West African Colonial Civil Servants in the Nineteenth Century

Edited by Kwame Arhin

African Participation in British Colonial Expansion in West Africa

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Preface

We are indebted to Professor J.D. Hargreaves, University of Edinburgh, for this volume. After he had seen Arhin's "Papers of George Ekem Ferguson ..." he suggested that it would be a good idea to organize a seminar on West African Colonial Civil Servants of the late nineteenth century.

The idea was taken up but the response was not greater than to be seen in this volume. However, in presenting Ferguson, Lawson and Payne, we hope that we have a fairly good sample of the backgrounds, careers and contributions of those Africans who served in the colonial service in the era of hesitant imperialism.

Kwame Arhin

Legon, September 1985
Contributors

Kwame Arhin is Associate Professor, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana.

G.O. Olusanya is Professor of History, University of Lagos, Nigeria.

David E. Skinner is Associate Professor of History, University of Santa Clara, California, U.S.A.
Introduction
Kwame Arhin

As Ajayi put it, at the turning of the tide in the 1890's towards the establishment of formal colonial rule in West Africa, the colonial governments in West Africa ceased to employ Africans in top positions. (1) The main reason for this was that it would not be, to put it mildly, appropriate for Europeans to serve under Africans in senior positions.

There were two main reasons for employing Africans in top positions in the embryonic West African colonial services and in the Christian Missions from the 1850's to mid 1890's. Firstly, the toll that malaria took of European lives made it necessary to employ Europeans only in the most strategic positions and use Africans, supposedly immune to malaria, in the intermediate positions. In the interlude between the policies of establishing and policing trade routes from the coast to the hinterland and the active pursuit of imperial expansion, it was impolitic to risk too many European lives. Secondly, while the colonial authorities were establishing preliminary contacts with the peoples in the hinterland of the coastal settlements they thought that African emissaries could understand and communicate with those peoples better than whites. The emissaries could understand and speak some of the languages of the various peoples, and their knowledge of the local cultures enabled them to conduct effective negotiations with the local rulers. So it is that several Africans including mulattos, were employed in intermediate reaches of the civil service and its auxiliary branches, such as the medical services. Charles Bannerman of the Gold Coast acted as Lieutenant Governor in the 1850's. (2)

Ferguson on the Gold Coast, Lawson in Sierra Leone, and Payne in Nigeria were among the most distinguished of those African colonial civil servants. Ferguson was partly British, Lawson wholly African like Payne who, however, was a re-captive and, like the Krios of Sierra Leone, had strong reasons for believing in the virtues of British rule. All three had this in common, that they believed in British rule as an instrument for civilizing their compatriots. They all believed in progress as exemplified in the British way of life, which offers a justification for their more than competent service to their colonial employers.
All three exceeded the normal demands of their jobs. They helped in moulding colonial policy. They helped to secure what they considered as economically viable territories for their emergent countries. They are all important sources for the reconstruction of the economic, political and social histories of their respective countries.

It is simplistic to see them merely as agents of colonial rule. They ought to be considered as men who thought of colonial rule as the best opportunity for advancing the technical and socio-economic progress of their respective peoples. Without them, there would have been colonial rule. But the countries that emerged from the colonial scramble are, certainly, the richer for their work.

The stories of Ferguson, Lawson and Payne are significant parts of the story of British imperialist expansion in West Africa. But they are also the stories of dedicated men with a sense of vocation which is worthy of emulation by later generations of Africans, particularly in the period of self rule.

NOTES


GEORGE EKEM FERGUSON OF THE GOLD COAST COLONY, 1864-1897

KWAME ARHIN

George Ekem Ferguson must be regarded as a founding father of modern Ghana for one main reason. He clearly saw that the coastal, forest and savanna areas of the Gold Coast and its hinterland were complementary in their resources and by his exertions and demands to the colonial Government at Accra, was largely responsible for securing the northern territorial basis of Ghana as it is today. (1) Ferguson had other admirable qualities. Firstly, he was an acute observer of the peoples in the northern part of the country among whom he travelled, and left valuable accounts of their cultures in his letters, memoranda and reports to the Government of the Gold Coast. (2) Secondly he was an extraordinary civil servant whose devotion to duty went beyond the normal demands of his office. (3)

Ferguson, also known as Ekow Atta, a younger survivor of twin boys, was born on July 14th, 1864, of Anomabo parents. He had four surviving sisters who were all married to noted public figures. His grandfather, Dr. Samuel Ferguson, was a colonial surgeon. His father, Robert Archibald, was an agent of the leading trading firm of F. & A. Swanzy at Winneba; on his retirement he became a Wesleyan Methodist, local preacher and one of the leading citizens of Anomabo. His mother was said to be a Christian woman of character.

Anomabo, twelve miles east of Cape Coast, the seat of British author- ity on the Gold Coast, had been an English trading town, since the eighteenth century, and had the characteristics of coast societies. Its population of Whites, Blacks and Mulattos was also stratified into classes on occupational bases: civil servants and catechist-teachers, domestics, traders, artisans, farmers, and fishermen. Following the intensified activities of the Methodist missionaries since 1835 under the Rev. T.B. Freeman, who established churches in the leading trading towns, the coast societies were also divided into Christian and non-Christian sections which also corresponded to that between literates and illiterates, and reinforced the occupational stratification. (4) Ferguson's family belonged to the upper social stratum whose members' styles of life were closely modelled on that of the British in housing, clothing and domestic
arrangements. His family and cultural background, which was strengthened by his education, was significant for understanding his later career, his attitude to the Asante and other inland neighbours of the Fante, and his strong belief in colonialism as an instrument for "civilizing" the inland peoples. Following his education in Freetown, he became a committed British patriot.

As was appropriate to his class, he went to school early. He entered the Wesleyan Boys High School, Freetown, in 1876 at the age of twelve, after Primary School education at Cape Coast. The Wesleyan Boys' High School at Freetown was opened on 6th April, 1874 by the leaders of the Local Methodist Church, as a rival educational institution to the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) Grammar School which had been founded in 1844 for the children of members of the Anglican Church. The school drew its pupils from sons of "gentlemen" who were also Wesleyan Church members. Its syllabus, modelled on that of the C.M.S. Grammar School, included Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Mensuration, Geography, History (English and Roman) Latin, Greek, French, Shorthand, Photography, Health Science, (Hygiene) and Religious Knowledge. (5)

Ferguson entered the Wesleyan Boys' High School as the 52nd pupil on the roll. The school building which was situated in an area on mainland Freetown known as the Falconbridge, now houses the main Freetown electric generator, and stands adjacent to the Main Bus Terminal. The school started as Day but later became Boarding. It aimed at the highest standards of conduct, its pupils told to "aim high" in whatever they undertook. Religious instructions, as a guide for conduct, featured prominently in the life of the Boarders, and emphasized honesty, reliability and respect for manhood; one ought to do one's duty, but avoid servility towards one's official superiors. The "system", as it came to be called, taught the pupil to accept the superiority of British values. (6)

In going to a school founded by leading Krios, Ferguson entered a society which was even more committed than the Coast society of the Gold Coast to upholding British Victorian values. As Spitzer characterizes it, Krio society, which was segregated from that of the inhabitants of the Sierra Leone hinterland by the circumstances of its birth and also by purpose, entertained
sympathies for Britain (which) went even beyond their near adulation of Queen Victoria and the handful of British Governors that pleased them. After the Congress of Berlin and during the accelerating scramble for Africa, for example, many educated Sierra Leoneans felt a genuine identity with the aims of British imperialism and the white man's burden. (7)

The Krios, who felt themselves indebted to England for what they considered as their material, intellectual and spiritual salvation, judged their role in the British conquest and domination of Africa as one of sympathy and judicious co-operation, and considered themselves as an important and privileged arm of British penetration and civilization of the interior of the African continent; they saw in themselves a living proof of the success of English ideas in action in Africa. (8) Ferguson's formal education and involvement in Krio society further prepared him for a career in the British Colonial Service.

But when he first returned to Cape Coast in 1881, he contemplated entry into the Methodist Ministry and, as a preparation towards this calling, entered the Wesleyan Boys' High School at Cape Coast (9) as a teacher. It is not known why he abandoned the ministry for the civil service, but he was recruited into the Governor's office in 1881 and made quick progress. He was promoted to the position of Clerk to the Queen's Advocate at a salary of £60 in November, 1882; was back in the governor's office by 1886, and was second clerk at a salary of £120 in 1889.

The breadth and depth of Ferguson's Freetown education greatly facilitated his progress through the Colonial Service. The great value put on his services at the Governor's office was due in large measure to his knowledge of Shorthand, Geography and Mensuration, which he had learnt at school and the use of all of which was required during the Governor's visits between 1887 and 1889; to Prasu (1881), to Little Popo and Lagos (1881, 1882, 1884), to Keta, Ada, Krobo and Akwapim (1882), to Wassu, Nzima and the western districts of the Colony (1888); and also as a member of government's missions to arbitrate in disputes between Krobo and Akwamu in 1886. Ferguson spoke Fanti and Ga which meant that he could communicate with all the Akan - and the Ga-Adamme - speaking communities: (10) that is, with nearly all the peoples between the sea and the Volta river. In consequence, within the eight-year period of his employment as a junior
civil servant before he went to the Royal School of Mines, London, in 1889, he got to know the Gold Coast Colony very well.

Ferguson applied to the Government of the Gold Coast for paid leave in England in order "to complete a course of instruction in the practical sciences which I have cultivated for some time past, intending to apply such knowledge to the interests of the Colony" on April 6 1889. His letter of application made it clear, in a modest way, that he had put his education to good use, and that he was anxious to increase and use his knowledge in the service of the Gold Coast. He pointed out that he knew certain amounts of Astronomy and Geography, having conducted surveys from Victoriaburg to Beulah under official guidance in connection with water supplies for Accra; that he could draw and copy maps, and had already drawn a Map of the Gold Coast Colony; but that much of his knowledge had been self-acquired, and he needed further instruction in cartography. He had read Geology, knew some Algebra, Trigonometry, and Seismology, and could read and translate French. He wanted the opportunity to increase his knowledge in these fields which he was sure would benefit the Colony. (II)

In his letter to the Colonial Office, the Governor, Sir William Brandford Griffiths, endorsed Ferguson's claims, testified to his extreme utility to the Government of the Gold Coast, and recommended the acceptance of his application for study leave as "a deserving instance of native intelligence which may in my opinion be encouraged with advantage to the community, which unfortunately possesses as yet comparatively few native officers of the same stamp". (12)

Ferguson studied at the Normal School of Science and Royal College of Science (now The Royal School of Mines) with Mining as his major subject. The course included lectures on the Theory of Mining and Mining Appliances, and excursions for practical demonstrations at the principal engineering works in London and other English cities, Wales, and the North of France. Lectures at South Kensington included demonstrations with a collection of economic minerals, and visits were paid to the Museum of Practical Geology in Jermy Street and the nearby Natural History Museum. The course included practical work in the summer vacation at mines in Cornwall, North Wales and the Isle of Man, for which a student either paid a small fee or was remunerated if he was considered to have done useful
work. Students in Mining were expected to attend mine surveying classes. (13)

Ferguson's course combined Mining, Geology, Surveying, Mathematics, and Astronomical Physics. He was regarded as an "Occasional Student", his course lasting one, instead of three years. He was unlikely to have taken part in the excursions and other practical training activities which were organized in the summer vacations, since he was back at work on the Gold Coast in September, 1890. But he did well enough in the June examinations. He was placed in the First Class with an aggregate mark of 84.3 (14) He clearly succeeded in sharpening the knowledge and skills he had acquired at school, through self-tuition and observation, and thus increased his utility to the civil service.

When Ferguson returned to the Gold Coast in September, 1890, the British, French and Germans were entering the first phase of the scramble for territory on the Gold and Ivory Coasts and Togoland, while the British were departing from the role of mediators between Asante and her erstwhile subject peoples, in the interest of trade, to that of active interference in their affairs as a prelude to their formal colonization. It was as the principal British agent in these expansionist activities that he became known.

