton factories were making greater demands for lubricating oil for their machines. It so happened that behind the great slave markets of the Niger delta, now barred to Liverpool merchants by the anti-slave trade Act of 1807, lay the great palm forests. The Liverpool merchants therefore moved into Brass, Bonny and Calabar, whose middlemen African traders gradually turned over from slave trading to palm oil to satisfy the demand. By the 1840s and 1850s the 'Oil Rivers', as they were now appropriately called, had become the largest and most lucrative centre of West African trade, and the African coastal states controlled the transfer of oil from the Ibo and Ibibio interior to the Europeans. In this area at least a 'legitimate commerce' had driven out the slave trade.

The movement of geographical exploration by Europeans began out of straightforward curiosity in the age of enlightenment at the end of the eighteenth century. But it was natural that, once begun, exploration should also seek to serve the interests of commerce by listing commercial products and potential markets, and also that some explorers should be of the humanitarian bent, and expatiate upon the horrors of the internal slave trade. The effect of these explorations was to tempt both European commerce and humanitarians inland. Mungo Park on the upper Niger, the Frenchman René Caillié in his journeys from Senegal to Timbuktu, Clapperton in Bornu and the Fulani empire of Northern Nigeria, all exposed a new Africa to European eyes and imagination. The Muslim Sudan seemed in every way more attractive to Europe; it was drier and therefore believed healthier, its people seemed more 'civilised' because, outwardly, they seemed more like Europeans with their centralised monarchical states, standing armies, and systems of taxation. Their long flowing cotton robes surely presented another opportunity for Lancashire's cotton exporters. And above all there was the Niger, the fabulous river, the artery of West Africa, the highway to the interior. What millions of customers could be reached from its banks! Did God create this river for the penetration of the Christian gospel? Europeans at this time, especially the shipbuilding British, were indeed obsessed with rivers, for they were about to embark on the technical revolution of the steamship, a vessel independent of winds and currents which could ascend any river deep enough. Steamships were soon to open up all the

great rivers of the world; the Yangtze, Mississippi, Amazon, Danube and Ganges, and the Niger would be no exception.

In 1830 the final geographical problem of the Niger was dramatically solved when Richard Lander, by following the river's flow by canoe from Bussa to the sea, discovered that the river entered the sea at precisely the point of maximum European trade in West Africa—the Oil Rivers. At once the Niger assumed added significance; it could be used not only to tap the Muslim north, but also to cut behind the African middlemen of the Oil Rivers to trade directly with the Ibo producers of palm oil. Lander's discovery was seized upon by Macgregor Laird, a younger member of a famous shipbuilding family, who proceeded to build the world's first ocean-going iron steamship, in which he and Lander ascended the Niger in 1832-4. Their experience, however, was a catastrophe, for they had underestimated the effects of the mosquito—one-third of the Europeans involved died. Laird resolved not to return to the Niger until the health problem was solved.

This setback would have drawn a temporary halt to Niger penetration had it not been for the third factor mentioned earlier, the renewed surge of humanitarian interest. Between 1807 (when the British government took over the Sierra Leone colony) and 1838, the anti-slavery forces in British politics were unable to concentrate their attention on West Africa, for during this time they were engaged, first under Wilberforce, and then under their new leader Thomas Fowell Buxton, in the great political campaign to abolish slavery in British colonies, which centred on the West Indies question. In 1833 the Abolition Act was passed, but for the next five years the humanitarians attacked the system of apprenticeship in the West Indies whereby freed Negroes were bound to their ex-masters during a transitional period. Apprenticeship was abolished in 1838. Almost immediately Fowell Buxton swung the energies of the movement around to West Africa. Fowell Buxton's followers were appalled by the discovery that the Atlantic slave trade had in fact *increased* since Britain had begun her campaign against it in 1807. They therefore concluded that the policy of patrolling the West African coast with the naval squadron was a failure. A new policy must be found. In 1840, Buxton published his answer in a book entitled *The African Slave Trade and its Remedy*. The 'remedy' lay not in naval force, but in legitimate commerce, which by its inherent superiority would drive the slave

trade out by competition, so that even if the demand for slaves in America continued, Africans would no longer supply it, being intent on the greater profits to be made from legitimate commerce. The means to this salvation lay in the steamship and the Niger. Buxton proposed a great expedition to Lokoja, the strategic key to the Niger and Benue river systems. A model farm would be established to teach Africans new agricultural techniques, treaties would be made in which local rulers would agree to abolish slave trading in return for guaranteed legitimate trade, and commerce would flow down to the sea. The humanitarians were at the peak of their influence, and the British government adopted the plan, despite the warnings of Macgregor Laird. In 1841 the largest expedition yet sent to West Africa ascended the Niger. It was an unmitigated disaster. All the Europeans went down with fever, and forty-eight of them died on the river. The failure was a very serious blow to humanitarian influence, exposing them to the charge of ignorance of local conditions. Fowell Buxton's health collapsed from the shock, and he died shortly afterwards, the last of the really powerful political figures to lead British humanitarian politics.

Above all, the failure of the 1841 expedition reinforced the idea of West Africa as the 'white man's grave'. In fact British cultural influence from this time until the 1870s grew much more from the efforts of coloured Englishmen (like T. B. Freeman, the Methodist missionary, whose mother was African), British West Indians (like those of the Presbyterian mission in Calabar) and 'liberated Africans' from Sierra Leone, than it did from white effort. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first Anglican African bishop, decided to take holy orders directly as a result of his experiences on the Niger expedition and his feeling of horror at so many white men's deaths. From this decision eventually grew the great Niger Mission. Similarly, liberated Africans played a considerable part, together with white missionaries, in involving the British in the politics of Yorubaland. British missionaries here were following the return of the Egba 'exiles' from Sierra Leone to Abeokuta, Lagos and Badagri in the late 1830s and the 1840s, and it was these developments, as well as pressure from British traders, which eventually produced British interference in the politics of Lagos in 1851 and culminated in the annexation of Lagos in 1861.

Nevertheless, if the British seem to have retreated from interior

penetration in the 1840s, they did not retreat from the coasts. Indeed they began to show some realisation of the fact that British political influence was expanding. In 1843, after a parliamentary inquiry, the British government officially returned to the Gold Coast, taking back administration of the forts from the committee of merchants. As yet, however, they were unwilling to recognise that this was in any sense a colonial commitment. The undoubted extension of British power in a territory she did not claim was disguised by the curious legal fictions of the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1843, empowering the Crown to exercise power 'in a foreign country in as full a manner as if that country had been acquired by conquest or cession'. The need for such powers to be passed legally to the British government lay behind the Bond of 1844.<sup>2</sup> In 1850, there was a further expansion of British influence in the Gold Coast when Britain bought up the Danish forts on the coast. One may detect a similar assertiveness in the Niger area at about the same time. Here again the British shunned any direct colonial rule;<sup>3</sup> instead the trader John Beecroft was made consul in 1849, and he was soon interfering in the politics not only of Lagos, but of Bonny and Calabar, in the interests of British palm oil traders.

In the 1840s and 1850s the French were similarly expanding their influence, in some ways in a more spectacular fashion. Between 1837 and 1842 the French naval officer Bouet-Willaumez made a series of voyages along the coast, calling at places where French traders had established themselves. At several of these trading posts he signed treaties with local African rulers, granting protectorates to France in the Gabon area, the Ivory Coast, and Mauritania. Most of these places did in fact become French colonies in the 1880s, although France did not maintain an unbroken authority.

In Senegal a much more aggressive spirit began to manifest itself after 1850. This was the result of several factors. We have seen that the policy of trying to develop plantation agriculture in Senegal failed, and the French changed their policy to one of developing commerce with Africans. Just as the British had begun to look on the Niger as a highway to the Sudan, so the French (partly as a result of the work of their explorers, like René Caillié) began to form the plan of penetrating to the Muslim states of the Western Sudan along the Senegal river, and from there building a

system of trade routes across to the upper Niger. These ambitions cut across existing African trade patterns, most of them controlled by powerful Muslim rulers, who naturally opposed such schemes. In addition, the interior trade was subject to numerous tolls and taxes, which the French found irksome. The basic cause, therefore, of French expansion in Senegal in the 1850s was desire to break into the interior trade routes, and destroy the commercial control of African rulers. But the new assertiveness of the French also owed something to personalities. The radical French revolution of 1848 soon saw the emergence of Louis Napoleon, first as President, then in 1852 as Emperor, anxious to restore to France something of the lost glory of Napoleon I. It was therefore possible for an energetic governor in Senegal to find some support for expansionist plans from the home government. As early as 1850 Governor Protet was given instructions to pursue an 'energetic' policy, and to refuse the payment of trade tolls to inland states. The real forward thrust began in earnest, however, with the appointment of Governor Faidherbe, a military man with experience of the long Algerian campaigns, and a considerable understanding of Islam. Faidherbe resolved to achieve complete French domination of the Senegal river, to make the Senegal an artery for the commerce of the Western Sudan, and to use Senegal as a base for expansion eastwards.

Faidherbe governed Senegal from 1854 to 1861, and then again from 1863 to 1865. He began by creating a formidable French African army of Senegal, a significant development, for soon the Senegalese 'tirailleurs' became a famous part of French military power.<sup>4</sup> With this force Faidherbe then embarked upon a series of campaigns; the coastal region was effectively occupied both north and south of the Gambia river (and the new city of Dakar founded in 1857), whilst a series of campaigns lasting several years were fought in the interior. Here the main obstacle to the French was the Tukulor empire of Al-hājj 'Umar<sup>5</sup>, centred at this time in Futa Jallon. In the long run both Faidherbe and Al-hājj 'Umar wished to avoid a final trial of strength, and in 1860 they signed a treaty virtually delimiting their spheres of influence. Al-hājj 'Umar abandoned the left bank of the Senegal and the Falémé river basin to the French; thereby for all practical purposes shifting the centre of his state eastwards to re-form in the Sudan proper. By 1864, the French were in full control of the Senegal

river. Missions were dispatched towards the Niger, the most important being that of the naval lieutenant Mage, instructed to survey the possibility of building a line of posts from Senegal to Bamako, on the Niger, and to visit Al-hājj 'Umar's new centre of power to arrange with him a mutual trade treaty whereby he agreed to channel trade down to the Senegal river.

Despite all this military activity the result was not to convert Senegal into a directly administered colony. The object was trade. Faidherbe left no permanent garrisons in the interior, nor did he attempt to levy any direct taxes. Faidherbe believed more in the effectiveness of a French cultural and economic impact than in close administration. To this end he devoted much attention to education, especially of the sons of chiefs, and the government began inspecting Muslim and Christian schools. A deliberate effort was also made to impress Africans with the glories of French culture by creating a dignified and well-planned city in St Louis, with a library, museum and many graceful stone buildings. Dakar was to be another such showplace.

By the 1860s it seemed almost as if a scramble for West Africa was beginning. Faidherbe's campaigns led to increased activity by the French in the 'Rivières du Sud' (i.e. what became French Guinea) which alarmed the British in Sierra Leone. Similarly the French became worried for their trading interests by British moves in Lagos and the Niger. In the 1850s the shock of the disastrous British Niger expedition began to wear off. The British sent Barth, the greatest of all African explorers, across the Sahara to Sokoto and Bornu, and in 1854 W. B. Baikie, financed by Laird, led an expedition up the river Niger to try to link up with Barth. In this he failed, but the other results of Baikie's voyage were revolutionary, for, by administering regular doses of quinine to his crew Baikie (himself a surgeon) ensured that every man came out alive—the health barrier for Europeans had begun to crack. Baikie's expedition also made a profit on trade, and this attracted a steady development of trade on the main Niger, particularly by firms from Glasgow, London and Manchester, shut out from the Oil Rivers by monopolistic practices of the Liverpool traders and African middlemen, who naturally opposed the Niger traders, often by force, and naval expeditions began to accompany the annual trading ventures.

Events in Lagos, however, did more to alarm the French. The

British intervention in 1852, deposing Kosoko, had led only to intrigue and instability in Lagos, whilst the British nominee rulers became more and more their puppets. Pressure from missionaries, traders and 'Sierra Leoneans', together with the ambitions of local officials, led to the open annexation of Lagos as a new British colony in 1861. The French feared, with real justification, that British officials would expand along the lagoons to impose customs duties on French traders to support Lagos revenues. In retaliation and to prevent this the French declared a protectorate over Porto Novo in 1863, and Cotonou in 1868, thus establishing claims to the coast of what became their colony of Dahomey.

However, a scramble did not materialise. From 1863 both France and Britain began to retreat politically and this had the effect of postponing partition for almost twenty years. The fact was that British and French local interests, missionaries, traders and ambitious officials, seemed to have usurped metropolitan control, and both the French and British governments began to clamp down on their local representatives. The French abandoned their protectorate over Porto Novo in 1864, and the Cotonou protectorate of 1868 was not enforced. Similarly the British restrained further attempts by Lagos officials to expand the colony. The British attitude was conditioned by events in the Gold Coast. In 1863, the Asante invaded the south, and in two successive campaigns the British failed to defeat them. This humiliation was the signal for an attack on government policy by parliamentary critics of expansion in West Africa. The government was almost defeated on the issue, and forced to set up the Select Committee on West Africa, which reported in 1865. This famous document advocated no further extension of territory and the preparation of Africans at present under British rule for self-government, with a view to the withdrawal from all settlements, except Sierra Leone. The committee's basic attitude was that West African colonies involved Britain in useless responsibility, expense and loss of life; the object of Britain's presence was trade, and it was shown in the Oil Rivers and the Niger that a lucrative trade could be pursued without recourse to colonial rule.

Such a report from the British Parliament probably helped to convince the French that they, too, could afford to relax. If not, any French West African ambitions were shattered by the Prussian war of 1870, when Napoleon III's forces were rapidly routed by

the efficient Prussian army, the Bonapartist state collapsed, and civil war erupted in Paris. The political history of France from 1870 to 1879 was one of extreme uncertainty, in which, within the Third Republic, Republicans, Monarchists (of several factions), Bonapartists and Socialists struggled to seize control of the regime. Overseas activity was out of the question in these conditions, and in any case French public opinion regarded the major French task as the recovery of the lost provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, seized by the Prussians in 1870. Colonial activity in Africa therefore seemed an almost treasonable diversion of effort.

The 1870 war was the culmination of the process by which Prussia, under the skilful direction of Bismarck, had unified Germany, and the victory was the opportunity for the proclamation of a united German Reich. France was so utterly defeated that Germany could have seized all her colonies, and Bismarck was urged to do so by the towns of Bremen and Hamburg. These towns (which before the unification enjoyed separate status) were the centres of a growing German trade with West Africa. The Germans had begun trading in Sierra Leone in the 1830s; they had then moved into Liberia after it became independent. In the middle of the century the German firm of O'Swald began an important and profitable trade by shipping cowrie shells from Zanzibar (where they were of little value) to Whydah for use as currency. In 1852 the firm moved to Lagos, where Germans were soon larger traders than the British. In 1869 O'Swald sold their Lagos interests to the firm of Gaiser and Witt, which became the main palm oil traders in Germany, setting up oil-crushing plants throughout the Reich. German traders also established an important position in the Cameroons, where by 1874 they were the main competitor of the British. The century also saw important German missionary endeavours. German missionaries were significant in the Gold Coast, whilst in what became German Togoland the North German Missionary Society established itself after 1847, with the support of the commercial firm of Victor, whose profits in Togo were used to support the mission.

Despite these growing interests, Bismarck was not tempted by French colonies in Africa in 1870. He was basically opposed to the idea of German colonisation. Germany had no navy to maintain contact with colonies, and Bismarck believed, like the British anti-colonialists, that colonies were useless and expensive burdens on the

state. His reply to the plan to seize French colonies was 'I want no colonies. They are good only for providing offices. For us colonial enterprise would be just like the silks and sables of Polish noble families, who have no shirts.'

With France on her knees, and with Germany uninterested in political adventures in West Africa, Britain was thus free from 1870 to 1879 to try to implement the policy laid down in 1865 of commercial expansion without colonial expansion. It should be noted, however, that no withdrawal took place. When the Fante, alarmed at the prospect of British withdrawal leaving them to the mercy of the Asante, tried to build a modern constitution for the state, they were treated by local British officials as traitors, and the plan ruined.<sup>6</sup> Similarly there were no moves to withdraw from Lagos, though Governor Glover was sacked in 1872 for his aggressive attitudes. On the other hand, no expansion took place, and on the Niger the mission of W. H. Simpson to Nupe in 1871 was designed to secure British commercial expansion under the 'protectorate' of the Etsu of Nupe. More striking perhaps is the failure of the British to seize Asante during Wolseley's campaign which captured Kumasi in 1874; instead an indemnity was extracted in gold and the army withdrew; the only positive result seems to have been the establishment of the Gold Coast Colony in 1874, the legal recognition of what had been the practice since 1844.

From 1879, however, the British ceased to have things so conveniently free from foreign European intervention. In that year the French once more became active in West Africa, showing thereafter a vigour and determination much greater even than in the days of Faidherbe. It is important to understand this new development, for it set in train the whole process of partition of West Africa between Britain, France and Germany, and throughout the next twenty years it was France which set the pace of partition.'

In 1879 the long years of uncertainty about the constitution in France came to an end with the deposition of the monarchist President Macmahon—the Republicans inherited the Republic. From this time the monarchist and Bonapartist forces ceased to be a threat to the state. Revenge and the recovery of Alsace and Lorraine were still the dream of patriotic Frenchmen, but such plans could not possibly be implemented then; Germany was much stronger than France, Bismarck's diplomacy had allied her

to Austria in 1879, and would ally her to Russia in 1881, whilst France was isolated. But Germany would not oppose French colonial expansion; in fact Bismarck positively encouraged it, for in his opinion it would weaken France, divert her resources from Europe to Africa, and make any French war of revenge even less likely. France, he hoped, might even come to think of expansion in Africa as compensation for her losses in 1870. In this he was too optimistic, but some influential French politicians were beginning to think France should expand in Africa for quite other reasons. Some saw West Africa as a great military training ground, whilst 'black Frenchmen', created by France's 'civilising mission' would swell French armies for the day of revenge against Germany. Others, like Jules Ferry, himself from Alsace, saw the contest with Germany as essentially economic. The unification of Germany had resulted in massive German industrial expansion; whilst German and British exports competed fiercely in world markets, French industry could not keep pace. France, thought Ferry, needed tropical colonies as sources of raw materials, where in addition colonial policy could create customs barriers in favour of French industry. 'Colonial policy is the daughter of industrial policy' were his words.

The first French moves in the 'scramble' began in Central Africa, in response to King Leopold of the Belgians' activities in the Congo. Jules Ferry, at that time Minister of Education in France, feared for the security of French influence in the Gabon, and therefore despatched in 1879 (with Education Ministry funds!) the explorer de Brazza to secure the north bank of the Congo to France. In West Africa the new imperialism was much more carefully thought out; it began by developing the ideas of Faïdherbe that Senegal should be the base for expansion into the Sudan. In 1879 the French began building the first West African railway from Dakar to St Louis. This move provoked considerable African resistance in Cayor, through which the railway ran, which led to military campaigns and direct administration through nominated chiefs. In 1880 plans for extending this railway into the Sudan were set on foot; Galliéni was given the task of surveying the proposed line from St Louis to the Niger and negotiating a French protectorate with Ahmadu, the son of Al-hājj 'Umar. In this Galliéni failed, being kept virtually a prisoner by Ahmadu for ten months. This in turn unleashed a series of French campaigns

between 1880 and 1883 designed to establish a series of fortified posts from Medina on the Senegal to Bamako on the Niger.

None of these moves from Senegal particularly worried the British, though there was concern for the frontiers and hinterland of Sierra Leone. They were much more dismayed by events on the lower Niger, where British trade predominated, and in the Congo region. In 1880 a French firm appeared to trade on the Niger in competition with the British United African Company, formed in 1879 by George Goldie as a monopolistic amalgam of all the British Niger traders. In 1881 another French firm joined in the Niger trade, and its chief agent was given consular status by the French, and began trying to make treaties with African rulers. The British consul in the Oil Rivers reported home that he feared the French might advance from the Gabon into the Cameroons, and then into Iboland, cutting behind the African coastal middlemen and the Liverpool traders to obtain direct access to the palm oil producing regions. A fierce trade war developed between French firms and Goldie's company (now renamed in more patriotic style the 'National African Company'). The consul in the Oil Rivers demanded the creation of a British colony to include the Cameroons, and looked forward to building a pleasant hill station for himself in the Cameroons mountains, from which to administer the new colony. But the Colonial Office would have none of the plan, and the Treasury refused to provide money enough even for the 'presents' necessary to sweeten the chiefs into signing treaties. After months of delay the consul was at last provided with £5000, and ordered to establish a 'protectorate', which he would administer under the Foreign Office.

The British consul, after making treaties in the Oil Rivers, arrived in the Cameroons in 1884 to find himself forestalled, not by the French, but by Germany. In fact Germany had declared protectorates over Togoland as well as the Cameroons.<sup>4</sup>

How is this extraordinary change of policy to be explained? It might be imagined that Bismarck had changed his ideas and was now a supporter of German colonisation, but this was not the case; his motives were diplomatic. By this time Germany's international position was almost impregnable, for Austria, Russia and Italy had all linked themselves to Germany by alliances. Of the major European powers only England and France remained outside Bismarck's system. Bismarck hoped to attach England to

Germany, especially after England occupied Egypt (a move much resented by France) in 1882. Bismarck believed that French opposition to Britain in Egypt would lead the British to give diplomatic concessions to Germany, and perhaps even cede the island of Heligoland,<sup>9</sup> to secure German support, but this did not happen. Bismarck's colonial adventures in 1884 were all directed against Britain; they were intended to appear as threats to the Gold Coast and Nigeria. The move could produce either of two results, both of which would satisfy Bismarck; the British might see 'reason' and offer Germany concessions; on the other hand the French might be tempted by a German offer of joint co-operation in the colonial field, and this co-operation in the end might lead to a growing amity between France and Germany and the healing of the wounds of 1870.

This last aim was very optimistic, but it was seriously attempted. In the summer of 1884, Bismarck persuaded the French Premier Jules Ferry to join Germany in summoning a West African Conference in Berlin. The object of the conference was to destroy British ambitions on the lower Niger and on the Congo,<sup>10</sup> by setting up some form of international control. The conference met during the end of 1884 and the early months of 1885. The British had to abandon their Congo schemes, and by skilful diplomacy King Leopold emerged as virtual ruler of the Congo. On the Niger, however, Britain salvaged her position. Goldie succeeded in buying up the French traders on the eve of the conference so that the British could claim to be the sole European traders on the river, and by the time the Niger question came up for discussion, the French government (afraid that French public opinion would accuse them of pro-German sympathies) had drawn away from co-operation with Germany. In return for concessions from Britain<sup>11</sup> Bismarck steered the conference into recognising British predominance on the lower Niger, and no international commission was set up. A Niger Navigation Act was passed, granting free navigation to all on the river, but in fact it never became effective.

The German intervention was soon over. Germany founded no new colonies in West Africa after 1884.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Bismarck hoped that he would not need to have anything to do with either Togo or the Cameroons, for he planned to pass over their administration to German merchants working through a chartered company. This proved impossible to achieve. In the years which followed

German officials rounded out the boundaries in the hinterlands of Togo and the Cameroons, and at times these activities alarmed both French and British, but in reality Germany had ceased to play a dominant role in the partition. The basic struggle reverted to what it had been before 1884, a struggle between France and Britain.

Nevertheless the effect of German intervention was to speed up the process and to create a feeling, particularly among the French, that greater speed was necessary now that there were three European powers involved instead of two. The British were less worried, upon reflection, by German colonisation, for German colonies remained free-trading; British traders continued to trade in them without suffering discrimination, whilst experiencing increasing difficulties in French areas. Britain, therefore, tried to hold her own after 1884 with the minimum of expense and responsibility. The Oil Rivers remained under Foreign Office rule (as the Niger Coast Protectorate after 1892). On the Niger an even cheaper method of ruling at no cost to the taxpayer was found by granting a charter to Goldie's company in 1886, after which it was, even more grandly, named the Royal Niger Company.

The French reaction was more forthright. The military penetration of the region between Senegal and the Niger was intensified, so that by 1890 the French were involved in full scale warfare against both Ahmadu of Segou and against the empire of Samori. But in addition to this penetration from Senegal eastwards the French now determined to establish bases on the coast farther south, and penetrate northwards from these. The French claims to Porto Novo were reasserted and the town was reoccupied in 1885. The posts at Assinie and Grand Bassam which had been held unofficially by the French merchant Verdier since France withdrew in 1870 were reoccupied to become the basis of the future colony of the Ivory Coast. By 1887 the French were beginning to make preliminary moves designed to hem in the British controlled areas as separated territories whilst the hinterlands of all French West African colonies would be joined. In that year Binger set out from Bamako making treaties behind the Gold Coast and in the hinterland of the Ivory Coast. Meanwhile King Gelele of Dahomey viewed growing French interest in the south of his kingdom with increasing distrust, and the French began preparations for the conquest of Dahomey proper. By 1890 they were

thinking in terms of linking not only all their West African colonies, but of maintaining communications between these and French Equatorial Africa by securing Lake Chad, and even joining this vast edifice to Algeria across the Sahara.

In 1889 France made two agreements with Britain; the first defined the frontiers between Senegal and the Gambia, whilst the second, in which the French probably sought to prevent any British interference in the coming struggle against Dahomey, defined a frontier between French and British 'spheres of influence' west of Lagos up to the ninth parallel of latitude. In 1890 the French made a further agreement with Britain in which they agreed to a frontier from Say on the Niger to Barruwa on Lake Chad which would be drawn in such a way as to comprise in the British sphere the territories of the empire of Sokoto, despite the fact that neither France nor Britain had the slightest effective authority in these regions! Nevertheless the French had made a serious blunder, for they had agreed to these terms in the belief that the Royal Niger Company had really established effective claims in Northern Nigeria, and might expand to the northern shore of Lake Chad, and into Air thus cutting possible future links between French West and Equatorial Africa, and Algeria. Shortly after the signature of the 1890 agreement French explorers who had visited the Niger Company's territories were to show that its power in the Muslim north was non-existent, and its rule in the south more a commercial monopoly than a proper administration.

This realisation spurred the French on to even more intense efforts designed to hem in the British-controlled areas. The key to success here lay in Dahomey, which drove an effective wedge between the Gold Coast colony and the Lagos sphere of influence. Relations between France and Dahomey were openly hostile after 1890, and at the end of 1892 the French mounted a well-prepared military invasion; the capital Abomey was occupied and King Behanzin declared deposed, though he was not in fact captured until 1894, after further fighting. The whole coastline was annexed, and the interior declared a French protectorate.

The conquest of Dahomey immediately alarmed the British in Lagos with the prospect that the French might move east into Yorubaland where hitherto the Colonial Office had tended to resist the efforts of British governors to intervene in the Yoruba wars; after the Dahomey invasion, however, Governor Carter was

authorised to parade through the interior Yoruba states in 1893 making treaties upon which the British claim to a protectorate rested. The French in reality were not much interested in Yorubaland, instead they planned to use Dahomey as a base to swing north-westward into Mossi and Gurunsi, behind the Gold Coast, and north-eastwards into Borgu and on to the Niger below Say to challenge the Royal Niger Company. This latter move had an added attraction for the French; it might undo some of the harm (from their point of view) of the 1890 agreement, by moving into the Fulani empire below the Say-Barruwa line.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, these moves were to be more than 'paper claims' or treaty-making expeditions, instead the French sent small parties of African troops under white officers to garrison important towns. This was intended to expose the hollowness of the Niger Company's claims, and to overrule any prior British treaty claims by 'effective occupation'. From 1894 to 1898 the French proceeded to implement this plan both in the rear of the Gold Coast, in Borgu, and on the great bend of the Niger. The British reply was at first feeble; the Gold Coast Government sent George Ekem Ferguson, a remarkable African geographer, explorer and surveyor,<sup>14</sup> into the northern territories behind Asante, where he made protectorate treaties with Dagomba in 1892, and with Dagarti Mamprussi and Mossi in 1894, but the French denied Ferguson's qualifications for such activities because he was an African, even though he was a fully qualified surveyor and an established British civil servant. The real point, however, was that Ferguson's work was not followed by effective occupation. The Royal Niger Company tried to protect Borgu by sending Lugard to make treaties with Bussa, Nikki and Kaiama in 1894-5, but he too had insufficient forces to attempt any real administrative control. When the French under Decoeur arrived in 1895 they occupied Borguan towns with soldiers.

In 1895 a Conservative government was returned to power in Britain with Joseph Chamberlain as Colonial Secretary. Chamberlain was an imperialist determined to place colonial questions in the forefront of political life. Almost immediately he began to organise a more forceful resistance to French pressure in West Africa. Lugard was appointed to create a British African army to resist French claims to 'effective occupation'—this was the genesis of the West African Frontier Force. In 1897 Lugard arrived at

Jebba on the Niger and began moving troops into Borgu; the result was a crisis in Anglo-French relations which came to the brink of war. By this time Chamberlain had also supervised forceful measures in the Gold Coast, an aggressive policy against Asante was begun in 1895, culminating in the deposition of King Prempe in 1896, followed by a deliberate policy of attempting to shatter the Asante Confederation, although the British disclaimed annexation of Asante until 1901.

The Niger Crisis of 1897-8 was the culminating point of the scramble for West Africa. Though Chamberlain was prepared for war on this issue neither the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, nor the French, were prepared to abandon negotiation. In 1898 an Anglo-French agreement was signed settling all outstanding issues in West Africa and defining the frontiers of the British colonies and protectorates. Borgu was divided, with Nikki going to France and Bussa to Britain, and France was granted navigation rights on the Niger on the tacit understanding that the Niger Company's monopoly would soon end. The French secured rather more gains in the rear of the Gold Coast.

By 1900 all West Africa, with the exception of Liberia, had been parcelled out among the European powers. Throughout the scramble France seemed to be the more aggressive force, and the map of 1900, with the vast territories of France stretching from Senegal to beyond Lake Chad and from Algeria to the Gabon, seemed to show that her energy had won her the lion's share, with the British and German colonies circumscribed and separated. In the longer view, however, much of this French success was illusory. The British had followed a commercial strategy, at first supporting, then protecting, and with Chamberlain after 1895, outstripping areas of British trading predominance. The French, on the other hand, had followed a geographical strategy; they had been excited by meandering rivers on vast maps. In the end it was the British who secured the most populous and economically productive areas

## NOTES

- 1 See Chapter 10.
- 2 Discussed in Chapter 20.
- 3 Although in the 1830s it did seem as if the British might establish a base on Fernando Po by purchasing the island from Spain.

4 The Senegalese troops played an important part in the military occupation of most of French West Africa in the 1890s, and also in the First and Second World Wars.

5 See Chapter 15.

6 The Colonial Office repudiated this attitude on the part of its officials, but by this time the damage was done.

7 Except perhaps for a few months in 1884, when Germany intervened decisively.

8 Germany also established the South West African protectorate in 1884 as part of this strategy.

9 Heligoland, a small island in the North Sea ruled at that time by Britain, was vital to the naval defence of the Kiel canal, a project planned by Germany to link the Baltic and North Sea through German territory, thus allowing a single German navy to operate in both seas. Heligoland was in fact ceded to Germany in 1890 in return for German concessions in East Africa, including British control of Uganda.

10 On the Congo Britain attempted to block both the French and King Leopold of the Belgians by the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty, which would have recognised ancient Portuguese claims. In return Britain was given trading privileges. This was a typical British attempt to secure commercial predominance without herself having to pay for a colonial regime.

11 Britain abandoned the Anglo-Portuguese Treaty, recognised the German protectorate over South West Africa, and permitted the Germans virtually to destroy British predominance in East Africa.

12 Although early in 1885, bringing further pressure against the British during the actual sitting of the Conference, the Germans established themselves in Tanganyika.

13 This they could do without actually breaking the agreement, for the frontier between Say and the ninth parallel of latitude had not been agreed upon. The rather absurd situation was that the French had agreed not to penetrate from the north, but could do so from the west.

14 Ferguson was the first African to become a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.

## 22 The Colonial Phase in British West Africa

### *(i) Political Developments*

W. E. F. WARD

THERE are difficulties in teaching the history of colonial rule at the present time. The very word 'colonial' rouses strong emotions; there is a very natural tendency in newly independent African countries to blame 'colonialism' for their difficulties, and to see in 'neo-colonialism' an obstacle in the way of further advance.

There is also a tendency to over-simplify the policy of the colonial power, in this case Britain. The British government is viewed as having been a group of determined and far-sighted planners, with the consequence that everything that happened in Africa is regarded as the result of deliberate policy decisions in London. The truth is very different, and far less simple. The British people's ignorance of Africa was and is profound, and even governments have not always been well-informed. There were very few Members of Parliament who had any personal knowledge of Africa, and a debate on colonial affairs was commonly held in a House of Commons of perhaps one-fifth of the total membership. The Secretary of State for the Colonies seldom received much guidance from Parliament on African affairs and so had to frame his policy in the light of the advice he received from other quarters: from small groups of Members of Parliament, from chambers of commerce and other business organisations, from missionary and other humanitarian societies, and from outstanding governors like Lugard, Clifford, or Guggisberg. The permanent officials in the Colonial Office also exercised an influence over policy, but the policy of the day was the result of the Minister's balancing of the advice he received from many different sources, and the balance would shift from one month to the next.

There are many examples of vacillation caused by yielding to a new pressure. In 1828, for example, the British government tried to abandon the Gold Coast, and nearly sixty years later it would

have been willing to abandon the Niger delta; but on both occasions, commercial interests forced it to give up the idea. Similarly, in 1887, the government in London forced the Gold Coast authorities to adopt a more positive policy towards Asante and this was largely because the Manchester business men protested at the decline in trade. On the other hand, we have the striking example of the influence of the anti-slavery society, which compelled the British government in 1807 to prohibit what was an extremely lucrative trade, and even forced the Treasury to pay for a naval patrol to enforce the prohibition on British and foreign slavers alike. It was under the influence of the missionary societies that the government later prohibited domestic slavery in British territory, and from 1874 onwards made treaties with so many African chiefs for the ending of human sacrifice.

Then again, the local colonial government often made mistakes through sheer ignorance, as when Sir Frederic Hodgson provoked the Yaa Asantewa war in the Gold Coast by demanding to have the Golden Stool brought out for him to sit on. And sometimes the government in London found itself in a difficulty which was not of its own making, as when Johnston deported Jaja of Opobo, or when the European cocoa-buying firms made their 'pool' agreement in 1937. On such occasions the government had to improvise a policy to get out of the difficulty as best it could. Examples such as these should make us wary of such phrases as 'the British' or 'British interests'.

#### THE ROOTS OF THE SYSTEM

The colonial system came into being because a number of people in Western Europe, holding certain ideas in matters of religion, social policy, politics and economics, came into contact with African peoples holding different ideas and living under a different system. To understand the colonial system, we should have some awareness of ideas prevailing in Western Europe, and of the circumstances which brought Europeans and Africans into contact.

Let us take first their economic ideas. Britain was a commercial country which for centuries had been trying to sell its products all over the world. The British firmly believed that trade was a good thing for both buyer and seller, and they had learned from the economist Adam Smith (1723-90) that governments should not try to direct or control trade. Every man, they thought, was the

best judge of his own interests, and he should be left free to act as he thought best for himself. If he did make a mistake, he would learn by experience not to make that mistake again. This extreme doctrine was in full force when the British founded Freetown, and for long afterwards. Gradually it was seen that it led to horrible absurdities, such as child labour in English factories, and must be modified; but all through the nineteenth century the idea lingered in Britain that government interference in economic matters should be kept to a minimum. This was one reason why, in Africa as well as in England, education was left so long entirely in the hands of the churches: and also, why governments were so slow in trying to do anything to control international trade and world market prices.

Britain was experiencing an industrial revolution. Science and technology were advancing fast, machinery was beginning to increase production and communications were being improved. People were starting to think differently about the nature of civilisation. Technology seemed more and more important, and other aspects of civilisation less so. Western society was individualistic and competitive; a man was expected to make his own way in the world. Families, of course, cared for their children and tried to give them a good start in life, and a man who had succeeded in his career would be regarded as heartless if he did not help his brothers and sisters. But there was nothing in Western Europe like the African extended family with its close network of obligation.

Christianity, as expressed in the practice of the Christian churches, contributed to the colonial system. When Christians decided that the slave trade was evil, influential groups of them, in one country after another, persuaded their national governments to stop it. (Denmark in 1792 and Britain in 1807 were the first.) But it was harder to stop the trade than to start it. After more than fifty years of naval patrolling, Britain decided that she could not completely stop the trade without annexing the island of Lagos, which she did in 1861. Christian missionaries also found certain African practices which they objected to and which they sought to have stamped out. They had to take Africa as they found it and in so doing frequently misunderstood what they found. In the circumstances of the time, some sort of colonial system may have been inevitable, though it is possible to imagine several improvements in the colonial system which actually came into being.

## THE BEGINNINGS

Freetown was established, even before the British government decided to prohibit the slave trade, as a settlement for freed slaves. For the first few years, these were Negroes who had been living in England; a judgment of the English courts in 1772 had established that no man could be a slave in England. After 1807, the population of the colony was greatly increased by the settlement of Africans taken from slave ships by British cruisers on the high seas. It is interesting to note that it was not at first intended as a colony but as an independent state under the name 'Province of Freedom'. The Province of Freedom was unlucky; it had a misunderstanding with its landlord, King Jimmy, and he destroyed it. It had to be refounded as a company's colony in 1791, and as a Crown colony in 1808: as a colony because the settlers needed strong backing, and as a Crown colony because the company could no longer afford to keep it going.<sup>1</sup>

Here we see how one step leads to another. The first settlers are reinforced by the Nova Scotians and the maroons: by sending them to Africa someone in Britain (Granville Sharp, or Clarkson, or the Company) has incurred a responsibility, and you cannot drop people in Africa and leave them to their fate. Then the misunderstandings begin; the settlers and their governors make treaties with their landlords, which they interpret in the light of their European ideas, not understanding that Africans have a different understanding of the relationship between landlord and stranger. So in the end, the British government has reluctantly to assume direct responsibility: the more so as Freetown harbour is the best harbour on the whole coast, the only possible naval base for the anti-slavery patrol, and the place to which captured slave ships must be brought and where the international commission must sit to judge them.

A somewhat similar gradual process can be seen at work on the Gold Coast. In the days of the Company there had been a similar misunderstanding of the relationship between landlord and stranger. The long settlements of the Europeans at Elmina and Cape Coast and the other forts brought about responsibilities; after the Asante invasion of 1806, the Fante people looked to the Europeans to protect them against the Asante. The short experiment of direct colonial rule from 1821 to 1828 was a failure, and

the British government wished to abandon the Gold Coast altogether. But the traders refused to go, and the Fante did not want them to go; and as a compromise the government agreed to subsidise a company government. There followed the work of George Maclean, and after that, events moved swiftly: resumption of Crown control in 1843; the Bond of 1844, the Poll Tax assembly of 1852, and then the great opportunity which the British government missed: the Fante Confederation.<sup>2</sup> After Wolsley's defeat of the Asante in 1874 the government in London had to find some way of avoiding a repetition of the misfortunes of the last twenty years. It rejected the idea of using the Fante Confederation, and so was forced to make what it called the 'very evil choice' between annexing the country up to the Pra river, and abandoning the Gold Coast altogether. It seems pretty clear that the government would have preferred to abandon the country altogether, but felt that this was not practical politics. And so the annexation, which was described in April as 'too ghastly a scheme to contemplate', was proclaimed in July.

When we move eastward to Nigeria, we have Professor Dike to show us how trade and politics intermingled in the Niger delta. Here there was a valuable trade, and it was natural that Africans and Europeans alike should have wanted to make as much profit out of it as they could. The Europeans naturally wanted to buy direct from the producers so as to keep down the price of the oil by competition; the African coastal chiefs just as naturally were determined to keep the handling of the oil in their own hands so as to make a middleman's profit.

Meanwhile, other forces were at work. As soon as the true mouth of the Niger was discovered, the missionaries wanted to use it as a road to the interior of Africa. The government, too, full of the hope that the interior might be healthier than the delta country, had its scheme for planting a commercial settlement at Lokoja, but the experiment was a disaster. Travellers and missionaries like Mary Kingsley and Mary Slessor were at work, describing life in Nigeria as they saw it, and trying to remedy some of the evils it contained. There is a pathetic passage in Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart*, describing how a group of women coming home from the farm in the evening hear the wail of an infant that has been exposed by its mother to die in the bush. The British people were, and still are, very ignorant of African life and the ideas which

lie behind it; but it was a genuinely kindly feeling which led them to think it their duty to stop the human suffering contained in such practices as human sacrifice and the exposure of twins. Similarly the British public was horrified when it read Barth's descriptions of the trans-Saharan slave trade as he saw it, with masses of skeletons heaped up near the oases in the desert.

Thus there were other forces at work leading towards colonial rule, besides the obvious cause of imperialistic international rivalry. We shall make a mistake if we label the Africans and Europeans of those days as simply nationalists or colonialists. They were human beings, with imperfect knowledge, trying to understand each other and to do the best in difficult circumstances. There is a Twi proverb in Ghana which comes to mind over such negotiations as theirs: 'Minim sa anka' ka akyi'—'After it is all over, we say, "If only I had known!"'

But of course imperialism existed as well. There was the colourful career of Sir George Goldie, with his Royal Niger Company: a man with much the same outlook as Cecil Rhodes in South Africa. 'Open up the country, push the trade, hoist the flag; philanthropy is good, especially if it pays five per cent dividends.' And all the half-formed and contradictory policies of British governments were resolved when Bismarck (much against his own will) decided that Germany must enter the race and obtain a 'place in the sun'. It was in 1884 that the enterprising German empire-builder Karl Peters made his first treaties in Tanganyika and convinced Bismarck that his work there must be followed up. In 1884 Bismarck summoned a conference of the Powers to Berlin, which resulted in the treaty called the Berlin Act. Under this Act, any European country which could show that it had a predominant interest in any African region would be accepted by the others as the administering power in that region; but it had to make its administration a reality. The British government would gladly have allowed France and Germany to divide Eastern Nigeria between them; but again the missionary and commercial interests combined to protest, and the government gave way. Goldie, the business man, and Hewett, the British consul on the spot, persuaded the British government to claim the Niger coast and the Lower Niger as a British sphere of influence. And it followed, of course, from the Act that spheres of influence had to be converted into protectorates.

Lugard forms the bridge between the old humanitarianism and the new imperialism. His career in Nyasaland and Uganda, before he came to Nigeria, had been devoted to putting down the Arab slave trade and stopping civil war between Catholics and Protestants among the Baganda. In Nigeria he was given the job of conquering the north, primarily with the purpose of stopping the slave trade across the desert.

It might be said that for Northern Nigeria, the colonial period began with the Fulani conquest. What Usuman dan Fodio had started as a holy war developed into a war for power and dominion, and the upshot was that the greater part of Northern Nigeria was organised into a series of Fulani emirates, which systematically raided their pagan neighbours and exported large numbers of slaves across the desert. The three years' campaign which Lugard fought over the great spaces of the north against the Fulani emirs, who were not supported by their Hausa-speaking subjects, was part of the old humanitarian tradition that runs from Granville Sharp through Wilberforce and Livingstone. But Lugard's conquest of the north was also welcome to Chamberlain, the British Colonial Secretary, because he saw in it a means of forestalling the French advance from the west. Lugard's race against the French to plant boundary posts along Nigeria's western border was part of the new imperialistic world.

#### PROBLEMS OF THE NEW COLONIAL GOVERNMENTS

By 1903, the four British West Africa territories had settled down under British rule within their existing frontiers, except for the adjustments which have recently been made with respect to Togo and the Cameroons. Over most of this area, the colonial system lasted almost exactly sixty years: two generations, a very short time. There may easily be old men still living in Kano or Sokoto who can remember the days before Lugard came. During this short period of sixty years there occurred three disasters. First, there was the 1914 war, which caused Britain to concentrate all her energy on fighting Germany. After the war there were about ten years of recovery and development, and then came the economic depression from about 1929 to 1937: world market prices slumped and government revenues fell. In West Africa there followed a short period of prosperity when rearmament in Europe brought a large demand for tin and manganese and diamonds;

and then, in 1939, came the Second World War, which brought sharp changes, shortages and inflation. It also stimulated African nationalism; Ghana, for example, achieved its independence in nine years from the date of the 1948 riots.

Apart from these two wars and the economic depression, the new colonial governments faced enormous difficulties. Africa was an unhealthy country; Dr Aggrey used to say that the malarial mosquito was West Africa's best friend, because it saved West Africa from European settlement. Hardly anything was known about the natural resources of the country, except for the palm oil of Nigeria, the gold of the Gold Coast, and small quantities of cocoa, pepper, and other tropical crops. Transport and communications were difficult; the rivers had sand-bars and rapids, the tsetse-fly made animal transport impossible in the forest region, and everything had to be carried from the coast in head-loads. (Benz and Daimler invented the modern type of internal-combustion engine in 1885, the year of the Berlin Act, but it was another thirty years before Henry Ford invented the mass-production system.) Railways were badly needed, but railways are slow and expensive to construct. It took three years to build the first Gold Coast line the forty miles from Sekondi as far as Tarkwa, and nearly four years to build the first Nigerian line from Lagos as far as Ibadan. West Africa badly needed capital, but in those days there were no international agencies to help. All finance was private, and it was rare for British public money to be used.