Between 1890 and 1897 when he died, Ferguson held two major appointments, neither of which was apparently related to his work as an empire builder: as a Supernumerary Foreman of Works in April 1891, and as Inspector of Trade Roads in October, 1893. He worked in both capacities mainly as a surveyor. In 1891 he was instructed to "take the comparative levels of the River Volta and (Keta) Lagoon with a view to ascertaining whether water can be let into the latter during the dry season, when it is not navigable and is moreover unhealthy owing to the exposed flats of mud". (15) In April to May, 1891, he assisted in a survey for the proposed Axim-Ankobra light railway intended to ease the transport difficulties of the expanding gold mines. In 1895, he commenced the survey of a line of road from Tinkranku to Kpong but was obliged to break it off in order to join the Expedition to Kumasi later in the year which led to the exile and capture of Prempeh I. And in April 1896, he was sent to survey Cape St. Paul for a proposed lighthouse. But his major work lay in acting as the agent of the British in their dealings with Asante's northern neighbours.
The British, French and German scramble for territory on the Gold and Ivory Coasts and in Togoland began in the 1880s. The first Anglo-French Boundary Commission demarcated the boundary between the Gold and Ivory Coasts at Half-Assini in 1883; and in July 1884 Dr. Nachtigal, a German trader on the Togo Coast, anticipated negotiations between officials of the Government of the Gold Coast and the chiefs of Togoland for territorial concessions by proclaiming a German protectorate over Togoland. The West African Concurrence held at Berlin from November, 1884 to February, 1885, settled the framework of territorial acquisitions, leaving the details to be worked out by further meetings in Europe and by on-the-spot Boundary Commissions. In February, 1887, a Joint British-German Commission fixed the boundary between the Gold Coast and Togoland, and created a Neutral Zone which included the market town of Salaga and Yendi and Bimbila, the capital towns of the Dagomba and Nanumba kingdoms; and in 1889, arrangements were made for advancing the delimitation of the English and French possessions on the Gold and Ivory Coasts. (16)

Ferguson's involvement in the partitionist arrangements began in 1892 when the Governor asked him to assist the British Commissioners with their survey and map work in demarcating the Gold Coast - Togo boundary with their German counterparts. The British Commissioners, C. Riby Williams and H.M. Hull, highly commended Ferguson's "good work" and "diligent enquiries" which resulted in his making better maps of the area than those produced by the Germans. (17) It was this testimony that led Sir W.B. Griffith, the Governor, to extend the services of Ferguson to the Commissioners, as he told Lord Knutsford, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, "in order that the observations taken by the Commission may receive further checks, and that they may have his knowledge and intelligence to assist them in their labours, which certainly appears to me to be anything but light in the circumstances". Griffith later told Knutsford in connection with German complaints about Ferguson that:

The observation of the German Commissioners that the English commissioners possessed a great advantage in the presence of Mr. Ferguson seems to me to afford evidence of the fact that they actually must attach more value to his observations than they have admitted when those observations have been quoted by the English Commissioners.
He thought that the Germans were apparently disturbed by the crude character of their maps compared with Ferguson's. In their final report the commissioners recorded their appreciation of "Ferguson's conduct, and the untiring energy, care and perseverance which he displayed in his endeavours to be useful and to produce a reliable map of the country through which we passed. His services have been invaluable".

Ferguson's valuable work in 1892 was a continuation of his commended mission to Atebu in 1890. The Atebu chieftain had been an Asante dependency but revolted in 1875 following the British invasion of Kumasi in 1874. She was able to maintain her defiant posture partly because of civil disputes in Asante in 1875-1888 and partly because of the barely veiled interest of the Government of the Gold Coast in sustaining the independence of the erstwhile provinces of Asante. After Lonsdale's visit to Atebu in 1881-82, on his mission to Kumasi, Salaga and Yendi, in an attempt to open trade routes between the Brong territories and the Coast that would skirt Asante, the Atebuhe and his sub-chiefs had drawn the conclusion from the visit that they had the support of the Government of the Gold Coast in defying Asante. (19)

Asante's internal problems in the period of the civil wars prevented her from making attempts to recover the Brong territories. But in 1888-89 the Asantehene, Prempe I. (Kwaku Dua III), felt strong enough to start a consolidation movement towards restoring Asante's authority, not only over such "real" Asante provinces as Mampong, Nsuta and Nkoreanza, but also over the Brong territories of Atebu and her neighbours. The presence of the refugee chiefs of Mampong and Nsuta in 1888-89 in the Atebu area clearly (20) made the Atebuhe nervous and apprehensive about Asante's intentions, and he, therefore, applied for British protection in January, 1890. Though generally unwilling to extend its protectorate beyond the then Gold Coast Colony, that is the greater Accra, central, eastern and western regions, the Government of Gold Coast was willing to strengthen her position in Atebu as a bridgehead to the north and also to counter German activities east of the Volta. (21)

Griffiths, the Governor, wrote to Ferguson on October 21st, 1890, soon after his return from London, asking him to go to Atebu on the prescribed route so that he could report on the natural conditions, the roads, trade and resources of the area of his route from Accra to Tsawam.
over the Densu river through Apedwa, to Kibi, Anyinam, Abetifi and the Afram plains to Ateubu. He was to investigate the Governor's strong impression that "diamonds, rubies, garnets and other precious stones will soon be discovered in the interior countries of the Gold Coast" and the possibility of an alternative route from Ateubu to Accra instead of the route of his outward journey. (22)

Ferguson concluded the Treaty of Friendship and Protection with the Ateubuhene and his sub-chiefs on 25th November, 1900. He also wrote a final report on his observations which the Governor and the Colonial Office found highly creditable and printed with suitable amendments. (23) L.A.K. Quashie, formerly of the Department of Geology, University of Ghana, Legon wrote of Ferguson's Geological Notes, in his report, that:

They must be considered as the first authoritative writing on the Geology of Ghana. For the past eleven years, I have had the opportunity to study the Geology of some of the areas that Ferguson describes. His identification of the rock and mineral specimens and his account of the structure and geological history of the country are very accurate.

Quashie believes that it was Ferguson's predictions that led Sir Albert Kitson, 1st Director, Geological Survey Department of Ghana, to look for diamonds in Ghana. (24)

Ferguson's unusual qualities unfolded from the results of these missions. He was hardworking and painstaking. He had an unusual aptitude for the practical application of knowledge to the understanding and solution of the problems with which he was faced. As was also the case with the highly educated among his contemporaries, Sarbah, Brew and Casely Hayford among them (25) he considered education not primarily as a badge of honour but as a tool for effecting changes in the environment. His report on his mission to Atebubu shows not only acquaintance with the anthropological writings of his day, including that of Sir Edward Tylor, but also their applicability to the socio-cultural situation of the Gold Coast and its hinterland. (26)

It was the official appreciation of these qualities, as well as his being a local man with knowledge of the local situation, and his capacity to endure conditions that European officials, presumably, could not for
lengthy periods, that led to his continued employment as the agent of British colonial expansion.

In 1892, pressures by merchants in England and the Gold Coast were mounting to get the British Government to expand British territory in the Gold Coast hinterland against the French and Germans. (27) In response to these pressures, Lord Knutsford, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, asked the Governor of the Gold Coast on April 5th, 1892, to take steps to secure the influence of Great Britain over the hinterland of the Gold Coast beyond the 9th parallel of latitude, by sending an efficient officer to make treaties with Dagomba, Gonja, Grusi and Mossi. The treaties should be those, not of protection, but of free commerce and friendship, which would also bind the signatories to refuse the protection of, or to make any treaties with, another power without the consent of Her Majesty's Government. (28)

In a letter of 25th April, Griffith asked Ferguson to proceed up north for the execution of the orders of the Secretary of State. He explained in detail the nature of the treaties he was to negotiate with the rulers of Gonja, Dagomba, Grusi and Mossi. He pointed out that it was impractical for Her Majesty's Government to offer protection to these territories, owing to their distance from the coast, while a treaty of friendship and commerce that would prevent them from accepting the protection of other European powers as a safeguard for the future would be in order. These territories might be used as diplomatic counters in subsequent negotiations (29). Ferguson was not to sign treaties with rulers whose territories lay wholly within the Neutral Zone demarcated in 1888. But it was legitimate to make them with those rulers in respect of those parts of the territories that lay outside the zone. The Governor foresaw some difficulties in handling the mission in such a way as to avoid complications with the Germans but relied on Ferguson's "tact policy, (and) judgment of native character and language to make it a complete success". (30)

Ferguson left Accra on 25th April, and returned to Accra on 1st October. His route lay through Aburi, Mampong, Koforidua, Nsuta and Abetifi in the present Eastern Region; Abease, Konkronsu and Daas and Atebu, all in the present Brong-Ahafo Region; and Kambale, Trugu, Bonialipe, Bole, Larabanga, Daboya, Yendi and Bimbila in the present...
Northern Region. He returned to Salaga (Gonja) in the Neutral Zone, unable to go to the Grusi territories, having learnt that the Grusi peoples were without centralized administration and, therefore, without chiefs with whom to sign treaties. He signed treaties with the Gonja chiefs of Boniape (Tulwe) Bole, and Daboya, the Na of Yendi, (Dagomba) and Na of Bimbila, (Nanumba). He was unable to go to Magadugu, (Mossi) owing to the unwillingness of the Na of Yendi to supply him with guards to proceed further inland. (31)

The Governor of the Gold Coast, the Colonial Office, the Foreign Office and the Military Intelligence applauded Ferguson’s work both on the ground of the treaty, which showed a shrewd appreciation of the signatories’ susceptibilities, and of the wealth of information in his reports and maps. (32)

Ferguson also demonstrated an acute awareness of the quickening pace of the race for territory among the European powers, of the key position of Asante in the British and French claims for territory, and of the threat posed by the French advance in the Niger territories. In his letters and reports, he sent all the information he could gather on what he believed was the Asante threat to her erstwhile dependencies in the Brong area, and on German and French advances in the Gold Coast hinterland. (33) His knowledge of the trade and political relations between the Asante and her northern neighbours and the essential complementariness of the natural resources of the forest and savanna regions gave him an insight into the most advantageous territorial basis of the emergent British Gold Coast Colony. Hence independently of the tortuous diplomacy of the European powers, he had his own vision of the desirable extent of the territorial basis of the Gold Coast. It was this vision that, beyond the demands of his career, made him such a zealous emissary of the Government of the Gold Coast.

The qualities that made Ferguson useful as a negotiator of treaties with the rulers of the Gold Coast hinterland also made him useful as an intelligence officer or information gatherer in the local disputes in which the British were interested. In 1892, Kumasi and other Asante forces attacked Nkoranza, a neighbour of Atebubu, a British-protected chiefdom, in order to restore Nkoranza to her former position as an Asante province. The Asante forces defeated those of Nkoranza and the Nkoranza men, led by
the Nkoranzhene, fled to Abease near Atebu, with the Asante army in pursuit. The pursuit gave rise to persistent rumours that the Asante army would use the opportunity of the defeat of Nkoranza and re-assert her rule over Atebu and the other Brong peoples. Consequently, in October, 1893, the Governor of the Gold Coast sent an Expeditionary Force of 300 men under Colonel F.C. Scott, Inspector-General of the Gold Coast Constabulary, to protect Atebu against the Asante. To help the Expeditionary Force with information on the strength of the Asante army and its movements, the Governor asked Ferguson to go to the area and organize an information-gathering network (34).

Ferguson's knowledge of geography came in useful for the purpose of organizing the network of spies. He knew the probable routes of the groups of dispersed soldiers and also their immediate hiding places. He dispatched his groups of spies to Yeji, Nsuta, Nkoranza, Kintampo and Mampong. His briefing was meticulous, and the spies brought information, on the disposition, strengths and arms - including 300 - 700 Snider rifles - and supply lines of the various Asante divisions; on the location of the Nkoranzhene and his allied chiefs of Yeji, Prang, Abease, Mo and Krachi; on the conflicts within the Eastern Brong Confederation (35) of which the Priest of Dente, the Krachi deity was the leader; on Asante diplomatic efforts to get Brong back into the Asante Union; and on the war of succession in the Gonja Kingdom (36). Ferguson's reports presented a vivid picture of the undercurrents of forces in the Eastern Brong Confederation, his work exceeding the demands of his instructions (37).