Additionally there were hundreds of different languages and great differences in customs all contributing to the difficulty of lack of staff. There were not nearly enough British officers to provide all the senior posts that were needed even in the administration, much less to do all the technical work that was needed in health, education, forestry, public works and so on; nor were there more than a handful of Africans with any useful amount of education. The new colonial governments had everything to do at once, and very little resources to do anything with.

#### BRITISH ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

The policy which the British adopted was that of 'indirect rule', first introduced on a large scale by Lugard in Northern Nigeria. Indirect rule had a tradition behind it: large parts of India<sup>3</sup> were left to the rule of the Indian princes, and Lugard had served in

Uganda, where it would indeed have been difficult to take over the powers of the Kabaka of Buganda. One audacious official in Uganda did suggest doing so, but he received no sympathy from his superiors.

Indirect rule was a system familiar in Africa. The great African rulers of old, like Mansa Musa or Sunni 'Alī, had to rule their vast empires through the local chiefs, and the Asante, for example, used a similar system in governing their conquered provinces. It was a system well suited to Northern Nigeria, where distances were large, and there was a well established system of government with laws and law-courts and a financial administration based on Islamic law. Lugard introduced the system of indirect rule partly because it suited the country and partly because he had no choice in the matter. He had no choice because he had only a tiny handful of administrative officers to cover this huge country, and no prospect of ever getting enough to make direct government possible.

Lugard's scheme had two parts. One was to rule Africa through its natural rulers, the native administrations. He hoped that the British would not often need to issue orders; most of the routine would go on unchanged. But if they did have to issue an order, he hoped that it would be possible to explain the necessity to the African chief, and persuade him to issue the order as his own, going through the customary procedure of consultations. The second part of Lugard's scheme was to educate and develop the native administration into efficient organs of modern local government. Here we see that Lugard and the British were facing a problem which did not concern Mansa Musa or Sunni 'Alī. Those rulers did not try to change the system of government or to introduce new ideas; all they had to do was to see that the provinces served them faithfully, paying their taxes and contributing their quota of armed men. But the British had to make changes: to abolish slavery and the slave trade, to prohibit some of the brutal punishments (such as mutilation) sanctioned by the emirs' criminal courts, and to open up the country with large-scale commerce and thus introduce the native administrations to all the ideas of the modern world.

Lugard's scheme did not explicitly provide for the development of national government. The British hoped that national feeling would grow up from below, as it had done in Britain itself. They

knew that their West African territories were artificial creations with arbitrary frontiers, and with many different traditions and government. They did not think any good would come of setting up national assemblies in order to stimulate national feeling; would be better, they thought, to allow national feeling to develop naturally to the development of a national assembly. They hoped that the chiefs and their councillors would become accustomed to handling local affairs in a modern and efficient way, that they would then form some sort of regional councils to handle regional affairs, and that finally the regional councils would appoint representatives to a central legislature and executive. This new scheme did not succeed. Both national feeling and national governments came into being in very different ways.

The first difficulty was that indirect rule had been devised to suit a region (the Hausa-Fulani part of Northern Nigeria) where there were large well-established native administrations already in existence. It needed a good deal of adaptation to regions with a different system, such as the clan system of the Ibo. The second difficulty was that outside the Hausa-speaking area (where many of Lugard's men learned to speak Hausa well) very few British officials learned enough of any African language to be able to dispense with an interpreter, and it was a long time before any serious anthropological study was done; so the system of indirect rule did not in fact get adapted. The British were so full of the idea that there must be a chief and his council in every district, that if they could not find chiefs they tended to try and appoint them. One important cause of the Aba riots of 1929-30 in Eastern Nigeria was that certain individuals tried to exert authority which the British had given them but which the people did not recognise. The third difficulty was that chiefs and their councils, naturally enough, took much more interest in matters they understood than in matters which were new and unfamiliar. A district commissioner in the Gold Coast had no difficulty in persuading chiefs and their councils to make lorry roads; for they could all see that lorries meant trade, and trade meant money. But he found it almost impossible to persuade them to set aside forest reserves, for they could not understand the reason for forest conservation: why waste good land on growing bush when it might grow cocoa? Consequently, the second part of Lugard's programme, the education of chiefs and councillors in modern ideas, needed long and patient and

skilful effort. Many British officers had not the patience and skill required; after two or three failures, they declared that it was hopeless to expect African elders to understand modern ideas, and they gave up trying. It was not always their fault; there were not enough of them, and they were moved about far too much from one district to another and were overwhelmed with paper work. But the fact remains that for one reason or another, this essential part of Lugard's programme was not strenuously applied.

We might have expected that this set-back would have led the British to insist on a stiff programme of education. But although the churches and the commercial firms needed education, and the government in London regarded education as one of the main benefits which British rule should bring to Africa, most British officers in the field distrusted education. We have to remember that popular education was still a new thing in Britain, and although local authority primary schools were common in the 1890s, there were no local authority secondary schools until after 1902. In distrusting the spread of education in Africa, most British officers were merely following the tradition in which they had been brought up at home. They took it for granted that subsistence agriculture would continue to be the main occupation of the people, and indirect rule the system of administration. They saw that educated Africans nearly always left the farm and the village and sought clerical employment in the town. Governors and senior officers criticised the education department for not producing Africans equipped with sound ideas on hygiene, nutrition and agriculture, and content also to stay on the land and obey their 'natural rulers'. In making this criticism, they showed themselves singularly ignorant of human nature. When A. G. Fraser of Achimota visited Nigeria in 1927 to report on Nigerian education, he was very scathing in his comments: he said, 'It may be urged in excuse that our administration in Nigeria is yet young. It might be aged and decrepit judged by the pace at which its education moves.' And he once bitterly criticised the Gold Coast government because at its then rate of progress it would be three hundred years before it got all its children into primary school. Achimota had to face bitter opposition for the first ten years or so: not from governors or the secretariat or the Colonial Office, but from the rank and file of the British in the Gold Coast. Education was regarded merely as one of the spending departments; very few

administrators could see that education was an investment, like railways or geological surveys.

This failure by the British to develop an effective system of general education brought about a new difficulty in their policy of indirect rule. There grew up in the big towns on the coast a group of educated men (Blyden, Sarbah, Casely Hayford and others) who saw that the process of developing traditional authorities into national governments was bound to be very slow, and who were unwilling to wait. In the 1860s, the Fante Confederation in the Gold Coast had been drawn up by traditional authorities and by the educated Fante, working together in complete agreement. In 1897, when the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society was founded, chiefs and educated men still worked together; and in fact, the Society claimed to speak for the whole body of Gold Coast chiefs. But in 1917, disagreements appeared over Casely Hayford's National Congress of British West Africa, and a group of members took the strong step of cabling London to say that the Congress deputation there had no authority to speak for the Gold Coast chiefs.

This split between the chiefs and educated leaders was the turning-point in the history of indirect rule. From that moment it was certain that although indirect rule might perhaps lead to good local government, it would not lead to national government. The split was widened by the Gold Coast constitution of 1925, in which Sir Gordon Guggisberg set up provincial councils, and brought representatives of the provincial councils to sit on the legislative council at Accra. Sir Arthur Richards in Nigeria had the same idea of linking regional councils to the central legislative council. These enlightened governors knew that it was not constitutionally possible for a chief to study a Bill and use his own discretion on it; they knew that he was the mouthpiece of his people, and must have time to consult them. But they hoped that the programme of legislation would be so small that all the Bills could be circulated to members of the legislative council in time for this necessary consultation to take place. Such expectations, however, did not meet the situation where an amendment to a Bill was moved during a debate; nor did they envisage the prospect that as West Africa developed, the legislative programme would grow until such leisurely consultations became impossible.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF NATIONALISM

All this description of British administrative policy implies a good deal of criticism. Lugard had produced a good policy, but a policy which required skill and patience to work; too often the skill and patience were not there. It needed a well-planned and steadfast educational system, but education was too often regarded with suspicion. It needed men with a sound knowledge of the different African languages and customs, but it was not until the 1920s that any serious anthropological study was done and any attempt was made at a centrally planned educational policy. The British behaved characteristically: they were usually hard-working and often genuinely devoted to the people they served, but they distrusted policy and preferred to muddle through, and nearly all of them felt much more at home with farmers and illiterate village elders than with educated Africans.

On the other hand, the British did realise that nationalism was bound to develop, and that independence was bound to come. When I joined the British Colonial Service in 1924, the fashionable slogan was 'trusteeship': I was told that West Africa was not yet ready for self-government, but that it would be one day, and my job was to bring that day nearer. When Sir Charles Arden-Clarke made his last personal speech on Ghana's independence day in 1957, he recalled how, when he joined the Nigerian administrative service as a cadet, his Resident told him the same. We were all expected to work ourselves out of a job; though I will not claim that all of us realised it, or that all of those who did realise it approved of the idea. This is another case in which generalisations are dangerous. One group of men lay down a policy, another group have to carry it out.

The African leaders both of the present generation and their predecessors, the Blydens, Carrs, Casely Hayfords and Sekyis, merit close attention. Most of these men worked through the legislative councils which the British established, the youngest being the Nigerian legislature of 1922. The great weakness of the legislative councils was that the British did not trust the African members with responsibility. Until 1946 there was an official majority in all four legislative councils, and Africans never numbered more than one-third of the whole membership; moreover, many of the Africans were nominated, not elected. The colonial governments

took up the position, 'This is what we propose to do; if you have any comments, we shall be glad to listen to them.' It was natural that the African members of the councils should regard themselves as an Opposition. British officials often complained that African speeches were too full of merely destructive criticism. But a parliamentary Opposition which has no prospect whatever of gaining power is almost bound to develop in that way. The British Governors and Secretaries of State might have done better to begin much earlier the process of gradually transferring power to African hands, on the principle that one cannot learn to swim on dry land, and one can only learn to take responsibility by taking it and seeing the consequences.

Africans, of course, always suspected the governments of wanting somehow to get hold of the land. The suspicion was not justified, but is understandable enough in view of the Gold Coast Lands Bill of 1897 and the Kenya Crown Lands Ordinance of 1902. The Lands Bill agitation brought about the formation of the Aborigines' Society, and the Society's proposals in 1920 would have provided British West Africa with something like a federal legislature, in which half the members would have been elected, and which would have controlled revenue and expenditure, and hence, policy as well.

This early attempt at Pan-Africanism having failed, African national movements had to be built up again in the countries separately. In Nigeria they tended to be built up on ethnic feeling, in Sierra Leone on the rivalry between colony and protectorate; in the Gold Coast, very little ethnic feeling was involved, but Asante and the north played little part. The nationalist movements worried the British authorities. It was not that they objected to nationalism, which indeed they regarded as natural and inevitable. But this seemed to them the wrong kind of nationalism; it was coming from the educated townsmen, not from the chiefs. It was part of the British creed that the chiefs alone were the true spokesmen of their people. The British district officer tended to distrust the 'agitators' from the towns as being unrepresentative of the people; many of the people in his district had never heard of the 'agitator', and to most of them, what he was talking about was quite incomprehensible. The British clung to the idea of indirect rule very long; as recently as 1948, the government in London protested against the Watson Commission's proposal that a more

modern type of local government authority should be set up. They thought in London that the people would prefer to see the native authorities developed.

The 1939 war and its social and economic consequences enormously stimulated the development of national feeling. After the war, the British had clearly lost their struggle to maintain a steady and balanced development, in which economic progress, developments in education and health and other social services, and constitutional advances, should all move together. The people were demanding two things above all: more education, and more political self-government. In the last days of the war, the Gold Coast education department carried out a survey of the existing schools, so as to be able to plan a great expansion of teacher-training. But the survey was largely a failure, because new schools were being established every week, and, long before the inspectors had gone round the country, the figures in the first districts they visited were hopelessly out of date.

It was the same in constitutional matters. The Burns Constitution of 1946 in the Gold Coast was greeted with enthusiasm everywhere, but two years later the Watson Commission was clearly right in saying that it was already inadequate. The British showed imagination and foresight in the ten-year development plans which they financed through the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts of 1945 and later. These plans provided West Africa with schools, universities, hospitals, roads and airfields, geological surveys, and (most important of all) trained African staff, which Africa could not have provided from its own resources. If only this had been possible forty years earlier!

The pace of post-war development was faster than even the more far-sighted officials had anticipated. The Gold Coast riots of 1948 were the decisive event which made the British government realise that it had lost control of West Africa's constitutional advance: that the independence, which everyone knew was coming, was coming sooner than anyone had expected. Britain regarded the Gold Coast as a 'model' colony; it was the richest, the best educated, the first to have an elected majority in the legislature, and the most completely organised as regards native authorities. The riots were therefore a tremendous shock to British confidence; if this sort of thing could happen in the Gold Coast, they could see no future for colonial government in any

African territory. From that time onwards, the Colonial Office set itself to equip the African territories as fast as it could for independence, trusting in African good sense not to demand self-government before there was a bare minimum of equipment and trained staff. One could wish that this sense of urgency, like the Colonial Development and Welfare Acts, had come about forty years earlier.

In granting constitutional advances, the British followed a definite pattern. All territories had had African members in their legislatures before the war, but in a minority. The first step forward was to place one or two African unofficial members on the Governor's executive council; this happened in Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone in 1942 and 1943. This gave Africans a chance to discuss proposals in the executive council before they reached the legislature; but since the Africans were individuals, not members of any party, and (like all other members of the executive council) were sworn to secrecy, it did not really mean very much.

The next step was to overturn the official majority in the legislative council, and replace it not merely by a majority of unofficial members, but by a majority of elected members. This step was taken in Nigeria and the Gold Coast in 1946, in Sierra Leone in 1951, in the Gambia in 1954. It was an important step, for it recognised that the legislatures must be developed so as to express the views of the people. But by itself it was quite inadequate; for policy continued to be laid down by the Governor and his officers, and the enlarged and representative legislature had no means whatever of making the Governor and his officers take heed of its criticisms. Over the years a sort of constitutional convention had grown up by which the government nearly always yielded to a solid body of opposition; thus, the Gold Coast government made several attempts between the wars to introduce an income tax, but never pressed the point when it found the African members solidly opposed, although its official majority in the legislative council would have enabled it to do so. But this was not enough. It was clearly necessary to make the executive directly responsible to the legislature.

The Governor's executive council was a body of senior officers, to whom two or three unofficial African members had recently been added. It was a collection of individuals, responsible for

advising the Governor; but the Governor was not bound to follow the advice he received, even if his executive council were solidly against him. The ultimate responsibility was his. The minutes of the council contain the recurring phrase, 'His Excellency concurred, and ordered accordingly.' The order was made by His Excellency, not by the executive council; but normally British practical common sense caused His Excellency to concur with the advice he received, and made provision for what should happen if he did not.

This primitive council had to be transformed into a cabinet, responsible to the legislature. The government in London was so used to the idea of a two-party system, with rival party leaders competing for the votes of the electors, that it felt uneasy when faced with one triumphant party, like the C.P.P. in Ghana, which had secured an overwhelming majority of the seats open to free election. In the 1951 constitution, not only did the government provide that half the legislature in the Gold Coast should be elected by state councils, but made the executive still responsible to the Governor, not to the legislature. The executive indeed was transformed: it consisted of eleven members of the legislature, three of them British officials and the others Africans chosen by Dr Nkrumah from the members of his own party. In the Nigerian constitution of the same year, 1951, the executive consisted of eighteen ministers: six official and twelve unofficial; they were chosen by the Governor, but the names were submitted to the legislature for approval, and it was open for the legislature to refuse its approval to any unofficial member—but not to an official. The executive council was fully transformed into a cabinet in 1954 in the Gold Coast, in 1957 in Nigeria, in 1958 in Sierra Leone, in 1963 in the Gambia. The ex-officio ministers were removed; all ministers were chosen by the prime minister from the members of his party in the legislature; the prime minister could dismiss any of his colleagues, and if the cabinet as a whole lost the confidence of the legislature, it would have to resign.

There were other constitutional changes from time to time: increases in the size of the legislature, the replacement of indirect election by direct, the establishment of a federal system in Nigeria. But these are unimportant compared with the essential points of an elected majority in the legislature and a cabinet which is

entirely drawn from the elected members of the legislature and is completely responsible to it. When this stage had been reached, the only barrier to complete independence was the Governor's reserved powers.

The Governor was given these powers to be used in an emergency. They were to be used only if the Governor found it necessary 'in the interests of public order, public faith, or good government'. If an elected government proposed to ease its financial difficulties by halving the salaries and pensions of all civil servants, it would be contrary to public faith; for these men and women had joined the service trusting in government promises that they would be paid at certain rates. If a government's policy had the effect of setting one section of the community against another, public order might be endangered; and if in its ignorance a government took a step that would be quite disastrous (for example, abolishing all forest reserves so as to make the land available for farming), the Governor's powers might be called into action in the interests of good government.

The Governor's reserved powers were large, and if they had been used brutally, they could have made self-government a mockery. If the legislature seemed likely to reject an important Bill (the Finance Bill, for example), the Governor could send it a message that the Bill was important under one or other of these three heads of public order, public faith, and good government; and after this, he could declare the Bill to be law, even though the legislature had refused to pass it. On the other hand, if a Bill was needed under one or other of these three heads, and no member of the legislature was prepared to introduce it, the Governor could require the Speaker to introduce it by a given date, and he could then pass it on his own authority. Of course, there were strict conditions laid down to prevent the Governor from using his reserved powers brutally; in particular, he had to report to London every case in which he had used them, together with any written protest he had received from a minister or a member of the legislature. No Governor to my knowledge used his reserved powers. They were nevertheless a limitation on a country's independence, and they had to go. They were removed in Ghana in 1957, in Nigeria in 1960, in Sierra Leone in 1961.

*(ii) Economic and Social Developments*

C. C. WRIGLEY

## DEPENDENT ECONOMY

THE West African economies during the colonial period were dependent economies. This is not a political term: the best work on the economic history of New Zealand is entitled *The Instability of a Dependent Economy*, and much the same description would apply to such countries as Argentina, which have for long enjoyed complete political independence. Moreover, West Africa was 'dependent' before the colonial period and has not ceased to be dependent now. The term is a semi-technical one, implying that the country's fortunes are bound up with the export of a small number of primary products, the price of which is determined much more by events elsewhere—by changes in demand or in the supply from other countries—than by any action or decision of the country itself. Only in the case of cocoa does West Africa supply a substantial proportion of the total world output of a commodity, and even in this case it is proving very difficult for the West African governments, even by concerted action, to alter the price which the world market is prepared to pay.

For countries in this position the whole course of economic development—and to a large extent political development also—is profoundly influenced by changes in the market prices of their products. It is not difficult, for example, to imagine how much more smoothly the first years of independence would have gone if they had not coincided with a sharp decline in the prices paid for West Africa's exports, along with those of most other primary products. It is thus necessary to be familiar with the outlines of price movements, which provide a convenient framework for the study of West African economic history during the last hundred years.

Up to the 1870s, the prices of most commodities were slowly rising, after which there set in a period of decline which lasted almost to the end of the century. The decline in the price of palm oil, however, had begun earlier, in the 1850s, though it was not until the 1870s that it became severe. From about 1896 until 1920, prices were on the whole rising, slowly at first but very rapidly during the First World War and for two years afterwards.

By contrast, the inter-war period, from 1920 onwards was one of falling prices. In this period, moreover, the changes were exceptionally violent. There was a sharp slump in 1921, followed by a few years of partial recovery, and then by an even more disastrous fall in the years 1930-3. In the mid-1930s there was again a partial recovery which, however, was giving way to renewed depression in 1938-9, when the Second World War intervened. From 1939 to 1955 there was a period of rapidly rising prices, with particularly sharp advances in the later years of the war, and again in the early 1950s. 1955 marks the beginning of a new era of depressed prices, in which we are still living.

#### THE EUROPEAN SCRAMBLE

The period of falling commodity prices which occupies roughly the last quarter of the nineteenth century coincides closely with the intensified European pressures and conflicts known as the 'scramble' (and with similar activity elsewhere in the world); and it is generally assumed that there is some connexion between these phenomena. That there were powerful economic forces behind the conquest of Africa is not in doubt. There is controversy over the relative strength of these forces compared with humanitarian, strategic and purely political (or prestige) motives, but this controversy is least acute in relation to West Africa. Here there was a substantial existing trade and reasonable prospects of increasing it, whereas the region was of little or no importance for imperial strategy, and the missionary influence, though not unimportant, was clearly secondary to that of the traders. But what exactly was the economic objective? It can hardly have been the quest for raw materials, for political advance took place at a time when raw materials in general, and the chief West African materials in particular, were already cheap and becoming steadily cheaper. It was certainly not to increase the supply of palm oil that the British pushed troops and officials into the hinterland of the West African coast; on the contrary they were finding it difficult to absorb the palm oil that the existing trading system was producing.

There is another side to this, however. While the British economy as a whole might be content with the commodity situation at this time, falling prices were most unwelcome to those British and other traders whose fortunes were bound up with West Africa.

Since profit margins were growing less, it became all the more important for each trader or group of traders to secure a commanding position, if possible a monopoly, in this increasingly difficult branch of commerce. The same was true of the African middlemen; and the period was one of sharpening conflict, not only between British and Africans but also within each racial group. Schism in Bonny and intensified inter-city warfare among the Yoruba reflect the developing crisis in the West African economy, as do the guerrilla warfare on the Niger and the deepening feud between the Liverpool merchants and the interlopers. All parties sought monopoly as a cure for their troubles. Hence the merger of the Niger trading firms which Goldie engineered in 1879. But monopoly was difficult to sustain, either against African or against European rivals, without political backing, and so there was by the early 1880s growing pressure on the British (and French) governments to intervene on behalf of their nationals.

But the West African trade was of very minor importance to the British economy and the firms which engaged in it were of negligible influence. Their difficulties would not by themselves have given the British government sufficient reason to reverse its long-standing policy of minimum political and administrative interference in West African affairs. However, if Britain did not need increased supplies of materials and foodstuffs at this time, she did need new markets. From the mid-seventies, British exports were increasing much more slowly than before, and there was growing depression in the great export industries which had been the main prop of her prosperity. The attraction of West Africa as a potential market for British manufactures was undoubtedly great, and it was this consideration which led much more important and powerful groups than the West African merchants to look with favour on political expansion in this (and other) regions. (The prospects were often exaggerated—it was not going to be so easy as some thought to convert the peoples of the Western Sudan from indigenous to Lancashire cloth—but that is beside the point.) Another powerful consideration was the prevailing low return on capital in Britain, which made the owners of capital more eager than usual to open up new fields of investment. For this, political intervention was a necessary first step; trade might precede the flag, but railways could only follow it.

Thus in the 1880s the desire of British merchants to extend their range of operations in West Africa and to exclude competitors chimed with the growing anxiety of the British government to stake a claim for British exporters and for British capital. The change in policy was very gradual, and for a time, as Dr Flint shows in Chapter 21, the government had to fall back on the compromise device of the chartered company in the Niger valley, where there was the greatest concentration of existing British interests and where the prospects of development seemed brightest. Thus in 1886 Goldie's National African Company obtained its desire: a royal charter which enabled it to exercise administrative powers and so, in effect, to establish a monopoly of the trade which found its way to the sea by way of the Niger. Not till the last years of the century was the government—and public opinion—sufficiently convinced of the economic value of West Africa to take over direct responsibility for the administration of Northern Nigeria, to undertake the final conquest both of the Fulani emirates and of Asante, and even to spend money on the development of the territory's resources. The Royal Niger Company, it should be explained, had administered only the actual trade routes, and had undertaken no real development.

Even now the British government's approach was hesitant. Colonial administration meant expense. If the British taxpayer was asked to bear the cost, his representatives would certainly grumble and might refuse. If the cost was to be met by local taxation there would be grumbles from the British traders and from the people; and the latter might do more than grumble. The Colonial Office had burned its fingers badly as long ago as the 1850s, when it had tried to introduce direct taxation on the Gold Coast.<sup>4</sup> It burned them even worse in 1896, when it tried to levy a hut tax in Sierra Leone.<sup>5</sup> Thus there was strong support for the proposition advanced by the merchants, who found an effective spokeswoman in Mary Kingsley, that government should be left to them, and should be limited to the measures needed to protect trade. This view was not in the end accepted, but the new administrations did everything possible to keep expenses to a level which could be paid for by light customs duties, which, it was hoped, the people would not notice and would therefore not resent. In Northern Nigeria the Fulani administration was left as far as possible intact, the existing system of taxation being merely

regularised and made more comprehensive. ('Indirect rule' later became a philosophy, but in its beginnings it was primarily an economy device.) By similar methods the imposition of direct taxation was delayed in south-western Nigeria until 1917-18, in south-eastern Nigeria until 1928, and was avoided altogether in the Gold Coast, where customs revenues were sufficiently buoyant to maintain almost the whole cost of such governmental services as it was thought necessary to introduce.

#### DEVELOPMENT OF CASH CROPS

Even a skeleton administration, however, could not be established and maintained without *some* expenditure, and the conquest provided the conquerors with a new motive for promoting the economic development of the territories; incomes had to be created in order that they might be taxed, indirectly if not directly. Moreover, the conquest coincided with a marked change in the market situation. Raw materials were again in demand, and Britain's new 'estates'—as the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, described them—thus acquired a value which they had not possessed before. Lancashire cotton manufacturers now began to worry more about the price of raw cotton than about the sale of cloth, and formed the British Cotton-Growing Association in 1902 to promote cultivation within the Empire, special attention being paid to West Africa. The great soap manufacturing firm of Lever Brothers also began to take an interest in the sources of its materials, and entered the West African market in 1906.

By then it had become apparent that, if there were to be any serious agricultural development for export, a major assault would have to be made on the problem of high transport costs, which had always been the greatest obstacle to Africa's progress. For this purpose the imperial government was, since the late 1890s, willing to relax its doctrine of colonial self-sufficiency in financial matters, and to advance money for railway building. Construction began from Freetown in 1896, from Sekondi in 1898 and from Lagos in the same year. Progress was hardly rapid. Kano was not linked to the sea until 1912, Enugu till 1916. The link between south-eastern and northern Nigeria was not effected until 1926. Though Kumasi was reached from Sekondi in 1903, it did not acquire a connexion with Accra until twenty years later. Large areas, particularly in Nigeria, remained without

any effective railway service, and lateral communications, as distinct from links with the sea, were very few. Nevertheless, it could be said that, during the period of high prices and bright prospects which lasted from 1896 to 1920, most of the potentially productive areas were bound by thin steel threads to the coast and to the world economy. To supplement the rail system and to facilitate administration, a considerable effort was also devoted to road construction, which became a major preoccupation of the district administrators—for some of them almost an obsession.

The effects of even this modest investment in transport, coupled with the imposition of the British peace, were spectacular. Between 1900 and 1913 the exports from the Gold Coast multiplied in value about five times, those from Sierra Leone about four times, those from Nigeria about three-and-a-half times, while imports rose in similar proportion. It is to be noted that, whereas British interests provided the stimulus for this development and British administration created the necessary conditions, the reaction of Africans to their new economic opportunities was swift and efficient. Except in the mining sector, where external capital and technology was now applied to the gold workings of Asante and the tin deposits of the Jos plateau, actual production for export was directed almost entirely by Africans. The capitalist plantation system gained hardly any footing in West Africa, partly because the authorities were unwilling to disturb the indigenous land tenure system or to risk the political complications which would be involved in the introduction of European landowners, but mainly because it was unnecessary. African farmers were willing to do the job on their own, and could do it much more cheaply. Even the choice of crop reflected African judgment more than British wishes. Cotton production, on which the British government placed most emphasis, made disappointing progress, but in the savanna zone the output of groundnuts, which were better suited to most of the local soils, increased dramatically; and in certain of the forest areas development relied on an entirely new crop, the introduction and expansion of which was a wholly African initiative. As late as 1890, cocoa was not mentioned among the products which the Gold Coast government was hoping to develop. But by 1902 it had become a major export, and by 1915 the principal export from the territory. Introduced in 1892, it was taken up with enthusiasm by African farmers, many of whom migrated into t

cocoa-bearing areas and acquired land there as a business investment. The establishment of this crop in Western Nigeria was largely the work of a small group of African entrepreneurs, who were, significantly, also leaders of the African church.

The success of African agricultural enterprise was owed to a number of favourable factors, in addition to the rising world prices which provided an incentive, and the new transport system which made possible the export of bulky products. Land, to begin with, was abundant. So also was labour, for it is clear that the traditional economic system by no means absorbed the full potential energies of the population, especially of the young males. (The reason, of course, was not the alleged laziness of the African race, but the absence of an adequate market for produce over and above the needs of local subsistence.) Further, the crops which were suited for export were also suited to the peasant economy; they fitted well into the traditional pattern of subsistence agriculture, and they did not require elaborate processing on the spot. In this respect, cocoa, groundnuts and palm oil differ from such products as tea, sugar and sisal, for which it is necessary, or at any rate more economic, to organise cultivation in units large enough to feed an expensive processing factory.

Essential to this development was an efficient marketing system, providing both for the collection of the agricultural produce and the distribution of the imported goods which were the incentive for production. This was supplied by an adaptation and extension of the arrangements which had been developed to cater for the palm oil trade, and before that for the trade in slaves. Merchant firms based on the ports and in the main centres of communication dealt with the ultimate producers and consumers through a chain of middlemen, mostly Africans, to whom they advanced credit. The system has been much criticised, yet probably was the most effective and economical way of extending commerce under West African conditions. What laid it open to serious objection was the tendency for the bulk of the trade to fall into the hands of a few large firms, who obtained a commanding position in the West African economies, and who from time to time made agreements amongst themselves to the detriment of their customers. This monopolistic tendency, however, did not reach its fullest development until the inter-war period, and will be discussed later.

Another feature of this period was the evolution of the monetar-

system. Money was by no means a novelty in West African trade, but the currencies and standards of value hitherto in use—cowrie shells, manillas, iron bars, cases of gin—were no longer adequate for commerce on the scale which had now developed. They were now supplemented by British coins, but the most important innovation was the setting up of the West African Currency Board in 1912. The system then adopted was what is known as the '100 per cent sterling exchange standard', and its effect was, briefly, that the purchasing power of West African residents was determined absolutely by the territories' earnings from exports. This prevented inflation, and so made West Africa more attractive to foreign investors, but it also made the economies still more 'dependent' and, in the opinion of some economists, had an unduly depressing effect on internal development.

#### THE INTER-WAR YEARS

For a short time after the war commodity prices rocketed to unprecedented levels, and both the imperial government and private capitalists showed even keener interest in West Africa as a source of supply. This was indeed the period when economic imperialism manifested itself in its crudest form; there was a good deal of wild talk about using the colonies to make Britain self-sufficient and to pay off her war debts. At the same time, it was a constructive period, one in which funds were more than usually available for investment in the colonies. Ambitious plans for railway construction, for example, were now projected, and some of these came to fruition in the early twenties. But with the breaking of the boom in the summer of 1920 this metropolitan interest, for better or worse, faded away; and for the rest of the inter-war period West Africa, with the rest of the colonial empire, was largely left to her own devices. This was the heyday of the district officer and the anthropologist, and of the doctrine of 'indirect rule' which had come to mean, among other things, the protection of African society from the unduly sudden impact of Western economic forces. It was fashionable in these years to say that Africans should be allowed to 'develop along their own lines', partly because no-one in these years had any urgent interest in developing them along any other lines. The pace of economic change thus became very slow. There had been a big rise in production for export between 1918 and 1925, but after that, for

several years, the volume of exports remained almost static. The West African countries had now, it seemed, completed the adjustment to the opportunities created by peace and railways. No new opportunities now presented themselves, and a condition closely resembling stagnation seemed to have become established. However, by the 1920s government revenues had reached a level at which it was possible for the authorities, without calling on London for help and without departing from the strict orthodoxy of balanced budgets, to embark on some modest development expenditure, chiefly in the fields of education and communications. Most progress, naturally, was made in the Gold Coast, already by far the richest of the British territories in West Africa, but the activities linked with the name of Sir Gordon Guggisberg were only the most conspicuous manifestations of a trend which was visible throughout West Africa.

In 1930, however, even these modest advances came to an abrupt halt as West Africa, along with all other primary-producing countries, was struck down by the world slump. Prices of most of its exports were halved, or more than halved. All incomes fell sharply, and government incomes not least. The slump was especially disastrous for these countries, inasmuch as a large part of their expenditure was fixed in money terms by contractual obligations. To construct their railways, the West African governments had borrowed heavily in London, and they had borrowed at a time when interest rates, like other prices, were much higher than they had now become. A much larger volume of exports was now required to pay interest on the debt and the pensions of retired officials; and in 1936 these two items accounted for about thirty per cent of Nigeria's budget. It is not surprising that, on the one hand, Nigeria's export surplus—curiously known as a 'favourable' balance of trade—became very large in the 1930s, or, on the other, that in the last year before the Second World War public expenditures on 'development and welfare' amounted to little more than £2 million in a country with a population of twenty-five to thirty million people.

One of the most striking features of the inter-war period was the concentration of external commerce in the hands of a very few firms. The number of firms engaged in the export or import trade or both, declined from one hundred and four in 1921 to eighty-four in 1936, but these figures tell only a part of the story. Most of

the firms were small and short-lived. Only fourteen had survived throughout the period, and at the outbreak of the Second World War roughly two-thirds of the trade of West Africa as a whole was handled by seven large firms. One of these, moreover, the United Africa Company, overshadowed all the rest, having in its hands something like forty per cent both of exports and of imports. The history of the United Africa Company is rather complicated. One of its parents was the Niger Company, which had continued to operate as a private concern after it had surrendered its royal charter in 1900, and which in 1929 united under the name of U.A.C. with the African and Eastern Trade Corporation, itself the result of an earlier merger of several smaller firms. About the same time, the great British soap firm, Lever Brothers, which had bought the Niger Company in 1920, formed a link with the great Dutch margarine combine of Vandenberg and Jurgens. Thus a very large part of West African trade passed under the control of a single firm, which was itself merely a subsidiary of one of the greatest business concerns in the world.

The reasons for this concentration are fairly simple. The overhead costs of European trading activities in West Africa were high, and the small firm was thus at a disadvantage. The risks were also great, especially in the inter-war period, when small businesses were repeatedly ruined by sudden fluctuations in prices. Under these conditions only a firm with large reserves could hope to survive and prosper. Concentration stopped short of full monopoly though in many localities the African traders had only one customer and creditor to deal with. But the share of U.A.C. in the total trade was so large that it was in a position to influence though not to determine, the prices paid and received, even when it was not in collusion with its competitors. When the principal firms were in agreement, however, as was fairly often the case conditions of true monopoly prevailed. It was not easy to sustain such monopoly arrangements for long, and the history of West African trade is one of alternation between periods of agreement and periods of what the firms called 'cut-throat competition' when some of them found it more advantageous to operate on their own. From time to time 'outsiders' were able to force their way into the closed circle of trade; there was, for instance, the successful invasion of the Kano groundnut trade by the Levantine merchant, Mr Raccah, in the late 1930s, and the dramatic rise of

the Greek businessman, A. G. Leventis, who during and after the Second World War was able to challenge U.A.C. on almost equal terms. African producers, moreover, were not completely at the mercy of the European firms, and on occasion met combination with combination, the most famous incident of this kind being the 'hold-up' of cocoa in the Gold Coast in 1938.

Along with this tendency to monopoly there went, almost certainly, a decline in African participation in the external commerce of West Africa. In the late nineteenth century a fair number of African merchants in Lagos and elsewhere were operating quite large-scale businesses, dealing direct with Liverpool and London. By the end of the inter-war period such people were very few, and the share of the external trade which they handled was at most five per cent. One reason for this decline was that African traders shared in the growing difficulties of small firms in this period, regardless of race; though often highly successful as individualists, Africans had failed, no doubt for reasons bound up with their social system, to develop strong, continuing organisations comparable with the large European company. Another reason was probably that the few Africans who possessed capital now found it safer and more profitable to invest it in land, especially urban land, or the education of their children than in commercial enterprises. But the virtual exclusion of Africans from the external trade sector must also be seen as part of a more general process, which had begun about 1890 and had been intensified after the First World War, and which is also visible in their exclusion from the higher ranks of the public service and the church hierarchies. There is here an apparent paradox. At the lower levels of the 'western' or 'modern' sector of the economy, African participation had increased enormously since the nineteenth century. There were far more clerks and others doing 'English work', far more farmers producing for the world market. But at the higher levels African participation had actually declined.

An important and unfortunate consequence of the great slump of the 1930s was the retreat from the principles of non-discrimination which had hitherto, on the whole, governed British commercial policy towards her West African dependencies. The United Kingdom had always been the largest single customer of the British West African countries, and the largest single supplier of

their imports. Hitherto, however, this British commercial predominance had been the natural result of informal and customary links, not of overt discrimination. British firms naturally ordered their supplies by preference from Britain, and sent their purchases thither; British administrations naturally procured their own requirements from British sources. But there had been nothing to prevent foreign firms from operating in these territories, nor had any fiscal measures been taken to divert trade into British channels. One exception must be made to this statement. Between 1918 and 1921 palm kernels and tin were diverted from the Continental to the British market by means of differential export duties. This measure, designed for the benefit of the owners of processing plants in Britain rather than for British consumers, was contrary to the liberal principles which still governed British policy; and the duties on palm kernels were dropped after parliamentary protests, though the duties on tin remained. But a far more serious departure from free trade occurred in 1934. Japanese cloth and other manufactures, far cheaper than the British products, had now begun to invade the West African market, to the detriment of the Lancashire manufacturing towns, where there was already massive unemployment. This time, liberal principles were not strong enough to resist temptation, and the West African consumer was not allowed to enjoy the benefit of cheaper clothing. (The Japanese goods were somewhat inferior, but the difference in quality was much less than the difference in price.) Ordinances were now passed by all four colonial legislatures imposing discriminatory duties on Japanese goods.

The economic change which had occurred between the conquest and the outbreak of the Second World War was limited in kind and in quantity. Peace and railways had had the effect of extending the market, so enabling West Africans to make fuller use of their one comparative advantage, the ability to produce commodities which were scarce or unobtainable in the rich temperate-zone countries. To the natural products which had been exported in pre-colonial times there had been added a number of cultivated crops, most of them already known and used in the traditional economies but now produced in much larger quantities for sale abroad. From the gross returns thus obtained, large deductions had to be made. Peace and railways had to be paid for in taxes; the profits of the indispensable commercial

intermediaries absorbed a further substantial proportion. The net gain consisted partly in an increased supply of manufactured goods, partly in public services such as health and education. Neither type of gain could yet be called large. The average cash expenditure of peasants in a prosperous cocoa-growing village of the Gold Coast was less than £10 per family per annum; and the incomes of farmers in the palm and groundnut areas were certainly much less than this. The small scope of public expenditure on social services has already been indicated. It is unlikely that Western-type education was yet touching ten per cent of West Africa's children, and secondary education was the privilege of a small fraction of one per cent. Outside the big centres of population, medical services except of the most rudimentary kind, were rarely available. Nevertheless, it is probable—though figures are wholly lacking—that population was growing, mainly as a result of the control established over the worst kinds of epidemic disease.

The export of primary products, on which these gains depended, had been grafted on to the traditional economic systems without destroying or seriously modifying them. These systems were not, in the true sense of the term, subsistence economics, for there had always been a considerable amount of local and even quite long-distance exchange within West Africa, and large numbers of people had made at least part of their living by specialisation in a craft or trade. Some of these industries, such as iron-smelting, succumbed to the competition of imported products; but others showed a remarkable vitality. Indeed, peace and railways stimulated internal as well as external exchange; palm oil flowed north from the forest zone as well as south to the sea-ports, and meat walked in from the savannahs. On the other hand, subsistence economics still prevailed in so far as the great majority of West Africans continued to grow most of their own food. The techniques of agriculture, moreover, had hardly changed at all, and productivity accordingly remained very low. Social organisation, similarly, was little altered. In a few areas, such as Asante and parts of Iboland, where land had become a scarce factor, modern forms of lease and sale had begun to emerge, but in general the traditional patterns of tenure remained intact. Wage labour was the exception rather than the rule, and few even of the urban workers had cut their ties with their homeland. Thus Wes

African societies had avoided the violent dislocations which had occurred in 'settler Africa', but the price of this was an economic system lacking in flexibility and condemned to inefficiency.

Until recently the colonial authorities had taken the traditional economy for granted. They had assumed that a moderate amount of production for export could be added to the production of foodstuffs, and that the old system could continue to function without special attention. In the 1930s, however, this complacency gave way to anxiety and even alarm. Problems of nutrition came into the foreground; it was at this time that the Twi language contributed the word 'kwashiorkor' to the vocabulary of medical science. It also dawned on the experts that population growth and production for export were placing a serious strain upon Africa's basic capital, the land. Books began to be written about the 'dying continent'. Though there was not in West Africa the spectacular soil erosion that could be seen in parts of East and South Africa, there was evidence enough of serious deterioration. The desert was said to be encroaching on the frontiers of Northern Nigeria, and there was particular anxiety about the pressure on the already poor soils of Eastern Nigeria. The one asset of this area was the palm oil, which tolerated the adverse conditions better than other plants, and gave the inhabitants cash with which to supplement their food supplies. But in the 1930s the oil palm was in serious danger from the competition of large plantations, in Indonesia especially, which had the three-fold advantage of producing more fruit per acre, more oil per ton of fruit and less 'free fatty acid' per gallon of oil.

#### LAST PHASE OF COLONIAL RULE

These anxieties were temporarily swept aside by the Second World War, which, though it created obvious short-term difficulties, inaugurated a new period of prosperity for West Africa. The last phase of colonial rule (which ended, in fact if not in form, in the early 1950s) was distinguished by three main features: first, a rapid rise in the price of West African exports; secondly, the awareness of the British government that the end of colonial rule was imminent and that much more determined efforts would have to be made to equip the territories with the economic framework of independent states; thirdly, a much more active intervention of government in economic life. The first two factors combined to

bring about a big increase in external investment, both public and private, in West Africa. Some of this investment, particularly in large-scale agriculture, was ill-conceived and almost wholly wasteful, being stimulated more by the critical food situation in Britain in the late 1940s than by the needs of West Africa. Though the most spectacular misinvestment in Africa at this time was the East African groundnut scheme, there were lesser examples of much the same kind of error in West Africa, such as the ill-planned Niger Agricultural Project, and the absurd plan for the mass-production of eggs in the Gambia. The problems of agricultural reconstruction were not to be so easily solved. On the other hand, much was done that was genuinely useful, particularly in the strengthening of the economic infrastructure: motor roads were built; schools were multiplied and universities were inaugurated; electricity and water supplies were vastly extended; towns took on a new look. In addition, there were the first feeble beginnings of industrialisation; factories for the production of textiles, cement, tobacco, beer, soft drinks and the like either made their first appearance or were greatly enlarged. To some extent this was the result of conscious government policy, but mainly it represented the response of private entrepreneurs to the new economic situation. The main obstacle to the growth of manufacturing had been the lack of effective demand; the people of West Africa had been too poor to buy enough of any one commodity to warrant the expense of factory construction. The new prosperity of the 1950s partially removed this obstacle.

The growth of governmental intervention in economic affairs was the result partly of the Second World War, which made controls inevitable, and partly of ideological change in Britain. One of its principal manifestations was the public corporation, an institution taken over from semi-socialist Britain and applied without much thought to the very different political and social context of West Africa. Most spectacular of these corporations were the Marketing Boards, which came into being during the Second World War and attained a commanding position in the economic (and political) life of West Africa in the post-war period. The sales of most West African commodities were now channelled through central organisations, which paid a fixed price to the farmers and organised the distribution of the products in the overseas markets. This system arose for three distinct reasons.

First, there were the special circumstances of the war period, when West Africa's products were sold by bulk contract to the British government. There was the popular dissatisfaction with the existing marketing system: the enquiry into the cocoa hold-up had elicited bitter complaints both against the middlemen and against the monopolistic commercial firms. Finally, there was the desire to save West Africa from the disastrous effects of price fluctuations in the world market: the idea was that producers should be paid less than the market prices when these were high, and that the funds thus accumulated should be used to subsidise the farmers in times of low world prices, so that their incomes would be kept relatively stable, but things did not work out quite as had been intended. The big firms were not curbed; on the contrary, as privileged agents of the Marketing Boards their position was more strongly entrenched than before. Nor was price stabilisation actually effected. Instead of falling shortly after the war, as everyone had expected, world prices continued to rise for another decade. But the farmers continued to be paid much less than the market price, with the result that huge surpluses piled up in the hands of the Boards. Moreover, by the early 1950s it had become clear that most of the money would never be returned to the producers, at any rate directly. For the Marketing Board system had acquired a new function, as a simple instrument of taxation. When prices did at last fall, the accumulated funds had mostly been spent in other ways, and little was available to support the farmers' incomes. European liberals who protested against this development, which they regarded as unfair exploitation of the agricultural population, were surprised to find that the nationalists, when they came to effective power, did nothing to alter the system; the Marketing Boards had become one of the main props of the public finances and pillars of the state.

More serious still was the criticism that for nearly ten years the marketing surpluses were neither returned to the farmers nor spent on development, but were for the most part hoarded in London with the result that the poor West African countries were actually lending money, on balance, to Britain. The political changes of the early 1950s altered this situation. Little of the money was ever returned to the farmers, but the funds were now rapidly spent—much of them on genuine development schemes, but some of them, as subsequent enquiries were to show in

Western Nigeria, in less justifiable ways. Indeed, it may be said that between them the late colonial regimes and the new national governments failed to make full use of the opportunities presented by the sudden access of wealth to West Africa in the post-war period. First there was too little expenditure and then there was too much, so that very soon after independence the new states faced a bleak future, with falling prices, depleted treasuries and much less new productive capital than they might have had.