The Governor of the Gold Coast took advantage of Ferguson's presence in the Eastern Brong area and asked him to make treaties of Friendship and Freedom of Trade with the rulers of the various chiefdoms. The latter, led by the Nkoranzhene, had wanted treaties of protection, which the Acting Governor had refused on the instructions of London whose policy of territorial expansion was still unsettled. The signatories of the treaties of friendship were Amantin, Abease and Nkoranza. With Captain Lang of the Royal Engineers engaged in similar work as Ferguson's east of Atebu in Prang, Yeji, Krachi and Wiase, Asante was prevented from re-asserting her control over its former Eastern Brong dependencies, while the German advance on the east bank of the Volta was practically halted (38).
Also while Ferguson was with the Expeditionary Force, the Secretary of State for the Colonies decided that he might as well complete his work in the Gold Coast hinterland by making treaties with "Bona, Wa, Lobi, and if necessary Warembele and Yariba". On 9th January, 1894, Hodgson, the Acting Governor, instructed Ferguson to leave his survey of the trade route along the right bank of the Volta river to Kpong and carry out the instructions of the Secretary of State. In March, a further instruction asked him to do the same with Chakosi and Mossi (39).

On 8th August, 1894, Ferguson presented to the Governor his successful accomplishment of the mission entrusted to him. That report was of also great interest in that, together with his written views on what was called the "Asante question", that is, what Britain was to do with Asante, it explains Ferguson's attitude to colonialism.

The report described the geographical position, and the economic and political conditions of the peoples with whom Ferguson had made treaties and their neighbours, and the threats posed by German and French advances, east, north and west of the territories of which Britain was in firm control. Using as his basis of reasoning, those territories' economic potentialities, their natural resources and their situation on the trade routes from the Middle Niger, the Mosi and the Haua countries, as well as the areas of effective control by the French and Germans, he made suggestions for the most advantageous boundaries of the Gold Coast colony and its hinterland, and also for "developing" the economic resources of the territories that Britain would acquire in such a way as to ensure the prosperity of the trade of the Gold Coast Colony (40). He took a strong line on the Asante question for the same reason: the recurrent violent conflicts in Asante both diverted the attention of the Government of the Gold Coast from its real job of developing the Colony, and also entailed the use of resources that might have been used for the same purpose (41).

Ferguson's primary concern was that the Government of the Gold coast should get on with the task of developing the Gold Coast, and he saw the extension of British rule within the boundaries that he was at such pains to define as a necessary condition for that development. Though he wrote often in these reports of British "prestige" and the need to safe-guard it, he clearly saw colonial rule as an instrument for ensuring the civilization of the peoples of the Gold Coast and its hinterland. Ferguson's
father understood this clearly and called him "the David Livingstone of
the Gold Coast" (42).

It was a measure of the success of Ferguson's missions that he came
increasingly under French and German attacks as the scramble for territory
in the Niger Bond hotened up, and the increasing number of French and
German missions into the area found that Ferguson had anticipated them
(43).

In 1895, the French newspapers Le Figaro, Les Temps and L'Estafette,
carrying accounts of the mission of Commander Decouer and Lieutenant Bund
into the Ivory Coast hinterland, ridiculed Ferguson's treaties with Bona
and Sansane-Mango. They stated that Ferguson had obtained the treaties
under false pretences, alleging the chiefs to have protested that they
would only deal with white men and not with coloured men. In response to
enquiries from the London and the Governor of the Gold Coast, Ferguson
sent a well-argued refutation of the suggestions. But eventually, Bona,
Sansane-Mango and Wagadugu, with all of whom Ferguson had signed treaties,
went to the French (44).

From the Togo side of the border, preliminary German expeditions were
undertaken unofficially by A.G. Krause, the German scholar-trader, who
traded in the Yeji-Salaga area within the Neutral Zone in 1892-94. In 1894
the British Government decided that Ferguson should sign treaties of
Friendship and Freedom of Trade with rulers in the Neutral Zone, as the
Germans had done, contrary to the Anglo German agreement of 1888 on the
zone. In late August, Ferguson succeeded in doing this with the Kpembe-
wura, the overlord of Salaga, the market town, and the Tuluiwewura whose
territory partly lay in the zone. Krause who heard about this on his visit
to Salaga reported to the German authorities in Togo that Ferguson had
cajoled the chiefs in the Neutral Zone to sign treaties of protection
which ignored German trading rights. Protests by the German Governor to
the British Governor led the latter to instruct Ferguson to return to
Salaga in May 1895 to negotiate a new and clearer treaty (45).

Between the two visits to the Gonja area by Ferguson in 1894 and
1895, German official missions to Salaga under H. Klose and H.D. Gruner
also reported deceptions by Ferguson of the chiefs in the Neutral Zone
which had led them to sign treaties contrary to the 1888 agreement on the
Neutral Zone, so that on his return visit Ferguson had to contend with the
accusations of Krause, Klose and Gruner as well as the treaty which Gruner had apparently forced on the Gonja authorities (46).

Throughout his visits to the Neutral Zone and his survey work along the Volta during the German hectic attempts to secure a foothold in the Neutral Zone and the territories immediately adjoining the zone, Ferguson displayed his concern about economically viable frontiers for the Gold Coast Colony in his letters and reports. But those efforts were partly negated by the higher considerations of imperial policy in Berlin and London (47).

In late December 1895 and January 1896, Ferguson joined the Expedition to Kumasi that resulted in the capture and exile of the Asantehene, Prempeh I, and the annexation of Asante to the Gold Coast Colony, and took part in surveying the famed city (48).

In November 1896, Ferguson was sent along with F.B. Henderson and a detachment of soldiers to the Bena-Wa area to counter the activities of Babatu and Samory, the local "empire-builders", and also French expansionist activities from the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta. On 1st April 1897, a band of Samory's Sofas, white-turbaned soldiers, attacked Henderson's camp and shot and wounded Ferguson in the leg. He died from his wounds, thrown down from the hammock in which he was borne and deserted by his carriers. He was laid to rest at Wa, and thus ended his ceaseless journeys in the service of the Gold Coast and the British empire from 1890 to 1897 (49).

Ferguson's claim to national distinction ought not to be estimated only in terms of his treaties. His letters and reports on his missions, which were more informative and more analytical than most of the other such reports, contain invaluable data on the ethnography and the social and political histories of all the peoples of the Gold Coast and its hinterland, while they afford insights into the potentialities of the natural resources of the various areas for development. Present-day planners of the economic development of Ghana would do well to read Ferguson's reports. Concern for the technical and socio-economic development of the Gold Coast Colony and its hinterland is manifest in these reports while one is impressed by the breadth of the learning Ferguson showed in them (50).
This concern for the technical and socio-economic development of his emergent country redeems Ferguson from the charge of overzealous loyalty to the colonial authorities that his own contemporaries and later generations laid against him (51). He was, paradoxically, a patriot. He was a committed believer in the civilizing mission of colonial rule, and had no doubts that it would lead to the "progress", as it was understood in the Victorian era, of his own people.

On his death, the colonial authorities showed a full appreciation of Ferguson's sterling qualities both as an official and as a man. The Governor wrote in his obituary notice to the Colonial Office:

I should not be doing justice to the services of this lamented officer, if I did not express to you my sense of the great loss which the public service of this Colony has sustained by his death. The geographical and political work which he has carried out under the direction of this Government is well known to you and won for him on several occasions commendation and reward (52). He was a striking example of an intelligent, industrious and trustworthy officer and was as modest as he was able. It will be long before his place can be filled. (53)

Mr. Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, accepted the Governor's proposed pension of £100 per annum to Ferguson's wife till her re-marriage and £3 18 per annum each for his children until they were twenty-one years of age. Chamberlain wrote:

I learnt the news of Mr. Ferguson's death with much regret. He was a very remarkable man and his death is a great loss to the Colony which he served with so much ability and devotion (53).

F.B. Henderson, the Travelling Commissioner of the Government of the Gold Coast who had known Ferguson, and who travelled with him on his last journey to the north, wrote to the Colonial Office:

Your Excellency is only too well aware of the irreparable loss the Colony has sustained by the death of Mr. George Ferguson. The circumstance in which we were placed and my constant intercourse with him made me fully realize his great ability and thorough knowledge of the country and its people. His untiring devotion to duty and readiness to give any assistance in his power, together with his courage in emergencies and high personal qualities, I shall never forget. I have lost a valued friend and the Colony an invaluable servant (54).
Ferguson was a devoted official of the Government of the Gold Coast. But he saw colonization as an instrument of advancement. The reason for his tireless efforts certainly lies in the following passage taken from his report on his mission to Atebubu in 1890:

With regard to progress "year by year" the influence of traders and missionaries is breaking down the old native life and substituting European ways. This change is inevitable, indeed it exemplifies in an extreme form those movements in civilization which in every tribe has gone on from remote antiquity by neighbouring bribes bringing in new arts and improvements at home taking place by slow degrees. This is what Dr. Tylor E.B. Tylor, the anthropologist says, and is true as representing the general progress of the people of the Protectorate in which, of course, I include Odumasi and Akropong (in the Eastern region) both under the influence of the Basel Missionary Society. Latterly, however, the more important factor in the progress of civilization has been the supervision which has been exercised over native affairs, education, sanitary requirements, the augmentation of postal service, and the extension of telegraphic facilities etc. in the Colony (S5).

This was Ferguson's idea of civilization and he thought that the only way of ensuring it for his people was colonial rule.
NOTES


2. See Arhin, 1974.


5. Information from E.J. Robinson, the oldest surviving old boy of the Wesleyan (now Methodist) Boys High School. Unesco gave me a grant to enable me to visit Freetown for enquiries about Ferguson.


7. Spitzer 1975: 42ff.

8. Ibid.

9. The later Mfantsepiim School, also founded by the Methodist Church in 1876.

10. Even in the areas north of the Volta, there were Akan-speaking communities in the trading towns of Salaga, Tendi, Wa and Gambaga. He could also speak Hausa.


12. Sir W. Brandford Griffith to Lord Knutsford, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 15.1.89 in P.R.O./C.O. 96/200. I am indebted to Roger Thomas formerly of the Department of History, Legon for copies of both letters.

13. From Reports of the Royal School of Science, London, 1889-90 and 1891-92, made available to me by the kind permission of Professor J. Sutton, Royal School of Mines, Kensington.

14. Ibid.

15. Thomas, op. cit.


17. Williams and Hull to the Governor of the Coast, 22.2.92, and 29/2/92, in P.R.O. CO/879/36.

18. Griffith to Knutsford, 3.3.92, and 30.3.92 in PRO.879/36.

20. Arhin, 1974: 37
22. Governor to Ferguson, 21.10.90 in PRO.CO. 215;
27. Metcalfe, op.cit.
28. Griffith to Knutsford, 10.5.92 in PRO.CO 96/223.
29. Griffith to Ferguson, 25.4.92, PRO.CO 96/223.
30. Ibid.
32. For example, Hemming to Bramston No. 2199 in Minute on Griffith to the Marquess of Ripon, 10.1.93, PRO.CO. 96/230.
35. On the Eastern Brong Confederation, see Arhin, 1974:36.
36. Braimah and Goody, 1967;
40. Ibid.
42. Information from Dr. R.K.A. Gardiner, Ferguson’s maternal nephew.
43. War Office to the Colonial Office 4/1/1893. no. 40 of African (West) no. 448.
46. Goody, op.cit.
48. Thomas, op.cit.
49. Henderson, in Arhin, 1974: 156-166; also, 1896;
50. 1898: Reports in Arhin, 1974.
52. Governor's obituary in Arhin, 1974: ix-xi
53. 10th August, 1897 in PRO.CO. 96/294.
54. Henderson, op. cit.
55. In Arhin, 1974: 23-24; for other views on Ferguson see Asante, 1933; Hodson and Thomas, 1933.
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THOMAS GEORGE LAWSON: COLONIAL CIVIL SERVANT IN SIERRA LEONE, 1846-1889

DAVID E. SKINNER

Thomas George Lawson was perhaps the most influential British African in colonial service in Sierra Leone during the nineteenth century. He was born in the Fante-kome or Adjigo quarter of Anecho (Little Popo) on the coast of modern Togo in 1814. His father and grandfather both had been influenced by British culture and commercial operations. The connections, wealth, and social position of his family in Anecho led Thomas to consider himself a representative of the African-European commercial and political establishment in West Africa. He is one of thousands of Africans who became vital to the development and operation of European colonial administration in the nineteenth century. (1)

Origins of the Lawson Family

According to various sources, (2) the kingdom of Glidji was established on the Togo coast late in the seventeenth century, and shortly afterwards the town of Anecho was founded. Both polities were created within Ewe territory by migrants from the coast west of Glidji. The founder of Glidji is reputed to have been a royal refugee from Accra, known locally as Folii (Ofori), and he was succeeded in about 1695 by Folii Bebe (Ofori Bambe-neen), who was, in turn, succeeded by Assiongbon Dandje around 1735. The first three rulers of Anecho, which evidently was subordinate to Glidji, were Quam-Dessou (a Fante prince from Elmina), his nephew Ahlanko (the first 'king' of the town), and Ahlanko's son, Ahlin. Glidji and Anecho were located in an area well-known to European slave traders and merchants, and ships often stopped there.