*(iii) A Reassessment of the Historiography  
of the Period*

A. E. AFIGBO

FOR the teacher of African history, there is no lack of books on the history of the colonial period in West Africa. The real problem is that most existing books assume that Africans were largely inert and contributed to their own history hardly anything worth recording. They take as West African history in this period what the British (or the French for that matter) thought and said and did in the countries they ruled. Such books depict a politically decadent, socially disorganised and morally depraved subject people, 'pacified' by a philanthropic British nation which guided them with fatherly patience and tender care to nationhood. Even the movements for independence tend to be presented as largely the maturing of a political programme which the British had planned from the onset of colonial rule. Some African nationalist zealots, and their often equally misguided paternalistic sympathisers from abroad, have in reaction tended to think that African history even in the colonial period should deal solely with the thoughts and sayings and doings of Africans. Knowledge, however, is not advanced by opposing cliché to cliché and distortion to distortion. A comprehensive conception of the history of these territories in the colonial period must embody the two views sketched above, and the history of the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana or Nigeria under British rule must therefore synthesise the interaction of the British and the indigenous peoples concerned.

One key to understanding the attitude of the textbooks is to realise that many of them were written by British people who

were defending an established system that was increasingly under fire. There was a time in Western Europe when expansion overseas was considered one of the most impressive expressions of a nation's genius, and colonisation of weaker peoples was regarded as a legitimate means of meeting certain national needs. British poets and historians extolled the process (colonialism) which made it possible to spread the influence of the Anglo-Saxon race all over the globe, while those who had a philosophical turn of mind regarded the colonisation of the technologically weaker peoples by the technologically stronger as the working out of Darwin's theory of evolution exuberantly distorted as the survival of the fittest. But what was fashionable yesterday has become unfashionable today. Colonialism has, of late, been subjected to invective and accusation by socialists and nationalists, and the former colonialists have taken up the pen in their own defence. Many former colonial officers chose to write histories of the colonies in which they served. They claimed that Britain came to West Africa on a philanthropic mission which, beginning with the abolition of the slave trade, progressed to the crusade against slavery, human sacrifice and other 'obnoxious' practices which existed amongst the people; that Britain's acquisition of political control over a number of African peoples was painfully forced on her partly by the discovery that such a step was necessary for the satisfactory accomplishment of her mission and partly by the rivalry of the French and the Germans. A number of the popular works which tell the story of Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria in the colonial period must thus be viewed as a defence of British doings in West Africa. As Dr Dike has said, 'In the period of colonial rule . . . much of what work was undertaken (in the study of Africa) was directed to justify the colonial policies of the metropolitan countries.'

Against this view, it may be contended that Britain came to West Africa and to other parts of the continent primarily to serve her own selfish interests. The industrial revolution had by the nineteenth century created in Britain a great need for markets and raw materials, part of which could only be satisfied through the colonisation of Africa. Thus the abolition of the slave trade was not only, or even mainly, a triumph for British moral scruples but a reflection of Britain's changing economic needs; Britain had discovered that it would pay better to leave Africans in Africa to

provide new markets for British goods and produce raw materials for British industries than to transport them to America and the West Indies. This point of view may be no more than a partial explanation of the reasons behind British occupation of parts of Africa but it serves as a corrective to the theory that the colonisation of Africa was undertaken primarily to show the light to benighted Africans. The colonisation of Africa was no doubt the result of a multiplicity of causes, not all of equal weight. It will probably be found, however, that the most important single factor was the quest for markets and raw materials. The industrial revolution not only created the desire for European occupation of Africa, it also made it possible by placing at the disposal of the colonial powers a superior technology.

As soon as it is accepted that the British did not come to West Africa as political or social reformers, the wars which they fought with Africans in the process of imposing their rule change character and acquire a new significance. Among the more famous wars were: the Bai Bureh War in Sierra Leone (1898) which resulted in British military conquest of the peoples of the Sierra Leone hinterland; the Anglo-Asante wars—particularly those of 1874, 1896 and 1901—which dominated the nineteenth century history of the former Gold Coast or modern Ghana; the expeditions against Ijebu (1892), Brass (1895), Ilorin and Bida (1897), Benin (1897), Arochuku (1901-2), and Northern Nigeria (1900-4) which marked the different stages in British conquest of what later became Nigeria. These wars, caused by African resistance to British penetration, are generally contemptuously termed 'pacificatory expeditions' in the older books, and the Africans who led the resistance are portrayed variously as wrong-headed and obscurantist slave dealers, or addicts to human sacrifice and cannibalism who tried to obstruct British torch-bearers of civilisation. On the other hand, we can see in these resistance movements some of the earliest manifestations of the nationalist resentment of alien rule by the various groups concerned. Some people even in recent times have written as if African nationalism were mainly the result of Western education and the reading by the elite of the nationalist literature and political philosophy of Western Europe. But indeed, African nationalism, defined as the African's desire to have his own cultural identity, is older than European colonisation of Africa, though it needed that event before it

could express itself in a form which the Western European could understand.

To understand the full import of these wars of resistance one should regard them as a stage in the clash of cultures which is the central theme of African history in the colonial period. Long before the British came, the various ethnic groups in present-day Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria had evolved specific cultural systems which were realistic adjustments to the various environments and which embodied particular solutions to the problems of human existence.

In the three centuries which had elapsed between Europe's establishment of the first commercial contacts with West Africa and the opening of the nineteenth century, there had also grown up patterns of trade and political relationships between the Africans and Europeans which the former had come to regard as forming part of their heritage. There was, for instance, the Atlantic slave trade which provided the Africans with a source of easy wealth as well as with a means of getting rid of criminals and other undesirables. Secondly, there were commercial relationships in which indigenous coastal groups became the main channel through which African goods from the interior passed into European hands, and European goods passed into the interior. In this period, too, especially along the Nigerian coast where Europeans had no forts, the indigenous chiefs and princelings not only enjoyed political independence but were able to offer protection and justice to the visiting European trader. The European penetration of West Africa in the nineteenth century meant therefore, for many African groups, an unwarranted interference by the white men with a system which had hitherto enjoyed their support or acceptance. It is therefore not surprising if bewildered African chiefs and their people resisted the British campaign against the slave trade, and the new economic doctrine that European traders and primary producers in the interior should be encouraged to conduct direct commercial transactions, as well as the equally new political doctrine that African affairs were better managed under a political relationship known as British Protectorates. Indeed, men like King Jaja of Opobo who died in the process of fighting against this attempt to subvert the old order were some of the earliest martyrs of the nationalist movement in British West Africa, and the wars which the British

fought to impose their new ways were nothing short of wars of aggression.

In the light of the above it is also necessary to question those descriptions of African states which offered opposition to British penetration as decadent and morally bankrupt 'tribal' organisations. Asante emerges from some of the old type textbooks as the untamed barbarian polity *par excellence* which lived and died by war; Oyo as a putrifying ramshackle empire racked by the selfish ambitions and slave-raiding activities of its provincial rulers; Benin as the 'City of Blood' whose ruler was a 'demon in human form'; and the Fulani as a corrupt and inept oligarchy whose empire was saved from impending collapse by the advent of the British.

The sources from which such books were written consist mostly of reports made by Christian missionaries, traders, European administrators, travellers or explorers. Most Christian missionaries saw everything unchristian as evil and so could not imagine that the Muslim and so-called pagan empires of the Western Sudan and the forest belt embodied any cultural achievements or ideas which could be other than inferior to their own Christian heritage. In writing reports home they had to attribute their modest success to the fact that they were working in a very difficult environment. The trader, too, was more often than not exasperated by the resistance of African princes to his economic imperialism. He thus circulated such reports about African princes as would win him the sympathy of his fellow nationals and emphasise to the British government the necessity for stepping in 'to re-establish law and order in the interest of trade and civilisation'. The European administrative officer in Africa had elements of the politician. Where he failed to advance the interests of his country by the cheap methods of tact and diplomacy, he had to explain his failure to the home government or face charges of incompetence or even risk withdrawal from the colonial service. It can thus be understood that the reports of colonial servants were no more objective than those of traders and missionaries. Similarly, the traveller came to Africa to satisfy the urge not only of scientific discovery but also of curiosity. Hence a description of the course of a river or the inhabitants of a region was often spiced with sensational stories about hideous customs and barbarous polities. Being themselves converts to the doctrine that Britain brought

light and civilisation to West Africa the writers of colonial history books accepted these reports uncritically. The result is the familiar story of European occupation of Africa taking place at a time when empires were falling or on the verge of total collapse and the future of the African generally was in grave danger.

It may be true that parts of what later became British West Africa were, at the time of the British advent, being rocked by wars and rumours of wars, and that a number of the more ancient empires like Oyo and Benin were facing a period of crisis and decline. However, one cannot, on the strength of this, conclude that had the British not come when they did these empires would inevitably have been dismembered, or that if they had fallen, this would have been the end of civilisation in these areas. Empires and kingdoms are, in a sense, comparable to individual human beings who may at one time enjoy robust health and at others suffer from serious illness which may or may not lead to death. Also a sore on a man's hand or foot does not always signify a total breakdown of his body mechanism. Thus there is no way by which a visitor to an empire that is in a state of depression, or where one of its many provinces is in the throes of civil war or external invasion, can know whether the empire is on the verge of total collapse or not. If Europe had been colonised during the Second World War by a set of people from outer space, by now their historians would be propounding the theory that at the time of that colonisation European political systems were on the verge of total collapse. The lesson of the political history of the western Sudan is that if one empire fell another rose. There is nothing to show that, if the Oyo empire had disintegrated and the British had not come, another pan-Yoruba state would not have risen on its ashes.

After British rule had been imposed by the use of force or the threat of it, there remained the question of consolidation through the establishment of a system of administration under the control of British officers. The policy adopted by the British in local government is that popularly known as 'indirect rule'. Under it, we are told, Britain sought to govern her subject peoples in West Africa through their traditional institutions and authorities. The aim of the policy, it is maintained, was 'to set on its legs a native government, capable some day of taking over the whole administration'. Many claims have been made for this system. Among

these are that 'indirect rule' is a system of ruling an African people through their traditional institutions, that it was decided on as a means of sheltering the African from the disintegrating influences of western culture and of helping him to retain his own cultural identity, and that indirect rule was a success.

The culture of any people, in Africa or elsewhere, is an organic whole. In the colonial situation which, above all else, involved a loss of sovereignty, one cannot tamper with an institution or practice that evolved naturally in that culture without distorting or hampering other institutions or practices which make up the organic whole known as the people's culture. The exponents of indirect rule seem to have conceived of the culture of each African people as a loose collection of practices and institutions from which they could withdraw those institutions and practices of which they did not approve while retaining unimpaired those of which they did approve. The justification of a chieftaincy or a council of elders among some African peoples lay, among other things, in its ability to enforce conformity to those practices sanctioned by traditional law and custom. The practices could include the veneration of ancestors, human sacrifice, the killing of twins, witch-hunting, the settlement of certain classes of cases by means of ordeals and so on. If the traditional authority failed in its functions it lost its *raison d'être* and was replaced. To take over such a chieftaincy and to associate it with a campaign against these established practices, as was generally the case under colonial rule, was the surest and quickest means of divesting it of its validity in indigenous eyes. Paradoxically, those who insist that an essential feature of indirect rule is that the institution used is indigenous to those governed also often accept that such an institution must be 'purged' of practices such as those mentioned above, repugnant to British ideas and natural justice. Christian missions, too, were sometimes called in to subvert the people's indigenous religion which in fact formed the main basis of all that was traditional to them.

It was not that African institutions were static and incapable of absorbing change. Change brought about in a system by those who evolved it and who know its purposes and modes of working can be regarded as a natural evolution that does not disturb the system, and may take place over such a long period of time that it passes virtually unnoticed. But change in the institutions of

subject people brought about by colonial masters can hardly pass unnoticed by the people, or without changing the ethos and *modus operandi* of the institutions in question.

It has been said that indirect rule was designed to prevent the disintegration of indigenous societies, but this presupposes that of all the different aspects of African cultural achievement only the political aspect was capable of protecting African society from disintegration. One would have thought that the first step in preventing a society from losing its identity under colonial rule should have been the preservation of its religious system. The fact is that the British were forced by circumstances to adopt a particular system of government and later set up philosophical justifications for the policy. Lack of sufficient staff, poor communications and the desire for economy in administration: it is these rather than any other considerations which account for the adoption of the indirect rule policy. Even Sir George Taubman Goldie, never over-bothered by the welfare of Africans, strongly advocated the adoption of the same policy. He realised that the European trader in Africa needed minimum involvement in the government of the people. The claim, then, that indirect rule was adopted to protect African societies is a subtle form of the more general claim that Europe's mission in Africa was philanthropic.

Similarly, those who maintain that indirect rule as a system of government was very successful can only be judged to write from the point of view of British administrators. To a colonial power, a system of government is successful if it is cheap and leads to very few revolts. But this is an entirely negative aim. A system of government should be designed positively to advance a people materially, morally and intellectually. By this criterion it is not so easy to proclaim that the system of indirect rule was an unqualified success. So far the accounts of the system have been written by its defenders and they are based on the political memoranda, diaries and the pious hopes of the men who worked it. A history of indirect rule based on a detailed investigation of how those who were administered under it felt and saw the system still remains to be written. It would certainly be relevant to compare the relative preparedness for independence of those regions where indirect rule is thought to have succeeded most with that of regions where the system is said to have failed.

Another important theme in the history of British West Africa

is the nationalist movements. A common impression conveyed has been that the agitation against British rule was found only among the western educated African elite who, being 'detrified', did not in any way represent the desires and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of the people. Recent inquiry, however, has shown that this is far from true. In the first place, the wars of resistance, considered above, were not an elite movement, but rather the reaction of the peoples and their traditional rulers to what they considered was a threat to their cherished way of life. Even after the establishment of British rule, the masses did not submit to alien rule. On many occasions when they felt that the things which they still held dear were threatened, they registered their protest, with or without the leadership of the elite. One example can be described here.

Because of their doctrine that each colony or protectorate must, as far as possible, be self-supporting, the British seized every opportunity that offered itself to introduce direct taxation in their African territories. With perhaps the exception of Gambia, Britain's West African territories offered serious resistance to this policy. In the Gold Coast, in 1852, an attempt was made under the so-called poll tax ordinance to impose a tax of one shilling on each man, woman and child who lived 'under British protection'. The resistance evoked by the attempt to collect the tax was so widespread that the ordinance was first allowed to go into abeyance and then abolished in 1866. In 1895, the British planned to levy a 'house' and 'land' tax in the colony of Lagos but were forced to abandon the scheme by the hostile reception which the people gave to the proposal. The imposition of hut tax on Sierra Leoneans in 1896 led to bloodshed. Later still the introduction of direct taxation into Eastern Nigeria in 1928 was one of the major causes of the famous Women's Riot of 1929-30 in which scores of women were either killed or wounded by rifle and machine gun fire. Investigations carried out in Sierra Leone and Eastern Nigeria have shown that the peoples' resistance to direct taxation derived not mainly from an unwillingness to part with meagre savings, but primarily from the deep-rooted belief of the masses that the imposition and collection of the tax implied an assertion by the British of proprietary rights to the things taxed.

It should not be thought that the masses, except on such occasions as the British offered them specific provocations, were

generally indifferent to what was going on around them under the colonial regime. Researches carried out in at least one of the affected areas have shown that people generally neglected the native courts and similar institutions which were designed to bring British rule home to them. Also many regarded the Christian missions as agents of British rule or at any rate as foreign institutions peddling an alien and perhaps inferior philosophy of God. The present writer remembers how his grandmother, even as late as the 1940s, used to ridicule her Christian neighbours about their kind of god who would one day die of hunger since his devotees were too selfish to sacrifice to him. There were also cases of old men who, because they associated coffins with the new ways, warned their children against being put into coffins when they died. There were people who, when pressed to send some of their children to school, sent their slaves instead. A group of Ezza elders in the early thirties of this century told an administrative officer that a boy learnt more from the farm than from the schools. These rejections of the new ways implied a continued belief or a reassertion of faith in the traditional culture; they were in fact manifestations of what might be called cultural nationalism. This is also one of the explanations for that very interesting phenomenon known as the African Church Movement which led to the breakaway of sizeable numbers of those who had been converted by the Christian missions. The people involved in this movement were, among other things, concerned to assert first the ability of the African to work out his own spiritual salvation without European leadership, and, secondly, that there were aspects of the African cultural heritage which could and should be incorporated into the new religion.

On the other hand, there were people among the masses who thought that the strength of the white man derived from the new ways which he brought with him, and in consequence sent their children to school to acquire some of the white man's 'tricks'. It was this group that raised the latter day elite leaders of the nationalist movement. Both those who stayed away from the new ways and those who embraced them rendered great services to the movement for independence in British West Africa. It was largely owing to the efforts of the one that indigenous culture and traditions did not completely disappear before the onslaught of the new ways. The other group acquired the techniques of party

organisation and political propaganda from the Western world which proved invaluable in the fight for national freedom. It is true that the masses were not generally as vociferous as the educated elite in this movement, but this is not to say that they were uninterested in what became of their inherited way of life, or in the fact that under the colonial regime they had lost the right to order their own lives in their own way.

It is important to emphasise that the division between the new (Western educated) elite on the one hand, and the traditional elite and the people on the other hand was not as complete as the British would have one believe. The tradition of co-operation between chiefs and educated elements was quite strong in the history of Ghana. This is illustrated in the story of the Fante Confederation related elsewhere, and it occurred again in 1897 when the colonial government, in an attempt to stop what it called the reckless granting of land concessions by the chiefs to aliens, introduced a Lands Bill in the Gold Coast Legislative Council which sought to vest the control of public lands in the Crown. Both the educated elements and the chiefs viewed the measure with great suspicion and argued that there was no such thing as public or waste land since under traditional law there was no land without an owner. In their own interest the two groups formed the Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society at Cape Coast which succeeded in securing the withdrawal of the unpopular measure. Agitations against British land policy in Lagos and Southern Nigeria, especially against the proposal in certain quarters in 1912 that the Northern Nigerian land law should be extended to the Southern Provinces, also provided the two groups in the areas concerned with opportunities to co-operate. It has been suggested that much of the popularity of a man like Herbert Macaulay derived from his ability to find many points of contact between the educated elements on the one hand, and the traditional leaders and the 'masses' on the other, especially on the land question and the rights of the House of Dosumu. But it was not in the interests of the colonial power that these two groups should co-operate; hence the differences between the two groups were always being emphasised. In fact, indirect rule which excluded the elite from participation in local government nearly succeeded in estranging the two groups from each other.

In conclusion, it is only to be expected that if there is disagree-

ment over what brought Britain to West Africa, there should also be disagreement over what benefits accrued to West Africa from British rule. On the one hand there is the view that it was British rule that launched Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria into the orbit of modern history by bringing them into contact with the achievements of Western Europe in technology, education and government. According to this view, Britain achieved, or at least laid the foundations for achieving, the object of her 'civilising mission'. On the other hand there is the view which grudgingly concedes that colonialism has brought technological progress to the colonised peoples, but which maintains that it is incidental that Africans have benefited from this; that Britain has merely used the colonial period to make the countries concerned a sure market for Western European goods; that the railways, roads, telephones and telegraphs which Britain built in her West African territories were designed to create ideal conditions for the uninterrupted flow of a trade which had hitherto always been balanced in her favour. Western education, the cinema and so on have also been regarded as subtle means of converting Africans into ready consumers of European goods. For instance, it is argued, the paper, ink and pen used by the educated man, as well as the book he reads, come from Europe or allied countries; by reading books written in Europe by Europeans, the educated African develops a taste for other types of European products. These two contrasting attitudes should at least be kept in view for they show that British colonisation of parts of West Africa meant for the subject peoples the dawn of a new era of history. And no period of history can be for any group of people one of only gains or losses.

## NOTES

1 See Chapter 19.

2 See p. 359.

3 The effects of British colonial practices in India were felt throughout the Empire not only in such things as administrative devices but even in such diverse matters as the arrangements of clubs and curries.—Eds.

4 See Chapter 20, p. 362.

5 See Chapter 19, p. 343.

## 23 The Colonial Phase in French West Africa

J. A. BALLARD

### *(i) Political Developments*

FRENCH-speaking West Africa is generally a blank in the knowledge of its English-speaking neighbours. There are, however, many traditional ties which bridge the colonial frontiers, for there are Hausa in both Nigeria and Niger, Ewe in Ghana and Togo, Malinke in Sierra Leone and Guinea, and Wolof in Gambia and Senegal. There are also commercial and religious ties which cut across boundaries, and Hausa traders from Nigeria can be found in all the states of West Africa, large numbers of Mossi migrate each year from the Upper Volta to Ghana to find jobs, and Muslim pilgrims continue to use the roads which have led them through Chad to Mecca for many centuries. Newspaper and radio reports now pay increasing attention to what is happening in neighbouring states, and the study of French in the secondary schools of Commonwealth countries is rapidly increasing.

#### THE GROWTH OF THE FRENCH COLONIAL EMPIRE

Until the late seventeenth century French colonial enterprise was limited to the establishment of a few points of departure in Canada, the West Indies, Guiana, Madagascar, Senegal, and the east coast of India. By the middle of the eighteenth century Canada and the West Indies had received large numbers of French settlers, while 675,000 African slaves worked in the sugar, tobacco and coffee plantations of the French West Indies. But as a result of the eighteenth century wars with England, France lost both Canada and her rights in India to England, and by 1815 she retained only small remnants of her colonial empire, Martinique and Guadeloupe in the West Indies, the wilderness of French Guiana, a few former slave stations in Senegal, the Indian Ocean island of Réunion, and five small trading stations in India.

The growth of the second French colonial empire during the

nineteenth century was not the result of a continuous policy of expansion. In 1830 Algiers was occupied by the French to prevent Barbary pirate attacks on Mediterranean shipping, and the gradual occupation of the interior paved the way for French settlers, who arrived in substantial numbers for trade and farming. In the 1850s and 1860s, the Second Empire under Napoleon III developed an active policy of military expansion which led to the extension of French control in Algeria and Senegal and the occupation of parts of Indochina. The defeat of France by Germany in 1870, however, marked a temporary halt in colonial activity and only after the Third French Republic was safely established did the French embark on their greatest period of colonial expansion, from 1880 to 1920.

Under Jules Ferry, the leader of the colonialist faction in France, Tunisia was invaded in 1881 and a protectorate was established. In other areas, local military officers, traders and explorers took the initiative in spreading French authority. The interior of West Africa was occupied from Senegal to the Niger, and French coastal trading posts provided bases for exploration of the interior of the Ivory Coast and Guinea. Then, after the Treaty of Berlin in 1885 declared that effective occupation was necessary to support territorial claims, the French unified their possessions in West and Equatorial Africa. After subduing Ahmadu and Samori in the Sudan and upper Guinea, and conquering the kingdom of Dahomey, the main French effort ended with three expeditions from Algeria, Senegal and the Congo to Lake Chad, where Rabeh was defeated in 1900. Competition with Germany led to still further French acquisitions. In 1912, the French declared a protectorate over the sultanate of Morocco, and after World War I, France was given mandates over most of the German colonies of Cameroon and Togo, so that by 1920 the second colonial empire in Africa was complete.

France and her colonies were not so rich or so powerful as Britain and hers, and even in West Africa it was rapidly apparent that the French had acquired territories which had poorer resources and were more difficult to develop and to govern than those of the British. At the same time, the French were divided on their colonial aims and methods of administration in much the same way that they were divided on questions of government in France itself, and this division brought to the colonies conflicting

philosophies and partisan politics totally foreign to British colonial experience.

#### FRENCH NATIVE POLICY: ASSIMILATION AND ASSOCIATION

The first colonial empire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was treated by the monarchy as a political and economic unit. Since France had no strong representative institutions like the British Parliament, French colonists were given no legislative councils of their own but were considered simply as overseas subjects of the king. The loss of the major colonies and the French Revolution did not entirely upset these arrangements. The Rights of Man declared during the revolution were regarded as applicable to all men in all nations; slavery was abolished and citizenship proclaimed not only for France but for all her colonial subjects. It is true that the abolition of slavery and the extension of citizenship were revoked by Napoleon but the same assumptions of universal equality were present in his Code of Civil Law, applicable to all Frenchmen and to the colonies, and in his strongly centralised administrative system which was intended to remove local inequalities by imposing uniformity. From these beginnings developed the theory that the mission of France overseas was that of assimilating colonial subjects to the culture and civilisation of France, which were assumed to be the best in the world. In educating her colonial subjects France would reveal to them the rational advantages of the French code of laws, French administration, and French culture, and once a man had absorbed all this he was fully qualified to be a French citizen, indeed a Frenchman.

The doctrine of assimilation, which fitted the republican ideals of Liberty, Fraternity and Equality, was strongest whenever the republican forces in France were dominant over the forces of monarchy and empire. Thus after the revolution of 1848, the Second Republic abolished slavery and gave to the Old Colonies—Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guiana, Réunion and Senegal—not merely citizenship but also representation in the French National Assembly. The right of political representation was suppressed during the Second Empire of Napoleon III, but after 1870 the Third Republic revived the policy of assimilation and parliamentary representation for the Old Colonies, and went further by creating in these colonies representative local government

institutions similar to those in France. Thus by the 1880s, when rapid colonial expansion began, the official colonial doctrine in France was that of assimilation.

But already the attempt to spread French culture and 'create' Frenchmen outside the small Old Colonies with their long French traditions had begun to create problems. During the period of expansion under Napoleon III, military officers in Algeria, Indochina and Senegal encountered strong traditional states and cultures which were not readily adaptable to French concepts of civilisation. Faced with the problem of governing these areas with a few inexperienced men, military governors made use of traditional rulers in much the way that Lugard later did in Northern Nigeria. Then in the 1880s, when the official motive for colonial expansion was the need for markets for French industry and the desire to match British and German expansion, the policy of assimilation came under heavy attack. Not only was it difficult to envisage the extension of citizenship and political rights to large numbers of Africans and Asians who were described in France as primitive and exotic, but the philosophical assumptions which supported the policy of assimilation were also crumbling. The doctrine of evolution, for instance, emphasised differences among the 'races' of man and denied that education could overcome racial and social variations. There was also a new interest in cultures and societies outside Europe and an insistence by scholars that these societies and their institutions be respected. Gradually, however, the idea took root that Europeans were racially superior and that only by centuries of slow evolution under European direction could Africans and Asians reach European levels of civilisation. This latter view of the colonies suited French merchants and French colonial settlers who saw colonies as business enterprises to be operated intelligently for French profit and who found the assimilation of native peoples an unnecessary distraction of scarce resources and a potential source of competition. Finally the French looked at the systems of indirect rule practised by the British in India and the Dutch in the East Indies and found them both less expensive to operate and more profitable. Thus the policy of cultural and political assimilation found opponents among colonial governors, scholars, and colonial economic interest groups, and by 1905 assimilation was no longer the official policy of the French Ministry of Colonies.

Assimilation was replaced by a policy of 'association', which emphasised variations in the geography and state of social development of each colony and allowed for the evolution along their own lines of native groups whose willing co-operation would be sought. As far as possible the French administration would use traditional institutions to encourage economic development. Accordingly when the French moved into new areas such as Tunisia and Morocco, with strong traditional institutions, these were kept intact under a system of 'protectorates'. In other areas, however, particularly in tropical Africa where the traditional rulers had either opposed the arrival of the French or did not appear to be sufficiently strong to be of use to the administration, the French made little use of the policy of association but maintained instead a strongly centralised administration.

#### ASSIMILATION IN PRACTICE: THE OLD TOWNS OF SENEGAL

Because of their long connection with France, which preceded by two centuries the establishment of other French colonies in West Africa, the coastal trading towns of Senegal held a special political and administrative position which was not extended to the territories occupied by the French during the nineteenth century. St Louis, at the mouth of the Senegal river, was established as a French trading fort in 1659, but although the French traded extensively in the interior for a long period, they annexed only St Louis and the small island of Gorée further south. By the end of the eighteenth century St Louis, with a population of seven thousand, had a European colony of six hundred, the largest on the West Coast of Africa, as well as a large assimilated mulatto population. It was this group of Europeans and mulattoes which sent its grievances to Paris on the eve of the French Revolution of 1789, asking for an end to the monopoly of trade by large French companies and the abolition of slavery. The Revolution heeded these grievances and citizenship was extended to all residents of St Louis and Gorée, including Africans.

During the nineteenth century the status of the residents of the Old Towns, which were increased to four with the establishment of Dakar and Rufisque on the mainland near Gorée, fluctuated with the changing regimes in France. In 1819 an attempt was made to start a French agricultural settlement near St Louis but this failed and by 1859 the French had reached a clear decision.

that colonisation in Senegal was impracticable. Under the harsh but able regime of Governor Louis Faidherbe from 1854 to 1861 and 1863 to 1865, the French holdings in Senegal were consolidated by military action. Believing firmly in equality but not in assimilation, Faidherbe used co-operating Muslim chiefs in his administration, promoted the export of groundnuts, and developed an extensive education programme. Then, with the restoration of republican government in 1871, the Old Towns were given the benefits of another effort at political assimilation. The right to elect a deputy to the French National Assembly, which had been granted briefly from 1848 to 1852 and 1871 to 1875, was restored to the citizens of the Old Towns in 1879. The Towns themselves were organised as French municipalities with elected councils and mayors after 1872—and an elected General Council (or Legislative Council), modelled on those of French departmental councils but with broader powers, was created in 1879.

Thereafter whenever the policy of assimilation was under attack, the citizenship and political rights granted to Africans of the Old Towns were also attacked, especially by governors who found the elected councils an obstacle to their local policies and budgets. The fact that African citizens of the Old Towns exercised political rights while preserving their traditional legal status under customary law was considered a dangerous inconsistency since it bestowed the privileges of citizenship without the legal obligations of the French Civil Code. From 1890 on, as a much harsher system of law and administration was developed in France's new African territories, the privileges of the Old Towns were frequently in danger of being removed, and the extension of citizenship and political rights was refused to new residents of the Towns and to descendants of earlier citizens. However, during the First World War, when France was badly in need of African troops, Blaise Diagne, the first African to be elected to the French parliament from the Old Towns, promised to aid recruitment in Africa in exchange for a law which reaffirmed the right of citizenship for all persons born in the Old Towns and for their descendants. Thus until 1946, when citizenship and political representation were extended to the inhabitants of all French colonies, the Senegalese of the Old Towns maintained a special status and special privileges not shared by other French Africans. The privileges of the Old Towns were not extended to the interior of Senegal, though the

chiefs of the interior were given representation on the territory's General Council (renamed the Colonial Council) after 1921 and their consistent support for the administration was used to neutralise opposition from the citizens of the Old Towns. Nonetheless the Old Towns retained a relationship of superiority towards the interior which was even more exaggerated than that in Sierra Leone between the Creole-dominated colony and the protectorate.

#### THE ADMINISTRATION OF FRENCH WEST AFRICA

To understand why French West Africa was organised as a strongly centralised federation of territories while British West Africa was a decentralised group of territories each with its own independent administration, it is necessary to know the history of the period during which the French occupied the interior. Apart from Senegal where their trading monopoly had been long established, the French traded at various points along the West African coast from the seventeenth century onwards, usually in competition with the British, Dutch and Portuguese. During the 1840s a series of treaties on the coasts of what are now Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey and Gabon were negotiated with local chiefs, and French forts or naval stations were established to support French traders in these areas. The coastal colonies eventually grew around these bases. Penetration of the interior was begun along the Senegal river early in the nineteenth century, but only under Faidherbe in the 1860s was there a serious attempt to extend French control and administration, usually through the co-operation of traditional chiefs.

When the French embarked again on a policy of expansion in the 1880s, they not only consolidated their claims along the coasts in which they held trading interests, but also began more aggressive penetration of the interior, led on by exaggerated estimates of economic riches and by fear of the extension of British interests. In the upper Niger and Futa Jallon, however, they encountered the strong Muslim states of Ahmadu, Samori, and the Fulbes<sup>1</sup> of the Futa Jallon. Between 1889 and 1893 extensive military activity brought the defeat of Samori and Ahmadu, as well as Behanzin of Dahomey. Thereafter the French advanced rapidly down the Niger to occupy the Sudanic belt. This cut off the expansion of each of the British territories, and France's hold over a unified

West African empire was confirmed by the general Anglo-French boundaries agreement of 1898.

The Ivory Coast, Guinea and Dahomey were created as separate colonies in 1893, and Sudan in 1904, but the interior regions of the Sudan, Niger and Mauritania remained under military control until after the First World War when the colonies of Niger, Mauritania and Upper Volta were created. During the earlier period conflict developed between civilian governors on the coast, who were eager to improve trade and to balance their territorial budgets, and military officers in the Sudan who were concerned to subjugate and pacify their territory no matter what the expense. In seeking an economic means of co-ordinating the administration of its new territories, the French government followed the model it had used in Indochina by creating a government-general in 1895 under the governor of Senegal, to organise both military and political activity. Then, after African military resistance was broken, the need for financial and customs co-ordination led to the formation in 1904 of a much stronger, and more independent, government-general of French West Africa based at Dakar.

The period of rapid colonial expansion from 1880 to 1910 in West Africa and elsewhere had favoured decisions and active control by the men who were on the spot in the new colonies. But once the preoccupations of officials turned from military expansion to budgets and the development of trade, there was a return to the tradition of a strongly centralised administration, with important decisions taken only in Paris or by the government-general. In France itself the central bureaucracy at Paris had grown up concurrently with the powers of the king and it continued after the Revolution to exercise very broad powers, opposing the spread of administrative power to local governments. The same degree of centralisation was now applied to the colonies. Although the French National Assembly could pass laws for the colonies if it chose to, most colonial legislation was left to decrees issued by the Ministry of Colonies. In French West Africa the governor-general, as the chief executive agent of the French government, was in charge of applying the decrees issued from Paris. Only he could correspond with the Ministry of Colonies and he maintained a large centralised staff at Dakar to co-ordinate and supervise the administration of the eight territories.<sup>2</sup> The governor of each territory could act only within the framework of decisions reached

at Paris and Dakar, but he, too, had a large staff with strong powers, so that the *commandant de cercle* and *chef de subdivision* (equivalent to the resident and district officer) were restricted by a large body of laws and regulations sent down through the hierarchy of administration. In fact, however, poor communications left most of these officials with considerable powers of discretion.

All this was in sharp contrast to the situation in British West Africa where each territory developed its own legislation and policies without tight conformity imposed by a government-general or by the Colonial Office. Like the British colonies, French West Africa slowly developed a set of advisory councils to the governor-general, the governors, and even to the residents and district officers. And as in the British colonies, a certain degree of popular representation was provided for after 1925 in the election of delegates to the governors' councils by the European traders and by a limited African electorate. But unlike the legislative councils in British colonies and the general council in Senegal, these advisory councils had no real power and their elected members seldom created difficulties for the administration.

#### THE POSITION OF THE CHIEF AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Perhaps the most striking difference between the colonial policies of Britain and France in West Africa lay in the positions given to chiefs and to local government. Officially the French policy of association resembled that of indirect rule in allowing for a flexible administration adapted to local circumstances and aimed at the slow evolution and modernisation of traditional institutions. During the period of penetration, particularly under able governors such as Faidherbe in Senegal, this flexibility was used in the administration of areas in which co-operative traditional authorities could be found. But the French tradition of centralised administration was reinforced by traditional French distrust of strong local government stemming from those days when feudal lords defied the king, and from the later period in which monarchist regions of France defied the revolutionary government. As a result the policy of association was seldom applied and chiefs, no matter how powerful or how co-operative, tended to find their powers sharply reduced while those of the French administration expanded. In effect the victory of centralisation over local

traditional institutions was a victory for the old policy of assimilation, and it was supported by republican administrators who felt that they were destroying traditional monarchy and feudalism.

An example of what happened in many places can be found in the history of Porto Novo. There King Toffa signed a treaty in 1883 by which he accepted French protection in exchange for French control of customs duties on the export of palm oil and import of alcohol, firearms and textiles. French protection meant that Toffa was protected against local rivals to his throne and against the kingdom of Dahomey and other enemies, but it also meant that the French administration based at Porto Novo gradually absorbed many of his powers when it found that they were not effectively or efficiently exercised. His taxes were replaced by French taxes; his courts were superseded by French courts except on minor customary affairs; his prison was closed; his militia was disbanded; and the size of his kingdom was reduced by division into cantons (districts) headed by local chiefs responsible directly to the French administration rather than to him. On Toffa's death in 1908 the 'protectorate' was conveniently forgotten and one of his sons, chosen by the French for his mildness and co-operation, was given the title of superior chief rather than that of king.

The example of Porto Novo is not entirely typical since it was a coastal town on which the impact of European trade and institutions was much stronger than in the more isolated regions of the interior. The Fulbes of the Futa Jallon, the emperor of the Mossi in Upper Volta, and some of the Muslim chiefs in the interior of Senegal, Sudan, Niger and Mauritania kept much of their traditional authority, especially in matters of religion. But in other areas the French either removed or ignored altogether the traditional authorities and imposed direct administration by French *commandants*. Because of the frequently disastrous economic effects of the disruption of traditional society, there were occasional efforts by governors-general and governors to reinstate the authority of the chiefs, but these attempts at reform came too late to salvage traditional authority and were usually opposed by the *commandants* who had responsibility for working with the chiefs.

The effective chiefs were in fact the *commandants* and the *chefs de subdivision*, and their relationship with African traditional authorities

was the key to the essential difference between British and French colonial rule. Under the system of indirect rule in Northern Nigeria the British colonial officer was an adviser to the chief or emir, encouraging the development and modernisation of local self-government through traditional political and legal institutions. The administration of taxation and justice was reformed but the position of the chief was reinforced and where there were no traditional chiefs, as in Eastern Nigeria, the British eventually discovered and re-established traditional democratic local government councils. In French West Africa the chief was entirely subordinate to the *commandant* and served as his agent for certain well-defined jobs, such as the collection of taxes and recruitment of labour. The area in which he served was an administrative canton which did not necessarily follow traditional political boundaries, and he did not head a local government administration but merely sat on a council of chiefs which met once or twice a year to advise the *commandant*. Finally, whereas the British attempted in most cases to respect traditional methods of selecting chiefs, the French paid less attention to legitimacy than to administrative efficiency and frequently named chiefs who were foreign to the area they administered, but who had gained the confidence of French officials while serving as interpreters or in the French army.

Thus French colonial officials visiting Kano were startled to find that the resident called on the emir in his palace and had learned Hausa in order to consult directly with him. The British desired a relationship of mutual confidence and respect. By contrast the Alaketu, traditional ruler of the Yoruba district of Ketu in Dahomey, was expected to wait upon the *commandant de cercle* at Ketu to receive his orders as a subordinate through an interpreter. Political and administrative power lay almost completely in the hands of the *commandant* who, despite the volumes of regulations and detailed instructions which filled his office, had very wide local discretion unhampered by the need to co-operate with and encourage native authorities or local government councils. Much therefore depended on the training and character of French colonial officials. The nineteenth century governors and military officers who had occasionally used the co-operation of traditional chiefs were usually the products of aristocratic or well-established bourgeois families. But the twentieth century colonial officials were

drawn from all social classes, had been exposed to the rationalist republican education of the French lycées and to the intensive and competitive university training of the Colonial School at Paris and were above all professional men preoccupied both with efficiency and with the spread of French civilisation. Hence they had little patience with African traditions, and they tended to reinforce many of the old precepts of the doctrine of assimilation.

#### CONCLUSION

In order to understand the organisation and aims of French colonial rule in West Africa, it is necessary to know something of the political and social history of France and something of early French colonial practices in other areas. The Frenchmen who arrived in West Africa usually came equipped with clear ideas of human society and political organisation which they attempted to apply to the solution of economic, social and administrative problems. Without an understanding of these ideas it is difficult to see why the French behaved as they did and why Africans who grew up under French colonial rule see the world in a different fashion from those who grew up in neighbouring British colonies.

The French were always more concerned than the British to justify and rationalise colonial rule in theoretical terms, and the concepts which they developed—both assimilation and association—were generous and altruistic. In practice, however, French colonial rule in West Africa was frequently far from generous or altruistic and tended to be more authoritarian than British rule, which was more directly and openly interested in development and trade than in the spread of British ideas and British culture.

#### *(ii) Economic and Social Developments*

THE policies of assimilation and association which dominated colonial administration and native policy in French West Africa also shaped colonial economic and social developments. But many changes resulted merely from the fact of colonial rule, and were not necessarily the result of any given policy. The traditional village economy and the social system which supported it were disrupted merely by the imposition of peace and the extension of new systems of communication, not to mention the replacement of chiefs as authorities, the imposition of taxes and forced labour, the

introduction of French currency and manufactured goods, and the attractions of growing cities. All of these changes fitted in with a policy of strict assimilation, since they tended to break up traditional economy and society in favour of the implantation of French models, but they also followed inevitably the imposition of an alien administration, particularly one with a much higher degree of articulation and specialisation.

Although these social and economic changes in traditional society were important and widespread they are not discussed in detail here, but are assumed as the background to the specific patterns of economic and social development which emerged in French West Africa during the colonial period, especially in so far as these differed from patterns of development in British West Africa.

#### ECONOMIC POLICY AND DEVELOPMENT BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The French colonial theory of assimilation, which we have examined in its political and administrative forms, found even stronger expression in the theory and practice of economic relations between France and her colonies. Assimilation in the economic sense meant subservience to the greater interests of the French empire. Just as local areas of France were not conceived as having a political or economic life of their own, the colonies, too, were seen as arms of a body whose brains were located at Paris. As arms, the colonies had no function except to serve the body as a whole and could have no separate existence.

In practice, economic assimilation meant that all important economic and financial decisions were made at Paris within the framework of French interests, that colonial resources were exploited fully for French interests, and that colonial markets were reserved for French manufacturers and merchants, no matter how adversely all this might affect the interests and development of the colonies themselves. With only slight variation, this was the basic French approach to colonial economic policy from the time of the first colonial empire until after the Second World War. The first colonial empire was built around what was known as the Colonial Pact—the French equivalent of British mercantilism. No colony was to engage in any foreign trade and all colonial products were to be sent to France by French transport; in return,

colonial products were slightly favoured in the French market. The essence of the system was monopoly and exclusion, since the only justification for the existence of colonies was their economic benefit to France.

Even after the French Revolution, no other policy was envisaged until the 1860s when France itself adopted a free trade policy, in line with the prevailing economic theory of the period. For a few years the Old Colonies controlled their own tariffs and were able to import from and export to countries other than France, but after a French economic crisis in 1882, free trade was ended and replaced by a system of high tariffs which remained in effect until France entered the European Common Market in the 1950s. The Colonial Pact was thus effectively revived under the new name of 'tariff assimilation', by which the tariffs protecting French industries were extended to the colonies, effectively forcing them to buy French products at artificially high prices and to sell colonial products to France, often at prices below those of the world market. In response to this situation and to the fact that after 1900 each colony was forced to be financially self-supporting, colonial officials attempted to develop colonial industry, but French manufacturing interests opposed the competition that this might create for them and prevented colonial industries from exporting their products to France.

This, then, was the situation at the time that French West Africa was organised as a colonial federation in 1904. In fact, one of the considerations in creating a federation was to meet the requirement of financial self-sufficiency by making import and export duties on trade in the coastal territories pay for the pacification and administration of the unproductive interior. Local finances were, however, insufficient to maintain the programme of railway and port building which was necessary to 'open up the interior' and increase trade, so several loans were made by the French government to the federation in its early years. Railway and port construction was the only form of economic development that was readily accepted at this time, and it had to be justified as necessary not only to the trade which itself justified the existence of the colony, but also to the spread of French military and administrative control of the interior.

In the 1880s, St Louis and its important Senegal river commerce were linked to the port of Dakar by the first railway in West

Africa, and the rapid growth of groundnut production and commerce along the new railway line encouraged railway building elsewhere. The attempt to connect the Upper Niger river with the sea led to the construction of a railway connecting the Senegal river with the Niger and, by 1923, of a line connecting this railway directly to Dakar. The resultant Dakar-Niger railway with its side lines to productive areas in the interior of Senegal, is still the most important rail network in French-speaking Africa. Three other rail systems were built to link the coast with the Niger river, and each created a separate economic area based on the ports of Conakry in Guinea, Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, and Cotonou in Dahomey. Only the Guinea line succeeded in reaching the Niger, but each railway opened up new areas to export production and new markets for imports. Each system was begun by 1900 and was largely completed shortly after the First World War but subsequent projects to connect the four railway systems and to link them to a proposed trans-Saharan railway to Algeria were never carried out. The failure to develop any integrated communications and transport system for French West Africa had important repercussions in later political and economic developments.

During the First World War, the colonies made an important economic contribution to the French war effort, and after the war there was growing recognition of the fact that the colonies could increase their contribution to French prosperity only if they were given a stronger base for economic development. Those who proposed a broad programme of colonial development also recommended that the colonies be given greater economic autonomy to match the financial self-sufficiency which had been imposed upon them; but the tendency to ever-increasing centralised control from Paris and the short-sighted interests of French manufacturers eager to maintain their protected markets in the colonies prevented such development programmes from being adopted. Thus there was nothing equivalent to Britain's Colonial Development and Welfare funds which were begun in 1929. The only significant economic change during the period between the First and Second World Wars was the introduction of new crops for export. Before the First World War the main exports from French West Africa were groundnuts from Senegal, which provided over half the value of exports in 1913 and almost as much in 1938, and palm oil from Dahomey. Between the wars, coffee and cocoa were introduced to

the Ivory Coast through a few French planters and they spread rapidly among African planters; similarly, in Guinea, bananas became an export product, primarily through the efforts of European-owned plantations. Apart from production for export, the French undertook a few major pilot projects in the development of the rural economy, and the administration created obligatory district co-operatives to enforce savings for local agricultural improvements.

The weak economic position of France during the 1920s and the world-wide depression of the 1930s helped to prevent any broad improvement of the economic situation in French West Africa. By 1939, on the eve of the Second World War, relatively little improvement had been made in the traditional economic structure. The railway system, a few roads, and the development of groundnut, coffee and cocoa production were the only important forms of development which fifty years of colonial rule had given French West Africa. The interior territories were still isolated from modern economic life, as were many areas in the coastal territories. Industry was limited to small beginnings at Dakar, and education and health facilities were rare outside a few major ports and other large towns.

#### THE PATTERN OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

The period of the Second World War was an exceptionally difficult one for Africans in French West Africa. After the fall of France to the Germans in 1940, the colonial administration supported the puppet government of Vichy until 1943, when Allied occupation of North Africa forced the administration to surrender control of West Africa to men loyal to General De Gaulle. It was cut off from France by an Allied blockade and so was unable to maintain the trade on which it lived. Difficult conditions continued until after the war. French West Africa was expected to produce heavily for export in order both to help rebuild liberated France and to earn sterling and dollars for France through exports to the Allies. Meanwhile France itself could not supply equipment or funds to aid this effort. The result was that under both Vichy and De Gaulle, French West Africa relied on heavy taxes, forced labour and harsh discipline to improve production, and large numbers of Africans migrated to escape French rule and enjoy the relative prosperity

of neighbouring British territories. Migration for similar reasons had taken place at various times since 1900, but it was vastly increased during the war, especially from the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta to the Gold Coast.

After the Second World War, a new and more liberal form of assimilation was adopted by France in both its political and economic ties with its remaining colonies, now mainly in Africa. Economically this meant that the reconstruction of the French economy was to include colonial development, for which substantial funds would be made available, but that control would remain in Paris and France's 'legitimate economic interests' would continue to be protected through tariffs and the suppression of competitive industry. The real change was that France, by diverting some of the Marshall Plan<sup>3</sup> aid she received from the United States, was able to furnish much larger funds for colonial development than before the war. Partially because of this investment and partially because of world demand for certain export crops, there was rapid economic development during the ten years from 1947 to 1957. Coffee production tripled, making the Ivory Coast the world's third largest producer; cocoa and groundnut production doubled; secondary industry and mining were seriously begun; electricity consumption, road-building and the number of automobiles and lorries increased ten-fold; education and health facilities were also vastly increased. The most marked development took place in the construction of major transport and communications facilities; roads, ports, airports, bridges and telecommunications received well over half of French government investment. Yet in 1957, eighty per cent of the population was still engaged in a subsistence economy, and the twenty per cent that had entered the modern exchange economy was almost entirely limited to agricultural export production, seventy per cent of it being concentrated on the three major crops: coffee, cocoa and groundnuts.

In many respects the economy of French West Africa was comparable to that of Nigeria, though both were far behind Ghana, and statistics for economic development in the French areas tended to give a misleading impression since there was a much larger number of Europeans involved than in British West Africa: ninety thousand as against fifteen thousand in Nigeria, and under ten thousand in Ghana. The important difference, however, lay in the fact that the development of Ghana and Nigeria was based on

internal resources, while that of French West Africa was heavily dependent on French money, French manpower and protected French markets. Each of these forms of dependence deserves extended comment.

Most development projects were financed with French grants under a plan for French West Africa which was an adjunct of the development plan for France. Planning was centralised at Paris and most projects were laid out there with no participation by Africans. The colonial development funds, known as FIDES,<sup>4</sup> were generous and totalled during the ten years after the war four times the amount given to British colonies by post-war Colonial Development and Welfare funds. But the concentration of FIDES investment on what is termed 'infrastructure'—roads, ports, airports, bridges and communications facilities—was so designed as to improve existing colonial production rather than to diversify it by adding new agricultural crops or aiding new industries. The investment of the funds also favoured the big colonial commercial, banking and transport companies, which reaped large profits during this period, and it benefited primarily the coastal towns, already far richer than the agricultural interior. It should be noted that, in addition to investment through FIDES, France paid for all defence and police forces, the judiciary and part of the administration in French West Africa, as well as for all scientific research and two-thirds of the cost of education and health development. The territorial budgets themselves were largely devoted to covering the major costs of administration which was overstuffed in comparison with that in British colonies. The over-staffing and high salaries of the colonial administration have left an expensive and top heavy administration as a burden on the budgets of the new states.

The staffing of the administration and private firms was almost exclusively French, and not only were very few Africans admitted to managerial positions, but there were many Frenchmen and French wives serving in low-level posts, e.g. bank clerks and salesmen, for which there were many qualified Africans available. Since the French colonies were still considered part of France for many purposes, there were few restrictions on the migration of unskilled Frenchmen to the colonies. As a result there was very little Africanisation before 1957 and hence very little development of African administrative and managerial skills. This meant that

when African political leaders were elected to ministerial positions in 1957 and began to fill top political offices there were very few trained Africans between them and the common man, and consequently a long-continued dependence on French technical and administrative personnel was necessary after independence.

Finally, much of the rapid economic growth of French West Africa was dependent on the tariff and quota protection given to its export products in France. France's own high tariffs and the continued policy of 'tariff assimilation' in the colonies meant that seventy per cent of French West Africa's exports went to France and seventy per cent of its imports came from France. The restrictions imposed on buying and selling at world market prices meant that the French colonies paid higher prices for imported goods and had a much higher cost of living than British territories, but also received a higher protected price for the sale of their products in France. French manufacturers received the benefit, and French consumers paid high prices for relatively low-grade Ivory Coast coffee and cocoa, while low-price British, American and Japanese goods were excluded from French West Africa, and better-quality, low-priced coffee, cocoa, groundnuts and bananas from other areas were kept off the French market. These artificially created conditions were particularly important for Senegal's groundnuts and Guinea's bananas, which could not have competed at world market prices.

As already indicated, both before and after the Second World War development was concentrated in the coastal territories at the expense of those in the interior. Because of the absence of interior links between the railroad systems and because coastal shipping monopolies made the industrial products of Dakar even more expensive than those of France at Abidjan and other ports, French West Africa tended to break down into two major economic systems and two minor ones based on the four ports. Dakar served Senegal, Mauritania and the Sudan; Abidjan served the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta; Conakry served Guinea alone; and Cotonou served Dahomey and Niger. The commerce of Dakar and Abidjan led Senegal and the Ivory Coast to outstrip by far the economic and social development of the other territories, with Guinea third behind them. Under the federal finance arrangements, the duties collected on imports and exports at Dakar and Abidjan were used to finance both the government-general and

the poorer territories. But while Dakar received the benefit of many government-general expenditures and was generally favoured by federal arrangements, the Ivory Coast, richest territory of all, saw itself as the cow being milked to pay for the government-general and the poorer territories with little benefit to itself. This was a major consideration in the determination of Ivory Coast leaders to break up the federation at the time self-government and independence were achieved.

The dependence of each of the French West African territories on French aid in the form of money, men and markets had its political impact in other ways. It made African leaders hesitant to demand independence or to choose it when it was offered in 1958 under conditions which implied a retaliatory removal of French support.<sup>5</sup> For Guinea, which chose independence in 1958, the immediate loss of French aid and personnel made its economic beginnings extremely difficult; for the others, who chose to wait for a negotiated independence in 1960, associate membership in the European Common Market has assured them of continued development aid and protected markets, though on a reduced scale.

#### URBANISATION

The rapid growth of cities during and after the Second World War was a phenomenon common throughout Africa, and most towns in French West Africa doubled their populations during the decade after 1945. Dakar, which had grown steadily from 25,000 inhabitants in 1910 to 132,000 in 1945, had 231,000 by 1955. Abidjan, with only 10,000 people as late as 1931, had 46,000 in 1945 and 128,000 in 1955. The same spectacular rate of growth was also true for Cotonou and in the interior, Bamako, Niamey, Bobo Dioulasso, and Ouagadougou, as well as for secondary centres in the Ivory Coast and Senegal. All of these towns were situated on railroads and flourished both from the development of commerce and from the growth of the administration with their accompaniment of building industries, transport facilities and other activities which require an increase in the urban labour force.

Most of the people who moved to the cities came from the surrounding territory, but there were also long-range migrants such as the Mossi of Upper Volta who moved south to the cocoa

plantations and docks of the Ivory Coast and the Gold Coast. They migrated in order to share in the rising wages, and to escape from the authority of district officers and chiefs to the comparative freedom of the city. Large areas on the outskirts of the established cities were soon covered with temporary housing, but the administration razed haphazard new quarters at the end of the war and re-designed them according to rigid plans with straight, neat streets and compounds all of equal size. Thus the Medina at Dakar, and Treichville across the harbour from Abidjan were carefully laid out in square blocks, in striking contrast to the newer districts of Lagos and Accra. Though officially segregation was non-existent in French colonies, the development of separate European and African quarters was similar to that in British West Africa.

The economic growth of the cities was based not so much on production, since colonial industry remained very small, as on the exchange of goods and their consumption. Most imports into West Africa were destined for the cities. Equally important as their economic functions was their social role. For the young men and the families who moved to the cities, contact with Europeans changed tastes and habits in everything from religious practices to food, dress and leisure activities, and city-dwelling also introduced or encouraged drinking, prostitution and crime. Traditional kinship ties remained strong, particularly as a means of finding jobs or support for the new arrivals, but new forms of association, ranging from small savings clubs to multi-purpose tribal unions, reshaped traditional ties for city purposes. In fact, the growth of cities fostered the growth of tribalism by throwing together hitherto separated peoples who began to compete with each other for jobs and prestige and, eventually, for political power. Since the cities were the main centres for education and employment of the educated elite, as well as for political awareness, they became the centres of activity for nationalist movements and political parties.

The new cities, then, were the primary focus for economic, social and political development during the colonial period, particularly after the Second World War. This was true in British territories as well, but in French West Africa, where administration and commerce centred almost exclusively on the territorial capitals and traditional institutions and local government outside

them had been destroyed, the cities had almost a monopoly of development and their social, economic and political importance was thus even greater.

#### EDUCATION

Since education was the means by which those who supported the policy of assimilation hoped to reach their objectives, it could be expected that the education system designed for French West Africa would stress the development of an educated class of Africans who were fully assimilated to French culture. This in fact was the case, though there were modifications imposed by administrative needs and local conditions. Those Africans who did receive a full education during any period in the twentieth century tended, in any event, to be much more thoroughly French in their interests and outlook than would seem proper to even the most Anglicised of English-speaking Africans.

Education in the nineteenth century was largely the work of Roman Catholic missions, which were particularly active in Senegal and southern Dahomey. As a result of mission efforts, these two territories produced a fairly sizeable educated elite who filled positions open to Africans in the administration and in private enterprise, not only in their own territories, but throughout French Africa. Government-sponsored schools were begun under Faidherbe in Senegal, as part of his effort to win the confidence of the anti-mission Muslim population. Beginning with a school for the sons of chiefs, whom he hoped to persuade to support the French, the government school system spread rapidly in each new colony. The separate territorial organisations were combined by the government-general into a uniform school system in 1903 and at the same time aid to mission schools was cut off following the separation of church and state in France. The official hierarchy of schools aimed at providing African-run village primary schools, which would feed regional primary schools as a preparation for entry to three-year territorial secondary schools. The latter schools trained recruits for subordinate posts in the administration, but the best students were sent on to the *École William Ponty*, a teacher-training college at Dakar with a three-year medical course, which provided the highest education available to most Africans before the Second World War. Most of the political leaders of the post-war period attended Ponty, where they formed

close personal ties and the basis for an 'old-boy' elite network which spanned the federation.

The educational system was a compromise between the assimilationist aim of forming a highly selected elite who could be considered Frenchmen, and that of filling the short-term needs of the administration. Mass education was to be provided by the primary schools, where only instruction in the French language was permitted, and government and private firms would be provided with necessary clerical and primary-teaching assistance by the products of the advanced primary schools and territorial secondary schools. But those who arrived at Ponty, though their places were limited to the number of middle-level posts which the administration needed to fill, were in fact given a very substantial dose of French secondary education with uncompromisingly high standards. For a few Africans, particularly those from the Old Towns of Senegal who qualified as citizens, there was access to the Lycée Faidherbe at Dakar, which provided the usual French secondary training in arts and sciences for French students in the colonies and prepared them for entrance to French universities. These, and the few students sent by wealthy parents or missionaries to lycée and university in France, formed a small group who were completely assimilated to French culture and who considered themselves Frenchmen. Several of these men, such as Lamine Gueye, who became a lawyer and participated in pre-war politics in Senegal, and Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first African to pass the rigorous examinations for certification as a lycée professor, were recognised in France for their high achievements within the French system. Nonetheless Senghor was one of those who began before the Second World War to react against French cultural assimilation and to assert the value of *négritude* and African culture. In similar fashion Ponty graduates in the Ivory Coast and Guinea developed an interest in African history and instigated a vigorous revival of traditional theatre and dancing.

After the Second World War, with the grant of citizenship to all inhabitants of French colonies, there was an effort to integrate the educational system in West Africa with that in France by complete assimilation. During the first years, while educational facilities in Africa were expanding rapidly, territorial scholarships were made available for bright students to study in French schools, lycées and universities. By the late 1950s, shortly before independ-

ence, an increasing number of university graduates was becoming available for the first time, and at the same time new lycées in West Africa were beginning to produce their first graduates. In 1953 an institute for higher education at Dakar was given university status within the French university system, and since independence a new university has opened at Abidjan, while large numbers of Africans are still enrolled in French universities.

The educational system since the Second World War has thus been parallel to that of France. Six years of primary school, taught entirely in French with a curriculum basically the same as that in France, leads to the examination for a certificate of primary studies (CEP), which is usually passed by one-third of the candidates<sup>6</sup> and which is the prerequisite for almost all salaried positions. Only one-fourth of those who obtain their CEP are admitted to the six-year secondary school or lycée with its traditional French curriculum. There are examinations at the end of the third year (the brevet), at the end of the sixth year (the first baccalauréat) and after an additional seventh year (the second baccalauréat). Only a very small percentage of those who enter secondary school arrive at and pass the second 'bacc' and are eligible to enter university; the numbers are so small that only in one or two states is there more than one full lycée.

By comparison with the system in British West Africa, which never attempted to duplicate exactly the British educational system, that of French West Africa provided at the secondary level a much more rigorous training, requiring a very high level of competence in the French language. The competence required to pass the baccalauréats was and is considerably higher than that required for school certificate and advanced level examinations in British West Africa. On the other hand, the British territories have always been far ahead of the French in providing primary and secondary education for large numbers of children, and the number of university graduates has always been substantially higher. Whereas education in French West Africa aimed at the selection of a highly trained French-model elite, education in British Africa, provided by both mission and state schools, and with much larger numbers of wealthy families able to pay for higher education, was more concerned with a wider spread of education.

## NOTES

1 See Chapter 15, p. 283.

2 There were only seven territories from 1932 to 1948 when Upper Volta was absorbed by its neighbours. The French mandates of Togo and Cameroon, known after World War II as trusteeship territories, were governed under the supervision of the League of Nations and the United Nations and could not be incorporated directly into the colonial federations of French West and Equatorial Africa. For many purposes, however, Togo came under government-general control, and the system of administration in both territories was almost identical to that of French West Africa.

3 The Marshall Plan (1948) was a large-scale programme of American aid to assist the economic recovery of post-war Europe.

4 Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Économique et Social.

5 See Chapter 24 (ii), p. 475.

6 The figures cited here are those for the Ivory Coast in 1957, but they are probably roughly accurate for most territories for the whole post-war period.

## 24 Nationalist Movements in West Africa

### (i) *Commonwealth Countries*

K. W. J. POST

AS teachers—whether in universities or in secondary schools—we are continually faced by two basic sets of problems, those related to the content of our teaching, and those related to its form. For students it is possible to concentrate primarily upon the subject-matter in hand; absorption is the prime concern, and skill at regurgitating the material is of lesser importance, provided the demands of examiners can be satisfied at the appropriate times. As teachers, however, we find that not only knowledge but also our ability to explain and convince, to make our account of events vivid and yet truthful, is of great importance. In fact, the form in which a subject is taught is perhaps of greater significance to us as professional teachers than the content, in the sense, that is, that almost anyone of reasonable intelligence can learn the necessary facts—our problem is to repeat them to someone else in a way which appears consistent and meaningful. This section, then, will be concerned with both sets of problems, the problem of what to teach, and also how to teach it.

#### THE CONTENT OF OUR TEACHING

The first basic question, then, is this: what is it about the nationalist movements in Commonwealth West Africa which we wish to teach? As a preliminary to this it would be as well to say something about the term 'nationalist movement' itself. Although this has passed into general usage in an African context, it is in fact a misleading term. As used in the classical European sense, related to, say, Ireland, Poland or Germany in the nineteenth century, it implies a unity of language and culture, and often a tradition of former political unity, existing prior to the attempt to free the people in question from foreign rule and to reunite them politically if (like the Poles or the Germans) they had become disunited in the meantime. In Africa, however, we are frequently told that one of the basic problems facing the new states after independence is to

create a feeling of national unity, and the most cursory survey of Ghana, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and even the tiny Gambia reveals their wide internal differences of language and culture, while in none of these cases was there an overall political unity in the pre-colonial period. African 'nationalist' movements, then, campaigned not in the name of an already-existing unity, but rather for the right to be free politically to try to create one. It is this distinctive quality which led Lord Hailey to suggest that 'Africanism' would be a better term to use than 'nationalism' in this particular context, and although this may be unacceptable because it seems to make Africa too much of a special case, nevertheless it is probably as well to remember that the descriptive phrase 'independence movements' may ideally be preferable to the one used in our title.

The use of the term 'independence movement', however, still implies the need to discuss the question, independence *from* what or whom, a nationalist movement *against* what or whom? These movements must be seen in terms of action, reaction and interaction; action in the sense that we are dealing with a period of very rapid economic, social and political change; reaction in the sense that opposition to alien elements (i.e. colonial rule) is involved; and interaction in the sense that developments in one colonial territory affected those in another, and they were all affected by developments outside Africa itself. It is a complex situation, then, which must be reduced to some sort of order and set out with clarity in our teaching. How best may this be done?

It may be suggested that it might be best to seek some fairly simple starting-point, one grasped easily enough to make further deductions from it readily understandable, and yet not so simple that it becomes an over-simplification which distorts our whole picture when developed further. Such a starting-point could be the principle that any organisation to be effective needs a leadership to direct it and followers to put into effect the decisions of the leaders. This principle was, of course, true of the modern independence movements in Commonwealth West Africa: indeed, the significant point in their development came when potential leaders united with a large enough following to put effective pressure on the British government. One essential task in our teaching, then, is to show how this situation came about, roughly in the middle and late 1940s.

## THE COLONIAL PERIOD

We are usually accustomed to view the period of colonial rule as something rigid, imposed from the outside, therefore alien and unacceptable to Africans. All this is no doubt true, but from the point of view of the development of independence movements it must also be remembered that the effect of this alien imposition was to set in train a process of rapid economic and social change within African society itself. The weakening of traditional authority, either by removing the chiefs' governmental powers (as often under the French) or by the British use of chiefs (where they existed) in systems of 'indirect rule', and by the attack on old beliefs and their priests by the Christian missionaries; the introduction of cash-crop cultivation for the European market; the imposition of taxation; the importation of a much wider range of consumer goods; the laying-down of a communications network of railways and telegraphs and later of all-weather roads; the growth of old towns and the founding of new ones; the opening of government and mission schools; all these together had a profound effect upon African society. Taken all in all, what we may say is that new opportunities to enhance their social position and thus their prestige were provided for a relatively small number of Africans. Just as Jaja of Opobo even before colonial rule was imposed was able to use his skill in the palm oil trade to rise from slave to king, so the changes introduced by colonial rule gave chances to earn new wealth, to get the new education, to become eminent and influential as a trader or lawyer, contractor or teacher.

This is not to imply, however, that such opportunities were unlimited. For one thing, the number of Africans given access to the new opportunities was very small indeed, and they were very unevenly distributed; the coastal towns like Calabar, Lagos, Accra, Cape Coast, Freetown and Bathurst were especially favoured here. In general terms Christians were much better placed than Muslims, and particularly in the field of education. Secondly, we have to remind ourselves that we are dealing now with the colonial period, and with a system of alien rule which inevitably meant frustration for any African who did succeed in taking advantage of new opportunities to advance himself. Thus, administratively, the local district commissioner, however new and

callow, however stupid and ill-informed, ultimately could always impose his will upon an African, however senior and experienced. The youngest European officer could earn more than the most senior African clerk. Economically, though Africans might be active in trade, transport and contracting they knew always that the overall control of the economy rested with the expatriate trading companies and banks, and that their own personal positions depended upon the willingness of such institutions to grant them credit. Politically, for the whole of the period up to the end of the Second World War it was quite obvious that Britain had no intention of giving power in any real sense to Africans. The most that was done was to create a few seats in the various legislative councils which would be filled by Africans from the coastal towns, elected on a very narrow franchise.

The effect of all this was to create a group of potential leaders for an independence movement; 'leaders' because they had risen socially far enough to command respect among their own people, 'potential' because it was not until the 1940s that they really began to show their interest in independence, as opposed to securing much more limited concessions from the colonial rulers. Or to put it another way, the first generation of the new African elite was concerned to improve its position *within* the colonial system, the second sought to change the whole system into another which would make them the masters instead of the British. Here, perhaps, we have the difference between Herbert Macaulay and Nnamdi Azikiwe, or between two generations of Casely Hayfords.

A further difference between the organisations formed by one generation and those of the next, between the Aborigines' Rights Protection Society of 1897, for instance, and the United Gold Coast Convention of 1947 (still more the Convention People's Party of two years later) was their attitude to mass membership. This brings us to the second component part of our organisational focus, the followers, as opposed to the leaders. The leaders of the early organisations were not concerned to recruit mass followings, and in particular made little effort to penetrate the hinterland behind the coastal towns. Their aim was to bargain with the Colonial Office to secure better terms for themselves rather than to force it to listen to radical demands because of the threat of mass action. At most a mass meeting in one of the coastal towns was all they needed, not a permanent organisational network

capable of mobilising activity in many different parts of the country.

Already before the Second World War, however, we can see changes, both in the nature of the leaders and of their followers. By the late 1930s significantly named new organisations had begun to be formed, the Nigerian Youth Movement, Dr Danquah's Conferences in the Gold Coast, the West African Youth League of I.T.A. Wallace Johnson—all of them showing by the emphasis on youth in their titles the consciousness of a shift to a new generation of leaders. Efforts were also made by them to recruit members on a wider basis, both geographically and socially, than before. Economic and social change had gone further and spread more widely, consequently a greater range of people were becoming aware of the colonial situation and its frustrations. Thus the late 1930s saw events of great significance in the Gold Coast and the Western Provinces of Nigeria, when the cocoa farmers, convinced that they were being cheated by the expatriate companies which monopolised the export of their produce, combined to hold back their harvest and refuse to sell it except at an increased price.

#### THE SECOND WORLD WAR

This was, of course, just on the eve of the Second World War. The effect of that cataclysm in West Africa, as in the rest of the colonial world, was greatly to strengthen the growth of independence movements. It may be said—taking our image from chemistry—that it had a catalytic effect, speeding up two processes, one of them the development of a new, more radical leadership, the other the emergence of a large group of potential followers for such leaders. Thus the potential leaders could not fail to be impressed by the lesson of Britain's defeat early in the war at the hands of both Germany and Japan; suddenly their opponent must have seemed far less formidable. Much could be made, too, of the propaganda of the Allies during the war. Britain, the U.S.A. and the rest claimed to be fighting for freedom, for the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they should live. Yet when pressed, the British government made it plain that this did not include colonial peoples, although they were being called upon to make great efforts to support the Allied conduct of the war.

The conduct of the war by the Allies had more tangible effects on the West African countries than merely to introduce them to new ideas. The production of arms and other war supplies greatly increased the demand for colonial raw materials, putting more money in the pockets of the producers, but at the same time working together with the shortage of consumer goods to produce inflation. At the same time the wages of urban workers remained low, failing to rise as rapidly as prices, while the urban population was growing in numbers, as more people moved from the bush to the towns, hoping to get jobs in the new factories which were being built in small numbers to produce the unobtainable consumer goods. The new jobs were never as numerous as the people who came to look for them, and unemployment grew, despite another source of jobs created by the influx of Allied servicemen. Perhaps the most important contribution of the servicemen was to help to destroy the myth of white superiority, carefully fostered by the insulation of Europeans from too much contact with Africans in the 'reservation' system. The tendency of servicemen to display natural human weaknesses, and the fact that some of them were even Socialists or Communists, opposed to the colonial system, made their contacts with West Africans educationally significant in more ways than one.

Lastly, it must not be forgotten that a considerable number of West Africans served in the British forces during the war (some sixty-five thousand from the Gold Coast, for instance). The effect of this experience must have been great, giving them the chance to travel to other countries and to see their European counterparts at close quarters. Although the role of the ex-servicemen after they returned to civilian life is a matter for further research (like so many other aspects of this subject), some of them certainly were among the most militant members of the independence movements after the war, and all of them were an important source of new ideas.

In the immediate post-war period, then, a more militant leadership with a potential mass following appeared, at least in Nigeria and the Gold Coast. The potentiality existed for the putting of far more pressure upon the British administration than before. Moreover, the Second World War had also had an important effect upon Britain itself; the colonial power was now far more receptive to such pressure. The new Labour government

had realised that some measure of colonial reform was essential, and was gradually facing up to the fact that the devolution of political power to Africans must be begun, the secret now being to ensure that African leaders basically sympathetic to the British point of view should inherit this power. There was a sense, then, in which the post-war British government—be it Labour or Conservative—was from the beginning anxious to respond to the demands of the independence movements.

It is at this point that differences between the various countries of Commonwealth West Africa began to be more significant than the similarities. From the mid-1940s they began increasingly to take different paths to independence. Thus in the Gold Coast the decisive factor was the emergence in July 1949 of a militant and radical independence movement—the Convention People's Party, led by Kwame Nkrumah—which replaced the U.G.C.C. and its moderate, more 'respectable' leaders. Having won the 1951 elections, the C.P.P. was then able to retain power as it was gradually handed over by the British, and to beat off the challenge presented by the National Liberation Movement and other opposition parties in the period 1954–7. By doing this, the British government was left with no choice but to accept it as the only possible heir to complete political power when independence came in March 1957.

Nigeria presents a very different picture. Here the modern independence movement, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, got off the ground earlier, in 1944, but was neither so militant in its demands nor so well organised as the C.P.P. The decisive factor in Nigeria seems to have been the early emergence (in 1948–51) of regional rivalries and of parties expressing them. As a result, the period 1951–8 became a period of the adjustment of interests between three major parties, between the north and the two southern regions taken together, and between the majority and minority ethnic groups in each region; the first and second of these adjustments resulting in the adoption of a fully federalised constitution in 1954. These internal divisions enabled the Colonial Office to retain the initiative much more effectively than in Ghana, and also ensured that the federal government which emerged after the 1959 election and led Nigeria into independence in October 1960 represented an uneasy coalition of very disparate interests.

Sierra Leone and the Gambia present a rather similar picture to the last, the decisive factor in their progression to independence being internal divisions, and also their lack of economic and social development compared with the two larger territories. In Sierra Leone, rivalry between the colony and the protectorate delayed constitutional change in the period 1945-51. However, the difference in population between the two meant that any party which gained the support of the protectorate and kept it would be the party which led the country to independence. The Sierra Leone People's Party, emerging in the election of 1951, was able to do this, weathering the storms of economic crisis, strikes, anti-chief riots and a split in its own ranks in the period 1955-8, and consolidating its position from then until independence in April 1961.

The Gambia was also distinguished politically by rivalry between colony and protectorate, and it was not until the end of 1962 that a party, the Progressive People's Party, emerged which was really able to control the majority of votes in the all-important hinterland. For the next three years the most important issue was to be whether or not the Gambia would actually become independent itself, or would enter into some sort of union with Senegal. This did not become immediately practicable, however, and in February 1965 the last of the British possessions in West Africa became independent.

#### TEACHING PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS

The subject has now been discussed in the general terms of content and the specific terms of what points would seem to be essential to our (and our pupils') understanding of the development of the independence movements in Commonwealth West Africa.<sup>1</sup> We must now consider this part of the syllabus in terms of how to teach it. It is with some diffidence that a university teacher should proffer advice to those who teach in schools and teacher-training colleges, since our job is far easier than theirs.

Moreover, what studies there are must often (and inevitably) suffer from bias. However open-minded the British or other expatriate writer, he is bound to view social change and its political effects in certain ways, to have a view of society and the political process which does not derive from African experience. Similarly, any African writer is likely to be committed to a view

of the independence movement which may not take a full account of the complexities of the colonial situation in its last years. Bias, too, is a menace in both teacher and pupils. In the former it is a problem because, remembering the colonial period well and possibly having been involved in the independence movement, the teacher is likely to show a much greater personal commitment than usual, while the pupils may not have participated in the events personally, but doubtless have absorbed some of the prejudices of their parents.

Perhaps the most difficult of our problems in teaching the history of these very recent events is our awareness of our responsibility to present governments—governments representing parties which developed as independence movements and often containing men especially active during this last phase of the colonial period. We have already mentioned the way in which emphasis is now laid upon the creation of a sense of national unity, which will transcend tribe and region. It is obvious that one of the most important single elements in creating this awareness, probably the most important, is education. There must inevitably, then, be great pressure, directly or indirectly, upon the teacher to take a certain point of view; yet what if he is an Asante and feels that the National Liberation Movement was not entirely wrong in its demands, or a Tiv in Northern Nigeria who would like to see the establishment of a Middle Belt State? It is frankly beyond my power to answer this question, but it is one of which we all have the responsibility to be aware.

Amidst all these pitfalls, what hope is there that this part of the syllabus can be taught properly? ('Properly' here being in such a way as to give the pupil a reasonably intelligible and balanced picture of how his country came to attain independence, and how its recent history in this respect compares with that of similar countries.) It can be done, but it will provide the severest test of the abilities of the teacher, who, having mastered his own bias and keeping that of his pupils in control, must seek to arouse their imagination sufficiently to transcend the lack of materials, while at the same time teaching them much which we might normally regard as within the provinces of sociology and political science, rather than history. In this situation, it would seem that much attention will have to be paid to creating one's own material, that is, supplementing inadequate published material with local

'projects' of one sort or another. For one thing, my experience and that of others working in similar fields would suggest that many more newspapers and pamphlets of the independence movement period have survived than might normally be expected, and people who have these stored away in cupboards and boxes somewhere might very well be prepared to give them to a local school. Similarly, there are many men and women to be found, who, while no longer active themselves in politics, may have been very active in the immediate post-war period. Records made of their life-stories, and particularly of their experiences in the early days of the independence movements, would prove invaluable guides to an understanding of people's motives at this time. It may also be possible to persuade some of the more eminent people who were leaders at that time to come and give talks in the schools.

In understanding the social change which produced the leaders and their followers, much can probably be made of local projects, asking pupils to find out what social changes occurred in their area in the colonial period, what cash crops were introduced, when roads were built, who built the first upstairs house, when the first bicycle was brought into the area, when the missionaries arrived and who they were, and many other questions. After all, people are in fact alive who know all these things, and, in my experience, it is possible to find them out. Similarly, it should be possible to discover when the first branches of the modern political parties were established in a particular area, and by whom; with any luck that person will still be living in the area and available to give a talk to the class!

Once again, of course, there are problems here. Reference has already been made to the uneven nature of economic and social change in the colonial period, to the fact that some areas witnessed far greater changes than others. Some teachers will be fortunate in the location of their schools in this respect, others not so fortunate. However, to continue raising obvious objections of this kind seems pointless at this stage. There is probably not one positive statement in this section, concerning either the subject-matter discussed or the ways in which it is presented which cannot be challenged, or at best heavily qualified. All that can be done is to accept the challenge that this very stimulating topic presents.

*(ii) The French Territories*

J. A. BALLARD

THE period between the end of the Second World War and 1960 saw a rapid transfer of power from Britain and France to their remaining colonies—first in Asia, then in Africa. For the British colonies the path of self-government was well-established by the older dominions in the Commonwealth, and self-government and independence were objectives accepted on all sides. The political problems were primarily those of working out constitutional provisions and time-tables. For the French, on the other hand, decolonisation was a painful process. Not only were there no precedents for the transfer of real administrative and political power to the colonies, but the whole tradition of centralisation and assimilation made Frenchmen feel that their colonies were essentially part of France. The Indochinese and North Africans who refused assimilation on French terms won their independence only after protracted warfare. For French West and Equatorial Africa, however, the goal was never entirely clear for Frenchmen or for African leaders. The steps towards self-government and independence were taken largely because of the situation in other colonies and unstable political conditions in France.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it is difficult to claim that there was a sense of national identity at the territorial or federal level. Assimilation had done its work, and African political leaders were unsure whether they wanted to be Frenchmen or independent Africans.

## THE REFORMS OF 1945-6

Apart from political activity concerned with elections to the special institutions of the Old Towns in Senegal, politics before 1945 in French West Africa was very limited in scope. In isolated areas there were occasionally revolts against French rule by particular ethnic groups, but these were quickly stamped out by military action. There was more subtle opposition to colonial rule in the activities of religious groups, both Islamic sects and syncretist ones which broke away from Christian missions. These were closely watched by the administration and, in the case of Islam, there were systematic efforts to persuade religious leaders of the

value of French rule; those who were so persuaded, particularly the influential marabouts of Senegal, were given advantages similar to those given to traditional chiefs who co-operated with the administration.

For the educated elite, however, there was very little opportunity for the expression of political protest. A few young Africans, supported by a few wealthy African traders, produced monthly newspapers in Senegal and Dahomey and in Paris, where they were aided by the Communist Party and other anti-colonial groups. But political associations and parties were banned until 1946 and, since educated Africans depended almost entirely upon the administration for employment, they hesitated to participate openly in political activity. To ensure that no serious political opposition developed, colonial officials had available to them the powers of the *indigénat* under which they could without judicial process impose fines or short jail sentences on anyone who refused to obey an order from an official or a chief, who left his administrative district without authorisation, or who broke any of a long list of regulations.

At the end of the Second World War, it was apparent that Africans would have a voice for the first time in the shaping of policy, but the African elite was uncertain what policy to pursue. The citizenship and political rights of the Old Towns of Senegal had always stood as an ideal for the colonial subjects of the other territories, since they conferred most of the privileges associated with French citizenship. On the other hand, there was a strong desire to break the authoritarian grip of the over-centralised colonial administration and to have a certain measure of self-government in the colonies. In a sense these two desires revived the old conflict between assimilation and association, thereby creating rival objectives which confused the discussion of proposed reforms.

In January 1943, during the war, a conference of colonial governors met under General de Gaulle at Brazzaville to define post-war colonial policy, and adopted a number of recommendations for social reform, including the progressive elimination of the *indigénat* and forced labour. Concerning politics and administration, the conference emphatically denied the possibility of future self-government, but suggested administrative decentralisation and moderate political assimilation, with representation for the colonies at the French Constituent Assembly which was to be

called at the end of the war to frame a new constitution for France and her empire. Following the terms of this last recommendation, French West African citizens (mostly Europeans outside Senegal) and subjects separately elected deputies to the National Constituent Assembly in October 1945. The temper of the Assembly was liberal and it enacted a number of colonial reforms and drew up a constitution which suited the hopes of the African deputies. Citizenship was granted to all inhabitants of the colonies and forced labour was abolished, while the Ministry of Colonies decreed the end of the *indigénat*. The constitution itself was ambiguous, but appeared to give each colony the right to choose whether it wanted autonomy or membership in the empire, now renamed the French Union.

This constitution was rejected by a majority of the voters of France for reasons other than its colonial provisions, and a second Constituent Assembly was elected in June 1946 which was less liberal than its predecessor. The European planters and traders in the colonies and the colonial trading interests in France attempted to repeal the reforms and constitutional proposals of the first Constituent Assembly, and, in response, the African deputies organised to defend their interests and threatened to withhold their small but important bloc of votes from other legislative proposals if they did not win renewal of the reforms. In the end, citizenship was preserved and other social reforms were maintained, but the constitution approved by the French people in October 1946 left no possibility of autonomy within or outside the French Union. The colonies were given a small number of representatives in the French National Assembly, in the Senate and in the Assembly of the French Union, and each overseas territory—including each of those in West Africa—was given a Territorial Assembly with limited powers similar to those of the old Colonial Council in Senegal.

The total effect of these changes was not so great as might appear on the surface. Effective legislative power remained with the Ministry of Colonies, rather than with Parliament (the National Assembly and Senate), and at the Ministry the voice of European interests in the colonies was much louder than that of African deputies. Parliament could legislate for the colonies if it wished, but during the Fourth Republic (1946–58) the absence of a coherent parliamentary majority and the resultant instability of

the French government meant that only non-controversial legislation had a good chance of obtaining passage. Furthermore, colonial reforms never seriously occupied the attention of the parliamentary majority. The traditional centralised colonial regime had been liberalised, but it was still very much intact.

As for the impact of the reforms within West Africa, the end of forced labour and the *indigénat* removed much of the legal basis for arbitrary administrative measures, but in practice these latter were only slowly removed, and the grant of citizenship proved to be largely illusory in providing equality with Frenchmen. The distinction between citizen and subject was preserved through the distinction between those who were subject to French law and those who preserved their traditional legal status, a distinction which had never been enforced in the case of the citizens of the Old Towns of Senegal. Representation in the Territorial Assemblies was given separately to citizens of French status and to citizens of local status, and discrimination in military obligations, hospital services, and civil service cadres was maintained in force.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES, 1945-56

Immediately after the war political study groups and small trade unions sprang up in most of the major towns in French West Africa, organised among the young educated Africans by French teachers and officials and affiliated with the French Communist and Socialist parties. These were the parties in France which were most concerned about colonial reform; through a few of their members in the colonial administration they provided invaluable training in political organisation and strategy for the new African political leaders and their supporters. The elections for the Constituent Assemblies provided the first occasion for open political activity among Africans and the study groups gave to their candidates a base for electoral organisation among a small electorate confined primarily to the educated elite and leading chiefs. Once elected, the African deputies at Paris worked together as a group but found that their influence was increased by affiliation with the major French parties in the Constituent Assemblies.

The threat to colonial reform at the second Constituent Assembly led the African deputies to issue a manifesto decrying the stand of conservative French colonial interests and calling for

a gathering of all African political organisations at Bamako to consolidate African efforts to obtain further equality and autonomy. Delegates from study groups, trade unions, elite associations and nascent political parties in each territory met at Bamako in October 1946 to announce their support for the positions taken by the African deputies at the Constituent Assembly and to organise an interterritorial party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (R.D.A.). The R.D.A. could at this point have grouped together all the developing political forces in French West Africa, but the Socialist Minister of Colonies feared that the French Communist party would capture control of the Bamako Congress and so he threw the entire weight of the colonial administration against the holding of the Congress. Several of the deputies who had signed the manifesto, but who were affiliated to the Socialist party, were persuaded not to attend the Congress, and since this included the two deputies of Senegal, Lamine Gueye and Léopold Sédar Senghor, the important territory of Senegal was cut off from the new party. The deputies of Sudan, Guinea and Dahomey were also persuaded not to join the party and this left Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast as the outstanding leader of the R.D.A.

In elections to the new French National Assembly in November 1946 the R.D.A. succeeded in electing several deputies, and the following month it won seats in many of the Territorial Assemblies, but obtained a strong majority only in the Ivory Coast. At Paris, the party allied itself to the French Communist party, the only one which supported its demands for further colonial reform and for genuine implementation of the reforms of 1946 by the colonial administration. The Communist party, however, was entering a long period of complete alienation from other French parties as the cold war between Russia and the West developed. As a result the R.D.A. leaders and their followers were harassed by the administration and accused of being subversive and anti-French.

The R.D.A. was modelled on the French Communist party and its strength as a party lay in mass organisation in the cities and the rural areas, and in its use of labour unions, tribal unions, women's organisations, co-operatives and other associations which widened its support and spread its ideas. In areas where the party enjoyed strong support its leaders were followed unquestioningly,

and this threatened to undermine the authority of the administration.

By 1949, when anti-Communist feeling was strongest among French politicians, colonial officials began to use all the powers at their disposal to weaken and eliminate the R.D.A. The party was strongest in the Ivory Coast, where it had been well organised and had the financial support of wealthy African cocoa and coffee growers, and here the political struggle between the party and the administration became especially tense during 1949. Early in 1950 a long series of incidents culminated in the shooting of several Africans at Dimbokro, an attempted arrest of Houphouët-Boigny, and a ban on R.D.A. meetings in all territories.

During the sittings of a parliamentary investigating commission the Ivory Coast was calmed, and Houphouët-Boigny and other R.D.A. deputies began to seek a quieter and more effective means of preserving their party and gaining their objectives. Through negotiations at Paris they agreed to drop their affiliation with the Communist party and won in exchange the removal of the governor of the Ivory Coast and of a few other strongly partisan officials. Nonetheless the R.D.A. continued to be distrusted and opposed by the colonial administration and, in the elections to the National Assembly in 1951, falsification in several territories resulted in only Houphouët-Boigny and two other R.D.A. deputies being re-elected. Thereafter the party's leaders were preoccupied with the task of rehabilitating the party's name in the eyes of French politicians and colonial officials and they sought to collaborate with administrative programmes wherever these seemed to be genuinely in the interest of Africans.

The policy of collaboration worked well in the Ivory Coast, where R.D.A. leaders and local European planters and traders worked together to persuade the French government to subsidise the sale of coffee and cocoa on the French market. In other territories, such as Cameroon and Niger, the R.D.A. leaders were active in labour unions which were closely linked with the Communist-supported French labour union, and their refusal to support the new R.D.A. policy of collaboration led to their expulsion from the party and, in the case of Cameroon, to guerilla warfare against the administration and other African political groups. In Guinea and Sudan, where the R.D.A. had been ardently opposed by the administration, party leaders such as

Sékou Touré and Modibo Keita found that the territorial administration was not willing to accept collaboration. They remained loyal to the R.D.A. but had to reorganise on a militant mass basis in order to prove their strength and win recognition.

No other party developed on an inter-territorial scale to compete with the R.D.A., but the African deputies who refused to join the party joined instead the Socialists or other French parties at the National Assembly in order to obtain support for their petitions and complaints to the Ministry of Colonies. The outstanding deputies among these were Lamine Gueye and Léopold Sédar Senghor. Lamine Gueye had long been associated with the Socialist party in pre-war politics in the Old Towns of Senegal and was the respected doyen of African political spokesmen during the Constituent Assemblies. Senghor, a brilliant young lycée professor, was at first the protégé of Lamine Gueye but became the spokesman for the interior of Senegal against the citizens of the Old Towns and broke from Lamine Gueye and the Socialists to found his own territorial party. By careful attention to organisation, he succeeded by 1951 in defeating Lamine Gueye and his supporters, who included the Socialist-controlled government-general. At Paris, Senghor joined with most of the non-R.D.A. deputies in 1948 to form a parliamentary party, the Indépendents d'Outre-Mer (I.O.M.), or Overseas Independents, which allied itself with a moderate French party. The I.O.M., apart from Senghor's mass-organised party in Senegal, was simply a collection of local political elites which received the support of the administration against the R.D.A., and never succeeded in setting up an inter-territorial organisation. Because of the I.O.M.'s collaboration with the administration, however, its supporters were able to win election to the National Assembly in 1951 and one of its leaders was given a minor cabinet post in several short-lived French governments.

The period from 1947 to 1956 was, then, essentially one of fierce, though largely non-violent, conflict with the administration followed by compromise. Neither strategy obtained any major political reforms for the colonies before 1956, but political leaders developed their abilities and organisations first in the major territories of Senegal and Ivory Coast, and later in Sudan and Guinea, and were ready for the period of rapid institutional change which followed.

## THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE, 1956-60

The aims of the R.D.A. and the I.O.M. were not different on essential matters. Both groups sought increased powers for the Territorial Assemblies and more effective democracy overseas, without real autonomy or full self-government. At the same time they insisted on assimilation to, or equality with, the political



Fig. 18 West Africa: Political.

and social advantages of Frenchmen. Since, however, all major political forces in French West Africa were more willing to collaborate with the administration than to enter into open rebellion to achieve these ends, French concern with colonial affairs tended to concentrate on the more troublesome areas of Indochina and North Africa. By 1954, when France was forced to accept compromises which meant full autonomy for Indochina, Morocco and then Tunisia, there was a realisation on the part of French

politicians that political concessions would have to be made in West and Equatorial Africa in order to contain the growth of political awareness and demands. The only major pieces of legislative reform since 1946 had been the enactment of equality of salaries for Europeans and Africans serving the administration, and the passage of a liberal labour code which was obtained only under the pressure of a general strike throughout French West Africa. Then in 1955, at the end of the Fourth Republic's second parliament, after several years of delay by the Senate a law was passed providing for elected municipal councils in most important African towns. This was the first important political reform since 1946.