Sometime early in the eighteenth century (during Ahlanko's reign at Anecho and at the end of Folii Bebe's in Glidji), two hunters came from Accra to Glidji. (3) They came without wives, and one of them, Latê Bewu, after becoming established at Agokpamé, asked Assiongbon Dandje, who had become king, for a wife. (4) Most sources agree that Latê Bewu was married to the king's daughter, Adaku, and all agree that the couple had a son named Latê Awoku, who between fifteen and twenty years of age was sent
with an English slave captain to be educated in commercial affairs. Given
the probable dates of settlement and Laté Awuku’s approximate age, he most
likely left with the ship during the 1750s. Some sources identify the
ship’s captain as Law or Lawson, and a captain William Lawson was on the
coast in the late 1750s.(5) Whether or not Laté Awuku actually went to
Britain, he returned to Glidji after several years of travel and educa-
tion, and he was recognized as a valuable resource by the ruler of Anecho,
Ahlin, who granted him land at Fantèkomé around 1767. It is from Laté
Awuku’s establishment as a commercial agent that this family developed its
importance in trade, politics, and military affairs on the coast.

Fully understanding the value of his own exposure to European com-
merce and languages, Laté Awuku sent one of his sons, Akuêté Zankli, to
Britain to acquire knowledge about commerce and to learn English, but it
is unclear where he studied and for how long.(6) During Akuêté Zankli’s
absence his father became a prosperous trading agent and interpreter for
the rulers of Anecho and Glidji, and he built up a military force which
he used to extend his influence. He was killed in battle in about 1795,
and it is said that the king of Glidji named Akuêté Zankli as intendant du
roi and successor to his father as commercial agent: “Il fût le véritable
fondateur de la ‘dynastie’ des Lawson”.(7) It is clear that it was Akuêté
Zankli who developed the power and prestige of the Lawson family on the
coast, who created the Lawson ‘kingdom’ at New London (also known as
Badji) in Anecho in 1821, and who later is known as George Acquatay Lawson
I in the English sources.(8) He consolidated the Lawson position in 1821
after a brief war with the king of Anecho, Comlangan, who was forced into
exile. According to some sources, Akuêté Zankli married princess Adolévi
Apè, and one of the sons was Laté Agamazon, known in Sierra Leone as
Thomas George Lawson, who was sent on his way to England for education in
1825.(9)

The Lawson ‘Dynasty’ at Anecho

Under the leadership of Laté Awuku and Akuêté Zankli the Lawsons
exercised a very strong influence over coastal trade between Accra and
Grand Popo for almost a century. They were related to the royal family of
Glidji, closely allied (until 1821) with the royal family of Anecho, and
connected by marriage and alliance with many of the leading commercial and political families on the coast. They had particularly close relations with English and Brazilian traders during this period, and they maintained themselves in a 'European' style. Perhaps none of the Lawsons had studied in England, but they allied themselves with Britian and even considered themselves to be British subjects. After Akuëtë Zankli built New London and signed a treaty with Britain, each morning he had the British flag raised in the town, and on at least two occasions the Lawson territory was offered as a colony to Britain. 10 Many of the Lawsons spoke English fluently, and they financed private English schools which were closed only in 1905 by the German governor, Graf von Zech.

Having initially attained the positions of interpreter and commercial agent, the Lawsons gradually assumed the roles of intendant du roi, customs collector, and keeper of the king's commercial treasury. Finally, they usurped the authority of the king in Anecho and ruled as the supreme power there. For the most part, the Lawson rule was uncontested during 'king' George A. Lawson's reign, but after his death in 1856 a constant struggle for power ensued which eventually involved British, French and German colonial authorities. Some sources say that Akuëtë Zankli's eldest son, George Laté, succeeded him. After his death in 1860, Thomas George Lawson of Sierra Leone was next in line, but he did not return to Anecho and instead offered the Lawson territory to Britain. 11 A number of regents or kings of the Lawson family ruled between 1860 and 1882, the year that King Edmund, a younger son of Akuëtë Zankli, died. After several months of indecision, the Lawsons of Sierra Leone again intervened, and Thomas George Lawson's eldest son, William T.G. Lawson, was sent from Accra where he was Assistant Colonial Surveyor. He was chosen regent by the family during the summer of 1883, the Lawsons agreed on a successor to Edmund, and in October King George Acquatay Lawson III (Daniel C. Lawson) was crowned. The territory had again been offered to the British in 1882, but by this time it was clear that the French and Germans would divide the coast between them, and in February 1884 a German military force induced the king to sign an agreement and William T.G. Lawson was removed to Lagos. However, the Lawson family continued to play an important part in the commercial and political affairs of the coast during both the German
and French periods of administration, and there was a "chief Lawson VII" reigning in 1976. (12)

**The Career of Thomas George Lawson**

At the age of eleven, Laté Agamazon Lawson was entrusted to an English merchant to be transported to Britain for education. There can be no doubt that by this time he had been thoroughly introduced to the idea that the English language, culture, and commercial advancement in West Africa were inextricably related to his family's interests. The ship on which he sailed stopped at Freetown, and, whether by accident or design, he remained there for his further education. The family lore is that he found an 'adopted' of 'half' brother in the colony, who persuaded him to remain. (13) He soon came under the guidance of a prominent British merchant, John McCormack, who had been in the colony for eleven years and who was an unofficial member of the colonial service. He acquired an English education and was instructed in local African politics by McCormack who was well acquainted with the immediate colonial hinterland and African societies. During the 1830s and 1840s Thomas George Lawson was employed by McCormack's timber company as an interpreter and trading agent, and he gradually became knowledgeable about the culture and political affairs of several African societies, including those of the Hullam Shore, Koya, and Port Loko regions. During this period he married a young woman of one of the royal houses of Koya Kingdom, and one of their children was William T.G. Lawson. Thomas George Lawson learned several African languages and also had extensive contact with Muslim societies. Although he became a devout Christian, he came to respect Islam and learned to read Arabic well enough to do some of the translations of Arabic letters sent to the colonial government during the second half of the nineteenth century. (14)

Lawson's marriage connections, his vast knowledge of African languages, his personal contact with African political and commercial families, and his devotion to British interests led McCormack to rely increasingly on his access to and judgment about African affairs in the hinterland. During the period from 1823 to 1845 the colonial government had become more directly involved with nearby African states, and the governor of the Sierra Leone Colony required a trusted official who could interpret
for him and transmit messages. John McCormack, who had performed several missions for the colony, recommended to Governor Norman William Macdonald in 1846 that his protégé, Thomas George Lawson, be selected as the governor's personal messenger to local African rulers. Thomas served in this capacity for five years, and he performed his duties so well that Governor Macdonald recommended him to the Colonial Office to be the first official Colony Messenger and Interpreter. (15) By mid-century Sierra Leone's relations with the hinterland had become so extensive and complex that a regular official was needed to facilitate exchanges of information and the collection of intelligence. The need of this new position was made clear in 1851 by the governor:

His duties will be to proceed on missions to Native Chiefs at seasons of the year when it would be impossible to send Europeans into the Rivers, and to translate and explain to them the contents of the letters of which he might be the bearer. ... also to act as Interpreter when any Chiefs or their messengers pay official visits to the Colony, or as occasion might require. (16)

Thus, Thomas George Lawson came to oversee the elaborate treaty arrangements that tied many important kings and chiefs into the British administrative structure in Sierra Leone. Also, the character of Freetown was beginning to change. In 1811 the population of the town was just under 2,000, but by 1850 it had grown to more than 16,000. Although most of this increase had come through the resettlement of the Africans freed from slave ships (known as Liberated Africans in Sierra Leone) and their offspring, migration of Africans from the interior was becoming significant. Permanent settlements of merchants, labourers, and Muslim clerics were well-established by mid-century, and well-defined ethnic communities with their own leadership structures had taken shape. (17) The colony government could no longer rely on the rather ad hoc character of African relations where European merchants or military officers occasionally made trips to the interior, and it was Lawson's responsibility to maintain direct and frequent contact with African notables and their representatives in the Colony and in the hinterland.

Thomas George Lawson's family background, his early socialization and exposure to pro-English sentiments, his education and training in Sierra Leone, and his experiences in African territories prepared him well for
the responsibilities set out for him in 1851. On May 1, 1852 he officially began to draw his salary of £100 per year, and he quickly became an indispensable member of the colonial civil service. For the next twenty years he was sent by governors on many missions to African rulers, and he was relied upon especially by governors N. Macdonald, A.E. Kennedy, W. Hill, and J. Pope Hennessy. Governor Hill praised him highly to the Colonial Office in 1861. (18) Lawson assisted with the expansion of the British-African treaty system in the Sierra Leone hinterland, was sent on fact-finding expeditions to the Gold Coast in 1868 and 1872, and became the chief liaison with Africans in the Colony. (19) In addition to his position as principal Messenger and Interpreter, he held the post of Inspector of Police from 1854 until late in 1860 and as Protector of Government Strangers (overseeing the housing, provisioning, and safety of African visitors to the government) from 1878 to 1889. In December of 1888 he finally retired from his official position because of ill-health and reluctantly vacated his office at the end of January, 1889. However, he continued to house government visitors and to advise colonial officials until his death in June of 1891.

From the evidence of Lawson's memoranda and reports, one sees his loyalty to and belief in the British colonial system. Although born outside the jurisdiction of Great Britain, Lawson desired to become a British subject, and in 1860 an ordinance for the naturalization of Thomas George Lawson was passed by the Sierra Leone Government; in the following year Lawson wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies to offer his family's land in Aneho as a colony. (20) He proclaimed his family's loyalty to the British empire, and he saw himself as an African agent of that empire. Frequently, he advised other Africans to follow his example. In 1863, on a mission to the kingdom of Moriah in Guinea, he scolded its rulers for not cooperating with the governor of Sierra Leone and reminded them of the many favours provided by colonial administrators. (21) On his first mission to the Gold Coast he told the king of Awuma, his maternal uncle, "... that he should thank the White man for having sent me his sister's son to see him; and that the White man came for the good of his Country." (22) In 1872 he was sent to the Northern Rivers to collect information about a civil war that was seriously disrupting trade. Lawson provided detailed information as a basis for the governor to make
decisions about future actions, and he concluded his report with the following recommendation:

... and to secure the trade from the interior, I would strongly and respectfully recommend that Treaties be entered into without delay with the following Chiefs from whose Countries a large amount of trade comes to Kambia and to this Settlement (Sierra Leone) and through which Caravans pass to Kambia and this Settlement with articles of trade independent of the Sierra Leone River. (23)

Included in his report was a list of the states and their principal rulers along with the amount each should receive as an annual stipend in return for signing treaties of trade and cooperation. Thomas George Lawson was not merely a servant of the colonial administration; he was a principal exponent and architect of British expansion and control over the hinterland. Because of his knowledge of the African cultures and political systems, his expertise in dealing with African rulers, and his strong loyalty to British imperialism, he was put in charge of the operation of two vital sections of the African affairs service during the 1870s and 1880s.