In January 1956 a new National Assembly was elected and in West Africa the patient work of organisation and collaboration by the R.D.A. was rewarded by the neutrality of the administration which allowed the return of their candidates to most of the seats available, primarily at the expense of the I.O.M. deputies. The new government placed in power by the new Assembly was committed to colonial reforms and Houphouët-Boigny was given a cabinet post to help frame new legislation. In June 1956 a *loi cadre* (Outline Law) was passed by the Assembly giving exceptional powers to the government to frame political reforms for West Africa and, at the same time, extending universal suffrage to the area. Under the *loi cadre* a series of decrees were put forth by the French government early in 1957 which stretched the October 1946 constitution to its limits. A limited form of self-government was given to each territory, under which the Territorial Assemblies could elect ministers who would serve under the governor as an executive council. The considerable degree of legislative autonomy given each territory was achieved largely at the expense of the government-general, whose federal powers and budget were strictly curtailed in line with the demands of Houphouët-Boigny and the Ivory Coast.

The new reforms were put into effect after the Territorial Assembly elections of March 1957, in which the R.D.A. confirmed its control of the Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Sudan, and its strong position in Upper Volta. The party was, however, subjected to new strains by the demands of the Guinea and Sudan branches for a larger measure of independence within the framework of continuing West African federation. Meanwhile Senghor and other

former I.O.M. leaders adopted a more radical line in favour of greater independence in federation. An attempt was made to bring together all African political parties to work for these aims and, when the R.D.A. refused to compromise its position of strength, all the others allied themselves under Senghor's leadership as the Parti de Regroupement Africain (P.R.A.). The conflict over federation and independence was thrown into clear focus by the peaceful revolution in France which brought de Gaulle to power in May 1958. After long negotiations de Gaulle agreed that his Fifth Republic constitution should provide for a French Community vaguely similar to the British Commonwealth but thoroughly dominated by France, and that the voters of each territory should be allowed to choose independence by voting against the new constitution in a referendum. De Gaulle made it clear, however, that any territory which chose independence would immediately lose all French financial and technical assistance, and under this threat most political leaders were persuaded to support membership in the Community. Youth and labour leaders favoured immediate independence at any cost, but only in Guinea did the political leaders of a well organised party order a 'no' in the referendum. When the referendum was held in September 1958, Guinea voted for independence and de Gaulle immediately withdrew all French personnel, and much equipment, and refused diplomatic recognition to the new state.

The other territories accepted de Gaulle's constitution. In November each of the Territorial Assemblies chose the status of autonomous republics within the French Community, and during the following months political leaders in each territory drew up constitutions shaped around the parliamentary system. The issues of independence and federation were, however, still alive. Senegal and Sudan, in order to have sufficient strength to confront the power of France within the Community, attempted to persuade the other territories to form a federal republic. The smaller territories, however, were placed under heavy pressure by France and the Ivory Coast to avoid federation, so that Senegal and Sudan alone joined together as the Mali Federation. The Ivory Coast, to counter the influence of the Mali Federation, persuaded Upper Volta, Niger and Dahomey to join with it in a very loose confederation called the *Conseil de l'Entente*, financed

by the Ivory Coast. Mauritania, which had always stood apart from French West African politics, joined neither group.

The new Community held power over foreign affairs, defence and various common services. Its most active institution was the Executive Council composed of de Gaulle, several French cabinet members, and the prime ministers of each of the new autonomous republics—six from former French West Africa, four from former French Equatorial Africa, and those of Cameroon and Madagascar. Guinea and Togo did not join. At the end of the Community's first year of existence, 1959, the Mali Federation demanded full independence within the Community, with each republic to be given full control over its own foreign defence and economic policies. Rather than lose all French influence by a total break, de Gaulle conceded the possibility of independence without the loss of French financial and technical aid, and during 1960 each of the new republics negotiated independence and aid agreements with France.

During the period from 1956 to 1960 parties based on a mass organisation developed during the period of opposition to the administration took control of several new governments. This was true of the territorial R.D.A. branches in the Ivory Coast, Sudan and Guinea, and of Senghor's party in Senegal. In the other states, no parties had succeeded in organising mass support on a territorial scale and political rivalries developed primarily on ethnic grounds. By 1960, however, each of the prime ministers holding office—whether they headed a mass party as did Sékou Touré and Modibo Keita, or merely had the support of an alliance of ethnic group spokesmen, like Hubert Maga of Dahomey and Hamani Diori of Niger—had eliminated political opposition by incorporating it into the government or by arresting and exiling opposition leaders. One-party systems became the accepted arrangement in each of the states of former French West Africa. At the same time the transfer of effective political power from Paris to the territories led to the breakdown of the inter-territorial R.D.A., whose leadership had been concentrated at Paris. The argument over maintaining the federation caused a split between Houphouët-Boigny and his strongest lieutenants in other territories, and each new territorial government became preoccupied with the consolidation of its own power at home rather than with the maintenance of inter-territorial links.

The rapid constitutional changes which led from full colonial rule without self-government in 1956 to independence in 1960, were not achieved without a certain amount of dislocation. Because of the French administrative and legal traditions of centralisation and uniformity, reforms were applied to all territories at the same time, with no adaptation to local circumstances. And since decisions were made almost exclusively at Paris, only the spokesmen of the strongest territories and parties had a chance to make their views heard. Federation, which would have provided a strong state capable of negotiating with France from a position of power, and avoided the extreme economic dependence of the 'balkanised' small states on France, was lost in the race for autonomy and independence. Finally, minority rights and democratic procedures were lost when political leaders holding office—no matter how tenuously—were allowed after the referendum to draw up constitutions and election laws to suit their own purposes.

#### DEVELOPMENTS SINCE 1960

The achievement of independence ended the short life of the French Community, which had been primarily a means of maintaining French control over foreign and defence policy. But the common experience of French colonial rule and continued dependence on French financial assistance led the new states to seek another framework for common services and joint negotiation with France. This framework was developed as the Union Africaine et Malgache (U.A.M.), African and Malagasy Union, during 1960 and 1961. The U.A.M. grouped together all the members of the Community except France and Mali (formerly Sudan), which separated from Senegal when the Mali Federation was dissolved in August 1960. Apart from frequent meetings of the Presidents of the U.A.M. states, the activity of the organisation was primarily that of its economic branch, the O.A.M.C.E. The U.A.M. states each became associate members of the European Common Market in 1961 and began to share in the Common Market's development funds and its protected market. After the formation of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963, other states, particularly Guinea, challenged the need for maintaining the existence of the U.A.M. and in 1965 it was redesigned as a purely economic organisation, the Organisation Commune

Africaine et Malgache (O.C.A.M.), the African and Malagasy Common Organisation.

The two states which remained outside the U.A.M., Guinea and Mali, took a strong position against continued close ties with France and on relations with the former colonial powers; they joined also with Ghana and other states of the Casablanca group to seek immediate African political unity. The U.A.M. states on the other hand took a more conservative position on African unity and on continued relationship with France. There were, however, differences of opinion within the U.A.M. group, and the old-established rivalry between Senegal and the Ivory Coast and their respective leaders, Senghor and Houphouët-Boigny, remained in force.

#### CONCLUSION

The differences between British and French colonial objectives and political institutions were clearly reflected in the differences in aims and organisation of the political movements which developed in British and French West Africa. The goals of self-government and independence were not clear for French African leaders until 1956, and the types of political parties which they led were unlike those in British West Africa in several important respects.

Social conditions in Africa contributed to this difference. Apart from the Old Towns of Senegal there were few French West Africans with sufficient education and sophistication and financial support to organise political activity before the Second World War, and French colonial regulations forbade the creation of political organisations. By contrast there were large numbers of African lawyers and journalists in the major towns of British West Africa who were supported by other Africans who had become wealthy through trade and cocoa-growing. They also competed actively for election to legislative councils and organised trade unions, protest movements and political parties long before the Second World War. In addition, the larger numbers of European traders and planters in French colonies meant that there were active European political groups who obtained separate representation in the Territorial Assemblies and in the early Constituent Assemblies. Nothing comparable to this or to the French Communist and Socialist initiative in organising

political study groups and labour unions among the African elite, existed in British colonies.

The most important differences stemmed from the centralisation of colonial politics and administration at Paris and from the presence of African representatives in the French parliament. Since political parties were first organised around the election of deputies to the Constituent Assemblies in 1945 and 1946 it was to be expected that victorious candidates would become party leaders. In fact, the special privileges, mobility and high salary of the deputies, as well as the political sophistication and influence which they gained from their experience in parliament, gave them a very special status and set them apart from and above other political figures. Those that took their work and their parties seriously developed a commanding political position in Africa and, eventually, at Paris. For British Africans there was no comparable position of territory-wide political power until the institution of self-government provided the post of prime minister. In addition the strength of local government and local politics in British colonies meant that the task of national integration under a single leader was not nearly so simple as in former French territories.

The other side of the political link between France and the colonies was the intrusion of colonial officials in African politics. Since African votes at the National Assembly were considered important by French parties, and since high-ranking colonial posts were assigned on a political basis, governors and governors-general who owed their appointments to Socialist party support in France had no scruples about falsifying elections or electoral conditions in order to assure the election of African deputies allied with the Socialist party.

## NOTES

1 It is hoped that it will be fully understood that the selection of certain points as 'essential' is entirely my own, and must not be regarded as absolutely final. Other teachers may wish to vary the emphases. However, I am convinced that some attention must be paid somewhere in any course to all the above comments and interpretations.

2 A knowledge of the main events in the political history of France between 1940 and 1960 is highly desirable as a complement to this chapter. 'When Paris sneezes France catches a cold' is a witticism that could be extended to cover France Overseas on many occasions. See bibliography.—Eds.

## 25 Trends and Tasks in the Independent States of West Africa

JAMES O'CONNELL

THE West African social scene is complex. Elements from tradition mingle with elements from modernity; a multitude of different peoples or ethnic groups, some of them highly organised, live side by side with one another in varying degrees of co-operation and competition; and a great gamut of interests and objectives makes an appeal to the energies of individuals and communities. The greater part of the lives of most persons is still lived within traditional structures—extended family, clan and tribal or ethnic links, subsistence agriculture—and even modernising groups in the towns organise themselves along social lines that long antedate the new towns or the new sectors of old towns. But more and more new attitudes towards human needs, cosmological explanation and social achievement, new machines and methods of technology, and new forms of organisation are spreading to individuals and groups and bringing them into the tempo of change.

Those forms of social organisation that increasingly mobilise the energies of individuals within West African communities are the new states. To these political communities or states principally falls the responsibility of welding the diverse energies of the traditional ethnic communities or nations into a social whole whose parts function co-ordinately, sustaining the progress of social welfare and the economic growth that underpins it, and maintaining links with other politically organised groups involved in similar commitments. Around the three main tasks of the states—national unity, socio-economic progress and foreign relations—we can best describe what is going on within them and between them.

### NATION-BUILDING

The new states owe their boundaries to the mixed accident and design of colonial occupation. Though the occupying powers did

not draw up colonial boundaries with complete arbitrariness, they inevitably included within the same administrative units or quasi-states a number of peoples who had never previously been politically joined together and who differed in history, social structures and language. The years of unified administration—a single public service, a common set of legal and financial institutions, a uniform system of formal education, and an incipient mobility of labour—began to develop a sense of common belonging among the various ethnic groups of each colonial quasi-state. This sense of belonging was deepened as the emerging elites struggled with the metropolitan governments and their local officials to gain independence. But in no case was the colonial system of administration unified and extensive enough in men and resources to make for a system that brought the various peoples within it closely together. In some cases, notably Nigeria, the colonial administration itself was so far from being unified that its cleavages passed over into the independent successor state. And in every case the struggle to become independent cost so little sacrifice and was so soon over, that the gain for a national consciousness was relatively small.

The strongest link between the various communities of the new countries is the continuing administrative apparatus of the public service that the nationalist leaders took over from the colonial authorities. It is through the public service also that the new rulers, like the old, set out to achieve their general modernising purposes. Some political leaderships, notably the Guinean and the Malien, have emphasised more than others the central and dominant role of the state structures; they have also endeavoured to galvanise the public service by using the political party that controls the government in conjunction with the civil service to impart a sense of direction to the energies of their people and to mobilise them. Kwame Nkrumah has made a similar effort in Ghana but with a less direct attempt at general mobilisation and with more reliance on a British-trained, largely non-political, civil service. Other countries, Nigeria for example, have made little or no attempt to mobilise their peoples but have used a public service that continues the tradition of the former colonial service to draw up public or mixed projects, and otherwise have done little more than co-ordinate the efforts of individuals and various groups as they develop their own enterprise.

But whether highly organised through the state administrative apparatus or little organised, the traditional ethnic groups within each country have retained their own strong individuality. Not the least aspect of this sense of individuality has been the feeling that they are not adequately represented in government except by individuals who belong to their particular community. In one way or another nearly all the countries have had to come to terms with such sentiment. The Ivory Coast has officially abolished tribalism (down to facial markings) but in practice its one party legislature is constructed along lines of 'ethnic arithmetic'. President Nkrumah has held on to Krobo Edusei to maintain a link with the Asante who are still somewhat alienated from his regime. Nigeria has sought to balance the distribution of power among its communities through a federal system and tacit agreements on regional security. Where a government has not felt itself strong enough to integrate a group, it has sedulously kept them out of power—thus, in Niger, a Hausa majority that was out-manoeuvred in the pre-independence struggle for power has been kept from any possibility of using its numbers to gain control of the government. The deep problem that continues to be posed for most of the countries is that political action tends to follow lines of ethnic cleavage. But the unity of the state is jeopardised when political and social divisions coincide. Nigeria, in particular, has recently paid the price of having failed to solve this problem by having a severe crisis over the location of power within the country.

Given the plural ethnic composition of the West African countries the best socio-political description to apply to them is 'multi-national states'. Each of the ethnic groups with its history, set of common traditions, language and sense of social identity meets the requirements normally laid down for a group to be considered a nation—the English in the multi-national state that is the United Kingdom do not meet these requirements any better than the Ibos in Nigeria or the Asante in Ghana. What, however, the term 'nation' does is to indicate a *cultural* identity. The basic *political* unit is the state within which efforts towards promoting social welfare, maintaining law and order and carrying on relations with other similarly organised political groups are institutionalised. Only time, trust and co-operation can develop a loyalty to the state that overcomes the centrifugal tendencies of the

nations within it. Yet it would be a mistake to envisage political unity—or national unity on the level of the state as distinct from that on the level of the particular nations within the state—as the engendering of a monolithic form of loyalty. Several reasons lie behind and support the acceptance of a certain diversity within the political unity: the African nations have not yet had time to grow together within one state with the kind of exclusivism that welded Bretons, Burgundians and Provençals together with the French state as it became a nation; culture in Africa has meaning within the nation, not within the state; and the various African nations through contemporary communication media as well as through the transport facilities of technology are too aware of what they hold in common to accept that differences should solidify between them through recently established political structures. In this context if the state is to achieve its purposes, it has to do so by respecting the individuality of each nation within it and integrating its various nations in a united effort.

The most common attempt to construct the unity of the West African state and to join political energies has been through the single party and the presidential system. Nigeria and Sierra Leone apart, the other countries have become one-party states. What this system has meant in practice is that the members of the political class (all those actively engaged in politics) have closed ranks and united to control political, social and economic development. The fewness in number of the intelligentsia and the absence of varied or complex structures in the modernising sectors have helped this process. It has had the merit of preventing the splintering of the energies of the elites and it has saved money from being spent on competitive party campaigning. But it renders difficult the offering of alternatives for political leadership and has led some governments to restrict liberty excessively by the arbitrary use of detention laws and interference with the judiciary. Yet it is probably true that in most of these countries in their present stage of development a built-in and institutionalised opposition would be impossible. Political attitudes persist from traditional structures where opposition was equated with disobedience and disruptive behaviour. Moreover, opposition groups themselves are far from having the long patience of a Swedish opposition and have shown little reluctance to make the most of non-constitutional possibilities of vaulting into power.

The various single parties try to organise on the level of the communities within their countries—village, town, clan—and claim to consult the communities before important decisions affecting them are taken. This consultative process has been used more effectively in Guinea and Mali than elsewhere. But even in Guinea and Mali it has seldom gone beyond consultation on strictly local issues and on plans for community development. Nonetheless it has had the merit of developing the sense of belonging to the State among the local communities. The decisions that affect the whole country are taken in the top echelons of the parties and legally channelled through the governments and the legislatures.

The final seal of the one-party systems has been their presidentialism. Some, like Guinea, have tended to emphasise the party and its collective leadership but even in those countries Sékou Touré and Modibo Keita are much more than a *primus inter pares*. There is no doubt about the personal autocracy of President Houphouët-Boigny and President Kwame Nkrumah, both of whom have eliminated most of those who collaborated with them in the nationalist struggle and who formed part of their first cabinets. Neither a presidential nor a single-party system has been evolved in Nigeria. The country has proved too diverse in its ethnic constitution and physically too large to be spanned politically by any single man. Its major peoples have evolved their own political parties which might best be described as 'parties of communal integration'.

If the members of the present political classes are to retain power in the West African states, they have to go on maintaining a balance between the nations that make up each state and ensure that the major groups possess the sentiment of being represented in the government. But they must also produce the socio-economic achievement that the socially mobilised citizens of each country now expect. The latter task may test them most in the long run. And it is time now to consider it.

#### SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH

The West African states are poor if judged by the standards of the economically developed countries of the Western world; Guinea has a national income per head that is approximately £20; Nigeria is better off with £30; and only Ghana reaches as high as

£60. Before colonisation, although certain areas like the Oil Rivers of the Niger delta traded extensively with other parts of the world, and though there were various levels of trade between different West African peoples and some across the Sahara to North Africa, the economies were dominantly subsistence agricultural economies. The colonial era brought peace with it, stimulated certain forms of agricultural export and furnished both the demonstration effect and the large-scale outside contacts that accelerated the modernising process among the peoples. In this connexion the Creoles of Freetown who found their way around extensive areas of the British-ruled territories must be given much credit as the African brokers of new ideas, technological processes and social structures. But for a long time the colonial administrations did little more than seek to maintain law and order, collect enough taxes to pay for the administration that the territories required, and make it possible for the trading companies (which were mainly owned by nationals of the colonial powers) to carry on their export-import activities.

But as time went on both the export trade and the internal trade of the territories expanded. Administration itself became more complex and developed and money was available to hire more men and put up more buildings. The field officers were being buttressed and organised from central secretariats. All the time African clerical skills were increasing. Both the administration and the trading firms needed clerks. In the French territories the government took the initiative in providing them and in the British territories the missionary bodies pioneered education. Inevitably the schools were geared to the literacy and numeracy<sup>1</sup> that the economy demanded. Alongside the rapidly growing numbers of Africans who were clerks and teachers was a small but important number who had received a professional training. It was these men—clerks, teachers and others—who were to take over rule from the colonial officials. And they found themselves in charge of economies that were import-export dominated in their modernising sectors and that were little developed industrially.

During the last years of the colonial regimes as education developed among Africans, pressure was put on the colonial governments to extend to educated Africans the welfare facilities that had been provided for the expatriate officials and finally to develop welfare facilities generally. Much of this development was

made possible by the high commodity prices that had prevailed during the Second World War and again as a result of the boom in prices caused by the Korean war. Though in the latter part of the 1950s, when the countries were already moving towards independence, reserves were being drawn on to pay for welfare, especially educational development, there was general optimism that a relatively fast rate of economic growth could be maintained, at least in the more well-to-do countries like Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Nigeria, and also in Senegal and the Sudan. The colonial administrations had drawn up what were the beginnings of economic plans. When the nationalist leaders took over the functions of government, they were deeply committed to expanding welfare schemes and promoting economic growth.

The new rulers took up vigorous attitudes towards economic development and integrated them into a socialist ideology. Several reasons explain the socialist approach of the African political leaders: (1) Most of the French-speaking leaders were trained by or had come under the influence of Marxist and socialist groups; and even the English-speaking leaders, if they had been less exposed to Marxist influences, owed a great deal to the ideology of the British Labour party. (2) Private enterprise had been most visible in the form of the foreign trading companies. Most African leaders were emotionally opposed to these companies. They also had little appreciation of the skills that were needed to run trading companies and of the importance of the outside contacts that those companies possessed. It was no accident that one of the first acts of the Guinean government was to substitute a government trading company for the French companies. It must also be said that the state-owned trading company proved commercially incompetent. Even Ghana has had little real success with a nationalised trading concern. (3) Whatever the ideological reasoning, in the last resort only governments have the capacity on a considerable scale to accumulate capital, direct resources and mobilise skills. African private entrepreneurs are not yet available in considerable numbers. There is a distinct limit to the sectors of the economy and the kinds of enterprise that foreign private capital will invest in. There is no alternative to government initiative and a heavily socialising approach if the countries are to have a chance of fast economic growth. The post-war colonial governments had themselves recognised the necessity of this

initiative. They had channelled their aid from the metropolitan countries into the public sector and had concentrated a great part of their resources on building up the infrastructures of the territories.

Governmental planning of the economy has laid a heavy burden of responsibility on the post-colonial public services. These services have had to move—in the last years of colonial rule as well as in the first years of independence—from a dominantly politico-legal administration to an administrative effort that is strongly geared to socio-economic objectives. They have had to make this change-over while they Africanised their personnel and allowed young administrators to gain experience on the job. Moreover, the political leaders realised only belatedly how much more thinly spread and less effective the colonial administrative structures were than they had looked. They overcommitted, too quickly, their own public services to tasks which they were incapable of coping with adequately because of their small numbers, shortage of offices and equipment, lack of specialised skills and an imbalance deriving from personnel with a literary-type education. Yet it is true that in many ways the new services showed a collective devotion that surpassed the efforts of the colonial days and brought a sense of perspective to the priorities of planning which only independence and African responsibility could have made possible.

Apart from the inherent difficulties of their tasks, the civil servants have had their work made more difficult for them in many countries by the absence of effective political leadership that could stimulate them, evaluate their advice, and translate administrative decisions into terms that the people generally could understand and follow. They have also had to put up with political interference in their work and with a disregard for merit in recruitment into the service and promotion within it. Such interference and disregard, where it took place, considerably damaged morale and took the edge from the keenness of the public services. The public servants themselves had inherited the salary structure of their colonial predecessors, and this inheritance has been a heavy burden on the economies of the poorer countries like Dahomey. Where the lack of political leadership of high calibre in certain countries took away the stimulus from civil service endeavour, the civil servants could still fall back on their

own relatively high salaries, good housing and health care, and remain insulated from the sense of urgency that might more easily have been felt among them if they had shared more fully the lot of the masses of their countrymen.

If economic development is to take place primarily through the public sector, there is need for some form of planning. With varying degrees of seriousness and thoroughness the different govern-

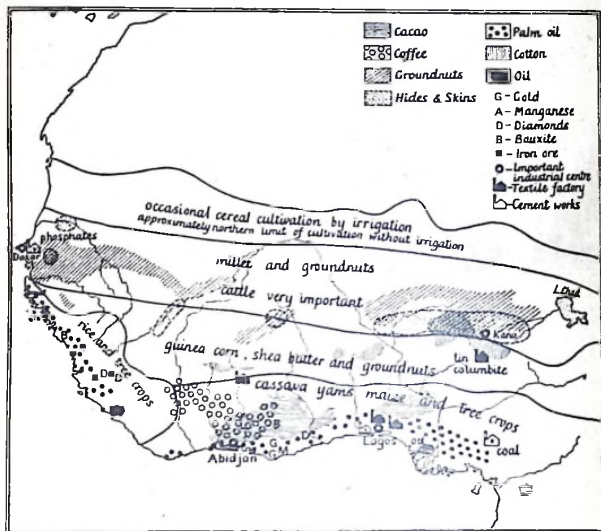


Fig. 19 West Africa: Economic.

ments have had teams of economists and other experts concerned with development draw up plans. These plans are meant to guide financial investment, the use of resources and the marshalling of skills over a period of years. The plans of several of the French-speaking countries, notably the Senegalese plan, have made efforts to build the implementation of the planning into the social structures of the country by using teachers and other opinion leaders for organising co-operatives and agricultural extension

work in the countryside. The Ghanaian and Nigerian plans have tended rather to be lists of projects, industrial and agricultural, that the governments intend to put their own resources into and suggestions for the direction of private enterprise. However, development in all the countries has been much more piecemeal and less co-ordinated than the plans envisaged. Several reasons lie behind this: (1) Not enough knowledge of the economies is available, especially precise statistical data, to provide a basis for genuinely co-ordinated planning. And even if planning could be better co-ordinated *theoretically* than it has been, continual problems would arise from divergences in the *practical* implementation. (2) The fall in world commodity prices has taken away much of the flexibility that the African countries had in the raising of capital through taxation and the levies on marketing boards. Foreign aid and investment have not been large enough to make a great difference in the general development of the economies though they have been important in certain strategic projects such as the Volta dam in Ghana and the development of the aluminium deposits in Guinea. (3) Seldom have the political leaders been willing to accept the self-discipline that would curb their own self-interest, desire for prestige and powers of patronage to accord with scientific planning. It might be said that without exception, though not all in the same degree, the political leaders have carried over pre-technological social attitudes into the running of the administrative structures that they control. They have not manifested that understanding of the timing of decisions which an endeavour to reach an economic 'take-off' requires; they have thought in terms of particular communities rather than in terms of overall national interest; and they have conspired to make money in disregard of the norms of public integrity. Too many have seen the possession of power as an end in itself and have given little serious thought to the uses of power. (4) The greatest single lack in the implementing of plans has been the lack of manpower skills. This lack raises the question of education.

In Nigeria and Ghana, and also in the Ivory Coast, nationalism took on its most concrete social welfare expression through a demand for education. The nationalists saw education both as a means of enhancing the dignity of the masses of their people through greater knowledge, and as an instrument for producing the skills that would permit them to take over the running of

government from colonial officials. The buoyant commodity prices of the 1950s encouraged the newly formed governments to press still further ahead with education schemes, especially elementary education, which the colonial regimes had begun to speed up after 1945. Secondary and technical education were proportionately less well invested in. But university education through the students sent abroad and the new universities established in the West African countries themselves, was considerably, if unevenly from the viewpoint of the spread of skills, invested in.

Together with the temperament of the peoples, it is the educational development of the countries that impedes the reproduction of a Latin American situation in West Africa. People have far too much ambition, are far too aware of developmental possibilities and much too willing to make sacrifices to educate their children to allow a small political and administrative elite to corner existing development. In a sense primary education in Ghana, Nigeria and the Ivory Coast has pushed too far ahead of economic growth and employment openings. The same may soon hold true of other forms of education, though, despite all the expenditure, certain skills may still be lacking owing to poor manpower planning. But the pressures on politicians from school leavers will leave the former in the near future with little alternative to a genuine commitment to industrial expansion and agricultural improvement. This commitment is a real gain though it derives from an unbalanced rather than a balanced approach to economic growth. However, there is the immediate danger that the existing leaderships will be unable to provide the economic achievement, the social-welfare benefits and the upward mobility of educated individuals that are being generally promised and sought. The consequence may be periods of social disruption such as Dahomey has already experienced, or an even sharper veering to the left than the Guinean or Malien experiences have revealed, and an attempt to control stringently social activities in the name of state mobilisation of all energies for immediate economic progress.

Since the Second World War the British and the French, the former through the Colonial Development and Welfare schemes (C.D. and W.) and the latter through the Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES), have provided funds for investment of some significance. French investment was much heavier than British and helped to make France

the country which gave the highest percentage of its national income in non-military aid to the underdeveloped world. Ghana and Nigeria, especially the former, received considerable American aid and investment with the coming of independence. Guinea and Mali as well as Ghana turned to the Soviet bloc for help. Though a fair share of aid has been forthcoming it has been beset to some extent by technical problems. Guinea tried hard to diversify her trade after the break with France—like all former French territories Guinean trade was closely linked with that of France because France much more than Britain had sealed off the economies of her colonies from outside competition. France had made special arrangements for the marketing of commodities from her colonies and had provided a system of guaranteed quotas and supported prices.

Since the former French countries (except Guinea) have now become associated members of the European Economic Community, they have privileged access to the European markets of the Six. The E.E.C. has also guaranteed foreign aid to replace what the French were giving. The French no longer have sole access to their former African markets but they still benefit from the already established lines of trade communication. Ghana and Nigeria originally refused to join the Common Market. Nigeria is now seeking a special form of associate status, having apparently become fearful of the long-term effects on her trade of exclusion from an area (or at least discrimination against her within it) to which she exports almost as much as to the British market.

By and large the West African countries have received less foreign aid than they might reasonably have hoped for. One explanation of the shortfall in aid is that the governments have been slow to prepare pre-planning surveys, have feasibility studies done and get projects worked into a shape that would attract investment—this slowness itself has for the most part been due to a shortage of available skills but it is also due to the lack of a sense of urgency about technological matters among literary-trained administrators. Another explanation of the shortfall is that after a brief period of world limelight the African countries have not appeared to offer advantages to either side in the cold war. The Russians and the Americans (though the latter were bedevilled by involvement in the Congo) have evidently reached a tacit agreement not to compete with one another in Africa. Moreover,

the growing consensus among the great powers to devalue the General Assembly of the United Nations underlines their intention to play down their previous willingness to court the independent countries. However, the single greatest explanation of the failure to increase foreign aid is one that concerns not only the African countries but all developing countries: the developed nations are not yet ready to curb to any real degree their own rising standards of living for the sake of the poorer peoples of the world. In large part the endeavour to cope with this failure must be left to those groups within the developed countries who are willing to awaken consciences to the needs of the developing areas. In part, too, it may depend on what kind of role the developing countries themselves manage to play on the international scene. This brings us to the foreign relations of the West African states. But these relations involve far more issues, and more complex ones, than foreign aid alone.

#### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Apart from Liberia which has enjoyed a kind of Latin American status with the United States ever since it was founded by freed slaves in the nineteenth century, the West African countries have only lately come to independence. Ghana led the way in March 1957, and Dr Nkrumah lost no chance of using that priority in time to press his views on foreign and Pan-African policy while his neighbours were sloughing the trammels of colonial rule. He urged neutralism in world politics and unity on a continental level between the independent African countries. By and large his views struck responsive chords among African intellectuals. But African governments concerned with the economic possibilities of politics and uneasy about the problems of political merging have shown themselves less enthusiastic.

For all the differences between them the African countries south of the Sahara, and the West African countries especially, share a great deal of common culture. Césaire's and Senghor's insistence on *négritude* and Nkrumah's on 'African personality' have tried to give political and social formulation to the sense of common culture. It is this sense of a common culture that has nourished the desire of the African intelligentsia for various Pan-African solutions a desire that haunts them much as the memory of Charlemagne's empire haunted the medieval German intelligentsia.

The African countries also share a common experience of Western colonisation. Though it can easily be argued that colonisation speeded the process of modernisation in Africa and that time will show how its benefits outweighed its drawbacks, it did injure the self-esteem of the colonised peoples. The strength of resentment against the colonial period is still no small factor in West African countries' foreign policies. It has lain behind the unwillingness of Ghana and Guinea to join the European Economic Community and it was built into the bitterness with which Nigeria broke off diplomatic relations with France after the French atom tests in the Sahara. Added to this sentiment of resentment there is a feeling of inferiority that not only the conquest but the technological superiority of the conquerors inculcated. And it is deepened by an understanding that Western countries have had a strange and warped image of Africa, Africans and people of African descent, an image that many educated Africans half believed themselves. Hence, foreign policy is at once more simple and more complex an operation than in developed countries. Less than in the latter does it concern itself with security and trade. But more than in the latter has it concerned itself with prestige and the projecting of an image of effectiveness that would redeem the distortions of the past.

Much Pan-African foreign policy activity has centred around a series of conferences that began with the All-Africa Peoples' Conference held at Accra in December 1958. The series reached its climax with the Addis Ababa conference of May 1963 that set up the Organisation of African Unity. In between there had been conferences that gave their names to different groupings of countries: Brazzaville, Casablanca, Monrovia. The Brazzaville group was made up of the former French West and Equatorial African territories (except Guinea and Mali, but including the Malagasy Republic). The countries of this group wanted to maintain friendly relations with France. They argued that they had historic links with French culture and that they were doing their best to make the most of French trade and aid. By and large these countries supported conservative social policies at home and pro-Western policies abroad. The Casablanca powers—Ghana, Mali, Guinea, Morocco, Egypt, the Sudan—were much more neutralist in their approach to foreign policy. Some among them—Ghana, Guinea and Mali—had sought economic aid and

technical co-operation from both Russia and China as well as from other members of the Communist bloc. They claimed to be strongly Socialist at home. And in their Africal policy they took a stronger and more emotional Pan-African stand than did the Brazzaville group earlier or the Monrovia group later. At one stage Ghana and Guinea announced a union of the two countries, and a little later it was announced that Mali was joining the union. But little happened in practice except that Ghana gave a ten million pounds loan to Guinea. The Monrovia group took shape when Nigeria and Liberia joined with the Brazzaville group to form a moderate bloc, and at the same time to try to lay the foundations of united action with the Casablanca powers. The Brazzaville group had already been co-operating with one another within an incipient economic union that ran one of the few profitable international airlines in the world. Under Nigerian prodding especially, this functionalist approach to unity was emphasised. This approach gained ground as the more ideologically conceived approaches proved impracticable and as other issues (Ghana and Guinea openly took different sides after the murder of Olympio in Togo) split the unity of the blocs. On the eve of the Lagos conference in January 1962 Nigeria tried to make a gesture to the more radical states (and one also toward conciliating Nigerian radicals) by abrogating the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact. When, finally, all the independent African countries got together at Addis Ababa in 1963 the spadework had been done to ground aspirations towards unity in reality. Though the charter of the Organisation of African Unity shows signs of the tension between those who wanted to emphasise the ideal of political unity and those who wanted to emphasise the sovereignty of the individual states, in practice a fair share of amity was achieved and an agreement to take a common line at the United Nations and elsewhere on African problems. However, the difficulty of even this much common action has been emphasised by the Congo problem where the members of the O.A.U. have been utterly unable to agree.

In the United Nations Organisation the West African countries have been part of the Afro-Asian bloc. They have also tended to lobby and vote as part of a general bloc of the developing countries. An indication of their strength has been the tone and timing of several U.N. declarations against South Africa and the caution

that they were able to impose on the British government over Rhodesian independence. The American and British decisions to place embargoes on shipments of arms from their countries to South Africa also undeniably owes something to African activity in the U.N. But lately this source of strength has diminished. The great powers have become less impressed by the voting powers of the General Assembly and the Russians have become frankly hostile to it in its present form.

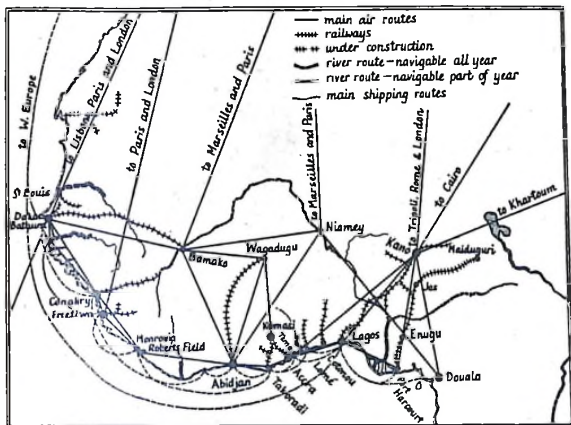


Fig. 20 West Africa: Communications.

For all the unity that might have appeared possible in West Africa very few real attempts have been made to reach any. This holds true even of economic decisions that might readily have secured agreement among two or more countries if there had been consultation. The Dahomean government co-operated with the French in 'opération hirondelle' which set out directly to compete with existing transport facilities in Nigeria. Nigeria made no attempt to consult Chad in constructing the Bornu railway extension. Guinea has built a match factory with a capacity much beyond the Guinean market and yet sought no agreement with

other countries. The one serious attempt at political unity, the joining together of Senegal and the Sudan in the Federation of Mali, lasted a mere two months and then disintegrated under the strain of personal rivalries, different political and social policies, conflicting economic interests and a general unwillingness to remain patient through the slow and complex processes of adjustment between two differently administered former French colonial units. What, then, have been the general reasons behind the failure to construct some form of unity in a relatively homogeneous region? First, there are political differences between the governments. Ghana, Guinea and Mali propound political and social views that are more strongly Socialist than those of countries like the Ivory Coast and Nigeria which lay more emphasis on both indigenous private enterprise and on foreign private investment. These differences overflow into foreign policy, not least into a support for different groups in the Congolese civil war. However, a similarity in ideology in itself is little guarantee of unity as the union, existing nowhere except on paper, between Ghana, Guinea and Mali goes to show. But, second, there are many other factors that militate against unity: the economies of the West African countries tend to be competitive rather than complementary; the differing colonial experiences have left a deep division in official languages, forms of technology, currencies, and cultural attitudes and interests among the elites; and there are problems that arise from scattered populations, immense physical distances and poor (former metropolitan-oriented) communications.

Beneath the political, economic and physical obstacles to unity lie the will to power and the desire to survive of the political classes. The former French federation fragmented initially because Houphouët-Boigny and the Ivory Coast co-operated with the divisive efforts of the French against the federation as the Ivory Coast did not want to bear what it considered a disproportionate amount of the cost of federation. It would be more difficult still at this stage to face the social and economic problems of linking the countries together in new forms of unity. The resulting strains might bring some of the governments down and they are not willing to run the risk. Moreover, it is not at all clear who the statesmen are who might emerge with the greatest influence within merged structures. Some of those securely in the saddle in

their present units do not care to accept the possibility of relative demotion.

Yet if the economic development of West Africa is to make progress faster than at present, there will have to be agreements on aspects of a division of labour and on the siting of different industries that cannot prove viable within the markets of single countries. It may well be that the only solution lies with forms of foreign aid that are given in a multi-country form, that buttress unity schemes and enable particular countries to cope with the adjustment to new and larger structures. At the moment the danger is that too many schemes are going ahead within individual countries that may render future co-operation difficult and that suggest that some countries are trying to jump the gun of co-operation and get in first with their industries. Finally, if rapid economic growth requires some form of regional unity in economic decision-making, such unity inevitably involves the development of political structures that straddle the existing countries.

#### CONCLUSION

These three trends and tasks of the West African countries are intimately linked with one another. Economic progress depends on trust and unity within the individual countries; otherwise political talent and time are likely to be dissipated in a struggle for power. But the possibility of reasonable sharing between the various nations that make up each state depends on the achievement of a reasonable rate of economic growth. West African unity, and in some general form, African unity, may be important to establish African self-respect and buttress the sense of identity that the individual states can offer their members only in an inadequate measure. And regional schemes of economic co-operation and the inevitably linked political agreements are needed to make economic growth and interdependence possible. It would be too much to hold that the trends are quite clear or that the tasks will prove easy. But the existing governments and their peoples are involved in both trends and tasks. The survival of the governments and the fortunes of the peoples depend on how successfully the problems are faced up to.

#### NOTE

- 1 Ability to understand and interpret mathematical and scientific concepts.

## TOPICS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The list which follows consists of some topics which arise from the material in this book. It is arranged broadly in chronological order and chapters to which particular topics refer are indicated in brackets. The select bibliography which follows on pages 501-511 should be used in conjunction with these topics.

### The Eleventh to the Eighteenth Centuries

- 1 Explore the usefulness of the study of linguistics, botany and blood-grouping to the student of early West African history (8 and *passim*).
- 2 Consider the significance of oral traditions in the study of history in several distinct areas of West Africa (*passim*).
- 3 Analyse the main differences in social and political organisation between the peoples of the Sudan and the forest areas of West Africa around A.D. 1000 (3).
- 4 Prepare an account of the origins and spread of the Fulani throughout West Africa (3).
- 5 Consider the role of geographical factors in the rise and fall of the Sudanese empires (3, 4, 5).
- 6 Assess the importance of the collapse of the Ghana empire in the history of the Western Sudan (4).
- 7 Examine the effects of the social organisation of the peoples of Southern Nigeria on their history (10).
- 8 Prepare an analysis of the political and social organisation of a number of separate groups in the Senegambia and Windward Coast areas (7 and 8).
- 9 Assess the importance in West African history of indigenous industries (13).
- 10 Compare the economic life of the forest and savannah peoples prior to the coming of the Europeans (3 and 13).
- 11 Follow the history of any one particular West African kingdom through to 1800 (*passim*).
- 12 Account for the decline of the Sahara trade between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries (13).
- 13 Describe how Islam first penetrated West Africa (6).
- 14 Assess the significance of the trans-Saharan trade in the growth of the Western Sudanese empires (4 and 13).
- 15 Consider the role played by Muslim scholars in the Songhai empire (4 and 6).
- 16 Describe the nature of the Portuguese and Dutch connections with West Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (12).
- 17 Explore the ways in which produce and merchandise acquired from Europeans influenced the life of West African peoples (12 and 13).
- 18 Examine the importance of Brazil for the history of West Africa (12).
- 19 Analyse the factors that undermined Portuguese influence in West Africa prior to 1800 (12).
- 20 Describe the main features of traditional government among the Efik or the Onitsha Ibo (10).
- 21 Examine the parts played by 'open' and 'secret' societies among the Ibibio and Ibo peoples (10).
- 22 Assess the significance of the Tsoede period of Nupe history or account for the decline of the Jukun kingdom (11).
- 23 Build up full biographical outlines of several prominent rulers in either the Western or Central Sudanese empires (4 and 5).

- 24 Assess the contribution made by Islam to government and education in West Africa prior to the nineteenth century (4 and 6).
- 25 Give an account of the rise of the Asante empire (9).
- 26 Describe the relations between the Fante and the Europeans in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (9).
- 27 Examine the significance of the Golden Stool for the Asante. Compare this with similar traditional symbols in other parts of West Africa (9).
- 28 Examine how Dahomey came under the control of Oyo in the eighteenth century (18).

### The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

- 29 Examine the ways in which any of the West African states, which were seriously affected, dealt with the changes caused by the ending of the slave trade (14).
- 30 Examine the factors which contributed to the decline of the Benin empire (17).
- 31 Analyse the value and the weaknesses of the 'house system' among the Niger delta communities in the nineteenth century (17).
- 32 Give an outline account of the Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century (18).
- 33 Assess the effects which the slave trade had on West African industries (13 and *passim*).
- 34 Consider the implications of the phrase 'The Aro empire in Eastern Nigeria' (17).
- 35 Consider the extent to which the jihād of Usuman dan Fodio may be described as a reformist movement (15).
- 36 Describe the organisation of the Fulani empire of Sokoto (15).
- 37 Describe the economic condition of Dahomey in the early nineteenth century (18).
- 38 Account for the success of Abeokuta in its conflict with Dahomey (18).
- 39 Examine how the Ibo and Ibibio peoples dealt with the issue of political integration (17).
- 40 Assess the importance of the careers of Al Kānemī, Samori Touré or Al-hājj 'Umar (15 and 16).
- 41 Consider the motives which lay behind the colonisation of Sierra Leone and assess the significance for the whole of West Africa of Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century (19 and 21).
- 42 Consider the significance in Gold Coast history of the Bond of 1844 (20 and 22).
- 43 Analyse the differences between political developments in nineteenth century Sierra Leone and Liberia (19).
- 44 Assess the importance of the Mankessim Constitution (1871) in the history of Ghana (20).
- 45 Assess the merits of 'indirect rule' as a system of administration in Nigeria (22).
- 46 Compare the theories of assimilation and association in French colonial policy and consider their relative importance in West Africa (23).
- 47 Compare British and French policies during the partition of West Africa and assess which was the more successful (21).
- 48 Prepare short biographical studies of some Europeans who helped to increase European influence in West Africa during the nineteenth century (21, 22, 23).

- 49 Explain why large cities developed in West Africa during the colonial period and assess their effects on African society (22 and 23).
- 50 Explore the parts played by road and railway systems in West African development (22 and 23).
- 51 Compare the rates of economic development in British West African colonies with those of neighbouring French territories and account for the differences (22 and 23).
- 52 Assess the contributions made by Guggisberg and Aggrey in the history of Ghana (22).
- 53 Trace the development of the nationalist movement in any West African country up to 1939 (22, 23, 24).
- 54 Examine the stages by which any one Commonwealth West African country attained independence (22, 23, 24).
- 55 Work out biographical sketches of five of the following leaders showing their contribution to the political development of their countries: Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sekou Touré, Kwame Nkrumah, Milton Margai, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, Obafemi Awolowo, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Lamine Gueye (24).
- 56 Compare the educational policies of the British and French in their West African colonies (22 and 23).
- 57 Consider the effects of the Second World War on the development of nationalist movements in West Africa (24).
- 58 Trace the development of self-government and independence in French West Africa from 1944 to 1960 (23 and 24).
- 59 Compare how the problem of developing national unity has been tackled in any two West African countries since independence (25).
- 60 Prepare a summary of the major economic and social problems which have confronted any one West African country since independence (25).