Lawson and the African Affairs Service

By the early 1870s British relations with the hinterland had developed to an extent that required a more elaborate agency for African affairs. Several recommendations had been made to expand the functions of the service and to add personnel. In particular, it was necessary to have an official bureau for the translation of the many Arabic letters received by the colonial government and to send replies, also in Arabic. (24) In 1872 Alfa Mohammed Sanusi, an Aku Muslim cleric, was appointed first Arabic letter writer and translator under the charge of Mr. Lawson; Alfa Sanusi, the son of a Yoruba (Aku) liberated African, had already been translating Arabic messages sent to the Colony government. (25) From 1877 and for the next twenty-three years a great deal of the Arabic correspondence was copied in bound volumes; some of the originals were put into the Aborigines' or Native Affairs' files, while a few were sent to the Colonial Office. (26) In 1873 Lawson began to keep a record of his memoranda, reports, and letters in leather bound books, a practice he continued for fifteen years. (27) In 1876 an Aborigines branch of the colonial
secretariat was established with an African staff of five: Thomas George Lawson as principal Messenger and Interpreter, Alfa Sanusi as First Arabic writer, Momodu Wakka (a Mandinka from Futa Jalon) as second Arabic writer and messenger, George Metzger Macaulay (a Christian Aku, who joined the staff in 1871) as assistant interpreter and messenger, and a clerk. In 1878 Macaulay left the service and was replaced by Sanoko Maddi, a Mandinka settler from Dingiraway; Lawson then also assumed the responsibility of Protector of Government Strangers, a position formerly held by Macaulay. From 1877 an elaborate file system was maintained by the Aborigines branch or the Native Affairs department (from 1891) until replaced by the District Officer administration in 1898 (28). Lawson was the director of the Aborigines branch until his retirement when he was replaced by another African, James C.E. Parkes.

Already Thomas George Lawson had played a very significant role in the development of relations between Sierra Leone and interior states. He was the principal intermediary between the colonial administration and African rulers. From the time Lawson began to keep a record of his reports in 1873 until his retirement in 1889, he was the pivotal actor in the operation of a well-informed African affairs service. He was director of intelligence gathering, principal secretary for African affairs, chief mediator between the British and African political systems, and special advisor to the governors or administrators-in-chief of Sierra Leone. He was well-placed to influence the course of British-African relations, to transmit the essence of British colonial ideas to African leaders, and to provide colonial rulers with detailed and intimate information about African cultures. Lawson lost no opportunity to express his own opinions, to push his own policies, and to promote the expansion of British rule in the interior.

In the eleven bound volumes Lawson compiled between 1873 and 1889, he provided a wealth of information on the condition of African societies inside and out of the Colony. In more than 4,000 handwritten pages he presented the colonial administration with data on a wide variety of subjects, and he also preserved intelligence and historical materials that he used as the basis for advising future governors about past programmes and policies. In the process, he left historians and social scientists with an invaluable record of contemporary events and a compilation of oral sources.
about the past, sometimes going back more than two hundred years. His journals gave detailed information on the history of African states, towns, and ruling families; data about trade routes, products, the size of caravans, and trading families or clans; intelligence on political intrigues, civil wars, and banditry in areas important to British interests; information about cultural characteristics, the development of Islamic institutions, and geographical features of many African societies and territories; and detailed reports to colonial officials about African responses to colonial programmes and policies, along with extensive notes on the nature and results of his missions to and interviews with African notables. (29)

Lawson's Significance as a Colonial Administrator

Although Lawson's official titles in the colonial service were Government Interpreter and Messenger and Protector of Government Strangers, he defined his own position in terms of colonial activism: a developer of programmes and a shaper of policies. He was not content with having Britain restrict herself to a coastal colony. (30) He strongly promoted Protestant missionary work, but he was suspicious of Roman Catholic missions, which he thought favoured French interests. He advocated expansion of imperial trade, establishment of armed customs stations and police posts at sensitive economic and political locations to counter French and African encroachment on British interests, and development of British rule over the colonial hinterland. Lawson consistently advocated a forceful policy to his superiors, as he did after a fact-finding mission to the Kolente (Great Scarcies) River region in 1872:

I would further recommend that... a proper person with a sufficient staff of Officers, and a Boat and men should be stationed on a proper spot to watch British Interests, and should be furnished with a flag which is to be hoisted daily, as some foreigners (Europeans) appear to be creeping gradually into those rivers, and I was informed by some of the Chiefs that some have offered to enter into Treaty agreements with them which the (Chiefs) have refused to do. (31)

Lawson often referred to his African origins when addressing African notables and frequently pointed out how much he and other Africans had benefited from British rule, but he thought of himself primarily as a
British citizen and as an agent for Queen Victoria and her Empire. He was not ashamed to advise fellow Africans to submit to British authority, to accept the structure of colonialism, and to promote the cause of Great Britain in West Africa. At his grand retirement ceremony in September of 1886 he addressed the following remarks to a large gathering of Africans and Europeans in Freetown:

I wish to point to you all my children, the necessity of perseverance, obedience and submission in everything you do, and not to be looking here and looking there. You all know I am now grey haired and it is now 61 years this year since I came to this Country and I have never seen such a thing done like the honour conferred on me today. We speak of celebrating the Centenary of the colony next year, and although the time is not yet come I believe we begin to feel its good. Do, my children and friends, I beg you to be obedient, persevering, faithful and submissive. And none here I think can doubt the success attending obedience, faithfulness and submission. (32)

He always upheld British authority and extolled the justness and beneficence of colonial rule among Africans, as demonstrated by his critical comments regarding a breach of the peace by Freetown Muslims during Christian services on a Sunday in 1863:

I told them that while the authorities have no desire to interfere in their mode of worship ... at the same time they would not be allowed to act in any way to disturb that of others and which might have led to a serious riot... I further told them that they might have been summoned every one of them before the Police Magistrate for provoking riot, but you do not wish to do so but warn them. (33)

I told them that you have been ill and that I have all reason to believe that the illness was brought on you from the bad conduct which irritated your mind fearing that their behaviour would produce a riot on that day and that as soon as you are better, I shall be in a position to inform them His Excellency's mind. (34)

Lawson also took a firm, pro-British stand when he talked with or wrote to African rulers in the interior; and he often advised them to cooperate with the Sierra Leone administrator and to refuse to have dealings with the French. This was precisely his attitude when he wrote to the king of Moriah about colonial relations in 1880:

You know that I am an African as you are and have been placed under the care of the English now 55 years and know a little of their
mannered; there is nothing in the world they hate more than a liar and two faced persons as well as a thief. I know you now nearly 20 years during which time I have proved you to be a truthful and honest King. I hope therefore you will prove yourself to the Administrator in that respect. You may rely on him as your entire and true friend who will do you good and not harm, and one upon whom you can depend. He wants those informations from you for the purpose of forwarding them to the Government of your friend the Great Queen of England and Governor Rowe. (35)

Lawson clearly perceived himself to be much more than an information gatherer, interpreter, and messenger. He was the mediator between the colonial system and African rulers, the adviser to both Africans and the governors and administrators of Sierra Leone, and the key officer in the colonial service to protect and further British rule. He sent a flood of notes and memoranda to governors to recommend more aggressive policies, anti-French steps, and control of African ambitions; and to these ends he promoted an expansion of the treaty system and the establishment of armed posts in the interior. In 1875 he reminded the governor that a periodic show of British authority in the interior was necessary to impress upon African rulers that Britain was serious about her treaty system and her empire. Port Loko, to the east of Sierra Leone, was an important centre of trade and an area of long-standing British influence; and Lawson advised that an official be sent there, as previous administrations had done:

It is requisite and necessary that the official visit be repeated as it serves to encourage trade and enliven the friendly feeling that is existing between the people and this Government — and as it will perhaps be inconvenient for your Excellency to go the venerable appearance of Major Doorly in his uniform will make a very good impression not only among that people but those in the Roquelle River also. (36)

Lawson's reports are full of advice to withhold chiefs' stipends, to send punitive expeditions, to withdraw recognition of legitimacy and to curtail the sovereignty of African states. Although he admired serious Muslims as more 'civilised' than 'pagans', Lawson viewed Islam primarily as a means to the establishment of British civilisation and the creation of Christian missions. While it might be too strong to say that Lawson was a policy maker, it is clear that he was a principal shaper of policy, as a provider of exclusive information and an advisor to colonial administrators, and as
the interpreter of British colonialism to African rulers. In an era when
communication between Freetown and the interior could be delayed for weeks
(especially during the rainy season) and communication between Sierra
Leone and London was none too swift, a civil servant as well placed,
knowledgeable and aggressive as Lawson could wield exceptional influence
over colonial policy. (37)

It is not just from Lawson’s perspective that one can judge his
influence or effectiveness. Several colonial officials commented on
Lawson’s abilities and usefulness during the course of his service. State-
ments by Governors N. MacDonal and W. Hill have been noted above, and
during the 1880s other officials evaluated his role as a civil servant. In
1884, Government Administrator Tarleton called Lawson “the Government
confidential adviser in Native Matters”, (38) while in 1886 two governors
and a colonial secretary who had worked closely with him were effusive in
their praise of his integrity, loyalty, and service:

I have been in no hurry to get rid of his service. I should scarcely
have completed the work I have lately done without his help and
though other Interpreters will be found it will be long before anyone
holds the position of confidence in the estimation of the neigh-
bouring natives which he has gained and which I believe him to justly
merit.

I do hope that Your Lordship may be pleased to show some special mark
of appreciation of the services rendered by Mr. Lawson. They stand, I
believe, alone and without equal in the history of Her Majesty’s
Settlements on this Coast. (39)

During this period, I may say a life time, he has by his strict
integrity and unswerving loyalty combined with a most conscientious
discharge of his duties, deservedly earned the respect and esteem of
all with whom he has come into contact. In addition, he has won that
which is always most precious to every loyal subject, the approbation
of his Sovereign, and Her Majesty has been graciously pleased to
sanction the presentation to him of a distinctive mark of Her appre-
ciation of his services. (40)

Since 1879 it has been my duty and pleasure to associate myself with
Mr. Lawson who has been the referee and advisor on all matters
relating to the Aborigines who visit this Settlement or are in any
way connected with it. ... Mr. Lawson has given each and all of us
unalloyed pleasure, and we regard it as a fitting recognition and
reward of long, staunch, and unwavering loyal service, and we are
pleased and proud to be here today to witness this ceremony. (41)
These statements were made with reference to Lawson's retirement from the colonial service in September of 1886, but neither he nor the Sierra Leone administration could tolerate his absence at that crucial period, and he continued his duties for more than two more years. However, late in 1888, in poor health, he announced his retirement and finally left his office at the end of January, 1889. Governor J.S. Hay had the final word about Lawson's long career in a dispatch to London in 1888:

Mr. Lawson has expressed his willingness to give the Government the benefit of his advice and assistance for as long as he is spared (from death), an offer which might have been expected from this long tried and valued public servant, whose record from the year 1846 has been one of unimpeachable loyalty and devotion to his Queen and Country. (42)

Lawson's Family and Social Status in Freetown

Thomas George Lawson was a prominent citizen of Sierra Leone and of rather high socio-economic status. He had had a good English education, had been a protégé of John McCormack (a highly regarded merchant and sometime colonial official), was a devout Christian and manager of his church, and successfully pursued a career in the colonial administration. He started his career with an annual salary of £100 and by the 1880s was earning £350. In addition, he had income from his position as Protector of Government Strangers, owned rental property and a substantial home in town, and had access to productive land in Koya Kingdom. His retirement ceremony in 1886 attracted a very large audience, consisting not only of hundreds of ordinary people, but most of the leaders of African, Sierra Leonean and European society. His funeral on June 14, 1891 was attended by government officials, including Major J.J. Crooks (the Administrator-in-chief), merchants, professional leaders, and many Christian and Muslim clerics, among the crowd of four thousand. The service, conducted by the Reverend C. Marke, superintendent of the Wesleyan First Circuit, was held at Lawson's church, the Church of God on Regent Road. This was the church established in Freetown by John McCormack, and many Sierra Leoneans were active in it, including J.W. Lewis, an Important colonial civil servant. (43)

Lawson had a large family, and at least five of his children lived to adulthood and played a prominent part in the affairs of Sierra Leone. (44)
Probably the eldest was William Thomas George Lawson, who studied at English schools in the Colony and who was sent to England on a government scholarship for further study of engineering. He returned to Sierra Leone in 1867 as a qualified civil engineer, and he had an nineteen year career as a colonial surveyor in Sierra Leone, the Gold Coast, and Lagos. He retired from the colonial service in 1886, by which time his annual salary had reached £500. Like his father, William was a strong advocate of British rule in West Africa. He represented the British in Anecho in 1883 when he tried to re-establish his family's control over the coast. Through his mother he claimed the right to rule in Koya and made several attempts between 1886 and 1903 to be appointed regent or king of the territory. Although he retired to Lagos, he often visited Sierra Leone and contributed frequently to the Sierra Leone Weekly News and attended social functions. He designed the bell tower for a new bell at the Church of God chapel in 1897.