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# Index

- Aba riots, Nigeria (1929-30), 394  
 Abagiyawa, earliest inhabitants of Kano, 96, 108  
 'Abd al-Qadir, founder of Qādiriyya brotherhood (12 cent.), 271  
 'Abd al-Rahman, son of Al-Kānemi, 295  
 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Sa'di, Sudanese Muslim writer (16 cent.), 55, 100  
 'Abd-al-Salam, supporter of Usuman, 272  
 'Abd el-Jelil, usurper of throne of Kanem (16 cent.), 81  
 'Abdullah, ruling prince of Kanem (16 cent.), 81  
 'Abdullah Ibn Yasin, leader of Almoravids (11 cent.), 51, 60, 118  
 'Abdullahi, brother of Usuman, 274, 276  
 'Abdullahi Buja, ruler of Kano (1438-52), 98  
 Abdur, founder of Fulani emirates (early 19 cent.), 289  
 Abeokuta, Egba capital, 323-4  
     Europeans at, 261, 370  
     besieged by Dahomey (1851, 1864), 326  
 Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 445, 449-50  
     University at, 454  
 Abiodun, ruler of Oyo (18 cent.), 318  
 Abo, title of Jukun prime minister, 208  
 Abode of Islam and Abode of War, in Muslim belief, 268, 272  
 Abomey, capital of Dahomey, 262  
     occupied by French (1892), 381  
 Abonnema, city state of Niger Delta, 305, 307  
 Abonse, inland market, 172  
 Abora, Fante state, 180-3; leading, 185, 187  
     Asante Regional Commissioners in, 348  
 Abū Bakr, Almoravid leader, takes Ghana (1076), 244  
 Abū Bakr, ruler of Mali empire (1275-1285), 63  
 Abuja, centre of resistance to Fulani (early 19 cent.), 264  
 Abul Bukar, son of Shaikh 'Umar, 296  
 Accra, coastal state, 167-8  
     Portuguese and, 168, 226  
     Asante at (from 1744), 178, 348, 351  
     surrendered by Asante to British, 353, 357  
 Achebe, Chinua, *Things Fall Apart* by, 389  
 Acheulean culture, in Africa, 28-9  
 Achimota, 395  
 Acron, small state, 186  
 Adamawa  
     invaded by Kanem-Bornu (13 cent.), 75  
     Fulani at, 54n, 121, 312  
     ivory from, 216  
 Adamfo, title of Asante resident commissioners in conquered states, 348  
 Adandozan, ruler of Dahomey (1797-1818), 320  
 Adansi, Akan people, 166, 169  
     trade route through, 167  
     British and, 358  
 Adar, trade route from Morocco to Niger through, 46  
 Addis Ababa, conference at (1963), 493-494  
 Adegun, Onikoyi of Oye (early 19 cent.), 322  
 Ader, absorbed into Keddi (early 16 cent.), 102  
 Adja, Fante coastal village, 181  
 Adjumako, Fante state, 180-1  
 administration  
     in Mossi kingdom, 49  
     in empires of western Sudan, 57, 58, 60, 64, 68  
     of Asante, 179, 262-3, 348-9  
     in Benin, 200  
     of Ibo, 204  
     in Bornu, 263  
     of Fulani, 264  
     in emirates of Northern Nigeria, 268  
     of Seku Ahmadu, 278  
     of Usuman, 281  
     of Samori Touré, 285-6  
     of Shaikh 'Umar, 296-7  
     in British territories, 204-5, 392-6, 405, 458-9, 485; taken over by independent states, 481, 487  
     in French territories, 435, 437-42, 448, 458, 478-9  
 Ado, Egbado town, besieged by Egba (1840s), 326  
 Adolo, ruler of Benin (1848-88), 302  
 Adom state (1629), 169  
 Aduana, clan of Akan peoples, 165, 171, 173  
 Adullahi, Galadima under Shaikh 'Umar, 296  
 Afenmai people, 296; attacked by Fulani, 304  
 Afonja, adheres to Fulani jihād (early 19 cent.), 322-3  
 Afram plains, trade route across, 167  
 African Church Movement, 428

- African and Eastern Trade Corporation, 412
- Africanisation  
of school curriculum, 10  
in administration of French territories, 449
- 'Africanism', 452
- Afutu, coastal state, 167-8, 183; *see also* Fetu
- Agades, 121; trade route through, 57
- Agadu, traditional leader of Jukun migration, 206
- Agaja, ruler of Dahomey (18 cent.), 317-8  
drives out Dutch, 231
- Agballa, oracle of, at Awka, 201
- Agenapoje, traditional ancestor of rulers of Igara, 211-2
- Aggrey, ruler of Cape Coast (mid 19 cent.), 359, 362
- Agona, coastal state, 168  
and Fante, 183-4, 186
- Agonglo, ruler of Dahomey  
receives Portuguese priests (1797), 235  
murdered, 320, 325
- agriculture  
beginnings of, 30-1, 33; in Africa, 35, 152  
in savannah zone, 44-5  
in Songhai empire, 65  
in Senegambia, 133  
of Serer, 134  
Islam and, 162  
of Tiv, 210  
neglected in Liberia, 337  
subsistence, 395, 447, 485
- Aguafu, coastal state, 168, 181, 184  
Fante and, 184, 186
- Ahafo, in Sefwi territory, 167, 178
- Ahanta, coastal state (1629), 168, 231
- Ahmad, ruler of Bornu (1793-1810), 83, 289-90
- Ahmad, son of Al-hājj 'Umar, 280, 377, 380  
defeated by French, 380, 432, 437
- Ahmad al-Tijāni (d.1815), founder of Tijāniyya brotherhood, 279
- Ahmad ibn Fartuwa, chronicler of Idris Aloomo of Bornu, 73-4, 79, 82
- Ahmadu II, son of Seku Ahmadu, 278-9
- Ahmadu III, grandson of Seku Ahmadu, 279-80
- Aicha (Amsa), queen-mother of Bornu (16 cent.), 79, 85
- aid, foreign, to independent West African states, 489, 491-2  
from France, for colonial development, 447  
from Britain, for colonial development, 445, 490
- Air  
Muslim rulers in (15 cent.), 121  
conquered by Kanta of Kebbi (16 cent.), 101  
French and, 381  
airline, international, of Brazzaville group of states, 494
- Aja states, 316-7
- Ajase-Ipo (Porto Novo), tributary to Oyo (18 cent.), 318, 320; to Dahomey (19 cent.), 326
- Akan language, 42
- Akan peoples, 165-7, 169
- Akassa, city state of Niger Delta, 305
- Aku, title of ruler of Jukun, 203
- Akure, in Benin empire, 201, 259, 302
- Akwamu, Akan people, 166, 169  
break through to coast (late 16 cent.), 172  
defeated by Akyem (1730), 178  
Asante vassal (from 1744), 169, 178-9, 187  
Asante military organisation borrowed from, 176
- Akwapim, 165  
Asante vassal (18 cent.), 178, 348  
rebel against Asante (early 19 cent.), 353
- Akyem, Akan people, 165-6, 169  
threaten Agona, 186  
defeated by Asante, 177-8, 187, 190  
and Fante, 185-7  
(with Krobo), defeat Asante (1764), 188  
Asante path to coast through (early 19 cent.), 351  
Asante vassal, 348  
surrendered by Asante to British, 353, 357  
Asante claim as vassal (1873), 354
- Al-'Aqib (d.1583), qādi of Timbuktu, 124
- Al-Bakri, Spanish Muslim geographer (12 cent.), on Hausa, 94; on Ghana, 59, 117; on Mali, 118; on Kanem, 126
- al-ḥadi (village head), in Mandinka states, 142
- Al-hājj Ahmad, teacher of theology at Kano (15 cent.), 100
- Al-hājj Bābir, vizier of Shaikh 'Umar, 295
- Al-hājj Muhammad, Askia ruler of Songhai (1493-1528), 267, 273
- Al-hājj 'Umar ('Umar ibn Sa'id Tal; (1794-1864)  
jihād of, 163, 265, 268, 279-81  
and French, 372-3
- Al-Hassan, *see* Leo Africanus
- Al-Idrisi, Arab chronicler (12 cent.), 50

- Al-Kānemi (Muhammad Al-Amin Al-Kānemi, Shaikh Laminu) (d.1835)  
Bornu leader against Fulani, 263, 273, 290-4  
corresponds with Usuman, 275, 272  
Al-hājj 'Umar with, 279
- Al-Maghili (Muhammad), preacher and scholar (15 cent.), 95, 120  
*Obligations of Princes* by, 93, 100  
and Qādiriyya brotherhood, 120, 121  
at Moslem courts, 68, 122, 123-4, 125  
works of, studied by Usuman, 124, 273
- Al-Masudi, geographer (10 cent.), 44, 55, 243
- Al-Murābitūn, *see* Almoravids
- Al-Suyuti, Egyptian scholar (15 cent.), 121
- Al-Tijāni, second successor of Al-hājj 'Umar, 280
- Alafin, title of Yoruba ruler, 193, 200, 316
- Alaketu, title of ruler of Ketu, 441
- Algiers, occupied by the French (1830), 432
- 'Ali Dalatumi (d.1846), son and successor of Ibrahim ibn Ahmad, ruler of Bornu, 290
- 'Ali Fulan (d.1528), minister of Askia the Great of Songhai, 100
- 'Ali Ghazi (Al-Ghazi), ruler of Bornu (1472-1504), 77
- 'Ali ibn Al-hājj 'Umar, ruler of Bornu (1645-84), 209
- 'Ali ibn Dunama, ruler of Kanem-Bornu (1476-1503), 127
- 'Ali Jedo, Usuman's army commander, 274-5
- 'Ali Yaji, ruler of Kano (1349-85), 125
- Alibawa, support Usuman, 277
- Alimi, Fulani leader (early 19 cent.), 213
- Aliyu Baba (son of Muhammad Bello), ruler of Sokoto (1842-59), 294
- Alkalawa  
Gobir settlement in Zamfara, 106  
Gobir capital, 107, 269  
Usuman and, 274-5
- Alkali (judge), in Hausa states, 106, 109-10
- All-Africa Peoples' Conference, Accra (1958), 493
- Allada (Ardra)  
slaves from, 230, 233  
invaded by Ovo (late 17 cent.), 316  
destroyed by Dahomey (1724), 317
- Almoravids (Al-Murābitūn)  
jihād of, 50  
conquest of Ghana by (1076), 59, 60-1, 117-18, 244
- Amachree, ruler of New Calabar (1870s), 307
- Amakom, 171, 173  
defeated by Asante (1680s), 176  
admitted to Asante union, 177
- Amankwatia, commander-in-chief of Asante army (1873), 353
- Amanse states, 170, 172, 184
- Amanto states, of original Asante clans, 262
- Amari Sonko, Mali general, in Senegambia (13 cent.), 140
- amberggris, trade in, 227
- American Colonization Society, 335-6  
344
- Amina (Aminatu), Queen of Zaria, 102-3
- Amororo, ruler of Owu (1820s), 321-2
- Amsa, *see* Aicha
- amulets, sentences from the Qurān as, 131n
- Anbara, rebel against Ghana (11 cent.), 60-1
- ancestors, cult of, 57-8; kings and, 49, 260
- Anglo-French agreement on West Africa (1898), 383, 438
- Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact, abrogated by Nigeria, 494
- Anglo-Portuguese Treaty, 384n
- Angola, slaves from, 230
- Ankobra river, 161; Portuguese fort on, 228
- Anlo, coastal people, allied with Asante (early 19 cent.), 352
- Annang groups, subdued by Jaja of Opobo (1860s), 308
- Anomabu, Fante coastal state, 180-1  
rapid growth of, 177, 182-3, 186  
wars of, with Fante (1791) and Cape Coast (1802), 350  
Asante prevented by Fante from trading at (1800), 351-2  
signs Bond of 1844, 361
- anthropology, 35, 394
- Anum people, 167
- Anyan, *see* Ayan
- ape-men, 28
- Apornu, Ife market town, 321-2
- Appollonia, Gold Coast  
Asante access to coast at, 189, 346, 351  
Fante and, 190
- Aputae, ruler of Assin (19 cent.), 353
- Aqit, family of judges in Timbuktu (15-16 cent.), 122, 124
- Arabia  
the prophet Muhammad in, 113-14  
supposed migration of African peoples from, 206-7
- Arabic language  
learned by Hausa (15 cent.), 98  
language of Muslim merchants, 129, and scholars, 270  
pamphlets of Usuman in, 271

- Arabs**  
 histories by, 1, 44, 55  
 expansion of (622-722), 115-17  
 opening of trans-Saharan routes by, 37, 241-2  
 Shuwa, in Kanem, 81, 83; as soldiers, 290, 297  
 Kunta (nomads), 120-1, 280  
 word used to mean 'African Muslims', 242
- archaeology**  
 approach to West African history through, 12-13, 23-38, 40-2, 56  
 evidence from, lacking for much of West Africa, 150, 256
- architecture, in forest zone, 43; in savannah zone, 46, 56**
- Arden-Clarke, Sir Charles, Governor of Gold Coast (1957), 397**
- Ardo, title of ruler of Masina, 275, 277-8**
- Ardra, see Allada**
- Are-Ona-Kakanfo (Kakanfo), title of leading Oyo general, 194**
- Arguin island**  
 Portuguese fort on, 220, 223  
 slave trade from, 224-5  
 passes to Spain (1580), 226  
 taken by Dutch (1633), 224; by French (1670s), 230
- Argungu, centre of resistance to Fulani (early 19 cent.), 264**
- Arma, descendants of troops of Sultan of Morocco, 54n  
 and Mossi, 49, 256  
 and Seku Ahmadu, 277-8**
- armies**  
 of Mossi, 49  
 of empires of western Sudan, 58  
 of Segu and Kaarta, 70  
 of Kanem-Bornu, 75, 77, 83; under Al-Känemî, 293; under the Shehus, 297  
 of Kano, 98, 99  
 of Gobir, 105  
 of Oyo, 194  
 of Dahomey, 261  
 of Samori Touré, 284-5  
 of Fante confederation, 359  
 French African, 372, 377, 384n, 436
- armlets, trade in, 214-5**
- armour, for men and horses, in Kano, 97**
- Aro people, leading Ibo group**  
 oracle of, at Arochuku, 201, 257, 311;  
 destroyed by British, 312, 421  
 organisers of slave trade, 257, 311
- arrowheads, stone, 29-30, 31; iron, 32; transverse, 32**
- Asantahene, title of ruler of Asante, 175, 178-9, 262, 349**
- Asante, 42; Akan people, 165-6**  
 trade of, 46  
 rise of (late 17 cent.), 169-74  
 constitution of union of, 175-6  
 expansion of (18 cent.), 175-80  
 government of, 255, 262, 347-8, 393  
 Islam in, 128  
 relations of, with Fante, 187-90, 346  
 wars of, with Fante and British (19 cent.), 346, 351-60, 366, 386, 423  
 defeated by British (1874), 353-4, 356, 376, 389, 421  
 conquered and annexed by British (1895-1901), 358, 383, 386, 406, 421  
 gold workings in, 408  
 scarcity of land in, 415  
 in independent Ghana, 482
- Asben, Asbenawa**  
 migrations of (8 and 15 cent.), 95  
 and Kebbi, (16 cent.) 101, (18 cent.) 105  
 and Gobir (18 cent.), 106  
 at Katsina, 107
- Asebu, coastal state, 167, 168, 182, 183**  
 conquered by Fante (1707), 184, 186
- Asencé, clan of Akan peoples, 165, 171**
- Ashadu, title of Igara lord chamberlain, 212**
- Ashmun, Jehudi, Governor of Liberia (1820s), 396**
- Askia dynasty, Songhai, 67, 68; fall of (1590s), 267**
- Askia the Great (Muhammad Askia Toure, d. 1528), founder of dynasty in Songhai, 67, 68, 100, 101, 123-4**
- assimilation, policy of, in French territories, 433-7, 439-40, 442**  
 more liberal form of, after 1945, 374  
 economic, 443-4  
 in education, 453
- Assin, Akan people, 165, 166, 169**  
 element of Fante group, 167  
 conquered by Denkyira (17 cent.), 172, 183  
 clash with Fante (late 17 cent.), 183, 184  
 surrendered by Asante to British, 353, 354, 357  
 sign Bond of 1844, 361
- Assinie, basis of French colony of Ivory Coast (1880s), 380**
- Assyrians, iron weapons of, 34**
- Ata, title of ruler of Igara, 211-2**
- Atakpané, small Yoruba kingdom destroyed by Dahomey (1830s), 325**
- Atlantic islands**  
 Portuguese in, 221, 223, 225, 230, 248  
 Dutch raids on (1598, 1599), 227
- Atlantic trade, 168, 170, 172, 183, 422**
- Atlantic tribes, 133**

- Atwima states, 184  
*Australopithecines* (southern apes), 28  
 Auyo, Fulani emirate (Bornu), 289  
 Awar, salt from, 96  
 Awdaghast, 130n  
   trade route from North Africa to Ghana through, 56  
   taken by Berbers (8 cent.), 116; by Ghana (992), 60; by Almoravids (11 cent.), 60, 118  
 Awka, traditional place of origin of Ibo, 201  
   oracle and itinerant blacksmiths of, 203  
 Awkar, Soninke territory, nucleus of Ghana, 59  
 Awole, ruler of Oyo (1793), 322  
 axes of Stone Age, 31, 34, 41  
 Axim, coastal state, 168  
   Portuguese fort at (1502), 222  
   seized by Dutch (1642), 230  
   cotton plantations at (18 cent.), 233  
 Ayan Abasa, Ayan Denkyera, Ayan Maim, Fante states, 180, 181  
 Azikiwe, Nnamdi, leader of National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, 345, 462
- Babaliya, included in Bornu (16 cent.), 81  
 Badagry  
   in Benin empire, 201  
   slave trade to Brazil from, 234  
   Egba and, 324, 370  
 Baddibu, lower Gambia, subjugated by Mali (13 cent.), 140  
 Baga people, Windward Coast, 151  
 Bagauda (999-1063), leader of immigrant groups to Kano, 96  
 Bagirmi, and Bornu, 83, 292, 294  
 Bai Bureh, Temne leader against British (1898), 343, 421  
 Baikie, W. B., Niger expedition of (1854), 373  
 Bakana, city state of Niger Delta, 305, 307  
 Bakwa Turunku, ruler of Zaria (1536-9), 102  
 Balante language (Bissagos Is.), 132, 133  
 Baluba people, Congo, carvings by, 42  
 Bamako, centre of Islamic learning, 115  
   Samori Touré at, 284  
   proposed line of French forts from Senegal to, 373, 378  
   rapid growth of, 450  
   congress of African political organisations at (1946), 470  
 Bambara, 48, 277  
   agriculture of, 44  
   succession states of (Kaarta and Segu), 65, 264  
   language of, 132
- Bambia valley, stone circles in, 36  
 bananas, 35, 43  
   exported from French Guinea, 446, 449  
 Banda, gold-producing region, conquered by Asante (mid 18 cent.), 178  
 Bandama river, Ivory Coast, food frontier at, 153  
 Bantu peoples, 35, 230, 312  
 Banu Hilal, nomadic Arabs, displace Berbers (11 cent.), 116  
 Baol, coastal state, 138  
 Barbari, ruler of Gobir (18 cent.), 106  
 Barbot, on Fante coastal states (17 cent.), 184  
 Barbushe, hunter-priest, in Abagiyawa traditions, 96, 108  
 bards (also genealogists and historians)  
*aulabe* (praise singers) of Futa Toro, 139  
*gewel*, of Wolof, 138, 139, 140  
 Bariba people, 67, 192  
 Barra, Mandinka state (lower Gambia), 140, 141  
 Barth, Dr Heinrich, explorer, 373  
   on Idris Alooma, 82; on Hausa states, 91, 93, 106, 107; on trans-Saharan slave trade, 390  
 Bashorun, title of Oyo prime minister, 195  
 Bassa people, 167  
 Bata-Margi language, 90  
 Bauchi  
   Fulani in, 54n  
   invaded by Usuman and Al-Kānemī, 275, 276, 277, 295  
 Baule, 59; language of, 165  
 Bawa, son of legendary first king of Hausa, 91, 95  
 Bawa, sultan of Gobir (1780s), 271  
 Bayajidda, legendary founder of Hausa states, 91, 96
- beads  
   quartz, of Nok culture, 41  
   glass, from Nupe, 257  
   trade in, 46, 129, 167, 215, 233, 249  
 Bedde, pagan tribes between Bornu and Fulani (1830s), 293  
 Beccroft, John, British consul on Gold Coast (1850s), 306, 371  
 beeswax, trade in, 215, 227  
 Begho, trading centre, 59, 128, 246  
   trade route through, 167, 171  
 Behanzin, ruler of Dahomey, deposed by French (1890s), 381, 437  
 Bekwai, Oyoko state, 171, 173  
   in Asante union, 176  
 Belgians, *see* Leopold, King of the  
 Bello (Muhammad), Sultan of Sokoto, son and successor of Usuman, 274, 275, 276, 277  
   chronicle (*Infaq al-Maysur*) by, 78, 102, 103, 105, 209

- Bello (Muhammad)—*contd.*  
 Al-hājj 'Umar with, 279  
 correspondence of Al-Kānemī with, 291-2, 293, 294
- Bemoy, Christianised Wolof prince (15 cent.), 223
- Bence island, Sierra Leone, British fort on, 156
- Bende, oil-producers of, 308
- Beni, Nupe people, 242-3
- Benin, 42, 198-200, 299-304, 423  
 introduction of bronze into, 37  
 bronzes of, 42, 191, 200, 201, 249, 299  
 trade of, 167, 199, 222, 233, 247, 257  
 link with Oyo, 191, 193  
 and Igara (16 cent.), 212  
 slaves from, 224, 248  
 and abolition of slave trade, 255  
 British expedition against (1897), 304, 421  
*see also* Bini
- Benson, Stephen, in Liberian politics (mid 19 cent.), 344
- Benue-Niger confluence, peoples of, 206-216
- Benue river valley  
 centre of dispersal of Bantu-speaking peoples, 35  
 home of Tiv, 210
- Berbers, 52-3, 55, 60, 73  
 conduct trans-Saharan trade, 46  
 and Muslim Arabs, 116  
 Wolofs driven south by, 135
- Beri-Beri, name of northern Nigerian peoples for Kanuri, 72, 105
- Berlin, West African Conference at (1884-5), 379, 384n  
 Treaty of (1885), 390, 432
- Bi Abdur, Fulani leader in Bornu (early 19 cent.), 275
- Biafra, Bight of, slaves from, 224
- Bida, centre of Islamic learning, 115
- Bilal (Jil, Jelil), fugitive Kanuri prince, traditional founder of Bulawa, 76
- Bilma  
 trade route from Tripoli to Kanem through, 46, 80  
 salt-producing centre, 80, 88  
 traditional place of origin of Gobir leaders, 95
- Binawa (western Ngizim), 81
- Binger, French treaty-making agent (1887), 380
- Bini people, 191, 198, 211, 301
- Biram, Hausa state, 91-2, 111, 207
- Biri, ruler of Kanem-Bornu (1151-76), 85  
*birmi*, Hausa walled or stockaded town, 107
- Bissagos Isles, 136, 147
- Bissandugu, capital of Samori Touré, 283, 285-6
- Bissau, Portuguese missionary base, 235  
 blacksmiths, *see* iron, working of
- Blyden, Dr E. W. (d.1912), Liberian scholar, 339, 344, 396
- Bobo Dioulasso, taken by French (1898), 288; rapid growth of, 450
- Bocquah (Ikiri), market on Niger, 214, 215
- Bolewa, descendants of So, 72
- Bona people, 166
- Bond of 1844, between British and Gold Coast chiefs, 361, 371, 389
- Bondou, *see* Bundu
- Bondoukou, centre of Islamic learning, 115
- Bonny, city state of Niger Delta, 201, 204, 305, 306-7  
 Jaja of Opobo in, 308  
 traders from, 215, 216  
 British traders in, 368, 371  
*Books of Roads and Kingdoms*, by Al-Bakri (1067), 117
- Borgu, Usuman in 275, 276; French and British and, 382, 383
- Borku, Kanuri kingdom extended into (15 cent.), 77
- Bornu, state of central Sudan, 72, 75, 77-90, 104  
 trade routes from, to Tripoli, 57, 244, 245; to Gwanja, 98; to the Nile, 244  
 trade of, 38-9, 214, 215  
 Islam in, 121, 124  
 Saifawa dynasty of Kanem moves to (14 cent.), 127  
 and Hausa states (18 cent.), 105, 107  
 and Jekun, 209  
 under Al-Kānemī, 263, 273, 300-4  
 under the Shehus (19 cent.), 289-98  
 railway extension in, 495  
*see also* Kanem-Bornu
- Bornu Chronicle, 74, 75, 83
- Boroboro, eastern Fante, 187
- Bosman, W., 236n  
 on Asante coastal states, 169, 171  
 on Fante coastal states, 184, 186  
 on gold trade, 231-2
- botany, evidence from, in archaeology, 35, 152
- Bouet-Willamez, voyages of (1837-41), 371
- Bowa Dan Goinki, "first king" of Gobir, 209
- Bowditch, negotiates with Asante (1860s), 352
- Bozo people, 267, 277
- Braffo  
 title of Fante rulers (17 cent.), 181, 182, 184  
 title of Fante priests (early 19 cent.), 350-1

- Braid, Will, head of Barboy 'house' in Calabar (19 cent.), 307
- Brandenburg Company, 231, 233-236n
- Brass, city state of Niger Delta, 305, 368
- British expedition against (1895), 421
- Brazil  
 Dutch in, 228, 229, 230  
 slave trade between Guinea and, 234-5, 261  
 African miners and blacksmiths in, 239
- Brazza, de, explorer, 377
- Brazzaville group of states, 493, 494
- Breku people, 167
- Bretuo, clan of Akan peoples, 165, 171
- bricks, sun-dried, 46; burnt, 82
- British  
 in West Africa (late 16 cent.), 226  
 forts of, on coast, 156, 231, 364  
 as traders, in Benin, 199; in Niger Delta, 306, 367-8, 371, 374, 378; in Liberia, 327; in Accra, 348; on Niger, 369, 370, 374, 376, 378, 379 and Asante, 177, 189-90, 351-63, 366 and Fante, 186, 189-90, 352, 354-5, 359, 361-2, 376  
 and slave trade, *see* slave trade, slavery and Sierra Leone, 332-3, 338, 364-6  
 withdraw from Gold Coast (1828-43), 366, 385; return (1843), 371  
 assist Egba against Dahomey, 327  
 period of retreat (from 1863), 374  
 and Samori Touré (1880s), 285  
 period of expansion (from 1880s), 302, 303-4, 308-9, 312, 342-3, 378, 386  
 agreements with French (1889), 381  
 Germans and, 378-9  
 reaction to French advances (1890s), 381-3  
*see also* British territories
- British Cotton-Growing Association (1902), 407
- British territories  
 growth of, 385-92  
 administration in, 204-5, 392-6, 406, 458-9, 485; taken over by independent states, 481, 487  
 economic and social developments in, 403-19  
 nationalist movements in, 397-402, 457, 459, 460-2
- British United African Company (merger of Niger trading firms, later National African Company), 378, 405
- Brong-Ahafo states, under Asante, 178, 357
- bronzes  
 'lost wax' method of casting, 36, 46  
 of So, 36, 73; of Ife, 36-7, 42; of Benin, 42, 191, 200, 201, 249, 299; of forest zone, 43
- W.A.II.—34\*
- Bronze Age, 33, 34
- brotherhoods, Muslim, 121, 122, 130n, 271, 276, 279
- Buba Yero, Fulani leader, disciple of Usuman, 275, 290
- Buduma, descendants of So, 72, 79
- Buguma, town of Niger Delta, 305, 307
- Bulala people, struggle between Kanuri and, 76, 77, 78, 294
- Bulom, coastal people, invaded by Manes (16 cent.), 158-9  
 language of, 151, 155
- Bundu, Fulani state, 143-4
- Bur, title of ruler of Serer, 138
- Bur, Burba, title of ruler of Wolof, 136, 138, 141
- Bure people, trade of, 46
- Busawa, origins of, 192
- Bushmen, stone and bone tools and weapons of, 35
- Bussa, British and (1894-5), 382, 383
- Buxton, Thomas Fowell, leader of anti-slavery campaign, 369-70
- Cabesterra, defeated by Fante (1707), 184
- Cacheu, Portuguese at, 223, 228, 235
- Cadamosto, Venetian explorer employed by Portugal (1455-7), 137, 220, 224
- Caillié, René, explorer (19 cent.), 368, 371
- Cairo  
 hostel for Kanem pilgrims at, 75, 127  
 market for slaves, 89
- Calabar  
 trading centre for slaves, later for palm oil, 209, 230, 368, 371  
 slave society in (1850s), 307  
 British consul at, 306-7, 371
- calendars, Muslim and others, 7, 114
- camels  
 introduced into Africa, 45, 46, 241  
 of early Maghumi people, 73; in Kano (15 cent.), 98; of Idris Alooma (16 cent.), 79
- Cameroons  
 German traders in, 375  
 German protectorate over, 378, 379-80  
 French mandate over, 386, 455n  
 nationalist movement in, 462, 471  
 as autonomous republic (1960), 476
- camwood, trade in, 157, 337
- canoe, copper-sheathed, of Kanta of Kebbi, 101
- canoe-building, introduction of, to Nupe, 213
- Cape Coast  
 wars of, with Komenda (1789) and Anomabu (1802), 350  
 Asante prevented by Fante from trading at, 351-2

- Cape Coast—*contd.*  
 Asante District Commissioner in (early 19 cent.), 348  
 signs Bond of 1844, 361  
 Cape Coast Castle, 354  
 Carnarvon, Lord, Colonial Secretary (1870s), 363  
 Carthage, iron-working at, 34  
 carvings  
   in Congo, 42  
   in forest zone (ivory and wood), 43  
   on Windward Coast (soapstone and ivory), 155  
 Cary, Lott, Liberian leader, 335, 336, 344  
 Casa da Mina de Guine, Lisbon, 222  
 Casablanca group of African states, 478, 493-4  
 Casamance river, 132, 144-5, 223  
 cassava, introduction of, 35, 224  
 castes, hereditary, among Wolof, 138-9, 140; among Mandika, 142  
 Castile, and Guinea, 220, 221; and slaves, 225  
 cattle, of Nok people, 41; in forest zone, 43; domestication of, 45-6; humped and humpless, 52  
 cavalry, of Gobir, 105; of Fulani, 159; of Oyo, 194, 197, 245; of Asante, 262-3; of Samori Touré, 284  
 Cayor, resistance in, to French railway, 377  
 cereals, cultivation of, 30, 44; *see also* grain  
 ceremonial, court  
   development of, 48, 49  
   in Ghana, 60; in Kanem-Bornu, 75, 83; in Kano, 98; in Mali, 124-5; in Benin, 199  
 Césaire, insistence of, on *négritude*, 492  
 Ceuta, terminus of African gold trade, 247  
 Chad, Lake of  
   peoples near, 36, 80, 207  
   French expeditions to (1900), 432  
 Chad, Republic of  
   archaeology of, 28, 37  
   part of Bornu now in, 72, 297  
   Nigeria and, 495  
 Chad family of languages, 40, 90  
 Chamba, enemies (early 19 cent.) of Jukun, 209, and Tiv, 210  
 Chamberlain, Joseph, as Colonial Secretary (1890s), 382, 391, 407  
 chiefs  
   different categories of, in Benin, 260  
   French and, 375, 436, 437, 439-42, 458, 467  
   British and, 305, 393, 398, 458  
 Chima Gama, title of administrator of fief in Kanem-Bornu, 85, 87-8  
 Chima Kura, title of holder of fief in Kanem-Bornu, 85, 87  
 Chuku (the High God), oracle of, at Arachuku, 203, 257, 311; destroyed by British, 312, 421  
 civet, trade in, 221-2  
 Clapperton, Hugh, explorer (19 cent.), 368  
 cleaver, tool of Acheulean culture, 29  
 climate, changes of, 25, 29; in Sahara, 31, 32, 40  
 cloth  
   of bark, in forest zone, 43  
   rolls of, as currency, 89  
   trade in, 133, 146, 167, 215, 233  
   weaving of, 46, 155-6, 239, 257  
 cocoa  
   as crop, in Ivory Coast, 445-6, 447; in Gold Coast, 408-9; in Nigeria, 409  
   combination of purchasers of (1937), 386; of producers of (1938), 413, 418, 460  
   producers of, in politics, 471  
   coffee, as crop in Ivory Coast, 445-6, 447  
 Coker, Daniel, Liberian leader, 335  
 Colonial Development and Welfare funds of Britain, 445, 448, 400, 490  
 Colonial Office, 385, 400, 459, 462  
 Colonial Pact, of first French colonial empire, 443, 444  
 colonialism, 16, 420, 430  
 colonial period  
   history of, 385, 419-30  
 Colonies, Ministry of (France), 434, 438, 468, 470  
 Company, incited by British against Dutch (17 cent.), 231  
 Committee of Correspondence, Sierra Leone (1853), 339  
 Committee of Merchants (in London), to administer Gold Coast forts, 360, 366  
 Committee on West Africa (report 1865), 362, 374  
 commodities, West African  
   British need for, 390, 421  
   world prices of, after first World War, 409, 410; during slump, 411; after second World War, 416, 418, 486, 489, 490  
 communications  
   difficulties of, 196, 392  
   development of, 447  
 Communist Party, French, and African colonies, 469, 470, 471, 478  
 Company of African Merchants, 355, 365  
   attacked by humanitarians and abolished (1821), 366  
 Conakry, Guinea, 445, 449

- Congo  
 carvings from, 42  
 slaves from, 224, 248  
 Europeans and, 225, 377, 384n, 491  
 other African states and civil war in, 494, 496  
*Conseil de l'Entente*, 475  
 Constituent Assemblies, France (1945, 1946)  
 and colonies, 467-8  
 Africans in, 469-70, 472, 479  
 constitutions  
 of Asante (late 17 cent.), 175, 176  
 of Liberia (1838), 337, 338  
 of Yoruba states (19 cent.), 323  
 proposed for Fante Confederation (1891), 359, 376, 389, 396  
 for Gold Coast (1925), 396  
 in republics formed from French territories, 477  
 Convention People's Party, Gold Coast, 401, 459, 462  
 copper  
 bars of, as currency (manillas), 216, 233, 250  
 Kanta of Kebbi's canoe sheathed in, 101  
 trade in, 88, 215, 243  
 Costa de Mina (Gold Coast)  
 Portuguese on (15-16 cent.), 222, 223, 224, 226  
 Dutch attack (1596), 227  
 Cotonou, Dahomey, 374, 445, 449, 450  
 cotton  
 cultivation of, 44, 233, 239; in U.S.A., 334; promoted by British, 407, 408  
 export of, 367  
 trade in, 223  
 weaving of, 46, 155-6, 239, 257  
*see also* cloth  
 councils  
 of Bornu, 84; under Shehus, 296  
 of Kano (Tara-ta-Kano), 98-9  
 of Serer chiefs, 135, 137  
 of Windward Coast communities, 153-4  
 of Asante union, 175, 349  
 of Fante elders, 182, 184; of Fante union, 186, 187  
 of Oyo (Oyomesi), 195, 200  
 of Benin (Uzama), 198, 200, 260, 301  
 of Jukun, 208  
 of Tiv, 210  
 of Idoma elders (Igabo), 211  
 of Igara (Igala Mela), 212  
 of Seku Ahmadu, 278  
 of Niger Delta city states, 305  
 of Ibo elders, representing ancestors, 310  
 of Liberia, 337  
 in French territories, 437, 468; elected, 436; advisory, 439  
 in British territories, legislative, 339, 362, 397-8, 400, 459, 478; regional, 396; executive, 339, 400, 401  
 cowries, as currency, 89, 215, 233, 244, 250, 261; import of, 375  
 crafts and industries, among Wolof, 133; in Benin, 200  
 credit trading, 233, 250, 251  
 criminals, sold as slaves, 158, 422  
 crops  
 introduction of new, 35, 223-4, 257, 445-6  
 diversion of slaves to growing of, on abolition of slave trade, 258  
 Crowther, Samuel Ajayi, bishop, first student at Fourah Bay College, 215, 340-1, 370  
 Crummell, Alexander, Liberian leader, 344  
 Cuffee, Paul, brings negro settlers to Sierra Leone, 335  
 currency, cowries, 89, 215, 233, 244, 250, 261; rolls of cloth, 89; manillas (copper bars), 216, 233, 250; small spiked hoes, 216; gold, 244; iron, 244; slaves, 259; British coins, 410  
 customs duties  
 of African rulers, 159, 199, 251, 342  
 in Liberia, 337  
 French control of, at Porto Novo, 440  
 in British territories, 362, 406, 407  
*see also* tariffs, taxation  
 Dadi, ruler of Kano (1670-1703), 209  
 Daendels, Director-General of Elmina, on Asante (1816), 349  
 Dagachi, deposed ruler of Bornu, in Kano (15 cent.), 97-8  
 Dagarti Mamprussi, British treaty with (1894), 382  
 Dagomba, 179, 357; British treaty with (1892), 382  
 Dahomey, 42  
 drive out Dutch (end of 17 cent.), 231  
 rise of (18 cent.), 172; attack fort at Whydah, 234  
 and slave trade, 255, 257, 261-2, 318, 329  
 send embassies to Europe and South America, 257  
 and Yoruba (18 and 19 cent.), 314-31  
 Hausa spoken in, 90  
 conquered by French and declared a protectorate (1892-4), 262, 327, 381, 432  
 as French colony (from 1893), 438, 449  
 and R.D.A., 470

- Dahomey—*contd.***  
 as autonomous republic (1960), 475, 490, 495
- Dakar**  
 foundation of (1857), 377, 435  
 under French, 377, 438, 444-5, 449  
 rapid growth of, 450, 451  
 university at, 454
- Dakar-Niger railway**, 445
- Damagaram**, vassal of Bornu (early 19 cent.), 293
- Damasak**, So stronghold, captured by Idris Alooma, 79
- Dan people**, Ivory Coast, masks of, 42
- Dan Marina** (d.1655?), scholar at Katsina, 125
- Dan Masanih** (d.1667), *mallam* at Katsina, 104, 125
- Dan Yahaya**, defeat of Bornu and Kano by Fulani at (1805), 289
- Danish**  
 in Accra (1776), 348  
 abolish slavery (1792), 387  
 forts of, bought by British (1850), 371
- Danish West India Company**, 231, 233
- Danquah's Conferences** (Gold Coast), 460
- Darfur**, copper from, 88
- 'dashes'**, customary presents of Europeans to African customers (18 cent.), 251
- dates**, trade in, 46
- dating in archaeology**, by radio-carbon, 26, 40, 41
- Daud**, Askia ruler of Songhai (16 cent.), 68, 100
- Daud**, Saifawa ruler of Kanem-Bornu (14 cent.), 76, 78
- Dauda Bakon Damisa**, ruler of Kano (1426-38), 97, 209
- Daura**, Hausa state  
 legends of founding of, 91, 92, 94  
 overrun by Kanta of Kebbi (16 cent.), 101  
 annual meeting of heads of Hausa states at, 111  
 and Usuman, 274, 275, 276, 289  
 vassal of Bornu, 289, 293  
 lineage of Galadima of, 108
- Degel**, Usuman at, 270, 271, 272
- democracy**, in Windward Coast communities, 154; in Ibo communities, 311
- Dendi region** of Songhai, 65, 69; Usuman in, 275, 276
- Dendo**, Fulani leader in Nupe (early 19 cent.), 213
- Denham**, Major, on Al-Kānemī (1823), 293
- Denkyira**, Akan people, 165, 166, 169, oppress small Akan states (17 cent.), 170, 171-2
- break through to coast, 172  
 alliance against (late 17 cent.), 174, 175  
 defeated by Asante (1699-1701), 176-7, 185; rebel, 178  
 surrendered by Asante to British, 353, 354, 357  
 sign Bond of 1844, 361
- Dia** (Za) dynasty of Songhai (from 7 cent.), 65
- Diagne**, Blaise, first African elected to French parliament, 436
- 'diffusionist'** school of historians, 32
- Digma**, title of royal secretary in Bornu, 296
- Dinguiray**, *hijra* of Al-hājj 'Umar to (1848), 279-80
- Diori**, Hamani, Prime Minister of Republic of Niger, 476
- Dja people**, 48
- Dodowa**, defeat of Asante by British at, 353
- Domaa**, Aduana state, 171, 173  
 trade route through, 167  
 campaign of Kumasi against (1670s), 174; of Asante against (1680s), 176
- donkeys**, domesticated in north-east Africa, 45; trade in, 214
- Drape**, William, founder of Sierra Leone newspaper (1855), 339
- Dress Reform Society**, Sierra Leone (1887), 339
- Drum Chief** (For Agbande), of Tiv, 211, 215n
- Dugu**, Dugutigi, Mandinka villages and rulers, 69
- Dunama I** (1097-1150), and **Dunama II** (1221-39), rulers of Kanem-Bornu, 75
- Dunama Dabalemi** (Muhammad), first Muslim ruler of Kanem-Bornu (mid 13 cent.), 126
- Dunama Lefiani**, ruler of Kanem-Bornu (1810-11, 1814-18), 294, 298n
- Dupuis**, British agent and consul for Asante (early 19 cent.), 347, 349
- Dupuis Treaty** (1820), between Asante and British (not ratified), 354, 356
- Durbawa dynasty**, Katsina (from 14 cent. or earlier), 95
- Durbi sa Kuseyi**, first settlement of Katsina, 95
- Dutch in West Africa**, 181-2, 227-43  
 at war with Komenda (1695-7), 186  
 send mission to Kumasi (1716), 177  
 and Fante, 182, 186  
 in Benin, 194; in Accra (1776), 348  
 exchange forts with British, 359, 362  
 withdraw from Gold Coast (1870), 362

- Dutch West India Company, first, 228-9, 230; second, 230-2
- Dyālo, Fulani people, ruling clan of Masina, 277
- Dya'ogo, Tekkur dynasty (9-10 cent.), 51, 52
- Dyara, kingdom of, 52
- Dyula, Muslim trading clan of Mandinka, 49, 61, 128, 130n, 145-6  
language of, 132  
introduce Islam to Hausa states, 121, 124  
in Futa Jallon, 162; on St Paul river, 164
- Ebirimoro, ruler of Sefwi (18 cent.), 178
- Ebohoun, title of minister of external affairs in Benin, 301, 313n
- eclipse of the sun, at Kano (1734), 105; in Bornu, 289
- École William Ponty, teacher-training college at Dakar, 452, 453
- Edo, 199; language of, 205n, 301  
education  
by societies on Windward Coast, 154, 156  
some Windward Coast children sent to England for, 161  
by missionaries, 336, 340, 452, 485  
in Sierra Leone, 334, 340-1  
under French, 373, 452-4, 485  
under British, 387, 395-6, 397, 399, 415, 458  
about nationalist movements, 464-5  
in independent West African states, 1-2, 489-90
- Edusei, Krobo, Nkrumah and, 482
- Efik people, Niger Delta, 304, 305
- Egba  
freed from Oyo yoke (end of 18 cent.), 192, 323  
towns of, destroyed by Oyo (1820s), 323  
repel Dahomey attacks (1844-64), 315, 321, 326, 327  
and Egbado, 324-5, 326  
and Europeans, 261, 325, 370
- Egbado  
Dahomey and, 262, 314, 321, 325  
Egba and, 324-5, 326
- Egga, market on the Niger at, 214, 215
- Egypt, 32, 33, 34  
Negro people in, 40  
supposed migration of African peoples from, 192, 198  
falls to Arabs (7 cent.), 116  
deaths of kings of Kanem-Bornu in (1097, 1150), 74, 75  
relations of Mali and Kanem-Bornu with, 118, 126, 244  
occupied by British, 379
- Ekiti, in Benin empire, 201, 259, 301, 302
- Ekoono, clan of Akan peoples, 165, 171, 173
- Ekpe Society, of Efik people, 305, 307
- Ekumfi, Fante state, 180, 181, 187
- Elmina ('the mine')  
trade route to Begho and Timbuktu from, 167  
Portuguese at (1482), 247  
falls to Asante (1699-1701), 176-7, 348, 352, 353
- Elmina Castle, 160, 177
- emirates, established under Usuman, 268, 277, 391, 406
- Enogie, title of ruler of Ishan (under Benin), 301
- Enugu, railway to sea from (1916), 407
- Eribo, title of Benin official transacting business with Europeans, 200
- Esiam, Fante state, 180, 181
- Esigie, ruler of Benin (early 16 cent.), 212
- Eso, military peers of Oyo, 194, 197
- Es-Sahili, poet and architect from Granada, in Gao (14 cent.), 82
- Etsii, clement of Fante group, 167, 169, 182, 183
- Etsu, title of ruler of Nupe, 213, 376
- cunuchs  
in slave trade, 89  
in offices of state in Kano, 98-9  
in Zaria, 103  
on Shaikh 'Umar's council, 296
- European Economic Community (Common Market), 444  
former French territories as associate members of, 444, 477, 491
- Europeans  
sale of gold to, 128, 242  
trade with Africa, 156-162, 246-252  
interfere in affairs of coastal states, 172  
superior technology of, 265, 387, 421, 493  
growing influence of (19 cent.), 363-383  
exploration of Africa by (19 cent.), 368-70  
partition of Africa by, 338, 341, 376-83, 404-5  
*see also individual nations*
- Evalue language, 165
- 'evolutionist' school of historians, 32-3
- Ewe people, 167, 431  
languages of, 42, 165, 316
- Ewedo, early ruler of Benin, 198
- Eweka I, early ruler of Benin, 198, 199
- Ewuare the Great, early ruler of Benin, 198
- excavation, archaeological, 26-7, 36, 200n; 'mock', 38
- exogamy, among Ibo, 203-4

- exploration of Africa, by Europeans, 368-70  
 exports, from British territories, 408, 411  
 Ezzidio, John, African member of Sierra Leone council (1863), 339  
 Fa Modu, chief of Kumadugu, defeated by Samori Touré, 233  
 Fagha, trading centre, 81  
 Faidherbe, Governor of Senegal (1854-6, 1863-5), 372-3, 436, 437, 452  
 Falaba, Yalunka kingdom, 163  
 Falémé river basin, gold-bearing, controlled by Ghana (11 cent.), 60; abandoned to French (19 cent.), 372  
 famine, in Kano (17 cent.), 104  
 Fante, Akan people, 165, 166, 167, 180-2  
   coastal state (1629), 168  
   and Saboe (early 17 cent.), 236n  
   expansion of (18 cent.), 169, 182-5, 185-7  
   relations of, with Asante, 187-90, 346; with Asante and British, 351-55, 388  
   conquered by Asante (1805-16), 348, 354-5  
   surrendered by Asante to British, 353, 357  
   confederation of, 359, 362  
   proposed plan for constitution (1871), ruined by British, 359, 376, 389, 396  
 Fantyn, Fante capita, *see* Mankessim  
 Farim, founded by Portuguese (mid 17 cent.), 228  
 Feloup (Jola) people, 145  
 Ferguson, George Ekem, African geographer and explorer in British civil service, 382  
 Fernando Po, 305, 383n  
 Ferry, Jules, French minister of education, later prime minister, 377, 379, 432  
 'Fertile Crescent', beginnings of agriculture in, 30-1  
 Fetu (Afutu), coastal state, 167, 168, 183  
   king and followers baptised (1503), 225  
   and Fante (17 cent.), 183, 186  
 Fez, Mali empire in diplomatic relations with (14 cent.), 64  
 Fezzan  
   trade route from Tripoli to Bornu through, 57  
 Arab raids into (7 cent.), 116  
 Kanem-Bornu empire extended to (13 cent.), 72, 75  
   Bornu influence felt in (18 cent.), 83  
   Al-Kānemi and, 290, 292  
 FIDES, 448, 490  
 fiefs of nobility, in Kanem-Bornu, 85, 89; in Benin, 260  
 firearms  
   in Kano (15 cent.), 97  
   of Moors (16 cent.), 69  
   of Turks (16 cent.), 79  
 imported by Idris Alooma (16 cent.), 112n, 128  
   of Portuguese (16 cent.), 122n, 159  
   imported by Bornu from Egypt, 244  
   obtained by Atlantic trade, 167, 233, 248  
   in Benin, 199; in Ibadan, 261; of Egba, 327  
   access to coast necessary for supply of, 324, 351  
   of Al-hājj 'Umar, 279  
   of Samori Touré, 284-5, 286  
 fish, trade in, 167  
 fisherfolk, 65, 213  
 flags of authority, given to Usman's commanders, 276-7, 278, 290  
 flotilla of Songhai on Niger, 67, 70  
 Fogni, 'emperors' of, and Europeans, 145  
 Fomena Treaty (1874), between Asante and British, 357  
 Fon language, 165  
 Fonds d'Investissement pour le Développement Economique et Social (FIDES), 448, 490  
 food, sale of, in markets, 215, 240  
 food frontier, rice/yams, 151  
 Foreign Jurisdiction Act (1842), 371  
 forest zone, 39, 41, 42, 43-4  
   products of, 46, 59  
   small communities in, 140, 149, 160, 310  
   trade in, 238-41  
   at beginning of 19 cent., 259-63  
 forests, conservation of, 394  
 forts  
   of Europeans on African coast, 226, 249  
   rent paid for, 156, 179, 250  
   of British, 156, 231, 364; of Portuguese, 222, 226, 228; of Dutch, 227, 231, 364; of French, 364  
   purchase of Danish, by British (1850), 371  
   Anglo-Dutch exchange of, 359, 362  
 Foso, Fante inland market, 188, 351  
 Fourah Bay College, 340  
 Fula, pastoral people, 134  
 Futa Jallon  
   Fulani and Susu in, 54n, 151, 155-6, 159, 162  
   Muslim Fulani migrate into (17 cent.), 162, and conquer in jihād (1725), 163, 257  
   Al-hājj 'Umar in, 279, 372  
   French and, 437  
 Franco-Prussian war, 374-5, 432  
 free trade policy, of France in 1860s, 441; in German colonies, 380  
 Freeman, T. B., African Methodist missionary (mid 19 cent.), 370

- Freetown, Sierra Leone, 333, 334, 387  
 anti-slavery naval squadron based on, 365, 388  
 dispersion of new ideas from, 485  
 railway from (1896), 407
- Freetown Bay, temporary Portuguese fort on, 222
- French  
 on West African coast (16-18 cent.), 226, 230, 364, 431  
 in Senegal (19 cent.), 366-7, 371-2  
 and Al-hājj 'Umar (1857), 280  
 renewed activity of (1878 onwards), 280, 297, 342, 376-7, 380-3, 438  
 struggle of, with Samori Touré (1882-1898), 284-5, 287-8, 432  
 against Dahomey (1891), 327; (1892-94), 263, 381, 432  
 aid from, to West African states, 490-1  
*see also* French territories
- French Community, 475, 476, 477
- French territories  
 growth of, 431-3  
 policies of assimilation and association in, 433-7, 439-40, 441  
 administration in, 435, 437-42, 448, 458, 478-9  
 economic and social developments in, 442-454  
 reforms of 1945-6 in, 476-9  
 development of political parties in, 469-72  
 road to independence in (1956-60), 473-7  
 developments since 1960 in, 477-8
- French West Africa, Government-General of (1904), 438-9, 444, 449
- Frontier Police, Sierra Leone, 343
- Fugoma, title of governor and executioner of town of N'gornu, 296
- Fulani, 45, 49, 52-4  
 names for, 150, 283n  
 origin of, in Senegal, 121, 132, 151  
 language of, 132  
 caste system of, in Futa Toro, 139  
 as Muslim teachers, 75, 94, 98, 121, 125  
 and Songhai, 67, 267  
 in Bornu, 81; in Kebbi, 102  
 in Futa Jallon, 151, 155-6, 159 162-3, 257, 437  
 in Hausaland, 269  
 theocratic states of (18 cent.), 265
- and Nupe, 213-4, 215, 304  
 and jihād of Usuman, 107, 269-70, 277, 289  
 conquests of (early 19 cent.), 83, 209, 263-4, 290  
 oppose Al-hājj 'Umar, 280  
 and Al-Kāncmī, 290, 292  
 defeated by British (1890s), 406, 423
- Fulbe, *see* Fulani
- Funda (Panda), Igbira state, 214  
 market at, 215  
 destroyed by Fulani (1853), 214, 215
- Futa Toro, Senegal  
 traditional place of origin of Fulani, 52, 53, 126  
 Tukulor language of, 132  
 Serer migrate from, 135, Fulani migrate from, 269  
 as theocratic state (18 cent.), 257, 265  
 ancestor of Usuman from, 270  
 birthplace of Al-hājj 'Umar, 279, 280
- Ga people, 192, 194  
 language of, 42  
 Asante and, 187, 352
- Ga-Adangbe people, 167, 178
- Gabon, French in, 371, 378, 436
- Gaga (Kaka), centre of Saifawa dynasty in Bornu, 127
- Gaha, Bashorun and usurping ruler of Oyo, 197, 318
- Gaiser and Witt, German firm of palm-oil traders, 375
- Galadima  
 title of Warden of the West in Kanem-Bornu, 84, 85, 86, 289, 290, 296, 297  
 of Daura, patrilineage of, 108
- Galliéni, General, in Senegal, 377
- Gallwey, vice-consul, and Benin (1892), 302-3
- Gambaru, palace of Idris Alooma at, 82
- Gambia, 132, 417  
 Franco-British agreement on frontier of (1889), 381  
 nationalist movement in, 463  
 stages towards independence in (1954), 400  
 independent (1965), 463
- Gambia river, 143, 220
- Gamergu, descendants of So, 72
- Gao  
 trade route from Tripoli to, 46, 56  
 trading centre, 57, 63, 244  
 under Songhai (9 cent.), 65; under Mali (13 cent.), 63  
 Islam in, 82, 122  
 in Catalan Atlas (1375), 218  
 captured by Moors (16 cent.), 112;  
 trade lost, 246  
 attacked by Tuaregs and Mossi (17 and 18 cent.), 69, 256
- Gaulle, General de, and Africa, 446, 467, 475
- Gaw (Yaw), headquarters of Bulala, 76, 127
- Geba river, 132,  
 Portuguese on, 220, 228

- Gelele, son and successor (1858) of Gezo, ruler of Dahomey, 326, 329, 380
- gems, trade in, 222, 241
- Germans, in West Africa, 375, 378-80, 390, 432
- Gewels, Wolof, craftsmen, 139, 140
- Gezo, ruler of Dahomey (1818-28), 197, 320-1, 323-4, 326
- Ghadames and Ghat, trade route from Tripoli to Gao through, 46, 57
- Ghana
- archaeology of, 29, 30, 31, 37
  - agriculture in, 44
  - languages in, 42, 90
  - Soninke empire of (8 to 11 cent.), 36, 42, 59-61
  - on trade routes, 56, 117, 243-4
  - taken by Almoravids (1076), 59, 60-1, 117-18, 244; by Soso (12 cent.), 118; by Mali (1240), 118, 244
  - trade shifts away from, 244, 246
  - see also* Gold Coast
- Ghana, independent from 1957, 392, 397, 492
- national income of, 484-5
  - state-owned trading company in, 486
  - education in, 489, 490
  - and European Common Market, 491, 493
  - seeks aid from Soviet bloc, 493-4
  - loan to Guinea from, 494
  - socialist policy in, 496
- giants, traditions of a race of, near Lake Chad, 36
- Gijirimasu, ruler of Kano (1095-1134), 96
- Glover, Sir John, Governor of Lagos (to 1872), 376
- Gobir, Hausa state, 91, 95, 125
- attacked by Songhai (1512-13), 100;
  - by Kanta of Kebbi (early 16 cent.), 101; by Kwararafa (17 cent.), 104, 209
  - rise and primacy of (18 cent.), 105-7, 264
  - takes over Zamfara (18 cent.), 106, 269 and Usuman, 271, 272, 274
  - Fulani and Bornu claims to (1830), 293
- Goddala people, 50, 117-18, 130n
- gold
- ornamental work in, 46
  - regions producing, in forest area, 46, 168, 171, 242; in Banda and Gyaman, 178
  - trade in, controlled by Ghana, 60, 243, by Mali, 63, 244
  - Muslim traders in, 128-9, 242-3, 248
  - Portuguese search for sources of, 220, 221
  - Portuguese trade in, 222, 224, 228
  - Dutch trade in, 230
  - shares of different European nations in trade in (1700), 231-2
  - staple of trade for three centuries, 233
  - from Brazil, 234
  - nuggets of (as distinct from gold dust), property of rulers, 243, 356
  - as currency, 244
- Gold Coast, 168, 169, 170
- British colony (1821-8), 388
  - British withdraw from (1828-43), 360, 365-6, 385
  - British return to (1843), 371, 389
  - attempt to impose poll tax in (1852), 406, 427
  - made Crown Colony (1874), 359, 361, 362, 363, 376, 389
  - constitution (1925), 396
  - education in, 399
  - economic affairs of, 407, 408, 415
  - nationalist movement in, 398, 462
  - stages towards independence in (1942-1946), 400, 401, 402
  - independent (1957), 392, 397, 492
  - see also* Ghana
- Gold Coast Aborigines' Rights Protection Society (1897), 396, 398, 429
- Gold Coast Lands Bill (1897), 398
- Golden Stool of Asante, 169-70, 357, 358, 386
- Goldie, George, and British United African Company (Royal Niger Company), 378, 379, 380, 390, 405, 406, 426
- Goinbe, jihād leader from, 275, emirate in (1824), 290
- Gomes, Fernão, of Lisbon, exploration by agents of (15 cent.), 221
- Gomez, Diego, explorer (15 cent.), 141
- Gonja, Akan people, 165
- Fante state, 180, 181
- Gongola area, Jukun in, 206, 207; Fulani in, 290
- Gonja, trading centre, 167, 171
- Islam in (17 cent.), 128
  - in Asante empire (18 cent.), 179; asserts independence, 357
- Gorée, Dutch forts at, 227; taken by French (1672-8), 230, 435
- Governors
- of Sierra Leone, 338, 345n
  - of British territories, powers of, 400-1, 402
- Gozo, ruler of Katsina (18 cent.), 106
- grain, cultivated in savannah, 44; trade in, 46, 88
- Grand Bassa
- settlement on St John river, Liberia, 336
  - subdivision of Liberia, 337

- Grand Bassam, Ivory Coast, occupied by French, 380
- groundnuts, cultivation of, 132  
in Senegal, under French, 367, 436, 445, 447, 449  
in British territories, 408
- Guan people, 167; language of, 165
- Gudu, *hijra* of Usuman and followers to, 272
- Gueye, Laminc, deputy from Senegal to Paris, 453, 470, 472
- Guggisberg, Sir Gordon, Governor of Gold Coast (from 1919), 396, 411
- Gugua, ruler of Kano (1247-90), 97
- Guinea, 32, 149, 159, 257  
Portuguese in, 220-5  
Dutch in, 229-30  
French in, 373, 432, 436  
as French colony (from 1893), 438  
export of bananas from, 446  
R.D.A. in, 470, 472, 474, 476  
votes for independence (1958), 450, 475
- Guinea, Portuguese, 12, 132
- Guinea, Republic of  
remains outside U.A.M., 478  
state structure in, 481, 484  
national income of, 484  
state-owned trading company in, 486  
aluminium deposits in, 489  
seeks aid from Soviet bloc, 491, 493-4  
and European Common Market, 493  
loan from Ghana to, 494  
match factory in, 495
- gum, trade in, 46
- Gumbu Smart, Loko chief (early 19 cent.), 341
- Gumsu, title of first wife of king of Kanem-Bornu, 84
- Gungu, town built for Kanta of Kebbi (16 cent.), 101; ruined by Zamfara (18 cent.), 105
- Gunguma, traditional first ruler of Zaria, 95
- Gurunsi, French in, 382
- Gurwa, at war with Gobir (18 cent.), 106
- Gwandu, base of Usuman's *jihād*, 274, 275, 276  
Fulani state (19 cent.), 49
- Gwani Muktar, Fulani leader against Bornu (early 19 cent.), 290
- Gwanja, trade route from Bornu to, 98
- Gwari, and Hausa, 91, 92
- Gyaman, 166  
new state of Domaa driven out by Asante (17 cent.), 176  
conquered by Asante, 178, 179; asserts independence, 357
- Habe, *see* Hausa
- Hadejia  
*jihād* leader in, 275  
lost to Fulani by Bornu (early 19 cent.), 263, 292; becomes emirate, 92, 289  
attacked by Al-Kānemi (1824), 292
- Haghaya, Marghi prince, defeated by Idris Aloomu, 80
- hājj, pilgrimage to Mecca, *see* Mecca
- Ham people, 41
- Hamdūllahi, capital of Seku Ahmadu, 278, 279
- handaxe of Acheulean culture, 28-9
- harpoons, bone, of Saharic Neolithic, 31
- Hashim (son of Shaikh 'Umar), ruler of Bornu (1885-93), 296
- Hassan, recent chronicler of Zaria, 105
- Hausa states, 48, 90-112, 431  
agriculture of, 44  
artisans of, 49  
trade routes to, 57, 167, 171  
introduction of Islam to (14 cent.), 124-6  
pay tribute to Bornu (15 cent.), 77  
supply mercenaries to Asante, 263  
and Usuman, 111, 274  
conquered by Fulani (early 19 cent.), 83, 263-5
- Hausa language, 72, 90, 124, 394  
in Timbuktu, 107  
*lingua franca* of much of West Africa, 90-1, 111, 216  
poems of Usuman in, 271
- Hawkins, Sir John, as slave trader (16 cent.), 157
- Hayford, Casely, organiser of National Congress of British West Africa, 396
- Henry of Portugal, 'the Navigator' (15 cent.), 219-20
- Herodotus, on trading in Africa, 243
- Hewett, British consul, and Nigeria, 390
- hides, trade in, 46, 223, 227
- hijra*, of Prophet Muhammad, 114, 280;  
of Usuman, 267; of Al-hājj 'Umar, 279-80
- Hikoy, title of officer in charge of Songhai fleet, 67
- Hill, Commander, Governor of Gold Coast forts (from 1843), 360-1
- Hippisley, Governor (18 cent.), of Asante, 189
- historians, traditional and Muslim, 55, 61
- history  
teaching of, 1-22  
development of interest in African, 453  
of colonial period, 385, 419-30
- Hittites, iron-smelting by, 34
- hoes, of Nok culture, 41; of savannah zone, 44; as currency, 216
- Hombori mountains (Songhai), 67

- horses  
 introduction of, into Africa, 45  
 of rulers, 48  
 imported in exchange for slaves, 77, 97  
 trade in, 77, 79, 97, 146, 214, 245, 286
- Hottentots, stone and bone tools and weapons of, 35
- Houphouët-Boigny, President of Ivory Coast, 478, 484  
 leader of R.D.A., 470, 471, 474  
 and federation, 476, 496
- 'house' system in Niger Delta, 250, 305, 306, 307, 313
- human sacrifice, in Nupe, 213; in Benin, 259, 303, 304; in Dahomey, 314  
 British efforts towards ending of, 360, 386, 390
- Ibadan, 115, 392  
 rise to power of (19 cent.), 261, 302  
 military aristocracy in, 323  
 raid Ketu (1883); 329
- Ibeno people, Niger Delta, 304, 305
- Ibibio people, 42, 368; and Ibo, 204; and Aro, 311, 312
- Ibn Battūta, Arab traveller (14 cent.), 55, 64, 119-20
- Ibn Hawqal, Arab geographer (10 cent.), 116
- Ibn Khaldūn, Arab chronicler (d.1406), 55, 75
- Ibn Munnabeh, Arab chronicler (8 cent.), 44
- Ibn Saïd, Arab chronicler (13 cent.), 75
- Ibo, 191, 201-4, 309-11  
 language of, 42, 165, 202-3  
 masks of, 42  
 Benin and, 191, 259, 301  
 in Niger Delta, 305  
 oil-producers, 308, 368, 369  
 clan system of, British and, 394  
 scarcity of land among, 415
- Ibrahim (son of Shaikh 'Umar), ruler of Bornu (1884-5), 296
- Ibrahim ibn Ahmad, ruler of Bornu (1818-46), 294, 295
- Ibrahim Yaje, ruler of Katsina, converted to Islam (end of 15 cent.), 95
- Ibrahim Zaki, Fulani leader against Bornu (early 19 cent.), 290
- Ibrahima Suri, leader of jihād in Futa Jallon (18 cent.), 163
- 'Id al-Fitr (feast after Ramadan), in Kano, 99; in Mali, 119
- Idah, capital of Igara, 212, place of origin of Nupe rulers, 213
- Idoma, 206, 211  
 language of, 211, 216  
 vassal of Jukun, 204, 209; of Igara, 212, 214  
 markets of, 216
- Idris Aloomaa, ruler of Bornu (1571-1603), 79-82, 112n, 127, 130, 294
- Idris ibn Harun, vizier of Idris Aloomaa, 80
- Idris Katakarmabi, ruler of Bornu (1504-1526), 78, 294
- Ife, 191, 193, 198  
 bronzes of, 36-7, 42  
 attacked by Owu (contrary to Yoruba constitution), 321-2
- Igabo, council of Idoma elders, 211
- Igala Mela, council of Igara, 212
- Igara (Igala), 42, 206, 211-2  
 language of, 216  
 trade of, 46  
 vassals of Jukun, 204; of Benin, 212  
 receive tribute from Igbira, Idoma, and Nupe, 212, 214
- Igbira, 209, 212, 214; language of, 21, 216
- Igbo-Ukwa, bronzes of, 37
- Igweke Ala, oracles of, at Umunora and Onyili-ora, 203
- Igwira state (1629), 169
- Ijaw people, Niger Delta, 304, 305, 309  
 Bini and, 186; Ibo and, 204
- Ijaye, military rule in, 323
- Ijebu, 322; British expedition against (1892), 421
- Ikin, *see* Bocquah
- Ile-Ife, old Yoruba centre, 193
- Ilesha, under Ibadan, 302
- Ilorin, 92, 276, 421
- immigrants, controlled in Mossi kingdom, 49
- Indépendents d'Outremer (I.O.M.), 472, 473, 474, 475
- indexes, use of, 20
- indigénat*, power of, in French territories, 467, 468, 469
- indigo, production of, 91; trade in, 215, 256
- 'indirect rule', in British territories, 392-96, 398, 407, 410, 425, 426
- Indochina, 432, 438, 466, 473
- Indonesia, palm oil of, 416
- industries  
 early localised, 239-40  
 in French territories, opposed by French manufacturers, 444, 445  
 beginnings of, in British territories, 417  
 in independent West African states, 417
- 'interlopers', in African trade (17-18 cent.), 231, 232, 233
- iron  
 working of, in early times, 33-5, 41; in forest zone, 43, 239, 240; at Kano, 96; by Wolof, 139, 143; by Fulani and Soso, 155; by itinerant Ibo, 203; by Tiv, 210; by Nupe, 213; at Funda, 215

- armour of, at Kano, 97  
 trade in goods of, 143  
 bars of, as currency, 244, 250  
 imports of, 249, 415  
 Iron Age, 33-5; empires of western Sudan as products of, 55  
 ironstone, behind Windward Coast, 149  
 Ishaga people, misled Dahomey army (1851), 327  
 Ishan people, and Benin, 301, 302, 304  
 Islam in West Africa, 44, 113-30, 264-5  
   religion of ruling families, 48-9, 94, 115, 120, 122, 128, 163; of towns, 58, 70, 120; of traders, 162, 246  
   spread by traders, 93, 115, 129  
   accepted by Dya'ogo dynasty of Tekrur, 50; by Songhai rulers, 65, 67; by Saifawa dynasty of Kanem, 74, 77  
   in empires of western Sudan, 57-8, 118, 267; in Kanem-Bornu, 81-2, 126-8, 292, 297; in Hausa states, 92-4, 97, 108, 111; on Windward Coast, 162-4  
   reform movements in, 253, 257, 263-4  
   *see also* jihads  
 Italians, trade with Magrib, 217; with Guinea, 220  
 Itsekiri, 304, 305; Benin and, 259, 301, 303  
 ivory  
   carvings of, 43, 155  
   trade in, 46, 157, 215, 216, 247; Portuguese, 203; Dutch, 230  
   as alternative commodity to slaves, 258, 259, 305  
   staple of trade for three centuries, 233  
   state supervision of collection of, in Asante, 263  
 Ivory (or Quagua) Coast, 151, 167  
   French in, 371, 380, 436  
   as French colony (from 1893), 438, 450  
   coffee and cocoa crops introduced in, 445-6, 449  
   migration to Gold Coast from, 447  
   R.D.A. in, 470, 471, 472, 474, 476  
   independent (1960), 475  
 Ivory Coast, Republic of, 475, 478, 489, 490, 496  
 Iwoye, Ketu town, attacked by Dahomey (1788), 329  
 Iyashere, title of prime minister in Benin, 301, 313n  
  
 Jaba people, 41  
 Jabu, coastal state (1629), 168  
 Jaja, founder of Opobo kingdom (1860s), 308-9, 386, 402, 458  
 jamā'a (community) of Usuman, 271, 272, 273, 304  
 Jambur, caste of freemen among the Wolof, 139  
 Japan, exports from, in West Africa, 434  
  
 Jenne  
   founded (c.1250), 61  
   trade route from Timbuktu to Gold Coast through, 167, 171  
   trading centre, 59, 63, 128, 244  
   under Mali (13 cent.), 63; under Songhai (15 cent.), 64, 65  
   trade diverted from, 99, 246  
   attacked by Tuaregs and Mossi (17 and 18 cent.), 256  
   in empire of Seku Ahmadu, 278  
 Jibril ibn 'Umar, teacher of Usuman, 273  
 jihāds (Islamic holy wars), 268-9  
   of the Almoravids (11 cent.), 50, 59, 117-18  
   Fulani and, 53  
   of Futa Jallon and Futa Toro (18 cent.), 163, 281  
   of Usuman, 111, 269-77  
   of Seku Ahmadu, 277-9  
   of Al-hājj 'Umar, 279-80  
   possible economic motivation of, 247  
   Al-Kānemī states case against, 291-2  
 Jimada, rival ruler of Nupe (1796-1805), 213  
 Jobson, Richard, English trader, 143-4  
 Johnson, Elijah, early leader in Liberia, 335  
 Johnson, Samuel, historian of Yoruba, 194, 197  
 Jola (or Feloup) people, 145-6  
 Jos plateau, Nigeria, 29, 34; tin workings on, 40, 408  
 Juaben, Oyoko state, 171, 173; member of Asante union, 262  
   British encourage defection of, 358  
 judge(s)  
   in Bornu, 87; in Hausa states, 106, 109; in Mali, 119; in Timbuktu, 122  
   women as, among Wolof, 138-9  
   Al-Kānemī as, 293  
 judicial affairs, in Bornu, 57; in Hausa states, 109  
 Jukun (Kwararafa), 42, 192, 206-9  
   language of, 216  
   trade of, 46  
   and Tiv, 210; and Igara, 211  
   invade Bornu (15 cent.), 77  
   decline of power of (17 cent.), 83  
   *see also* Kwararafa  
  
 Kaarta, Bambara succession state (17 cent.), 64, 70, 257  
   rival of Segu (early 19 cent.), 264  
   conquered by Al-hājj 'Umar, 265  
 Kacella  
   title of commanders of Bornu armies, 86  
   title of emissary of Bornu at Zaria, 105  
   title of eunuch section of Shaikh 'Umar's council, 296

- Kachicheri people, 42  
 Kagalma, title of Bornu official charged with containing the Tuareg, 296  
 Kaiama, British treaty with (1894-5), 382  
 Kaigama, title of commander-in-chief and warden of the south, Kanem-Bornu, 77, 84, 86, 289  
 Kakanfo, *see* Are-Oha-Kakanfo  
 Kalabari, of Niger Delta, 304-5; *see also* Calabar  
 Kanajeji, ruler of Kano (1390-1410), 97, 125, 208  
 Kanawa, attacked by Idris Alooma, 80  
 Kanem  
   trade route from Tripoli to, 46  
   taken over by Bulala from Kanuri (14 cent.), 76, 293  
   recaptured; becomes vassal of Bornu (16 cent.), 78, 81, 83  
 Kanem-Bornu, state of central Sudan, 72-6; Islam in, 126-7  
   *see also* Bornu  
 Kanembu (Kanuri), people of Kanem-Bornu, 72; under Al-Kānemi, 290, 294  
   *see also* Kanuri  
 Kangaba, Mandinka state (12 cent.), 63  
 Kaniaga, early Susu state, 61, 63  
 Kankan, in empire of Samori Touré, 284, 287  
 Kano, Hausa state, 91, 96-9  
   trading centre of central Sudan, 46, 75, 99, 244, 246, 247  
   cloth made at, 239, 244  
   Islam in, 121, 124-5  
   vassal of Bornu (15 cent.), 77, 98; (18 cent.), 83, 105; (19 cent.), 289  
   attacked, (16 cent.) by Idris Alooma, 80; by Songhai, 100; by Kanta of Kebbi, 101; (17 cent.) by Jukun, 209; (18 cent.) by Gobir, 106  
   traders of, 107, 214, 215  
   and Usuman, 274, 275, 276  
   threatened by Al-Kānemi, 292  
   British in, 441  
   railway to sea from (1912), 407  
 Kano Chronicle, 94, 95, 96, 104, 112n, 125, 208  
 Kanta (Kotal Kanta) ruler of Kebbi (to c.1550), 78, 101-2  
 Kanuri empire, first (800-1470), 74-6; second (1470-1808), 74, 77-92; decline of, 83-5  
   *see also* Kanem-Bornu  
 Kanuri people, of Kanem-Bornu, 48, 72, 207  
   language of, 124  
   Hausa and, 93  
   intermarry with Kanembu, 294  
 Karabka (near Kano), trading centre, 98  
 Karamoko Alfa, leader of jihād in Futa Jallon (1725), 163  
 Karawa, capital of Mandara, 80  
 Kariagiwa, title of official appointed to despatch old or ailing king in Katsina, 95  
 Katagum  
   subdued by Idris Alooma, 81  
   Fulani emirate of, 263, 276, 290  
   in temporary possession of Al-Kānemi (1824), 292  
 Katsina, Hausa state, 91, 93, 94-5  
   trading centre, 99, 107  
   centre of Islamic learning, 107, 115, 121, 125, 264  
   vassal of Zaria (15 cent.), 103; of Bornu, 83, 104, 289  
   at war with Kano, 98, 99; with Gobir, 106, 107, 269  
   attacked, (16 cent.) by Songhai, 100; by Kanta of Kebbi, 101; (17 cent.) by Kwararafa, 104, 209  
   and Usuman, 274, 275, 276, 289  
   Fulani and Bornu claims to (1830), 293  
 Kawkaw people, element of Kanuri, 73  
 Kayor, coastal state, 139  
 Kebbi  
   Kanta of, 78, 101-2  
   dismembered (18 cent.), 105  
   temporary vassal of Gobir, 106, 107  
   superseded by Zamfara as leading power on Rima river, 269  
   Fulani of, 269, 277  
   and Usuman, 271, 272, 274  
 Keita, Modibo, R.D.A. leader in Sudan, 472; Prime Minister, 476, 484  
 Kelwari people, incited against Tuareg by Idris Alooma, 80  
 Kenya, 39, 308  
 Ketu, Yoruba kingdom, attacked by Dabonmey, 328-31; French and, 395  
 Khatia, Mansa, ruler of Mali empire (1274-5), 63  
 Kiawa, Katsina town, 106  
 Kimberley, Lord, Colonial Secretary (1870s), 363  
 King, G. F. O., African mayor of Monrovia, 341  
 'King Jimmy', destroys Sierra Leone settlement, 333, 388  
 King Jimmy Water, Sierra Leone estuary, 158  
 kings  
   development of, 48  
   sacred, of Mossi, 49  
   Islam and, 58  
   in empires of western Sudan, no fixed law of succession for, 58, 64, 68

- divine, of Ghana, 59-60; of So, 73; of Benin, 199, 200, 299; of Oyo, 200; of Jukun, 208; of Nupe, 213  
not seen in public (Kanem-Bornu), 76, 84  
matrilinear succession of, 92, 95  
not allowed to die of old age or illness (Katsina), 95  
as magicians (Songhai), 122; (Benin), 198; (Tiv), 210  
elected, of Wolof, 137-8; of Balanga, 145; of Tiv, 210  
on Windward Coast, 153-4  
under Asante, 175, 179  
representative of ancestors (Benin), 260 and Europeans, 250
- Kingsley, Mary, on Africa, 389, 406
- Kiriji war, in Yoruba country (19 cent.), 330
- Kisi people, 163; language of, 151, 155
- Kita, Fulani in, 54n
- Kofi Kari-Kari, ruler of Asante (1867-1874), 347
- Kokenawa, councillors and officials in Bornu under the Shehus, 296
- Kokofu, Oyoko state, 171, 173; rebels against Asante, 358
- kola nuts, source of stimulant permitted to Muslims, 245-6  
trade in, 46, 89, 98, 129, 167, 171, 228  
as tribute, 103
- kola trees, cultivation of, 43
- Komadugu Yobe river, 76, 77; boats of Idris Alooma on, 80
- Komenda  
at war with Dutch (1695-7), 186; with Cape Coast (1789) and Shama (1805), 350  
abuse Asante envoys, 355
- Koniagi, semi-nomadic people, 134
- Konni, ancestors of Usman from, 269, 270; captured by Usman, 273, 277
- Kono people, invade Windward Coast, 159
- Koranko people, Susu chiefs among, 163
- Kormantin, Fante coastal outlet, 181, 351; and meeting-place, 187
- Kosoko, ruler of Lagos, deposed by British (1852), 374
- Kotoko people, descendants of So, 72, 80; language of, 90
- Koton Karafi, Igbira state, 214
- Koular, lower Gambia, subjugated by Mali, 140
- Kpengala, ruler of Dahomey (1774-89) 329
- Krache, annexed by Asante (1740s), 179; asserts independence, 357
- Krio language, Sierra Leone, 161
- Krobo, (with Akyem) defeat Asante (1764), 188
- Kru coast, 247
- Kru peoples, 133, 151, 343  
language of, 151  
lack 'sickle-cell' trait, 153  
employed by Europeans as seamen, 160-1, 343
- Kuka, later Kukawa, seat of Al-Kānemī and capital of Bornu, 293, 295, 297
- Kukia, trading centre of early Songhai state, 65, 117
- kulla (purdah, wife seclusion), in Kano, 99
- Kumadugu, defeated by Samori (1866), 283
- Kumasi, Oyoko state, 170, 171, 173  
at crossing of trade routes, 171  
Asante capital, 175, 262, 347  
Islam in (end of 18 cent.), 128  
captured by British (1874), 376  
railway to (1903), 407
- Kumayo, traditional founder of Katsina, 94-5
- Kumbi Saleh, excavations at, 36
- Kunta Arabs (nomads), as Muslim missionaries, 120-1; oppose Al-hājj 'Umar, 280
- Kurmi Market, Kano, 98
- Kurunmi, ruler at Ijaye (19 cent.), 323
- Kusaeri, defeat of Shaikh 'Umar by Wadai at, 295
- Kusi Obodum, ruler of Asante (1750-64), 188, 348
- Kutumbawa, Hausa and, 93; dynasty at Kano from, 94
- Kwa languages, 42, 151, 165
- Kwaaman, Aduana state, 173, 183
- Kwahu, Akan people, 165, 169  
annexed by Asante (1740s), 178  
surrendered by Asante to British, 357
- Kwaku Dua I, ruler of Asante (1838-67), 347
- Kwaku Dua III (Prempe I), ruler of Asante (1888-96), 358  
deposed by British, 383
- Kwararafa (Hausa name of Jukun), 92  
invade Bornu (15 cent.), 77; Zaria (16 cent.), 102; Hausa states (17 cent.), 99, 104, 209  
Kano demands tribute from, 97  
conquered by Zaria, 103, 209  
*see also* Jukun
- Kwarau, founder of dynasty in Katsina (15 cent.), 95, 112n, 209
- Kwasi Gyani, fugitive from Asante to British (1863), 356
- Kwona people, section of Jukun, 207
- Kwonni, captured by Gobir (18 cent.), 106

- Kyedye (Kede), Nupe fishing and trading people, 212
- Kyerepong people, 167
- labour, forced, in French territories, 446; ending of (1945), 468, 469
- Labour Code, in French territories, 474
- Lade, temporary capital of Bornu (16 cent.), 78
- Lagos  
in Benin empire, 201, 259  
slave trade to Brazil from, 234  
annexed by British (1861), 370, 374  
British in, 371, 373-4, 376, 381  
German traders in, 375  
attempt to impose house and land taxes in (1895), 427  
railway to Ibadan from, 392, 407  
conference at (1962), 494
- Laird, Macgregor, shipbuilder, and Niger (1832-54), 369, 370, 373
- Lamtuna tribe of Herbers, 129n; capture Awdaghost (9 cent.), 116
- Lander brothers, travellers, 201, 369
- languages  
Niger-Congo family of, 40-1, 132, 145, 216; Kwa sub-group of, 165; Mande sub-group of, 42, 133, 142, 158, 159  
Chad family of, 40, 90  
'trade language' of Windward Coast, 161
- law  
Islamic, in Songhai, 67; in Bornu, 82, 127; in Hausa states, 109; in Asante, 188; in northern Nigeria, 393  
Maliki school of, 75-6, 109, 115  
British, in Fante states, 361-2  
French, Napoleonic code of, applicable to colonies, 433  
leather, and leather goods, trade in, 46, 215, 239-40
- Lebi (son of War-jabi), ruler of Tekrur (11 cent.), 51
- legumes, cultivated in forest zone, 43
- Leka, Kebbi city, ruined by Zamfara (18 cent.), 105
- Lenaghain, Mr, founder of Sierra Leone Committee of Correspondence (1853), 339
- Leo Africanus (Al-Hassan), Arab traveller (16 cent.), 77, 100, 125, 209
- leopard skins, trade in, 199, 215
- Leopold, King of the Belgians, and Congo, 377, 379, 384n
- Lerlima, ruler of Masina, leader of Fulani against Bornu (early 19 cent.), 275, 289
- Levant, market for slaves, 89
- Leventis, A. G., Greek businessman, and United Africa Company, 413
- Lever Brothers, and West African trade, 407, 412
- Lewis, Sir Samuel, first mayor of Freetown (1893), 339
- Liberated African Department, Freetown, 334
- Liberia, 149  
foundation of, 334-5  
growth and development of, 335-8  
independent (1847), 337  
politics in, 343-5  
United States and, 341, 492  
German traders in, 375  
loan to (1871), 343-4  
in Monravia group of African states, 494
- Liberia College, 344
- Liberia Herald* (1830), first newspaper in West Africa, 336
- Limba people (Sierra Leone), 151, 163
- lineages  
in social organisation, 43, 48  
of Hausa rulers, 92  
of Galadima of Daura, 108  
of Akan peoples, 165-6  
of chieftaincies in Oyo, 200  
of groups of Ibo, 310
- linger*, *lyngüre*, title of mother or sister of ruler of Serer, 138
- linguistics, evidence from, in archaeology, 35, 40; in history, 121, 124, 150-1
- Liptako, Fulani in, 54n; and Usuman, 276
- Lishabi, Egba leader against Oyo (18 cent.), 197
- literacy, Islam and, 49, 264; of Hausa (15 cent.), 98; of Muslim merchants, 129
- Liverpool, oil traders from, 367, 373, 378, 405
- livestock, 30, 43, 45; tax on (in Hausa states), 110
- local government, in Hausa states, 109; under French, 439-42; under British, 398-9
- loi cadre*, of French Assembly, on colonies, 474
- Loko people, defeated by Temne (1841), 341
- Lokoja, attempted commercial settlement at, 379, 389
- Loli people, trade of, 46
- Lugard, Sir Frederick, in Nigeria, 382, 391, 434; and indirect rule, 392-5
- Lycée Faidherbe, Dakar, 453
- M'Carthy, Sir Charles, Governor of Sierra Leone (1812-24), 335, 366
- Macaulay, Herbert, in nationalist movement, 429

- Maclean, George, representing Committee of Merchants on Cape Coast (1830-43), 360, 366, 389
- Maclean Treaty, between Asante and British (1831), 353, 356, 360
- Madagascar, 431, 476
- Madawaki (Madaki), title of master of the horse (commander-in-chief) in Hausa States, 108
- Maga, Hubert, Prime Minister of Dahomey, 476
- Magaji, title of lord of the treasury in Hausa states, 108
- Magajin Malan, title of representative of Bornu at Zaria (18 cent.), 105
- Magara, title of official 'elder sister' of king of Bornu, 73, 84
- Maghumi, clan among Zaghawa, 73
- magicians, kings as, 123, 198, 210, 213, Jukun as, 209
- Magira, title of queen-mother in Kanem-Bornu, 73, 75, 79, 84
- Magrib, North Africa  
language of, 72  
contacts of West Africa with, 52, 75, 93  
Italian trade with (14 cent.), 217
- Maguzawa, non-Muslim Hausa people, 93
- Mahmid Kati, Sudanese Muslim writer (16 cent.), 55
- Mahmūd b. 'Umar, qādi of Timbuktu (early 16 cent.), 124
- mahram (letter of privilege), 74, 88, 111n
- Mai, title of ruler of Bornu, 262
- Mainin Kanendi, title of chief judge in Bornu, 87
- Mairoki (Malu), ruler of Zamfara (18 cent.), 106
- maize, introduction of, 35, 224
- Makluf ibn 'Ali, jurist and geographer in Kano (1500), 100
- Malagasy Republic, 493
- malaguetta pepper, trade in, 157, 222, 247
- malaria, 157, 369, 370, 392
- Mali  
archaeology of, 37  
agriculture in, 44  
medieval Mandingo empire of, 36, 42, 61-5  
conquers Ghana and Soso (13 cent.), 61, 118, 244  
dominates Songhai (13-14 cent.), 65, and Senegambia (15 cent.), 133, 140  
checked by Mossi armies, 49  
Mande region of, 70  
in Catalan Atlas (1375), 218  
Islam in, 118-20, 121  
Portuguese mission to (15 cent.), 223  
people from, at Katsina, 107  
as French territory, see Sudan, French
- Mali Federation (Senegal and Sudan), 475, 476; dissolved after two months (1960), 477, 496
- Mali, Republic of  
remains outside U.A.M., 477, 478  
state structure in, 481, 484  
seeks aid from Soviet bloc, 491, 493-4  
socialist policy in, 496
- Malinke people, 263, 431; language of, 132
- mallamai*  
local judges in Bornu, 87, 88  
missionaries to Hausa, 93, 94  
in Kano and Katsina, 104  
Fulani leaders (early 19 cent.), 213
- Mamma, ruler of Nupe (1795-6), 213
- Mampong, Asante state, 171, 262, 358
- Mamponen, Ekoona state, 171, 173  
provides commander-in-chief for Asante union, 176
- Mandara, Bornu and, 80-1, 83; language of, 90
- Mande languages, in savannah region, 42; in Senegambia, 132; of invaders of Windward Coast, 158, 159
- Mande peoples, 70, 133, 140; trading specialists, 142-3
- Mandingo (Mandinka)  
agriculture of, 44, 45  
Mali empire of, 48, 61-5; see also Mali  
trade of, 59; with Europeans, 222, 228  
language of, 132  
states of, 63, 140-1  
Muslim trading clan of, see Dyula  
subject to Mali (15 cent.), 133; to Wolof, 135  
Muslim revival among (18 cent.), 257  
slaves among (19 cent.), 136  
Barra and, 140  
Samori Touré and, 280, 287
- Manes, invaders of Windward Coast (mid 16 cent.), 158-9
- mangroves, of Niger Delta, 304
- manillas (copper bars), as currency, 216, 233, 250
- Mankessim (Fantyn), Fante capital, 180, 181  
dispersion from, 182-3  
meeting of Fante Confederation at (1871), 359
- Manna, branch of ruling clan of Dyara, 52
- Mano river, 158, 159
- Mansa, title of emperor of Mali, 63
- Manso, Fante inland market, 172, 186, 351
- Manuel, Bob, wealthy chief in Calabar (19 cent.), 307

- manufactured goods from Europe, in Africa, 46, 157, 168, 199, 216, 243, 248, 251-2
- maps
  - in teaching history, 19
  - of Catalan Atlas (1375), 118, 218
  - Portuguese, of Africa (1487-9), 77
  - of Gold Coast, 168, 169, 170, 350
  - of Asante empire, 179
  - of Fante region, 182
  - of Benin, Niger Delta, etc., 300
  - of western Yorubaland, 315
  - of West Africa, economic, 488; communications, 495
- Maradi, centre of resistance to Fulani (early 19 cent.), 264
- Marketing Boards, 417-8
- markets
  - development of, 238, 240-1
  - provided by court of Bornu, 89
  - of Ibo, 203
  - of Niger-Benue peoples, 214-5
  - British need of, 405, 420
- Maroons, from Jamaica, in Sierra Leone, 333, 388
- Maryland Colonization Society, 338
- Masina, 277
  - non-Muslim dynasty in (17-18 cent.), 256
  - conquered by Al-hājj 'Umar, 265, 280
  - theocratic Fulani state of, 54n, 265, 280
- mass organisation, of nationalist movement,
  - beginnings of, in British territories, 428-9, 460
  - by R.D.A., 470
- Massa, gold port, 217, 218
- Masufa, of Sanhaja confederation, 134n
- Matankari, captured by Usuman, 273
- matrilineal descent
  - in social organisation, 43
  - of early Hausa rulers, 92
  - of Akan groups, 165-6, 168
- matting, screwpine and raffia, in forest zone, 43
- Mauritania, 116, 120
  - trade route from Guinea to, 220
  - French in, 371, 438, 449
  - autonomous republic (1960), 476
- Maxim gun, of Europeans, 265
- mba tsav*, Tiv secret society, 201, 211
- Mecca, 113, 114
  - hostel at, for Bornu pilgrims, 81
  - pilgrimages to, 162, 268; by Ummc Jilmi of Kanem (1097), 74; by Berber leaders (11 cent.), 117; by Mali rulers (13 and 14 cent.), 64, 118; by Al-hājj Ahmad (1485), 100; by Askia the Great of Songhai (1497), 123; by Idris Albooma of Bornu (16 cent.), 81, 82; by Hausa, 90; by Al-hājj 'Umar (1820s), 279; by Al-Kānemi, 290
  - roads to, through Chad, 431
- Medina, Arabia, 114
- Medina, on Senegal river, 280, 378
- Mende people, 159; rise of (19 cent.), 341; massacre of aliens by (1898), 343
- mercenary troops, of Asante, 263; of Aro, 311
- Meroë, iron manufacture at, 34
- Mestrema, title of Warden of the East and keeper of the king's household, Kanem-Bornu, 84, 86
- metallurgy, development of, 32, 33
- microliths, 30, 34
- Middleburg Commercial Company, 232
- middlemen in trade
  - empires of western Sudan as, 56
  - Kanuri as, 88
  - coastal peoples as, 157, 249-50, 389, 422
  - Fante replace Assin as, 185, 350
  - for agricultural produce, 409
- migration(s) of peoples, 15
  - of Wolof, 135; of Mandinka, 141; of Temne, 151; of Akan peoples, 166; of Fante, 180; of Yoruba, 192-3; of Ibo, 201; of Jukun, 206-7; of Tiv, 210
  - of Mossi, to coast, 431, 450-1
  - from French to British territories, 446-7
- military organisation and warfare
  - in history, 16
  - of Kanem-Bornu, 86-7, 89
  - of Asante union, 175-6
  - see also armies
- millet, cultivation of, 44, 133
- mining, African, 239, 240, 242
  - external capital and technology in, 408
- mirrors, trade in, 46, 249
- Misau, inhabitants of, killed by Kwara-*rafa* (17 cent.), 104
- missionaries, Christian
  - Portuguese, 161, 199, 212, 225-6, 228, 235; and slave trade, 225
  - American, in Liberia, 336, 341
  - education by, 336, 340, 452, 485
  - British, in Sierra Leone, 340, 365; in Abeoluta, 261, 370
  - criticisms of Africans by, 254, 387, 389, 423
  - criticisms of, by Africans, 428
- missionaries, Muslim
  - Arab traders as, 93, 115, 128
  - nomads as, 120-1, 129
  - Toronkawa as, 270
- Moa river, 158, 159
- Mokwa (Nupe), Kanta of Kebbi and, 101