A second son, Thomas George Lawson, was born in 1865 and was educated at the Church Missionary Society Grammar School, after which he studied civil engineering under the direction of his brother, William. He spent his early adulthood operating a mercantile business in the Gold Coast, but he returned to Freetown in 1886 and worked as a civil engineer. His health failed in 1896, and he died a few months later, on 13 March 1897. His funeral at the Church of God chapel was attended by a large number of friends and relatives.

A younger son, Moses Thomas George Lawson, was also educated in the Colony's Schools and at the Fourah Bay Institution where he received religious instruction. He became the superintendent of the Church of God and was for a long time active in the social and political life of Sierra Leone. He was a prominent member of the Sierra Leone chapter of the Congo Training Institute, a school for Africans in North Wales established with funds from King Leopold II of Belgium; and he was the secretary of the British and Foreign Bible Society chapter in Freetown. In 1886 Moses married Lucretia During, a daughter of the Reverend J. During of the Church Missionary Society's Niger Mission. Their marriage was officiated by the colonial chaplain in St. George's Cathedral, and the ceremony was attended by a large number of the Sierra Leonian upper class.
Thomas George Lawson had at least three daughters. One, possibly the eldest, married John Parker, a missionary in the colonial hinterland for the Church of God. Without mentioning her name, Thomas George Lawson recorded the death of a daughter at his home in 1878. (45) A third, and the youngest, daughter was named Catherine Sarah Anne. She was educated at the Annie Walsh Memorial School, a secondary school for the daughters of the elite in Sierra Leone. Like her brother, Moses, she was married in the Anglican Cathedral, St. George's. Her husband was Nicholas John Spaine, a customs' official, whose elder brother, J.H. Spaine, was the Colony's Postmaster. The wedding ceremony was performed by Bishop E.G. Ingham, Reverend J.E. Taylor (Assistant Colonial Chaplain), and the bridegroom's brother. Reverend S. Spaine. The uniting of these two prominent families in 1887 was attended by a very large number of the socio-economic upper class of Sierra Leone. Catherine Sarah Anne died before 1896, and Nicholas John Spaine married Eliza Annie Manly in February of 1896. (46)

From the 1840s until well into the twentieth century Thomas George Lawson and his family were prominent members of the African colonial upper class of Sierra Leone. They were well-educated, prosperous, professional men and women who were dedicated to the British colonial system and to their own advancement within this system. The Lawsons, then, helped to develop the administrative bourgeoisie who increasingly played a dominant part in the political affairs of the Sierra Leone Colony during the twentieth century and who have controlled the top government positions since Sierra Leone became an independent state in 1963.

Conclusion

For almost two centuries members of the Lawson family had a significant role in the African-European trading system and in the expansion of British colonial rule in two distinct regions of West Africa, and the Lawsons of Anecho continued to be prominent during German and French periods of colonial rule in Togo. Laté Awoku founded the Lawson dynasty at Anecho during the 1760s. His son, Akuêtê Zankli, firmly incorporated dynastic rule on the coast in the early decades of the nineteenth century. His son, Laté Agamazon, brought the dynasty to fruition in the colonial administrative system of Sierra Leone between 1846 and 1889, and his
descendants carried on the tradition. Latë Agamazon, known as Thomas George Lawson, was the colonial civil servant par excellence. His career encompassed a dedication to the development of British influence and control, an intimate knowledge of colonial policies and African socio-political systems, a firm belief in the Christian 'civilising' mission, and an extraordinary ability to work with both African and British officials. Thomas George Lawson assisted and advised African rulers and British governors and other officials in thirty-three different colonial administrations. Colonial secretaries came and went, governors were appointed and transferred, military officers were posted and reassigned; but Thomas George Lawson was the principal administrator for African affairs and the key shaper of colonial policy and programmes in Sierra Leone and the hinterland for almost half a century. The Lawson families of Anecho and Freetown helped to establish and manipulated colonialism, to serve what they perceived to be their own interests. In the town of New London at Anecho, King George Akuëtê Zankli Lawson had the British flag raised each morning over the Lawson compound, while in Freetown Thomas George Lawson superintended the expansion of the British Empire in the colonial hinterland. They were just two of thousands of Africans who were important participants in the development of colonial rule on the continent during the nineteenth century.
NOTES

1. In particular, there were many in Sierra Leone where, from the beginning, the British relied very much upon African personnel. See Fyfe 1955 and 1962; Negreros 1954; Peterson 1969; and Harrell-Bond, Howard and Skinner 1978.

2. Important sources on the history of Glidji and Anecho include the following: Dizel 1793; Duncan 1847; Forbes 1851; Gayibor 1976, 1977, 1978; Ata Quan-Dessu XIII 1981; Fio Agbano II 1981; Isert 1793.

3. The sources do not agree on all points. Dating is always a problem; Gayibor has surveyed the sources and attempted to reconcile dates, and I have followed him. The important sources for the origin of the Lawson family are: Ata Quam-Dessu XIII; Fio Agbano II; and Gayibor 1977 and 1978. There are several discrepancies in them. For example in some versions the hunters are father and son, while others just call them hunters.

4. Again the sources disagree; at least one says Laté Bewu married the king's granddaughter; another identifies Adaku as the daughter of Foli Bebe.

5. The three explanations for the family name are that the captain was Lawson, that the young man took the name son of law, or that he was gone so long that he was known as the 'Lost Son'. In at least one source Captain Lawson is associated with Laté Awuku's son, Akuèté Zankli. For William Lawson see: Commissioners for Trade and Plantations, Journal, January 1759 to December 1763, pp. 73-74. Although many West Africans served on selling ships and many were educated in England, there is no clear evidence as yet that either Laté Awuku or Akuèté Zankli studied there. Professor N.L. Gayibor thinks the name Lawson was first taken by Akuèté Zankli: personal communication, 5 August 1983.

6. Both Duncan and Forbes identify Akuèté (George A. Lawson I) as having been an interpreter for a physician on a slave ship and that he returned to the coast and became re-established there around 1810. One source says he studied in Sierra Leone: Fio Agbano II, p. 42.

7. Fio Agbano II, note 89; Gayibor 1978, p. 157ff. Akuèté Zankli's return to Anecho is dated between 1795 and 1812 in various sources.

8. Duncan; Forbes; PRO: 30/29, Granville Papers 269.

9. Thomas George Lawson identified his mother as a sister of the king of 'Ahwoonah': SLA, Local Letters to Governor, T.G. Lawson's Report on Mission to the King of Ahwoonah, 7 Dec. 1868. Adolevi Ape's homeland is confirmed by Professor Gayibor: "En ce qui concerne la princesse Adolevi Ape: son lieu d'origine doit être Anloga, la capitale des Anlo. Les Anlo sont les Ewe de l'ouest qui habitent sur la côte entre la Volta et la ville de Keta. Awua ou Wuna est une déformation en anglais du véritable nom qui est Anloga". Personal communication, 5 August 1983.

10. Duncan; Forbes; C0 267/270, Despatch 74, Governor Hill to the Secretary of State, 20 April 1861, enclosing a letter from Thomas George
Lawson, dated 18 April 1861. Governor Hill says in his letter: "Mr. Lawson bears a high moral character; he is a diligent public servant, and most truthful, and I, therefore, beg to submit Your Grace's favourable consideration of the enclosed petition". See also 30/29, Granville Papers.

11. CO 267/270, Despatch 74, Lawson's Letter.

12. Gaybkar 1917; PRO: 30/29, Granville papers 269; F0 881/Confidential 4962/6, Rear Admiral Salmon to Secretary of the Admiralty, 9 Jan. 1884.

13. SLWN, 2 October 1886 and 20 April 1891. If Akuête Zankli had studied in Sierra Leone for a number of years, as one source says, it is possible that he left a son there; another source indicates that a kin convinced him to stay in Freetown. Thomas George Lawson states that he was sent to Freetown in the care of Captain Isaac Spence of number 206 Piccadilly, London. In Freetown he was taken in by Mr. John McCormack who sent him to the "Colonial Government School" where he studied English: CO 267/270, Despatch 74, Lawson's letter. Thomas George Lawson lived in the McCormack household on Rawdon Street, near to the house of Solomon Lawson on Wilberforce Street; Thomas Lawson's occupation was listed as "servant" in the 1851 census return: CO 267/111, 1851 Census, 30 July and 3 November 1851. Professor Gaybkar has written that one source states that Latê Agamazon left Aneho because of an embarrassing incident (K.A. Gaba, The history of Aneho ancient and modern, 1942, unpublished manuscript.), but he notes that the author was a notable of a clan rival to the Lawson clan: personal communication, 5 August 1983.

14. SLA, Arabic Letter Books, 1877-1901; Skinner 1973. At Thomas George Lawson's funeral it was stated that he was "converted to God" around 1840 in the Wesleyan faith, became a Baptist in 1850 and was a founder of John McCormack's church of God chapel in 1853: SLWN, 20 June 1891; cf lyfe 1962 and Sibbendorf 1970, p. 71.

15. CO 267/193, Despatch 119, Governor Macdonald to the Secretary of State, 13 July 1846; SLA, Governor's Letter Book, Local Letters, 1846-1848: letters dated 29 May, 2 August, 10 September of 1847; CO 267/222, Despatch 126, Governor Macdonald to the Secretary of State, 6 July 1851.

16. CO 267/222, Despatch 128.


18. CO 267/270, Despatch 74. See quotation in Note 10 above.

19. For evidence of Lawson's role in the expansion of the British colonial system see the following sources: SLA, Governor's Letter Books, Local Letters to Governor; Arabic Letter Books, 1877-1889; Government Interpreter's Memoranda, 1873-1876; Aborigines Minute Papers, 1877-1889; Government Interpreter's Letter Books, 1876-1889; CO 879/35/411, 1892; CO 267/220, Despatch 20, Governor Hennessy to the Secretary of State, 10
Feb. 1872, enclosing Lawson's report dated 17 October 1872. For examples of Lawson's letter, reports, and memoranda see Skinner 1880.

20. CO 267/266, Despatch 41, Acting Governor Fitzjames to the Secretary of State, 12 April 1860, enclosures (Fitzjames describes Lawson as "a zealous public servant"). CO 267/267, Despatch 108, Fitzjames to the Secretary of State, 31 July 1860, enclosures; CO 269/2, No. 4, 1860 (reprinted in Skinner 1880, following page 49); CO 267/270, Despatch 74, Lawson's letter. In 1860 Lawson was earning £200 per year: £100 as First Police Inspector and £100 as Government Interpreter and Messenger. By the end of 1861 his sole position was Government Interpreter and Messenger with a salary of £200 which reflects his increasing role as principal government adviser on African affairs: CO 272/37, 1866; CO 272/38, 1861.

21. SLA, Local Letters to Governor, Mr. Lawson to Governor Blackall, 30 Dec. 1863.


24. CMS, CA1/047, Dr. E.W. Blyden, 1871-1872; CO 267/316, Governor Pope Hennessy to the Secretary of State, 1 Sept. 1872, enclosing Dr. Blyden's report, 26 March 1872; CO 267/301, Despatch 133, Governor Kennedy to the Secretary of State, enclosing W.W. Reade's memorandum; SLA, Colonial Secretary's Office 894/1869, W.W. Reade's report. See also Fyfe 1962; Hargreaves 1954; Skinner 1880.

25. CO 267/305, Despatch 81, enclosing Arabic letter and translation by Alfa Sanusi in 1870 (reprinted in Skinner 1880, following page 49). It is interesting to note that another Muslim Aku, Alfa M.A. Savage was translating Arabic documents for the French Commandant in Sajou during the late nineteenth century: Gambian National Archives, Banjul, Ref. 54, File 107, 1897.


29. See the citations in Note 27 and CO 879/25/332, "Sierra Leone: Despatch from the Administrator-in-chief, enclosing information regarding the different districts and tribes of Sierra Leone and its vicinity", 1887.