- monopoly (ies)  
   of Muslim traders, 129  
   of rulers of Benin, over European trade, 199  
   of Portuguese Crown, in African trade, 221-2  
 monopoly capitalism, 405, 409, 411-13  
 Monrovia, capital of Liberia, 336  
 Monrovia group of African states, 493, 494  
 Montserrat, subdivision of Liberia, 337  
 Moor, Ralph, consul at Benin (1890s), 303, 304  
 Moore, Francis, on Mandinka society, 142; on Wolof king, 138  
 Moors, *see* Morocco  
 Moriba Kindo, Temne leader against Susu (early 19 cent.), 341  
 Morocco  
   ape-men in, 28  
   conquered by Muslim armies (8 cent.), 116; by Almoravids (11 cent.), 118  
   trade route to Senegal and Niger from, 46, 116, 241  
   Portuguese expeditions against (15 and 16 cent.), 218  
   conquests by (16 cent.), 68-9, 82, 255, 256  
   rule by pashas from, 69, 267  
   French declare protectorate over (1912), 432, 435  
   Morocco, French, autonomy for, 473  
   'morocco' leather, 46  
   mosques, in Bornu, 82, 127; in Kano, 97, 125; in Ghana, 117; in Mali, 118; built by Samori Touré, 286  
 Mossi, 42, 48  
   kingdoms of (Wagadugu and Yatenga), 49-50  
   attack Mali and sack Timbuktu (c.1400), 64  
   expeditions of Songhai against (15 cent.), 67, 68  
   attack cities of old Songhai empire (17 cent.), 256  
   resistant to Islam, 264  
   French and, 282, 440  
   British treaty with (1894), 382  
   migration of, to coast, 431, 450-1  
 Mouree, Dutch fort at (1612), 227; Fante deny Asante access to (1800), 351  
 mouth-veil (lithām), wearers of, 130n  
 Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, 113-14  
 Muhammad, prince of Kanem (16 cent.), 81  
 Muhammad, ruler of Bornu (1526-45), 78  
 Muhammad Askia Toure, *see* Askia the Great of Songhai  
 Muhammad ibn Ahmad, qādi at Katsina (16 cent.), 100  
 Muhammad ibn Mani, said to have brought Islam to Kanem-Bornu (11 cent.), 74, 126  
 Muhammad Ngilliroma, ruler of Bornu (1811-14), 298n  
 Muhammad Rumsa, ruler of Kano (1463-99), 98-9, 121, 125, 129  
 Muhammad Salih, ruler of Wadai (19 cent.), 295  
 Muhammad Sottose, ruler of Agades (1486-93), 121  
 Muhammad Zaki, ruler of Kano (1582-1618), 104, 208-9  
 Muniyo, vassal of Bornu, 293  
 Murzuq, trade route from Tripoli to Kanem through, 46  
 Musa, Mansa, ruler of Mali empire (from 1312), 61, 63-4, 82, 118, 245  
 Musa Jokolo, ancestor of Usuman, 270  
 Musgu, descendants of So, 72; language of, 90  
 Muslim names, note on, 282  
 Naba, title of ministers in Mossi kingdom, 49  
 Nafata, ruler of Gobir (1796-1802), 106, 269; and Usuman, 271-2  
 Naguji, ruler of Kano (1194-1247), 96-7  
 Nananom Mpoom, place of worship of Fante, 180  
 Nasarawa, Fulani town in Benue valley, 214  
 nation, term indicating cultural unity, 482  
 National African Company (previously British United Africa Company; afterwards Royal Niger Company), 378, 380, 406  
 National Congress of British West Africa (1917), 396  
 National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, 462  
 National Liberation Movement, Gold Coast, 462, 464  
 nationalism, African  
   pioneers of, 339, 341, 345  
   cities as centres of, 451  
   in British territories, 393, 397-402, 456-65  
   in French territories, 466-78  
   in British and French areas compared, 478-9  
   resistance to British penetration as, 421, 427  
 natron, trade in, 88, 96, 98  
*négritude*, 453, 492  
 Nembe, city state of Niger Delta, 305  
 Neolithic culture in Sahara, 31  
 newspapers, in Liberia, 336; in Sierra Leone, 339

- N'gazaragamu  
 new capital of Bornu (c.1470), 77, 80, 82, 98  
 Jukun and, 207, 209  
 three times taken by Usuman and retaken by Al-Kānemī, 77, 275-6, 290-1
- Ngizim people, expedition of Idris Alooma against, 81
- N'gornu, on Lake Chad, seat of Al-Kānemī, 293, 296
- Nguru, station of Warden of the West, in Kanem-Bornu, 84, 290
- Niamey, rapid growth of, 450
- Niani, capital of Sundiata of Mali (13 cent.), 63
- Niger, as French colony, 438, 449  
 R.D.A. in, 471  
 autonomous republic (1960), 475
- Niger, Republic of, 297, 475; Hausa in, 90, 482
- Niger Agricultural Project, 417
- Niger-Benue confluence, peoples of, 206-216
- Niger Coast Protectorate (1892), 380
- Niger Company (previously Royal Niger Company), bought by Lever Brothers (1920), 412
- Niger-Congo family of languages, *see* languages
- Niger Crisis (1897-8), 383
- Niger Delta  
 early European traders in, 249, 250  
 in 19 cent., 304-9, 386  
*see also* Oil Rivers
- Niger Mission, 370
- Niger Navigation Act, 379
- Niger river  
 African rice first cultivated near, 43, 152  
 trade route from North Africa to, 46, 57  
 Tuaregs control (1737), 69  
 exploration of, 368, 370  
 development of trade on, 373, 374  
 French on, 378, 379  
 navigation on, 379, 383  
 British predominance on lower part of, recognised by West African Conference (1884-5), 379, 390, 406  
 French railways from coast to, 445
- Nigeria  
 archaeology of, 30, 34-5, 37  
 agriculture in, 44  
 languages in, 42, 90, 151  
 southern, peoples of, 191-205  
 northern, emirates in, 268; conquered by British (1900-4), 406, 421;  
 indirect rule in, 393, 394  
 borderland of, with Cameroons, 312-13  
 as British territory, 406, 407  
 railways in, 407-8  
 exports of, 408, 411  
 nationalist movement in, 398, 460, 461, 462, 481  
 regional rivalries in, 462, 464  
 Women's Riot in (1929-30), 427  
 stages towards independence in (1941-1946), 400, 401, 402  
 independent (1960), 402
- Nigeria, Republic of, independent from 1960, 402  
 part of Bornu now in, 297  
 federal system in, 481, 482, 484  
 national income of, 484  
 education in, 1, 489, 490  
 policies of, 491, 493, 494, 495, 496
- Nigerian Youth Movement, 460
- Nikki, British treaty with (1894-5), 382; to French (1898), 383
- N'jimi, early capital of Kanem, 74, 75  
 trade route from Tripoli to, 46  
 captured by Buala (14 cent.), 76  
 recaptured by Kanuri (16 cent.), 78, 81, 294
- Nkrumah, Kwame  
 leader of Convention People's Party, Gold Coast, 401, 462  
 President of Ghana, 345, 481, 482, 484  
 and Pan-African policy, 492
- Nku, suzerain of Beni groups, 213
- Nkusukuni, Fante state, 180, 181, 182, 183
- Nok culture, West Africa, 34-5, 41, 239
- Nokana, council of Bornu under the Shehus, 296
- nomads, attack empires of the Sudan, 58-9; as Muslim missionaries, 120-1, 128
- North German Missionary Society, 375
- Nova Scotia, negro settlers from, at Sierra Leone, 333, 388
- Nsuta, Oyoko state, 173; in Asante union, 176; rebels, 358
- Nubia, iron-working in, 34
- Numana people, 42
- Nuneh river, 132, 159
- Nupe, 212-14  
 language of, 42, 216  
 trade routes to, 46, 88, 171  
 and Hausa, 92, 93, 103  
 vassal of Igara, 212, 213  
 slaves from, 215  
 glass beads from, 257  
 and Usuman, 276  
 British mission to (1871), 376  
 Fulani in, 304
- nutrition, problems of, 416
- Nyoro, Al-hājj 'Umar in, 280
- Nzima, Akan people, 165

- Oath of the Asante (Great Oath of Memenede), 178, 179, 190n
- Oba, title of ruler of Benin, 198, 200, 259, 299
- Obanosa, ruler of Benin (1804-16), 302
- Obiri Yeboa, ruler of Asante (17 cent.), 170, 173-4
- Obligations of Princes*, by Al-Maghili (early 16 cent.), 93, 100
- Obunumankoma, priest, leader of Fante migration, 180
- Oda river, 170
- Odapagyan, priest, leader of Fante migration, 180
- Oduduwa, mythical Yoruba founder, 193
- Odwira, annual festival of Asante union, 175
- Ofin river, 166, 170
- Ofinso, defeated by Osei Tutu (1680s), 176; admitted to Asante union, 177
- ofe*, club-like symbol of heads of lineages among Ibo, 202, 203
- Ogbori cult, of Oyo, 195
- Ogiso, old dynasty of Benin, 198
- Ohambele, oil market at, 308
- Ohimi, Igbira leader (18 cent.), 212
- Oil Rivers (Niger Delta)  
European trade of, 368, 369, 373, 374, 485  
British consul in (1880s), 378  
British protectorate over (1885), 302, 308, 309; becomes Niger Coast Protectorate (1892), 380
- Ojigi, Oyo ruler (18 cent.), 195
- Okomfo Anokye, friend and adviser of Osei Tutu (17 cent.), 174, 175, 357
- Okpara, title of heads of lineages in Ibo, 202
- Okrika, threatened by Bonny and New Calabar (mid 19 cent.), 308
- Old Colonies of France, 433, 434
- Old Towns of Senegal (St Louis, Gorée, Dakar, Rufisque), 435, 436, 437, 469, 472, 478
- Ologboshere, title of commander-in-chief, in Benin, 301, 313n
- Olowu, title of ruler of Owu, 321, 322
- one-party systems, in West African states, 476, 483
- Oni, title of ruler of Ife, 198, 322
- Onyili-ora, oracle of Igweke Ala at, 203
- Opobo (Niger Delta), kingdom of Jaja, 308-9
- Opoku II, ruler of Asante (early 19 cent.), 189
- Opoku Ware, ruler of Asante (18 cent.), 170, 173, 178-80  
attempts to replace hereditary by appointed officials, 348
- opposition groups  
African members of legislative councils as, 398, 400  
in West African states, 483
- oracles, of Ibo, 103, 311, 312; of Dahomey, 329
- oral tradition, 1, 13, 23, 55, 87, 150, 256
- Oranmiyan, traditional founder of Yoruba, 193, 195, and of dynasty of Benin, 191, 193
- Organisation of African Unity (1963), 477, 493, 494
- Organisation Africaine et Malgache pour Co-opération Économique (O.A.M.C.A.), 477
- Organisation Commune Africaine et Malgache (O.C.A.M.), 477-8
- Orompoto, early Oyo ruler, 195
- Osei Bonsu, ruler of Asante (1801-24), 189, 347  
reforms of, 348-9, 350
- Osei Kwadwo, ruler of Asante (1764-77), 188, 189  
reforms of, 348, 350
- Osei Kwame, ruler of Asante (1777-1801), 128, 188-9  
reforms of, 348
- Osei Tutu, ruler of Asante (from late 1670s), 170, 173-77, 357
- Osei Yaw, ruler of Asante (1824-38), 347
- Osemwede, ruler of Benin (1816-48), 302
- Oson, priest, leader of Fante migration, 180
- ostrich feathers, trade in, 46, 215; fans of, 98
- osu*, cult slaves among Ibo, 203, 205n
- O'Swald, German trading firm, 375
- Otta, conquered by Egba (1842), 325
- Otibu, ruler of Assin (1850s), 353, 362
- Ovonramwen (Overrammi), last independent ruler of Benin (1888-99), 303-4
- Owerri district, oil-producers of, 308
- Owo district, under Benin, 301
- Owu war (1821-5), 321-23
- Oyo, Old  
rise of empire of (15-17 cent.), 172, 193-7, 205n  
trade of, 245, 257  
over Dahomey (18 cent.), 315-21  
assists Akyem against Asante (1764), 188  
break up of (19 cent.), 260, 321-3, 423, 424
- Oyoko, clan of Akan peoples, 165, 170, 171, 172, 173
- Oyomesi, council of Oyo, 195, 200

- palm kernels, trade in, 199, 341; differential export duties on (1918-21), 414
- palm oil  
trade in, 209, 337, 341, 365, 389, 445  
manufacture of soap from, 240, 367-8  
as alternative commodity to slaves, 209, 258, 259, 305, 368  
price of, 403
- Panda, *see* Funda
- panyarring, 349, 363n; in Fante states, 350, 361
- Park, Mungo, explorer, 131, 144, 256, 368
- Parti de Regroupement Africain (P.R.A.), 475
- patrilineal groups, of Akan peoples, 165-6
- Pepel people, seafaring, 145
- pepper, trade in, 157, 199, 215, 222, 247; unsuccessful plantations of, 233
- Pepple V (William Dappa Pepple), ruler of Bonny (1837-54), 306
- Pereira, Pacheco, reports about Gold Coast from (c.1500), 168
- pestilence, in Jukun, 209; in Bornu, 289
- Peters, Karl, treaty-maker in Tanganyika (1884), 390
- Phillips, J. R., acting consul at Benin (1890s), 303
- Phoenicians, iron-using, 34
- pilgrims, hostels for, 75, 81; as Muslim missionaries, 93; unable to get home, 90; *see also* Mecca
- Pithecanthropus* (ape-man), 28
- planning, in independent states, 2, 488-9
- plantations  
under Dutch, 233; under French, 367, 435  
in Ibadan, 261; in Dahomey, 262; in Calabar, 307
- Poll Tax Assembly, Gold Coast (1852), 389
- Popo, in Oyo empire, 194, 197; raids Dahomey, 317
- Poro Society, Windward Coast, 154
- Port Loko, Susu at, 163
- Porto Novo  
slave trade through, 234, 320  
Ajase-Ipo kingdom at, 318, 320, 326  
French at, 374, 440
- ports, in French territories, 444, 448, 449
- Portuguese, in West Africa, 217-27, 247 and Dutch, 227-30  
in communication with western Sudan (15 cent.), 112, 223  
African carvings made for, 157  
accounts given by (16 cent.), of Windward Coa 153-4; of Gold Coast, 168  
at Benin, 199, 201, 299  
as missionaries, 161, 199, 212, 225-6, 228, 235
- Portuguese Guinea, 132
- pottery, 30, 31, 36
- Pra river, 166, 170
- Prempe I (Kwaku Dua III), ruler of Asante (1888-96), 358; deposed by British, 383
- priests, of Serer, 137; of Fante, 180, 350-1; of Jukun, 208; of Ibo, 311, 313; of Aro, 311
- Progressive People's Party, Gambia, 463
- Protet, Governor of Senegal (1850s), 372
- purdah (*kulle*, wife seclusion), in Kano, 99
- qādi, Muslim magistrates, in Bornu, 82, 87; in Kano, 97; in Katsina, 100; in Timbuktu, 123, 124
- Qādiriyya, Muslim religious brotherhood, 121, 122, 271, 280
- quartz beads, of Nok culture, 41
- quinine, used by Baikie, 373
- Qurān, 113, 114-15, 129; jihād prescribed by, 268
- Raba, Nupe capital, 213; market at, 214-15
- Rabeh, conqueror from eastern Sudan, defeats Bornu (1893), 287; killed by French (1900), 297, 432
- Raccali, Mr, Levantine merchant, and ground-nut trade, 412
- radiocarbon dating, 26, 40, 41
- railways  
in French territories, 377, 444-5, 450  
in British territories, 392, 407-8, 410, 411, 414, 495
- Rainy, William, early leader in Sierra Leone, 339
- Ramadan fast, 162, 268
- Rano, Hausa state, 91
- Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (R.D.A.), 470, 471, 472, 473, 474; after independence, 475, 476
- referendum, in French territories (1958), 475
- Refurelu, Egbado town, destroyed by Dahomey (1830s), 325
- religion  
in history, 15  
indigenous, Islam and, 115, 122, 130, 256; British and, 425, 426  
of Songhai, 65, 67; of Kano, 97; of Serer, 137; on Windward Coast, 154; of Yoruba, 194, 316; of Ibo, 203, 311, 313; of Gobir, 273, of Benin, 299  
*see also* Islam
- Rhodesia, West African states and, 495

- rice  
 cultivation of, 35, 43, 132, 133  
 indigenous African species of (*Oryza glaberrima*), 152  
 trade in, 223
- Richards, Sir Arthur, Governor of Nigeria, 396
- Rio Nunez, Rio Pongas, Fulani and Susu trade diverted from Sierra Leone to (16 cent.), 159
- roads, building of, 392, 407, 417
- Roberts, J. J., agent in Liberia, 337; first President, 344
- rock paintings and engravings, Sahara, 40, 45-6
- Rogan-Koto, Idoma market, 216
- Royal African Company (17-18 cent.), 230, 231
- Royal Niger Company (previously National African Company, afterwards Niger Company), 380, 381, 382, 383, 390, 406
- Roye, Edward J., early leader in Liberian politics, 344
- Rufisque, French town in Senegal, 435
- Saboe, and Dutch (1612), 227; and Fante, 236n
- Sahara  
 archaeology of, 29, 30, 31, 40, 45-6  
 trade routes across, 39, 46, 56, 77, 99  
 trade across, *see* trade
- Saif (Sef) ibn Dhi Yazan, traditional first king of Kanem, 73-4, 126
- Saifawa dynasty of Kanem-Bornu (800-1846), 74, 76; end of, 295
- St George's Bay Company, for African colonisation, 332
- St John river, Liberian settlements on, 336
- St Louis, French trading fort (1659), 435; French town, 363, 435  
 railway from Dakar to, 377, 444-5
- St Paul river, 164; Liberian settlements on, 336
- Sakura, usurping ruler of Mali empire (1285-1212), 63
- salaries, of administrators in Africa, 459, 487-8
- salt  
 from Sahara, 46; 80, 88, 96, 129, 168, 243-4  
 trade in, 98, 167  
 coastal production of, 155, 238-9  
 import of, forbidden by coastal rulers (18 cent.), 249
- Saloum, 136
- Samori ibn Lafiya Touré (Al-mami), Muslim conqueror in forest zone, 265, 280, 283-8  
 defeated by French, 380, 432, 437
- Sangare, clan of Seku Ahmadu, 277
- Sango, deified ruler of Oyo (? 15 cent.), 193, 195
- Sangha Stone Age culture, 29
- Sarhaja confederation of Berber tribes, 116, 126n  
 origin of Almoravid movement among, 117  
 Portuguese and, 225
- Sankore mosque (university), 82, 100
- Sannau, ruler of Katsina (15 cent.), 95
- São Jorge da Mina (Elmina), Portuguese castle, 222, 224  
 attacked by Dutch, 227, 228, and captured (1637), 229
- São Tomé  
 Portuguese in, 221, 223, 224  
 taken by Dutch (1641), 229  
 retaken by Portuguese (1648), 230
- Sapele, city state of Niger Delta, 305
- Sarki, title of rulers of Gobir and elsewhere, 106, 107
- Sarkin Dogarai, title of head of king's bodyguard in Hausa states, 108
- Sarkin Doka, title of chief of police in Hausa states, 108
- Sarkin Fada, title of chief official of king's household in Hausa states, 109
- savannah (grassland) zone, 39, 41, 42, 44-6  
 empires in, 55, 56  
 probable origin of Akan peoples, in, 166
- Say-Barruwa line between French and British 'spheres of influence', 381, 382
- school certificate examination, 2, 9
- schools, in Nigeria, 1; under Samori Touré, 286; in Liberia, 336; in Sierra Leone, 340; in Senegal under Faidherbe, 373, 452; in British territories, 417, 428
- scrubland zone, 39
- Sebera, Seku Ahmadu in, 277
- Sefwi people, 166; defeated by Asante (1720s), 178, 179  
 surrendered by Asante to British, 357
- Segu, Bambara succession states, 64, 70  
 non-Muslim military oligarchy in, 256-7, 278  
 rival of Kaarta, 264  
 conquered by Al-hājj 'Umar (1861), 265, 280
- Sekondi, British fort at (17 cent.), 231; railway from (1898), 392, 407
- Seku Ahmadu (1775-1844), 268, 277-9, 287
- Sekyeré, Ekoona state, 170, 171, 172
- Senegal, 30, 45, 54n, 449  
 Portuguese in (15 cent.), 220, 224  
 French in (1815-30), 366-7; (from 1850), 371-3, 432; (from 1890)= 377-8, 380, 432

Senegal—*contd.*

- French troops from, 372, 384n  
 frontier with Gambia, 381  
 Old Towns of, 435, 436, 437, 469, 472, 478  
 nationalist movement in, 470, 472, 474  
 autonomous republic (1960), 475, 478  
 Senegambia, peoples of, 132-48  
 Senghor, Léopold Sédar, President of Senegal, 478  
 deputy from Senegal to Paris, 470  
 founder and leader of *Indépendants d'Outremer*, 472, 474-5, 476  
 insistence of, on *négritude*, 453, 492  
 Serahuli, *see* Soninke  
 Serer, 45, 135, 137; Islam in, 265  
 serology, historical evidence from, 52, 152-3  
 Shagba Or (Man of Substance), title of one of the two rulers of Tiv, 210-11  
 Shama  
 Portuguese fort at, 226; taken by Dutch (1637), 229  
 cotton plantations at (18 cent.), 233  
 war between Komenda and (1805), 350  
 Shari'a, law of Islam, 82, 109, 115, 127, 350  
 Sharp, Granville, and Sierra Leone, 333  
 shea butter, trade in, 143, 258  
 Sherbro estuary, British fort in, 156  
 Sherbro island, settlement of Negroes from U.S.A. on, 335  
 Sherbro people, 341  
 Shehu, *the*, *see* Usuman dan Fodio  
 Shetima 'Abd al-Karim, ruler of Bornu in the name of Shaikh 'Umar, 296  
 Shira, district in western Bornu, 289  
 conquered by Fulani, 290  
 Shuaibu, chronicler of Zaria, 105  
 Shuwa Arabs, in Kanem, 81, 83; under Al-Kānemi, 290; under Shaikh 'Umar, 297  
 'sickle-cell' trait, 152-3  
 Sidi Ahmad al-Bakkā'i (d. 1504), shaikh of Kunta Arabs, 121  
 Sidi Muhammad Ghali, of Tijāniyya brotherhood, 279  
 Sierra Leone, 149, 158, 159, 265, 285  
 foundation of colony in (1787), 332-4, 364  
 as Crown Colony (1808), 333, 338-43, 345, 365  
 emigrants from, to other African states, 327, 340-1, 345, 365, 370, 374  
 German traders in (1830s), 375  
 inland area of, as protectorate (1896), 342-3  
 attempt to levy hut tax in (1886), 343, 406, 427  
 rivalry between colony and protectorate in, 398, 463  
 exports from, 408  
 nationalist movement in, 398, 463  
 stages towards independence in (1943-1951), 400, 401, 402  
 independent (1961), 402, 463  
 Sierra Leone Committee of Correspondence, 339  
 Sierra Leone Company, 331, 365  
 Sierra Leone Merchants' Association, 339  
 Sierra Leone People's Party, 463  
 Sifawa, Usuman at, 276  
 Sijilmasa  
 trade routes through, 56, 116, 242  
 captured by Almoravids (1061), 60, 118  
 destroyed (16 cent.), 247  
 Sikasso, Samori Touré defeated by French at, 287  
 silk, trade in, 46, 214  
 silver, ornamental work in, 46  
 Simpson, W. H., mission to Nupe of (1871), 376  
 Sine, subjugation of, 137  
 slave trade  
 trans-Saharan, 46, 52, 70, 77, 129, 167-8, 244-5, 390, 391  
 from Windward Coast, 157-8  
 from Kru Coast, 160  
 through Benin, 199, 222, 224, 248  
 at Niger-Benue markets, 215  
 of Portuguese, 220, 222, 224-5, 248  
 of Dutch, 230, 232  
 inland states and, 316  
 Dahomey and, 318, 319-20, 329  
 Liberia and, 336, 337  
 campaign against, 254-5, 325, 332, 364, 386, 387  
 abolished by Britain (1807), 305, 320, 333, 368, 386, 422; by U.S.A. (1808), 334  
 British naval patrol against, 259, 305, 337, 365, 369, 386, 387, 388  
 effects of abolition of, 255, 258-9, 305-6  
 alternatives to, 209, 258, 259, 305, 368  
 slavery, made illegal  
 in Britain (1772), 332, 364, 388  
 by Danes (1792), 387  
 in British colonies (1833), 369, 386  
 in U.S.A., 334, 338  
 in French territories, 387  
 slaves  
 as tribute from conquered peoples (Hausa states), 110, 208  
 prisoners of war as, 158, 258  
 criminals sold as, 158, 422  
 cult, of Ibo, 103, 205n  
 domestic, 205n, 253, 258-9; of Wolof, 138, 139; of Dyula, 142; in North Africa, 245; of Ibadan, 261  
 Slessor, Mary, on African life, 389

- Smeathen, Henry, botanist and speculator, and foundation of Sierra Leone, 333
- snake, sacred, in Hausa legend, 91, 92, 94
- So (Sao), traditional race of giants, near Lake Chad, 36, 72-3
- struggle between Kanuri and, 73, 76, 79
- soap, African manufacture and export of, 239-40; palm oil for, 367-8, 407
- social and political organisation
- in history, 15
  - in forest zone, 43-4; in savannah, 48-9
  - in Kanem-Bornu, 84-5; in Hausa states, 107-12; of Wolof, 137; of Mandinka states, 141-2; of Windward Coast communities, 154-5, 159-60; of Ibo, 202-4
- 'social studies' approach to history, 10-12
- Socialism, African leaders and, 486
- Socialist Party, French, and African colonies, 469, 470, 472, 478
- Societies, on Windward Coast, 154; in Benin, 299, 301; of slaves in Calabar, 307; secret, of Tiv, 210, 211
- see also* brotherhoods, Muslim
- soil erosion, 416
- Sokoto, 540, 115, 209, 214
- empire of Usman based on, 267, 276, 277
  - jihād of, 269-77
  - enmity between Bornu and, 294
  - comprised in British sphere, by agreement with French, 381
- Sokoto river, 101
- Songhai
- origins of, 48, 56, 65
  - empire of (15 cent.), 36, 42, 64, 65-70, 244, 267
  - Islam in, 65, 121-4
  - Portuguese in communication with (15 cent.), 112
  - relations of, with Hausa (16 cent.), 99-101
  - overthrow of, by Moors (1591), 82, 99, 124, 246, 256, 267
  - people from, at Katsina, 107
- Soninke (Serahuli)
- language of, 132
  - Dyara kingdom of, 52
  - Ghaz kingdom of (8-11 cent.), 59-61
  - as traders, 59
  - Islam and, 134
  - in Songhai empire (15 cent.), 267
  - in Masina area (19 cent.), 277
  - Samori Touré descended from, 283
- South Africa, West African states and, 494-5
- South-West Africa, Germans in, 384
- Souza, da, slave trader at Whydah (early 19 cent.), 320
- Soviet bloc, aid to West Africa from, 491
- spear, of Stone Age, 29
- spearmen, Tetala people as, 80
- spices, trade in, 222
- spirits, distilled, sold by Europeans, 249, 258
- state, enterprises of, in Asante, 263; as political unit, 482
- statuary
- terraccotta, of Nok culture, 34, 41; of Yoruba, 193
  - clay and bronze, of So, 36, 73
  - see also* carvings, bronzes
- steamships, on Niger, 369, 373
- Stone Age, 28-31, 40
- stone circles, in middle Gambia valley, 36; in Senegambia, 134
- stone engravings, in Sahara, 40, 45-6, 241
- stratification, 24-6, 37-8
- Sudan, 30, 44-5, 46
- western, empires of, 55-71
  - European view of, 368
- Sudan, French, 449
- R.D.A. in, 470, 472, 474, 476
  - in Mali Federation, 475, 476
  - see further* Mali, Republic of
- sugar
- taxes on, in Hausa states, 110
  - from Sao Tomé, 223-4, 226
  - unsuccessful plantations of, 233
  - American, produced by slaves, 183, 229
- Sulaiman, Mansa, ruler of Mali empire (1341-60), 64, 119-20
- Sumaguru, Kante, ruler of Susu (1203), 61
- Sundiata ruler of Mali empire (1230-55), 61, 63, 64, 140
- Sunna, received traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, 115, 268, 271
- Sunni 'Ali, ruler of Songhai (1464-92), 64, 65, 67, 122-3, 267
- Sunni Barou, son of Sunni 'Ali, 123
- Sunni dynasty of Songhai, 65
- Surame, capital of Kebbi, 78, 101, 102; ruined by Zamfara (18 cent.), 105-6
- Susu
- conquer Ghana (1203), 61, 118
  - in Futa Jallon, iron smelters and weavers, 157
  - combine with Fulani against Manes, 159
  - and reform movement (18 cent.), 163, 257
  - and Temne (19 cent.), 341
- Tablet oasis, trade routes through, 56
- Tabkin Kwotto, defeat of Gobir by Usman at (1804), 273

- tabus*  
 shared by members of Akan clans, 167  
 on cult slaves of Ibo, 203  
 Aku of Jukun subject to, 208
- Tado, leader of Aja states, 316
- Tafo, inland state, 167, 169; defeated by Asante (1680s), 176; admitted to Asante union, 177
- Taghaza  
 trade route through, 56  
 salt mines of, 57, 63, 68, 244  
 in Catalan Atlas (1375), 218
- Tahert, Algerian Sahara, Muslim state based on (8-9 cent.), 116
- Takedda, copper mines of, 57, 63
- Talba, title of keeper of legal records in Bornu, 87
- talisman(s), sacred, of Kanem-Bornu, 76; Muslim, 129
- Tanganyika, Germans in, 384n, 390
- Tar Hazo Bakki, ruler of Katsina (1667-1684), 104
- Tara, defeat of Songhai by Kebbi at (early 16 cent.), 101
- tariffs  
 French, extended to colonies, 444, 449  
 in British territories, 414  
*see also* customs duties
- Tarih al-Fettaḥ* (16 cent.), 55
- Tarih Gonja* (History of Gonja), 180
- Tarih as-Sudan* (History of the Sudan, 1655), 55, 100
- Tarkwa, railway from Sekondi to, 392
- Tarsina, leader of Lamtuna tribe of Berbers (11 cent.), 117
- Tassili plateau, Sahara, rock paintings and engravings of, 40, 45-6
- taxation, 48  
 in Bornu, 85, 87-8; in Hausa states, 97, 110; among Wolof, 138; in Oyo empire, 196, 199; in Benin, 198; in Asante, 263; by Seku Ahmadu, 278; by Samori Touré, 286  
 on trade, by inland states, 143, 372  
 on those conquered by Islam, 269  
 under French, 440, 446  
 under British, 343, 362, 400, 406-7, 414, 427; Marketing Boards as instruments of, 418
- Teage, Colin, early leader in Liberia, 335
- Tebferilla, battle of (11 cent.), 51
- Tebu (Teda), 73, 126; campaign of Idris Alooma against, 80
- technology  
 European superiority in, 265, 387, 421, 493  
 lack of sense of urgency about, in West African states, 491
- Teda, *see* Tebu
- Tee (Spokesman), title of one of the two rulers of Tiv, 210, 211
- Tegbesu, ruler of Dahomey (mid 18 cent.), 318
- Tekrur, 42, 48, 50-1, 135  
 Fulani in, 49, 52; Berbers of, 135  
 Portuguese mission to (15 cent.), 233  
 non-Muslim dynasty in, 256
- Tekyiman, 166; place of origin of Fante, 180  
 conquered by Asante (1723-4), 178
- Temne, 151, 158-9  
 language of, 165  
 agree to settlement of Sierra Leone (1787), 333  
 rise of (19 cent.), 341
- Temne-Loko war, 341
- Tenda, people of, 133
- terracotta statues, 34, 41, 193
- Teshena, border district in western Bornu, 289; conquered by Fulani, 290
- Tetala, spearmen near Lake Chad, 79-80
- text-books, choice of, in teaching history, 20-1
- textiles, imported into Africa, 248; *see also* cloth, cotton
- thunderbolts, Stone Age axes regarded as, 31
- Tibesti, Kanuri kingdom extended into (15 cent.), 77
- Tijāniyya, Muslim brotherhood, 279, 280
- Timbuktu, 63, 64, 65, 67  
 trade routes to, 56, 167, 171, 241  
 commercial centre, 57, 214, 244  
 centre of Islamic learning, 68, 94, 107, 115, 122, 125, 244  
 in Catalan Atlas (1375), 218  
 Portuguese mission to (15 cent.), 223  
 Moorish headquarters (17 cent.), 69, 256, 267  
 diversion of trade from, 99, 246  
 attacked by Tuaregs and Mossi (18 cent.), 256, and captured by Tuaregs (1787), 69
- time-concepts, development of, in teaching history, 17-19
- tin, working of, 34, 40, 408  
 differential export duties on, in British territories (from 1918), 414
- Tinubu, Madam, leader of Egba women (1851), 327-8
- Tiv (Munshi) people, 206, 210-11; language of, 216
- Tlemcen, Algeria, place of origin of Al-Maghili, 93
- tobacco, trade in, 249; taxes on, in Hausa states, 110
- Toffa, ruler of Porto Novo (d.1908), French and, 440

- Togo, 29, 90  
 Togoland  
   German protectorate over (1880s), 375, 378, 379-80  
   French mandate over, 432, 455n, 476  
 Tomo, ruler of Kebbi (early 18 cent.), 106  
 Tondi Farma, title of Songhai official in charge of Hombori mountains, 67  
 Tondibi, Songhai defeated by Moors at (1591), 69  
 Tor Agbande, title of Drum Chief of Tiv, 211  
 Toronkawa, 'cousins' of Fulani, missionary tribe, 126, 270  
 Touré, Sékou, R.D.A. leader, 472; Prime Minister of Guinea, 476, 484  
 Toyéje of Oghomoshó, Kakanfo (1820s), 322  
 trade, 237-52  
   in history, 15  
   trans-Saharan, 46, 52, 56-7, 59, 70, 77, 99, 129, 167-8, 241-46, 390, 391  
   Atlantic, 168, 170, 172, 183, 422  
   in French territories, 437, 438  
   in British territories, 389, 404-5, 409-13, 442, 451; Africans in, 413  
   *see also* slave trade, and individual commodities and places  
 trade unions, organisation of, in Africa, 478, 479  
 trading companies, state-owned, in Ghana and Guinea, 486  
 transport, development of, 407-8, 447; *see also* railways, roads  
 trees, sacred, in Kano, 99; at Damietta, 291  
 Treichville, Abidjan, housing at, 451  
 tribalism  
   abolished in Ivory Coast, 482  
   fostered by growth of cities, 451  
 Tripoli, trade of, 46, 57, 89, 214; embassies from Bornu to, 78, 79  
 trona (salt substitute and medicine), trade in, 214, 215  
 'trusteeship', in British territories, 397  
 trypanosomiasis, of horses, 245  
 Tsaidu, ruler of Kiawa (18 cent.), 106  
 tsetse fly, 392  
 Tsoede (d. 1590), Nupe warrior-king, 213  
 Tsofon Birni, traditionally earliest Hausa town, 94  
 Tsuntsua, defeat of Usuman by Gobir at (1804), 274  
 Tuaregs, 58-9  
   attack Timbuktu, 64, 69, 256  
   enemies of Songhai (16 cent.), 67, 68; under Songhai, 267  
   expeditions of Idris Alooma against, 80  
   allied with Bornu (17 cent.), 209; harass Bornu (18 cent.), 83  
   kept at bay by Gobir (18 cent.), 105  
   involved in jihād (19 cent.), 264, 270, 274  
 Tuat, Algerian Sahara, trade route through, 56; Kanem and (mid 13 cent.), 126  
 Tubman, President, of Liberia, 344  
 Tukulor people, 50, 123, 132, 135-6  
   language of, 132  
   converted to Islam, 135  
   reform movement among (18 cent.), 257  
   support Al-hājj 'Umar, 280, 372  
 Tunisia, 57, 89  
   relations of, with Kanem-Bornu, 75; with Mali, 118  
   French establish protectorate over (1881), 432, 435  
   autonomy for (1954), 473  
 turbans, wearing of, 272  
 Turkey, musketeers from, 79, 112n; market for slaves, 89  
 Turunku, ruined town near Zaria, 102  
 Twi language, 165, 390, 416  
 Twifu, Akan people, 165, 166, 167, 169  
   conquered by Denkyira (late 17 cent.), 172  
   under Asante (early 18 cent.), 176  
   allied with Fante (1760s), 190  
 twins, exposure of, 390  
 Twon, city state of Niger Delta, 305  
 Uganda, 384n  
 'Ulema, and rulers, 61, 63, 67, 76, 83  
 Uli, Mansa, ruler of Mali empire (1255-1270), 63, 118  
 'Umar (son of Al-Kānami), ruler in Bornu (1835-80), 294-6  
 'Umar (son of Sidi Ahmad), Shaikh of Kunta Arabs (to 1552-3), 121  
 'Umar Dallaji, emir of Katsina, supports Usuman, 275  
 'Umar ibn Idris, ruler of Kanem-Bornu (14 cent.), 76, 294  
 'Umar Musbarma, chief imam in Bornu (15 cent.), 127  
 Umme Jilmi, ruler of Kanem (1085-97); died in Egypt on way to Mecca, 74  
 126  
 Umunora, oracle of Igweko Ala at, 203  
 Union Africaine et Malgache (U.A.M.), 477, 478  
 United Africa Company, 412, 413  
 United Gold Coast Convention (1947) 459, 462  
 United Nations, West African states ■ 494, 495  
 United States of America, Negroes 334-5; and Liberia, 342, 492

- universities, in British territories, 339, 417; in French territories, 454
- Unwagwe, title of Benin official transacting business with Europeans, 199
- Upper Volta  
 Mossi kingdoms in basin of, 49  
 as French colony, 438, 449  
 migration to coast from, 431, 447, 450-451  
 autonomous republic (1960), 475
- Uqba ibn Nafi, leader of Muslim armies (7 cent.), 116
- urbanisation, in French territories, 450-2
- Urhobo, Niger Delta, 304, 305; Benin and, 191, 259, 301
- Usuman dan Fodio (the Shehu) (1754-1817), reformer, 18, 102, 120, 126, 270-7  
 influenced by Al-Maghili, 124, 273  
 jihād of, 163, 256, 267, 391
- Uzama, council of Benin, 198, 200, 260, 301
- Vai people, invade Windward Coast (early 17 cent.), 159
- Vandenbergh and Jurgens, Dutch marine company, 412
- veils, wearing of, by women, 272
- Verdier, French merchant on Ivory Coast (1870s), 380
- Victor, German firm in Togoland, 375
- Vintang Creek, 145, 146, 147
- Volta dam, Ghana, 489
- Volta gorge, trade route through, 167
- Volta, Upper, *see* Upper Volta
- Wadai, 73, 75; invades Bornu (1840s), 295, 297
- Wadan, trade route through, 220; Portuguese at, 223
- Wadi Medani, Hausa pilgrims at, 90
- Wagadugu, Mossi kingdom, 49, 450
- Walata, merchants move from Ghana to (1224), 57, 61, 244; under Mali domination, 63; falls to Tuaregs and Berbers (15 cent.), 64
- wall-building, under Queen Amina of Zaria, 103
- Walo, Wolof state, 137-40
- Wangara, fabled gold-producing country, 242, 247; absorbed into Kebbi (15 cent.), 102
- Wangarawa, *see* Dyula
- War-jabi, ruler of Tekrur (11 cent.), 50
- Warri, city state of Niger Delta, 225, 305
- Wassa, Akan people, 165, 166, 169  
 conquered by Denkyira (late 17 cent.), 172  
 Asante vassal (early 18 cent.), 176, 178, 179
- and Fante, 187, 188, 190  
 Asante and Fante allied against, 346  
 Asante path to coast through, 351  
 surrendered by Asante to British, 353, 354, 357
- Waziri, chief minister in Hausa states, 108; in Bornu, 289
- Weaver, Richard, first Governor of Sierra Leone (1787), 333
- welfare facilities, development of, 485-6
- Wenchi, trade route through, 167
- West African Conference, Berlin (1884-5), 379, 384, 432
- West African Currency Board (1912), 410
- West African Frontier Force, 382
- West African states  
 emergence of, 16-17; in British territories, 462-3; in French territories, 476-7  
 nation-building in, 480-5  
 socio-economic growth in, 484-92  
 international relations of, 492-7
- West Indians, in Africa, 338-9, 370; as Governors of Sierra Leone, 345n
- West Indies, African slaves in, 224, 431; Dutch in, 228
- wheel, invention of, 32, 33
- Whydah  
 slave trade to Brazil through, 234  
 conquered by Dahomey (1727), 317  
 shipment of cowries to, 375
- Windward Coast, 131; peoples of, 149-61
- Wolof people, 45, 137-40, 431  
 language of, 131  
 Portuguese and, 146-7, 223  
 Islam in, 265
- Wolsey, Sir Garnet, defeats Asante (1874), 353-4, 376, 389
- women  
 among So and Kanuri, 73  
 fief of, in Kanem-Bornu, 85  
 as rulers, (Zaria) 102-3; (Wolof) 139  
 as traders, 238, 240  
 as soldiers in Dahomey, 314, 320, 326, 327  
 organise supplies for Egba army (1851), 327-8  
 riot of, in Nigeria (1929-30), 427
- World Wars  
 first, 391, 493  
 second, 404, 424, 486; in French territories, 446-7; and nationalist movements, 392, 399, 460-3
- writing, invention of, 32, 33
- Wukari, Jukun capital, 208, 211
- Wuli, Mandinka state, 141
- Yahya, leader of Lamtuna tribe of Berbers (11 cent.), 117

- Yahya ibn 'Umar, companion of  
 Abdullah ibn Yasin (11 cent.), 51  
 Yaji (Yahia), ruler of Kano (1349-85),  
 94, 97, 208  
 Yalunka, sub-group of Susu, 163  
 yams, in West Africa, 35, 43; frontier  
 between rice and, 152  
 Ya'qib, ruler of Kano (1452-63), 94, 98,  
 125  
 Yar-naba, title of Mossi minister in  
 charge of Fulani, 49  
 Yari, title of head gaoler in Hausa states,  
 108  
 Yatenga, Mossi kingdom, 49  
 Yauri, under Hausa influence, 92  
 Yerima, title of warden of the north in  
 Kanem-Bornu, 84, 85, 86  
 Yetseram and Yobe rivers, Bornu, 72, 82  
 Yoko, Madam, Mende ruler (late 19  
 cent.), 342  
 York island, Sherbro estuary, British fort  
 on, 156  
 Yoruba, 42, 191-7  
   language of, 42, 165  
   trade of, 46, 240  
   Hausa influence over, 92  
   and Igara, 211; and Benin, 299  
   and slave trade, 260  
   civil wars in (19 cent.), 258, 260, 405  
   and Dahomey (19 cent.), 314-31  
   and British, 381-2  
   *see also* Oyo  
 youth movements, 460
- Yunfa, Gobir ruler, and Usuman, 111,  
 272, 273  
 Yusa Tsaraki, ruler of Kano (1136-94),  
 96
- Zaberma, at war with Gobir (18 cent.), 106  
 Zaghawa people, 73, 126  
 Zamfara, 92, 95  
   sacked by Askia of Songhai (1512-13),  
   100  
   absorbed into Kebbi (16 cent.), 102  
   leading power on Rima river (early  
   18 cent.), 269  
   allied with Gobir and Asbin, 105  
   struggles between Gobir and, 106, 107,  
   269  
   and Usuman, 271, 272, 274, 276  
 Zanzibar, source of cowries, 375  
 Zaria, Hausa state, 91, 95-6  
   Islam in, 126  
   defeated by Kano (14-15 cent.), 97;  
   by Askia of Songhai (1512-13), 100;  
   by Kanta of Kebbi (early 16 cent.),  
   101  
   under Queen Amina, 102-3, 209  
   pays tribute to Bornu (17 cent.), 104,  
   105, 289  
 Zaria Chronicle, 95, 102  
 Zazzagawa, colony of Zaria men in  
   Kebbi, 101  
 Zazzau, *see* Zaria  
 Zinder, Kunta Arabs at, 121; currency at,  
   89; and Bornu (19 cent.), 88, 297