30. SLA, Local Letters to the Governor: Aborigines Minute Papers 90, 107, 613, 634 of 1865.

31. CO 267/320, Despatch 20, Lawson's report.
32. CO 267/365, Despatch 354, Governor Hay to the Secretary of State, 25 Sept. 1886, enclosures.


37. Lawson often cited unratified treaties to African rulers as a basis for inducing them to comply with programmes of the Sierra Leone Colony.

38. CO 267/355, Despatch 46, Administrator Tarleton to the Secretary of State, 27 Feb. 1884.

39. CO 267/363, Despatch 160, Governor Rowe to the Secretary of State, 18 May 1886.

40. CO 267/365, Despatch 354, Governor Hay to the Secretary of State, 25 Sept. 1886.

41. CO 267/365, Despatch 354, comment by T.R. Griffith, the Colonial Secretary of Sierra Leone.

42. CO 267/372, Despatch 373, Governor Hay to the Secretary of State, 19 Nov. 1888. Lawson finally retired with a government pension of £210: SLWN, 20 June 1891.

43. SLT, 19 Sept. 1896 and 9 Oct. 1897. For the account of the funeral, see SLWN, 20 June 1891.

44. References for the Lawson family in Sierra Leone include the following. The Sierra Leone Times (SLT): 22 Feb. 1896, 9 May 1896, 19 Sept. 1896, 13 and 27 March 1897, 15 May 1897; the Sierra Leone Weekly News (SLWN): 29 May 1886, 9 July 1887, 9 May 1896, 13 March 1897, 9 Dec. 1899, 18 June 1903, 27 Oct. 1906, 4 April 1906. For William Thomas George Lawson’s role in the Anecho affair, see Granville Papers, Note 8 above. In 1886, after William T.G. Lawson's retirement, he became very heavily involved in a dispute over who should become the king of Koya, a small state east of the Colony. He claimed to be a prince of the Kingdom through his mother, whom he identified as a granddaughter of Bai Farimah, a former king; furthermore, he said he had been selected by members of the royal families and the chiefs of Koya to be crowned king. He asked the British to allow him to accept the kingship so that he might "introduce the blessings of Civilisation which signify moral, social and religious advancement": CO 267/363, Despatch 153, Governor Rowe to the Secretary of State, 14 May 1886, enclosures. According to Rowe, Thomas George Lawson thought his son's scheme of becoming king was "foolish", and Rowe thought
that William was a good candidate to succeed his father as Government Interpreter. For other references to this scheme see: CO 267/366, Individuals, W.T.G. Lawson, 22 Oct. 1886 and 19 Nov. 1886; SLA, Aborigines Minute Papers 158, W.T.G. Lawson to Mr. Parkes, 29 March 1890 and 159, Bai Kompa to Governor Hay, 31 March 1890. Who were the mothers of various Lawson children is not clear. Thomas George Lawson is said to have married a granddaughter of either the Nam Ghana (regent) or the Bai Farimah (king) of Koya. The name of Lawson's wife at the time of his death in 1891 was Sarian, a name of probable Arabic origin. Christopher Fyfe has told me that they were married in St. George's Cathedral in 1863 (St. George's Cathedral Marriage Register, 6 January 1863). However, none of the newspaper accounts of Lawson marriages or funerals mention the name of any of the childrens' mother.


46. Very little is known about Thomas George Lawson's grandchildren. By the 1970s there were no known direct descendants of his living in Sierra Leone. A grandson, James Glynn Lawson, attended the Congo Training Institute in North Wales during 1896 and 1897; he returned to Freetown as a qualified printer and later entered the Sierra Leone colonial service: SLWA, 9 May 1896 and 9 Dec. 1899; SLT, 9 May 1896; CO 272, Sierra Leone Blue Books.
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JOHN AUGUSTUS OTONBA PAYNE AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COLONIAL RULE IN NIGERIA

G.O. OLUUSANYA

John Augustus Otonba Payne was born on August 9, 1839 at Kissey, Sierra Leone. Not much is known about his parentage except that his father who was certainly a recaptive was from one of the royal houses of Ijebu Ode and that the name, Payne was an anglicized version of the original Yoruba name, Adepeyn. (1) Otonba (properly written as Otunba) which he added to his name is a title which is only given to members of the Ijebu-Ode ruling houses. Whoever his parents were, one thing is obvious and that is, they did not appear to have played any important role in Freetown society nor did they achieve a position of prominence.

Like the children of the other captives or even some of the recaptives themselves, Payne attended the local primary school and from there moved on to the C.M.S. Grammar School in Freetown. We do not know much about his performance as a pupil, but he must certainly have done fairly well, otherwise it would not have been easy for him to secure a good job with the government on leaving school. His performance on the job is but another solid evidence of his ability.

There were generally four main types of options open to the recaptives and their children as regards employment. First, was either a place in Church Ministry which generally began with a spell in teaching, followed by an appointment as a Cathechist and then ordination into the Ministry. The second option was to go into trading. This was a more popular choice for a number of reasons. The first was that government jobs were limited and, in any case, not many of them possessed the necessary qualification or training for such jobs. Second, was the fact that farming or agriculture was difficult if not impossible. This was because the soil on the hill side in Freetown where most of the agricultural land was available was unsuitable for farming. Consequently, many of them went into trading where opportunities were almost unlimited for those with initiative and enterprising spirit.

In the pursuit of trade, they did not limit their horizon to Sierra Leone alone. They sought their fortunes along the Wesley coast of Africa.
Nigeria, because of the thriving trade in palm oil and other products during the 19th century, was one of the most attractive areas of trade. Besides, most of them were victims of the Yoruba wars of the 19th century and still had vivid memories of where they came from. They were therefore anxious to return 'home' to their kith and kin. The third avenue was farming which, as has been observed, was not too lucrative. The fourth, and particularly for those with the requisite qualification, training and ability, was to take up a job with the administration. In doing so, the opportunities were not, as in trading, confined only to Sierra Leone. There were even greater opportunities on the Gold Coast and in Nigeria and many found their way to these areas, particularly Nigeria, where the need for educated Africans in the administration was very great at this period. The number of educated Nigerians then was significant and at a period when Britain was much more interested in trade, in which the cost of administration was to be limited, rather than in the acquisition of territories. It was not until the last quarter of the 19th century during a period of aggressive imperialism that educated Africans were to have their opportunities for employment in the administration seriously curtailed. It was this fourth option that Otonba Payne took.

On leaving school in 1861, he proceeded to Lagos where he obtained employment as a clerk in the administration in 1863 and by sheer ability and dedication to duty rose rapidly in the service. In 1866 when the Court of Civil and Criminal Justice was established he became its Sheriff. In addition, he was appointed clerk to the Chief Magistrate as well, and was therefore called 'Clerk of Courts'. In 1872 he became registrar of births, deaths and marriages and in 1877, when the Lagos Supreme Court was re-created, he was appointed its Registrar, a post he held until 1899 when he retired. It was this that led Elias to state that Payne "shepherded the life of the Supreme Court in its formative years". (2) In addition to being Registrar, Otonba Payne performed a number of judicial functions for the government. For example, in 1881 he acted for Nash Williams, a lawyer, as district commissioner of Lagos. (3) This appointment involved being both police magistrate of the Supreme Court and Coroner. In 1884 he acted as Queen's Advocate in the absence again of Nash Williams. (4) As Queen's Advocate, he successfully prosecuted a case for the Crown in the murder case of Regina V. Adeoshun. (5) This was a remarkable achievement for a
man who had no formal legal training. He was one of those that Adewoye refers to as 'self-taught attorneys'. (6)

While Payne's rise in the administration is commendable, it should also be noted that he was an essential part of the system through which colonial rule was established in Nigeria. The colonial administration was, of course, an important instrument for promoting, establishing and maintaining colonial rule. In order to achieve this goal, the administration deliberately pursued a policy of subverting indigenous institutions and substituting their own and in so doing, it generally succeeded in imposing not only political control but also in achieving cultural subjugation. The importation of British legal process was an important means for achieving this. This is what led Adewoye to state:

A very potent factor in consolidating and stabilising colonial rule was the imported European legal process. In the hands of British colonial administration law was a veritable tool, stronger in many ways than the Maxim gun... English law and the whole paraphernalia of the English judicial process brought into Nigeria were natural servants of colonialism. (7)

The courts that were established as an instrument for giving practical expression to this process were, of course, part and parcel of the efforts to maintain, extend and consolidate colonial rule in Nigeria. Thus, as Adewoye observes;

The courts might have served the ends of justice, but they served much more besides. Viewed in their larger context, they were part of Britain's armour in her conquest and control of Southern Nigeria. (8)

As has been noted, Payne occupied a very significant position in the judiciary and in so doing, his contributions to the establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria, though made unwittingly, cannot be denied.

It was not only in this respect but in many others that Otonba Payne helped in promoting and consolidating colonial rule in Nigeria, though in many of these cases unconsciously. Payne was an amateur historian of great excellence. Fortunately too, he was placed in positions where he had direct access to important data. This coupled with his own natural interest in finding out and recording the history of his own people, as well as developments in West Africa generally, made him in his time a repository
of historical knowledge. Even today, his publications are still extremely useful in our attempts to reconstruct the past.

In 1874 Payne began publishing his Lagos and West African Diary and Almanack, a copy of which he presented to Queen Victoria as a gift at her first Jubilee. This work which appeared annually until 1894, was as Ayandele points out, "the best source for the social, political and ecclesiastical history of Lagos which he (Payne) knew before the 1861 cession and with which he was intimately and continuously connected till 1906". (9) In 1893 he published a Table of the Principal Events in Yoruba History. These two works are important sources of knowledge on Nigeria and West Africa and the various colonial administrators of the time made significant use of the information they contain in their very successful attempts to establish colonial rule in West Africa. In addition, these works became, as it were, textbooks for all lawyers and judges in Lagos during the period.

It ought in fairness to be pointed out that it was not Payne's motive that the knowledge contained in these two important works be utilized to subjugate his people. His interests, as has been pointed out, was first to find out and record developments in his time and whatever he could recover from the past of his people and, second, was his deep interest in history. However, once the books were out, any one could use them, like any other information made public, in the way he liked. This was what the colonial administrators of his time, as well as those who followed, did with these publications. Thus in producing these excellent works Otonba Payne made himself unwittingly a useful source of information for the British in their successful efforts to subjugate and control the peoples of West Africa.

In another unwitting manner, Payne and other returnees helped to promote British colonial rule in Nigeria. With the British occupation of Lagos and establishment of political control and influence in other parts of Nigeria, a new situation was created whereby educated Africans assumed an importance which could not have been possible under the old order. They were the beneficiaries of the new opportunities created by colonial rule. They therefore became the standard for those members of the indigenous communities who were beginning to acquire western education although they were scorned by majority of the uneducated. The returnees, including the
cultural nationalists amongst them, admired western culture and viewed themselves as examples of successful adaptations to that culture. Payne and the others hoped that 'their brethren in the interior would copy the good example' (10).

The newly-educated Nigerians admired with a touch of envy the social position of the returnees in Lagos society and with the government. Payne loomed large amongst the group of returnees in this respect. As already pointed out, he occupied a top position in the administration - Registrar of the Supreme Court. In addition, he occupied equally important positions in social life in general. He was a member of the Council of five laymen and five clergymen appointed in 1870 with Bishop Crowther as Chairman to work with the missionaries in starting 'a native pastorate' distinct from the body performing missionary functions of the church. He was amongst the cultural nationalists who advocated the use of African names and dress and the need for adaptation of Christianity to the African religion. He strove to ensure for Africans respectable places in the Church. Payne was a Mason. He was a member of the first Masonic Lodge established in Bamgbose Street in 1868. He rose to become the Worshipful Master of the Lodge and also the Chief Ranger of the Ancient Order of Foresters which was founded in 1890. He was amongst those who arranged the visit of Edward Blyden to Lagos in 1890/91 - a memorable visit that provided the immediate occasion for the establishment of the United Native African Church and had the honour of proposing the vote of thanks on that occasion. Payne had the honour of naming Lagos Streets in 1868. He was a highly respected member of the various societies in Lagos including the Auxiliaries of the British and Foreign Bible Society and the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society. He was a regular attendant at parties in the government house. He was an organiser of concerts, musical shows, picnics, debates and athletics. It was around these events that Lagos social life revolved at this period. Thus, Payne was 'one of the moving spirits of Lagos social life (11) All these were admired by the newly-emerging educated Nigerian elite who sought to emulate him and yet, all these were the trappings that accompanied colonial rule and helped to soften the ground for the rule. For, it must be emphasized that colonial rule did not manifest itself mainly in the form of political subjugation and economic
exploitation alone but also in the form of cultural and mental coloni-
zation which is more insidious and more difficult to destroy.

Payne also softened the ground for British control of the hinterland,
particularly Ijebuland. To understand this, it is necessary to examine
Ijebu attitude to foreigners, particularly to non-Africans and their
culture and their own strong belief in their own culture, traditions and
institutions. It is equally necessary to examine Payne's relationship with
the Ijebu and the use the colonial government made of Payne because of his
Ijebu connection in paving its entry into Ijebuland.

The Ijebu had always had a healthy dislike for foreigners. It had
always been their policy not to allow foreigners - white and non-white -
into their territory. This policy was a product of economic reality. The
Ijebu were essentially middlemen in the trade between the coast and the
interior which was the source of their wealth and power. Consequently,
they guarded very jealously their middleman's position. To ensure this,
they shut their territory to all foreigners in order to prevent it being
used as a transit road to and from the interior. Also the Ijebu were very
strong believers in their customs and traditions. They were not in any way
anxious to throw away institutions, customs and traditions that had served
them from time immemorial for any new-fangled ideas. They were particu-
larly suspicious of the white man and contact with him was regarded as
abominable. Consequently, they were hostile to receiving any white man
-trader or missionary- or even having anything to do with him at all.

Their suspicion of the white man and his motive was very much strengthened
by the bombardment and the cession of Lagos to the British Government in
1851 and 1861 respectively. They were convinced that a similar fate
awaited any community that had anything to do with the white man and they
made sure that they warned the people in the hinterland of the danger
inherent in dealing with Europeans. They scorched the Europeans and their
ways. They were hostile to Christianity for they were shrewd enough to
realize that the purveyors of the gospel were the advance guard or torch
bearers of imperialism.

The Ijebu equally disliked educated Africans who had been absorbed
into the white man's culture. This was so obvious that it was common
knowledge then. For example, James Johnson, the famous Nigerian missionary
who was partly of Ijebu parentage had this to say in the matter:
I had long heard of the stubborn dislike of my countrymen, the Jebus, to the gospel and to English customs, particularly to long trousers, shoes, socks and to umbrella which last I suppose only Royalty carries... Their dislike of European missionaries and suspicion of natives who had associated themselves with Europeans and who use their costumes and whom they like the others are fond of designating "white men" are partly based upon the fears they entertain that Europeans would take away their country from them. (12) However, because of Payne's relationship with the Ijebu (it may be recalled that his father was from one of the royal houses of Ijebu-óde), the Ijebu were ready to maintain relations with him despite the fact that he was a westernized African. Payne himself was equally proud of his Ijebu connection and he nursed his relations with them. On one occasion, he gave an expression to this pride when he stated: "I am a Jebu man. I am a Prince of the country. Every week I have information concerning the country. There is no week that I have no communication with my people". (13) Because of this link and because of his admirable knowledge of the Ijebu as well as of the other communities, he proved a very valuable asset to the colonial administration in its dealing with the Ijebu. Owing to the obvious hostility of the Ijebu towards the Lagos administration, Payne was the only representative of that government who could attempt negotiations with them for the opening of trade routes, - and these trade routes, both the Egbas and the Ijebu ones - were vital to the economic survival of Lagos. His mediation with both the Ijebu and the Egba began in 1871 when the Lagos economy was suffering from serious economic recession by the closing of the routes. Following the negotiations the roads were opened but only temporarily in 1872. In 1879, he was sent by Alfred Moloney to the Anuaje of Ijebu-óde in an effort to open friendly relations between Lagos, Ijebu and the Egba. The mission was equally unsuccessful, mainly because Payne, though Ijebu by blood, was a suspect to the Ijebu because of his westernization. (14) The interesting thing was that the colonial administration was equally suspicious of him. This was made obvious by Rowe, the Governor of the Gold Coast (Ghana) when he wrote..." (15) He (Payne) is not a fitting person to hold the offices of trust which he does as a British subject in the country of Lagos... so long as he holds the
position which he does in Government employ... he should not visit Ijebu on political missions except he be sent there as a messenger from government. What is important in the colonial administration making use of Otonba Payne to attempt to open up relations with the Ijebu is not so much his lack of success as that he was being used as an agent of British colonial administration to begin a process which eventually led to the acquisition of Ijebuland by that administration. It is not very clear whether Payne was aware of this or not. But whether conscious of it or not, he was certainly an important instrument of the British Colonial administration in its bid to acquire a territory which is now part of modern Nigeria.

However, the story did not end there. Payne persisted in his efforts to get the Ijebu to throw their doors open to Western ideas and influence. Since the beginning of missionary activities in what is now modern Nigeria, several unsuccessful efforts were made by the Christian missions to penetrate Ijebuland. The cause of the failure lay in what was stated above, that is the unreceptiveness of the Ijebu people to new fangled ideas and the deep faith in their own culture and traditions. They also had an idea of the consequence of missionary activities if allowed in their territory. However, because of Otonba Payne's connection with them, they were ready to yield some ground. Thus, it was to their own 'son' that the first concession to allow a missionary was made though with the important qualification that the missionary must be an African.

The first African missionary to go to Ijebu-Ode was one George. However, once a crack had been made, it was a question of time before the gate was thrown open. By converting some people to Christianity the African missionary himself was already paving the way for colonialism. Furthermore, his residence in Ijebu-Ode encouraged both the white Christian missionaries and the British administration to intensify their efforts at penetrating Ijebuland. This is obvious from what follows.

Within barely two weeks of George's arrival at Ijebu-Ode, white Christian missionaries began to make their appearance. The first to appear was Thomas Harding of the Church Missionary Society who was located in Ibadan. He brought with him an African agent, Daniel Olubi. As would be expected, the Ijebu were hostile to him and his African agent. They refused to entertain him, and even to sell him water. (16) In April 1891,
Acting Governor Denton decided to pay a visit to Ijebu-Ode. The Ijebu did not prevent the visit, but refused to hold any discussion with him or to sign the treaty which he had already prepared from Lagos. Denton felt insulted and suggested teaching the Ijebu a lesson. But the colonial office demurred. In that same year, Moloney left and Thomas Gilbert Carter was appointed to succeed him. Moloney unlike Carter, was a man of peace who had attempted to win the Ijebu by peaceful negotiations.

Carter was a strong exponent of the Forward Policy. He arrived in Lagos in September, 1891, burning with the desire to smash the Ijebu and the Egba if they continued to close their routes, the reluctance of the colonial administration towards this policy notwithstanding. He particularly detested the Ijebu whom he believed possessed "every vice a native race could have." (17) In December 1891, he requested the Awujale to send his representatives to Lagos to apologise for the 'insult' they were supposed to have heaped on Denton and to discuss routes. On January 18, 1892, a deputation composed of four Agurin, four Ogboni, three Pampa and eleven Parakoyi was sent by the Awujale to Carter. The deputation was mandated to concede the two points raised by the Governor which were to apologize for the 'insult' and declare that the trade routes were opened. However, Carter was not interested in negotiation, but only looking for a casus belli. First, he rejected the gifts the Ijebu brought, which was an undiplomatic and unfriendly act. Second, he used the occasion to threaten the Ijebu by displaying the British might. He held a military parade in order to convey to the Ijebu representatives the consequence that would follow should they refuse to accede to all his requests. Following the parade, he demanded an apology for the insult to Moloney and this was given. He then addressed the delegation at length in a very insulting language emphasizing what he called their backwardness and unresponsiveness to enlightened ideas by refusing Christian missionaries and traders entry into their territory. He then called on the delegation to sign a treaty which he had already drafted. There was to be no discussion. They were just to sign. The delegation refused as this was beyond the mandate given them by the Ijebu Authority. Non-plussed, Carter ordered Otunba Payne and Jacob Williams, a trader and Ijebu by extraction too, to sign on behalf of the Ijebu. This was absolutely illegal. The two had to sign. Following the signature, the ceremony of breaking and taking kolanut was
performed and the delegation was given a copy of the treaty with a gift of £20 for the King and Chiefs of Ijebuland.

The treaty which the Ijebu delegation refused to take with them stated that the Ijebu were to throw open all roads and rivers to all people and would receive from the Lagos Government a sum of £500 annually for the loss of their tolls. It was obvious that the Ijebu would not accede to this and it was their refusal along with subsequent developments that eventually led to the military expedition of 1892 which brought Ijebuland under the control of British Colonial Government.

As can be seen from above, John Augustus Otonba Payne played a significant role in the events that led to the subjugation of Ijebuland and by so doing, he certainly helped to advance the cause of colonialism in Nigeria. The plea, of course, is that his efforts to get the Ijebu to accept an African Christian missionary were with good intentions though they had different end results, and that, in signing the treaty between the British colonial administration and the Ijebu on behalf of the latter, he was acting under duress. While this is valid, it cannot still be doubted that he was an agent, albeit, an unwilling one in the successful efforts of the British to colonize Ijebuland.

Thus, John Augustus Oton Payne and many of his fellow returnees from Sierra Leone were consciously or not agents of imperialism in West Africa. This is not to condemn them for they could not have behaved in any other way. They are to be judged by the circumstances of their time. They were either recaptives or children of recaptives who were trained by the British Government and offered opportunities to serve in the colonial administration. Once they agreed to serve, they became part and parcel of the system. It can be argued that they could have refused to serve but what choice did they have? They could not all be traders and, in any case, for successful trading in the Nigerian and other parts of Africa peace and stability were necessary, given the constant warfare on the continent, and it was only the presence of foreign troops that could and did provide the needed peace and stability. It would be time wasting trying to dwell on the cause of the internecine warfare and the instability which plagued the continent. The fact is that these areas were largely unsettled and it was only by making them settled that progress could be achieved. Moreover, Payne and the other returnees had faith in the British because of their
own peculiar circumstance. They also possessed faith in Western culture and were convinced that Africans needed a dose of Western ideas and culture if it were to take its place amongst the developed regions of the world. Even the extreme nationalist of today cannot deny this.

They did not however, accept Western culture, lock, stock and barrel. Payne was, like some of his contemporary returnees, a cultural nationalist who advocated an adoption of what is good in Western culture by Africans. Again, that is a realistic view which is still very current. He and the others might have been somewhat naive to believe in the good intentions of the British Government but the naivety only seems obvious when one looks at development retrospectively, which amounts to being wise after the event and is, in any case, bad history. Subjected to the same situation, majority of men would have reacted the same way and held the same view.

But of great importance is the belief that European tutelage was needed for some time and that eventually Europeans would be driven out and Africa emerge independent. They initiated cultural nationalism which provided the basis for the political nationalism of the 20th century - nationalism that has eventually won freedom for almost all African countries. For this reason, it can be said then that they had vision and worked towards a goal, however distant that goal might have looked in their time. One would wish to be able to say the same for Africans nowadays: We have not been imaginative and determined enough to dismantle the colonial structure and erect a new one which would be in conformity with our own peculiar experience and history nor have we been able to emancipate ourselves mentally. We seem, in fact, to have lost our sense of purpose and direction and to be plagued with indecision and lack of vision. Otherwise how do we explain our present predicament?
NOTES

2. Adewoye, 1969: 54
3. Kopytoff, op.cit., p. 212
4. Ibid
5. Ibid

6. Adewoye, op.cit: J.A.O. Payne was enrolled on 16 May, 1900.

8. Ibid, p. 131. In another passage he declared that "One may indeed argue with considerable justification that the British political penetration of the territory (Nigeria) was accomplished through the instruments of the courts". p. 40.

10. Kopytoff, op.cit., p. 274
11. Adewoye, op.cit., p 54
12. Kopytoff, op.cit., p. 192
13. Ibid., p. 191
14. Supra
15. Kopytoff, op.cit., p. 192
16. Ayandele, op.cit., p. 60
17. Ayandele, op.cit., p. 60
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